



# STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2023





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# Foreword

Since our last Development Plan commenced in 2014 there has been a great deal of change in Irish cricket largely brought about by Ireland's transition to Full Member status of the ICC.

For the NCU that has led to a different approach to the administration of the game. We have incorporated as a company limited by guarantee, we have employed a team of staff dedicated to the development and promotion of the game at all levels and we now run an interprovincial team playing first class and List A matches.

Given that transformation it is necessary to give thought and direction to the sport for the next few years.

Cricket Ireland recently introduced its Strategic Plan 2021 – 2023 which is the first stage of a 2 step programme for growth.

The first stage is aimed at continuing to develop a world class High Performance system whilst also seeking to rebalance its decision making and investment to ensure cricket in Ireland is built upon sustainable and vibrant foundations.

The second stage 2024 – 2031 is expected to target substantial growth in the game driven by what is hoped to be an accelerated ICC funding cycle. There is an acknowledgement that since gaining admission as one of the 12 Full Member nations of the

ICC the initial focus was, perhaps understandably, on the elite end of the sport and whilst there was an increased investment in the Provincial Unions more needs to be done to service the needs of the grassroots and clubs.

Since much of the NCU funding is derived through Cricket Ireland it makes sense to align the time period for our Strategic Plan with Cricket Ireland. It is also helpful that the Cricket Ireland priorities align with and, perhaps to some extent reflect our own thinking.

From our Vision of supporting and strengthening our member clubs and schools to develop and grow the game of cricket for everyone throughout the NCU region there emerged 4 strategic themes covering the participation in cricket in clubs and schools; developing our talent and performance pathways; the organisation and culture within the game and raising our profile from which in turn the strategy framework has developed.

I would like to thank the NCU staff, Directorates, and sub-committees for their contribution to the Plan which we hope will strengthen the game in our Union over the next 3 years at which point we want to be well placed to meet the challenges and opportunities anticipated in the next cycle.

