

31st October 2025

Dear Affiliate,

I am writing to you today to provide an important update on the Aligned Football Calendar (AFC), a central element of our collective long-term strategy, the Football Pathways Plan.

Since the AFC was approved by the FAI General Assembly in December 2024, we have engaged in extensive consultation and listened carefully to the feedback from our leagues and stakeholders. While the support for the strategic direction is overwhelming, we recognise that the implementation of this change presents significant logistical and operational challenges for some.

In acknowledgement of these realities, and following a comprehensive review, the FAI Board has formally approved two key adjustments to the implementation of the Aligned Football Calendar. These are: a revision of the original implementation timelines and the introduction of a formal exemption process.

Revised Implementation Timelines

Please note the following updated timelines for the mandatory transition to a calendar-year season:

- The requirement for U5 to U12 leagues to transition on 1 January 2026 has been removed. The new mandatory transition date for this age group is now 1 January 2027.
- The transition for U13 to U16 leagues remains 1 January 2027.
- The transition for Youth and Adult leagues remains 1 January 2028.

Importantly, leagues that have the capacity and desire to transition earlier than these mandatory dates may still do so voluntarily. The FAI will provide our full support to any league that wishes to take this proactive step.

Formal Exemption Process

Following Board approval, a formal and structured pathway will be introduced for leagues to apply for a temporary exemption from the Aligned Calendar. This process is designed for leagues who can demonstrate clear, evidence-based barriers to a successful transition.

Key details of this process are as follows:

- **Purpose:** To grant a temporary, two-year exemption to leagues facing significant, documented challenges.
- **Review:** Exemptions will be subject to bi-annual reviews to assess progress and support the league's eventual transition to alignment.
- **Criteria:** To ensure fairness and transparency, all applications will be assessed against detailed criteria, which will include:
 - Evidence of a formal member club vote within the league.

- Illustration of significant refereeing shortages.
- Demonstration of severe pitch/facility congestion.
- Evidence of a significant, negative impact on participation due to seasonal conflicts.

Greatest weight will be given to evidence of a formal member-club vote within the league.

- **Application:** Further details on the application opening date will be communicated in due course.

This process will be overseen by a dedicated Exemption Subgroup, whose Terms of Reference have been approved by the Board, ensuring all applications are handled with fairness, equity and objectivity.

The Exemption Sub-group will be chaired by the FAI President.

The Exemption Sub-group will be comprised of:

- 3 Senior Members of the FAI Executive Team
- 3 Football Directors of the FAI Board

Regulations

The Registration Regulations (Section 6 of the FAI Handbook) have been updated to reflect the revised implementation timeline and exemption process approved by the Board, as described above. A copy of the Registration Regulations showing the updated wording (in track-changes) is enclosed with this letter. The Regulations, approved by the Board, shall be published on the Governance Handbook on the FAI website.

This decision reflects the FAI's commitment to listening and adapting to the realities faced by our affiliates on the ground. It strikes a crucial balance, providing necessary flexibility to our leagues while protecting the strategic integrity of the Football Pathways Plan as our ultimate goal remains unchanged, to maintain the strong momentum towards full alignment for the betterment of Irish football.

We believe these adjustments provide a clear and practical path forward. We thank you for your continued engagement and commitment as we work together to build a stronger future for our game.

Yours in football,



Paul Cooke
President, Football Association of Ireland