



DDSL Emerging Talent Programme Handbook

August 2025



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1. Background and Ethos

The Emerging Talent Programme (ETP) is a dedicated initiative within the DDSL focused on player development. At the heart of the ETP lies our guiding principle and mission: *'Empowering young players through increased time on the ball , nurturing creativity and developing their skills'* This ethos drives every aspect of the programme and shapes the environment we strive to create. Our aim is to foster a positive, engaging, and educational player focused environment for all of the children.

Launched in August 2023, the ETP has grown significantly, evolving into a dynamic platform for talent development. The programme offers weekly training sessions, each designed with a specific skill focus, and brings together players from various clubs across the league. While individual development remains central, we also organise competitive matches across age groups to give players the opportunity to apply their decision making skills in real game scenarios.

Each year, we review and adapt the programme to ensure we are continuously delivering the highest quality experience for all participants—providing every player with the tools and support needed to thrive.

2. Our Team

The success of the Emerging Talent Programme (ETP) is a direct result of the expertise and dedication of our team of volunteers, who work diligently to deliver sessions of the highest standard for all players. The programme is led by Director of Football and supported by ETP Coordinator and Administrator. Together, they oversee the smooth operation and continued growth of the initiative.

Each age group within the ETP benefits from a dedicated coaching team, composed of Head Coaches and Assistant Coaches, all of whom bring extensive experience from within the football world. All of our coaches are fully player focused and put a lot of time and effort into planning each session. They look at the individual players' development as well as the overall development of the team. In addition to their football knowledge, our coaches also incorporate unique insights and skills from their professional backgrounds outside the sport, adding a distinctive and personal touch to each coaching style.



Beyond the core coaching staff, numerous members of the wider DDSL team contribute to the programme across various stages. We also regularly engage specialist coaches in areas such as fitness, goalkeeping, and other disciplines, to provide targeted, high-impact sessions that enhance the overall development experience for our players.

3. Programmes

3.1 Football Foundations Programme

The Foundations Football Programme is a newly introduced initiative designed to support the development of both players and coaches. The programme specifically targets the U9, U10 and U11 boys and girls age groups within the DDSL, offering a structured and enriching experience. Each September, the ETP extends invitations to teams across the U9s, U10s and U11s Saturday and Sunday divisions to attend a workshop session hosted by the ETP coaching team at Abbotstown. These sessions provide young players with a fresh and engaging football experience while giving club coaches the opportunity to observe their teams from a more analytical, classroom-style perspective. The sessions are tailored, with a strong emphasis on enjoyment and skill-based drills, and run annually from October to December.

The core objective of these sessions is Coach Development to give coaches new ideas and concepts for positive, fun and enjoyable sessions. Our coaches aim to create a positive, enjoyable, and challenging environment where young players can enhance their technical skills. These sessions also serve as a vital stepping stone, helping prepare players for the transition into more competitive football as they move towards the U12 level.

Building on this foundation, we are aiming to create the U11 Foundations Programme. This programme which ideally commences in January annually is composed of selected players from various high-performing U11 teams across the top divisions. Clubs are invited to nominate a set number of players to participate in focused workshop sessions, led by a dedicated ETP coaching staff. Again the focus and target of these sessions is individual player development. While this programme has not yet been confirmed for the upcoming season we do hope to be in a position to run this.

3.2 ETP Development Squads

In addition to the U11 ETP Academy, the Emerging Talent Programme (ETP) operates Development Squads for both boys and girls at U12, U13, and U14 age groups. These squads are composed of players selected from clubs across the top divisions within each age category.



Each squad trains on a weekly basis under the guidance of a dedicated coaching team, which delivers structured, skill-focused workshops aimed at enhancing individual and collective development. The programme also includes classroom-based technical sessions tailored to each age group, along with position-specific workshops, particularly for goalkeepers. The emphasis is firmly on creating a customised, educational environment where learning and progression are the core priorities.

Throughout the season, the coaching staff also arrange competitive matches to provide players with valuable game experience and the opportunity to apply what they've learned in training. In addition, the ETP runs an U18 Boys Interleague Team, which represents the DDSL in official competition. We also enter an U19 Girls Interleague Team into official competition when these are running.

Entry into the Development Squads begins with a Player ID process, which typically starts in September. Clubs from the top divisions are invited to nominate a select number of players to attend Player ID sessions held in Abbotstown. During this period, the coaching staff aims to observe as many players as possible—both at the sessions and by attending club matches.

Due to the high volume of interest and limited places, the initial Player ID phase is open only to players from the top divisions in each age group. However, the ETP fully recognises that talented players also exist outside of these divisions. To ensure inclusivity, coaches may invite promising players from lower divisions at a later stage or attend games to assess them in their own playing environment. In some cases particularly for less saturated age groups Player ID invitations may be extended to clubs from lower divisions earlier in the process.