**Sam Beckett**

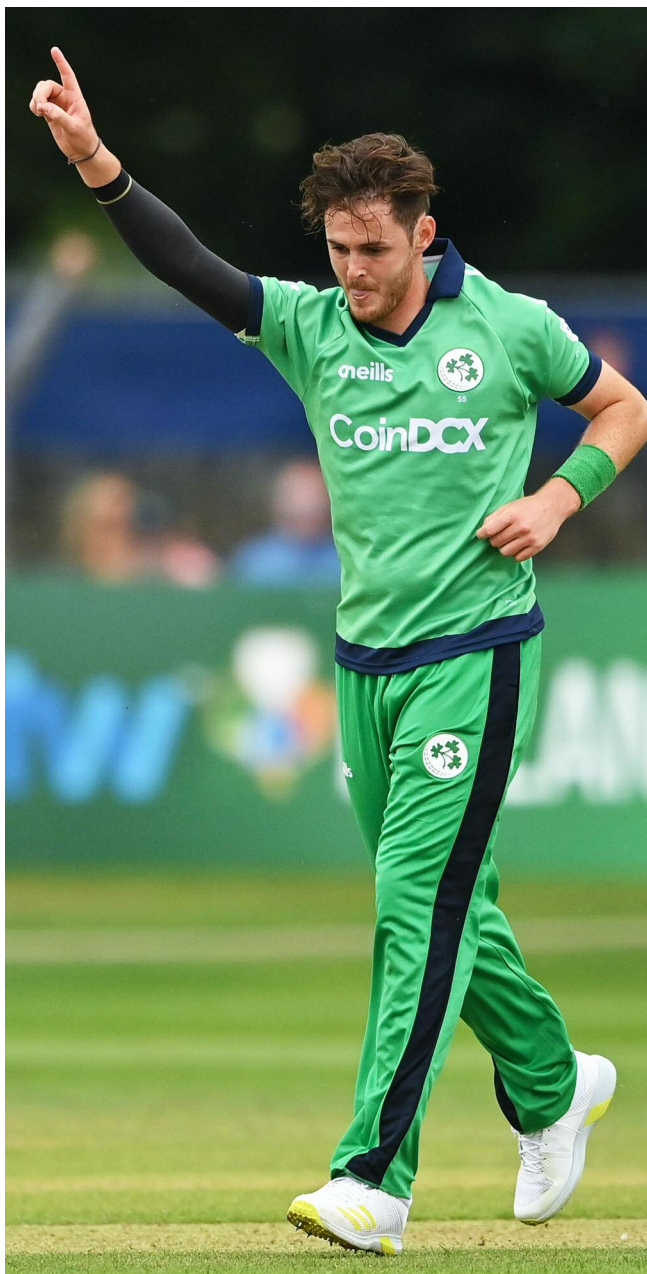
Chairperson



## The Background

The Northern Cricket Union of Ireland (NCU) is a regional/provincial organisation that is responsible for the administration, promotion, development, and delivery of cricket within the northern region. As an organisation and a growing sports business, the NCU has developed a new Strategy that will enable the sport to develop and flourish in our region. The Strategy outlines our commitment to delivering services that support our member clubs and schools and aims further to enhance the structures the NCU now has in place so that we can continue to develop cricket from grassroots to performance level.

On and off the pitch, the NCU continues to demonstrate ambition and desire to improve in all aspects of the sport from playing, coaching, officiating, administration, and governance. However, to achieve the strategic aims and objectives contained within this new plan we will also need the engagement and support of our member clubs and schools to play their part to assist us in growing and developing our sport during this strategic plan cycle. In addition to our members, we will also require support from Cricket Ireland, other Provincial organisations, Government Agencies, and key partners and stakeholders to deliver on our ambition and continued development of our sport.



## The Plan

This Strategic Plan outlines a new and ambitious period for cricket in the NCU. It sets out our strategic themes and priorities to build a more sustainable future for cricket in our region. By providing greater opportunities for more people to get involved we want to grow our game through participation opportunities, support and strengthen our clubs and schools, succeed at talent and performance levels, and be recognised for leading the way by demonstrating excellence through governance and culture within our organisation.

We recognise some of the targets outlined in this plan are ambitious. However, the targets will require us to improve our operations and performance in every aspect to achieve even better results in the coming years. We also accept that attaining all the targets outlined in this plan may not be achievable within the timeframe we have set for ourselves. However, by striving to achieve them we are stretching ourselves and laying much stronger foundations and frameworks for longer-term future success.

The delivery of some elements of this plan will also require increased investment in both financial resources and people. If we are not able to obtain increased investment during the term of the plan, we will review our objectives, re-assess the priority of our key programmes, and agree a revised set of targets.

## Our Vision

**“Supporting and strengthening our member clubs and schools to develop and grow the game of cricket for everyone throughout the NCU region”.**

Through this plan we want to strengthen our clubs and schools to engage more people to get involved in cricket and provide opportunities for people to stay involved for longer in all aspects of the sport. To do that we have identified four strategic priorities, and these are outlined below.

## Strategic Themes

We have identified the following strategic themes which are critical to realising our ambitions:

### 1. CRICKET FOR ALL

**“Make cricket more accessible to more people through inclusive participation initiatives, stronger clubs and schools, and enhanced member support programmes”.**

### 2. TALENT AND PERFORMANCE

**“Developing our talent and performance pathway systems to support players to reach their full potential”.**

### 3. EXCELLENCE IN GOVERNANCE AND CULTURE

**“A high performing organisation that is culturally welcoming and displaying good practice in all of our operations”.**

### 4. SHOWCASING THE GAME

**“Raising our profile through use of new technologies and broader partnerships to maximise our brand”.**

Each strategic area has headline initiatives identified and is supported by a detailed operational plan outlining the objectives, targets, roles, and responsibilities for delivery. More importantly the plan also identifies the key outcomes we are working to achieve in each strategic area.



# Strategy Framework

## 1. CRICKET FOR ALL

**“Make cricket more accessible to more people through inclusive participation initiatives, stronger clubs and schools, and enhanced member support programmes”.**

To achieve this, we will require the input of everyone involved in our sport to provide opportunities for cricket to be more accessible to more people. We will work with our members to strengthen our clubs and schools reflecting their importance as the core foundation of the game of cricket in our region.

Improving the player and volunteer experience so that they stay involved in our sport for longer is dependent on ensuring we focus on strengthening key aspects of infrastructure across the whole sport. Schools and Clubs are the foundation of cricket and play an extremely important role in attracting, developing, and retaining players within our sport. Therefore, supporting schools and clubs to attract, develop and retain participants forms an important part of our strategic priorities. Building capacity and strengthening our school and club communities will enhance the player and volunteer experience and provide improved cricket experiences for all involved in our sport.

Volunteers are the lifeblood of our sport. The volunteer workforce of umpires and scorers, teachers, coaches,



# Strategy Framework

grounds staff, administrators, and volunteers also requires investment and support to raise the quality and quantity of these key roles across game. Improving standards and engaging more active volunteers will ensure the sport continues to grow in the future as well as enabling stronger sustainable systems.

Facilities are also a crucial element of our infrastructure. Suitable facilities are integral as we strive to develop and grow the game. A co-ordinated approach to retaining and improving current facilities, as well as developing new facilities, is required. Engaging with key partners is essential for this.

## Our outcomes and what we are aiming to achieve.

- Increased number of schools engaged in NCU cricket programmes and delivering cricket.
- Stronger school club links to support the smooth transition from being introduced to the game into club membership for sustained participation.
- Strengthen our clubs with club development plans in place for all NCU clubs.
- Grow our game with more participants playing the game at all levels (KS1 – Senior/Adult)
- Grow our game by increasing the number of women and girls playing cricket through focused women and girls initiatives.
- Improved and new partnerships with external organisations to support delivery of initiatives.
- Enhanced offer for Domestic Competitions (Senior & Youth) that attracts and retains more participants.

- Increased number of quality coaches developed and active within our game.
- Increased number of volunteers engaged and active in our game.
- Stronger, more robust “workforce” of teachers, coaches, officials, grounds staff & volunteers to support participation initiatives in schools & clubs.
- Facility infrastructure development within clubs and schools across the region to support broader participation programmes through schools and clubs.

## We will achieve our outcomes by:

- Implementing sustainable School cricket development programmes
- Implementing sustainable club cricket development programmes
- Implementing practical toolkits and resources to strengthen member clubs and schools.
- Introducing innovative new participation programmes
- Supporting Cricket Ireland with the implementation of all-Ireland mass participation programmes to new and existing members.
- Developing and implementing diversity and inclusion initiatives for specific groups (Women & Girls, Ethnic Minorities, Disability)
- Developing our people through targeted development programmes for specific groups (umpires and scorers, teachers, coaches, grounds staff, administrators, and volunteers)
- Developing a stronger domestic cricket pathway

for women’s and girls’ cricket to make cricket more accessible for females.

- Enhanced domestic cricket competitions in place to attract and retain participants.
- Implementing a cricket facilities improvement programme (access grants to support)

## 2. TALENT AND PERFORMANCE

### “Developing our talent and performance pathway systems to support players to reach their full potential”.

The NCU has demonstrated a successful history of work in the identification and development of talented players. Achievement is reflected in the number of NCU players who have been involved in national pathway and senior international programmes.

Over the last few years our work has focused on broadening our approach to the identification and development of talent and performance players. We have expanded the pool of players we work with, as well as investing in developing our coaching workforce.

The introduction of our Pathway Head Coach role in 2018 has enhanced the pathway system further in our support of player and coach development. This role





has enabled an increased focus on the development of players, specifically working with leading under-age and senior players either individually, in small groups, or performance squads. The role has also provided a clearer framework for how our coaches operate within the pathway system.

During the period of this plan, we will retain many of the core elements of the player pathway system we now have in place while improving the system for further refinement and enhancement. However, we have ambitions to expand and further develop the work we do with our talented players and coaches.