The Player ID phase typically runs for six weeks with players attending normally only one session, after which an initial training squad is selected. These players train weekly for a set period, with squad reviews conducted every 4–6 weeks. During these blocks, new players may be invited in for further assessment based on continued scouting and performance.

At the conclusion of each training block, the coaching team may add or release players depending on performance and progression. Players released from the programme will receive a formal feedback report and the option of a one-on-one meeting with a member of the coaching staff. To ensure feedback is meaningful, it is only provided to players who have participated in the programme for at least four weeks, as shorter periods do not allow for a comprehensive evaluation.



4. Communication

The Emerging Talent Programme (ETP) maintains a strict communication policy to ensure transparency, consistency, and the efficient handling of all queries. All correspondence should be directed to the ETP Coordinator via email at etp@ddsl.ie. During the Player ID phase, communications regarding player nominations and invitations are managed exclusively through email with the clubs. This approach continues throughout the training blocks for selected squads.

Parents will be provided with a dedicated ETP contact number, which should only be used to notify the team if a player is unable to attend a session. All other communication whether questions, concerns, or updates must be routed through the player's club. In cases where a player is released from the programme, we offer the opportunity for a feedback meeting with the player and their parents. This meeting, led by our coaches provides a chance to give brief, constructive feedback, answer any questions, and most importantly, offer reassurance and encouragement to help the player remain confident and motivated in their football.

The only exception to direct communication with parents is during participation in Kennedy Cup and Gaynor Cup competitions, where direct contact may be required for logistical reasons. Notably also in case of an emergency during a session the ETP team will make direct contact with the parents.

Under no circumstances should clubs or parents contact ETP coaches or staff directly. All enquiries must be submitted via the official ETP email address, where they will be addressed appropriately or escalated to the relevant personnel as needed.

5. Player ID Sessions and Player Development Programme

The DDSL follows a structured process for squad selection. As previously mentioned, we conduct Player ID Sessions at the beginning of each season. The DDSL is committed to a fully inclusive policy and does not discriminate against any players. However, given the limited weekly coaching resources and the need to maintain child safety standards by restricting the number of players per session, initial Player ID invitations are extended primarily to teams within the top divisions.

Each September, the ETP team invites clubs to nominate a specified number of players for these sessions. These players are then invited to participate in training sessions over a six-week period. During this time, the coaching team also attends matches to observe and identify players who demonstrate potential for the Player Development Programme (PDP).



The PDP is a system employed by the ETP coaching staff to monitor standout players during games and tournaments. Those who consistently exceed expectations are noted and added to the PDP database. Following this, clubs may be contacted to invite these players for trial sessions. It is important to emphasize that while clubs are initially asked for a limited number of nominations, additional players may be invited subsequently. In some instances, squads may include more than three players from a single club.

Our coaching team invests considerable time and effort into analyzing and assessing players to finalize the training squads. The Player ID process continues beyond the initial selection, with coaches regularly attending matches throughout the training block to further evaluate players. Clubs are encouraged to flag promising players during this period, and we strive to accommodate these recommendations.

We also recognize that talented players may be present in divisions outside the top tiers. Accordingly, at an appropriate stage, we may extend invitations to clubs outside the top divisions to nominate players, and our team will endeavor to observe these players in competitive matches whenever possible.

Players from the final training block at the U12 and U13 age groups will automatically be invited in for a Player ID Session for their next age group. The ETP coaching team will reach out to the clubs to organise these trials.

6. Squad Selection and Release Forms.

Following the conclusion of the Player ID period, an initial training squad of 20 to 25 players will be selected. This selection is based on a thorough assessment and evaluation of all trialists which is conducted by the ETP coaching team. The ETP will notify clubs via email regarding the players chosen for the initial training squad. This squad will train together for a predetermined period, typically lasting 4 to 6 weeks or aligned with a holiday break. During this time, the coaching team may invite additional players to trial alongside the squad, with the possibility of subsequent inclusion.

At the end of this training block, the coaching staff conducts a comprehensive evaluation of all players and trialists. Decisions will then be made regarding player retention or release in preparation for Training Block 2. Recognizing its responsibility towards child safety and development, the DDSL has implemented a supportive policy for the release of players. When a player is released from the squad, their club will receive a detailed feedback form from the



coaches outlining areas of success and opportunities for improvement. This feedback is designed to encourage and motivate the player to continue their development. Additionally, the ETP coaching team offers the player and their parents an opportunity to meet for a brief discussion to clarify feedback and support the player's confidence and understanding. It is important to note that release does not preclude future involvement. The ETP team will continue to monitor the player's progress and may invite them to participate in future trial sessions. All players who finish in the final block of the year will receive a certificate of completion at the end of the programme.