We will also ensure improved alignment of the pathway system to Cricket Ireland programmes, thereby providing clearer pathways for our talented players to progress to achieve their full potential.

## **Our outcomes and what we are aiming to achieve.**

- Delivery of improved competition and training structures to support talent identification and development.
- Improved delivery of talent pathway and Academy (male & female) programmes supporting player development.
- Improved quality and standard (competitiveness) of the Northern Knights Men's Senior team
- Improved quality and standard (competitiveness) of the Northern Knights Women's Senior team
- More NCU players representing Ireland at all stages of the player pathway.

- Improved regional hub training and playing facilities for talent and performance programmes (indoor & outdoor).
- Develop appropriately trained and skilled pool of active Coaches working with talented players.
- Greater use of other resources to support player and coach development (S&C, psychology, physio etc)
- Develop facility infrastructure within the talent and performance environment across the region.

## **We will achieve our outcomes by:**

- Strengthening our talent pathway and Academy programmes
- Providing high quality competitive opportunities for talented players and the relevant squads within our pathway and performance programme
- Enhancing our Northern Knights Men's Senior training and competition programmes
- Enhancing our Northern Knights Women's Senior training and competition programmes
- Enhancing the support systems on offer to support player development and welfare.
- Encourage development and access to appropriate regional hub training and playing facilities (indoor & outdoor)
- Developing a Coaching workforce CPD programme to have quality coaches working with our pathway and performance players.



## 3. EXCELLENCE IN GOVERNANCE AND CULTURE

**“A high performing organisation that is culturally welcoming and displaying good practice in all of our operations”.**

How the NCU is governed will have an impact on our future success. In the last few years, our governance model has changed, partly due to the changing needs of the organisation and of the game. We have become a Company Limited by Guarantee registered in Northern Ireland (Company Number NI 649724) and a Charity registered with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland (Charity Number NIC 106791). Our Directorate work areas have evolved to reflect the growth of our operations and the need for devolution of operations to key areas within our governance structure.

We have also seen the evolution of Cricket Ireland's plans for strengthening the Provincial Unions, which has expanded our work and our staff resources. With that in mind, and in an ever changing environment, we must continue to assess our strengths and weaknesses, identify improvements, and ensure the NCU always has a best practice governance model.

Sustainable 'best practice' governance will, amongst other things, facilitate important succession planning,

and identify expertise to ensure this is put to the best use in the continued development of our game.

The NCU now, of necessity, has many of the characteristics of a business, and we must ensure we develop modern and progressive “fit-for-purpose” governance and management structures to reflect best business practice. In leading our sport, we will continue to develop our governance to ensure we achieve our ambition and a more successful future.

As a charity and not-for-profit organisation, financial return for the NCU is not the goal. However, a healthy financial position is of course extremely important for the long term sustainability of the NCU and our sport. Our need to operate more effectively as a business in the future is clear. Our financial performance is how we secure the resources to pursue the aims and ambitions outlined in this plan.

Our financial aim during this strategic plan, is to generate more income from other sources, to become more self-sustaining financially and less reliant on public funding. This will enable us to become more independent and in more control of our own future.

### **Our outcomes and what we are aiming to achieve.**

- Financial stability and security
- Financial planning to ensure delivery of programmes within resources.
- Increased revenue in addition to public/grant funding.

- Reviewed and updated governance structure to reflect changing needs of organisation.
- Culturally welcoming organisation providing open environments for all.
- Broader representation on committees and Board from under-represented groups.
- People development initiatives to support volunteers and staff to carry out their roles.