This feedback process applies only to players who have attended four or more training sessions, as it is challenging to provide meaningful feedback for those with limited attendance. Once the squad for Training Block 2 is finalized, the ETP team will notify the clubs accordingly.

This training block typically lasts around six weeks, followed by another assessment period. This cycle continues throughout the season, with each age group usually completing three to four training blocks.

7. What to Bring ?

All players attending Player ID sessions, squad training, and matches are required to wear their full club attire, including socks, shorts, and training tops. Players should also come prepared with the following items:

1. Shin guards (must be the correct size, no credit card size shin guards)
2. Football boots
3. Rain gear
4. Water bottle
5. Spare change of clothes (for match days)
6. Light snacks or fruit (for match days or when traveling)



8. Attendance

Attendance is a vital element in ensuring the smooth operation of the programme. The coaching team invests significant time and effort in planning each session, making it essential to be informed if a player is unable to attend. Clubs or parents should notify us in advance by emailing etp@ddsl.ie or contacting the main ETP phone number.

Consistent attendance is considered during squad selection and ongoing player assessments; therefore, timely communication regarding absences is imperative. Any players who consistently miss sessions without communication or proper reasoning will be released from the programme and will not be eligible for feedback.

9. FAI Abbotstown Pitches

The ETP squads train at the National Sports Campus in Abbotstown. Parents are kindly requested to park only in the designated parking areas and to avoid parking directly in front of the pitches. Additionally, smoking and vaping **is not permitted** on the sidelines of the pitches. Anybody who breaches these rules will be asked to leave the premises.

As these facilities are rented by the ETP, we ask all players and parents to treat the grounds with respect, ensuring that the pitches, changing rooms, and toilets are left clean and tidy.

Changing rooms and toilet facilities will be available for all players.

Google Maps Location: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/DLfj3yAk5ckfmB5X8>

10. Behaviour

The ETP team is dedicated to fostering a safe and enjoyable environment where children can learn, develop, and enjoy playing football. We encourage all players to embrace new skills, give their full effort, and maintain a positive attitude. Open communication is welcomed, and players are encouraged to ask questions and engage with the coaching staff.

While players play a central role in this process, parents also have a significant part to play. Coaches are focused on their responsibilities, and we kindly ask parents to allow them to carry out their roles without interference. Parents should refrain from giving instructions to players on the sidelines, as this can cause confusion and distraction. Additionally, any concerns or questions should not be directed to coaching staff during sessions; instead, they should be addressed through the official ETP email, in accordance with the communication policy outlined in Section 4.



All parents must attend the ETP parents session prior to the sessions beginning.

11. Kennedy & Gaynor Cups

Each year, the U14 ETP Girls and Boys squads participate in the Kennedy and Gaynor Cups, the largest National League competitions held annually in June. These tournaments bring together teams from various leagues across the association to compete in a knockout format.

Following the conclusion of the third training block, typically around April, the ETP coaching team selects their squads for these competitions. Unlike regular squad selections, each squad is limited to a maximum of 20 players. Those not selected will be invited to meet with the coaching staff to receive feedback and could be placed on a reserve list in case of injuries or withdrawals.

The tournament usually spans five days and takes place at the University of Limerick. A dedicated team from the DDSL accompanies the players throughout the event, providing supervision, meals, accommodation, and organizing activities outside of match play.

Once the squad is confirmed, the ETP will communicate directly with parents. An information evening is held for all parents, and a WhatsApp group is established with the ETP Coordinator to facilitate ongoing communication. All correspondence follows the established communication protocol and is managed through the ETP Coordinator. In case of emergencies, parents will have direct contact details for the dedicated support team, who are available at all times during the tournament.

All parents must attend the parents information sessions for the Kennedy and Gaynor Cups.

12. Insurance

For all queries involving insurance and to view the insurance policy and claims procedure please see details on the link below

<https://ddsl.ie/insurance-terms/>



13. Complaints and Child Welfare

The ETP Programme is committed to maintaining the highest standards of child safety, welfare, and programme integrity. Formal complaints relating to the conduct, environment, or procedures within the ETP may be submitted via email to etp@ddsl.ie, in line with our communication protocol. To ensure transparency and accountability, anonymous or informal complaints cannot be acted upon.

If a complaint involves a child welfare concern or a matter that falls outside the direct scope of the ETP, individuals are encouraged to contact childwelfare@ddsl.ie, where they will be supported by the DDSL's appointed Child Welfare Officer. The DDSL takes its safeguarding responsibilities seriously and is fully committed to ensuring a safe and supportive environment for all players involved in the ETP.