### **We will achieve our outcomes by:**

- A commercial and income generation strategy to support the Union's activities.
- Continued financial and other support from our key stakeholders, such as Cricket Ireland and government agencies.
- Review governance structure of organisation to ensure fit for purpose.
- Open and transparent decision making processes.
- Diversity & inclusion initiatives to broaden representation across Committees and Board.
- Administer the game responsibly to support sustainability of our operations (staff & volunteers).
- People development programme to support succession planning (staff & volunteers)

## 4. SHOWCASING THE GAME

**“Raising our profile through use of new technologies and broader partnerships to maximise our brand”.**

Raising the profile of cricket will require a co-ordinated approach to achieve a greater awareness of our game at all levels, from grassroots to high performance. Key partnerships are crucial to the long-term success of this area. Improving the profile of cricket through engaging online and social media content, good branding, rewarding sponsorship, as well as broadening our methods of media coverage is important. It is also essential that we ensure we convert the benefits of this work into a legacy of consistent support and growth beyond a single event or activity.

Gaining recognition and increased awareness at club level can be more challenging to achieve. However, through continued support and partnership with our members, we will ensure greater reach of our profile beyond the clubhouse and the boundary rope.

The stakeholders within our sport – from clubs, schools, players, elite athletes, and volunteers, through to the board members, investors, partners, and sponsors – have the ability, and responsibility to work together to build the best relationships that will benefit cricket at all levels.

### **Our outcomes and what we are aiming to achieve.**

- Implementation of new IT systems to improve operations and streamline administrations.
- Implementation of a NCU Digital strategy
- Implementation of a registration platform to capture accurate player data.
- Availability of up-to-date data covering the various aspects of participation.
- Delivery of showcase “events” to maximise brand awareness and reach new audiences.
- Development of new partnerships with new organisations (sponsors, local authorities, funding bodies etc).
- Maximise the Knights brand for greater commercial gain and audience/fan interaction.

### **We will achieve our outcomes by:**

- Use of new technologies to support improved efficiencies across operations.
- Digital strategy developed to raise our profile across various online social channels.
- Player registration platform to support improved data capture.
- Data capture system in place for other participants.
- Innovative profile activities (live scoring / streaming platforms).
- Linking our profile activities to the needs of sponsors and partners.
- Maximise the NCU brand and exposure to drive income generation and reach for new audiences.
- Expand our partnerships to increase our brand awareness.







## Conclusion

The NCU has a rich tradition and history governing and developing the game. The organisation has made significant progress in many areas over the last few years. However, as this plan highlights, there is still much work to be done to continue our development journey.

Cricket is a sport enjoyed by people of all ages and abilities, with a rich tradition of volunteers engaged in clubs throughout the region. However, the infrastructure requires focus and investment as well as resources aimed at raising the profile of the sport to ensure greater awareness and media exposure in the coming years.

In the current economic climate, and during the uncertainty of the impact from the pandemic, there will be many challenges facing our endeavours to deliver this ambitious plan. However, the willingness of our member schools, clubs, and our valuable team of volunteers, supported by our staff team, is vital for us to work together as we move into a new, exciting, and ambitious phase of development for the NCU.

This strategy sets out the strategic priorities that will help to grow our game, strengthen our clubs and schools, improve the quality of our people (coaches, officials, administrators, volunteers, and staff), have better structures in place to support our talented players to reach their full potential and raise the profile of our sport across our region and beyond.

By 2023, cricket in the NCU, through strong leadership, will have reached a new level in its development, which will provide a bigger platform for future progress of the sport at all levels. Together through this ambitious Strategic Plan we all have a role in achieving our vision, ***“Supporting and strengthening our member clubs and schools to develop and grow the game of cricket for everyone throughout the NCU region”.***

## STRATEGIC THEMES OVERVIEW

### CRICKET FOR ALL

Make cricket more accessible to more people through inclusive participation initiatives, stronger clubs and schools, and enhanced members support programmes

#### Headline Initiatives

- Develop sustainable school and club development programmes.
- Develop practical organisational toolkits to strengthen clubs and schools.
- Innovative new participation programmes.
- Develop additional innovative domestic competitions.
- Diversity and inclusion initiatives for women and girls, ethnic minorities and disabled people.
- Enhance range of external partnerships to support specific development initiatives.
- Further develop the skills of officials, teachers, coaches, ground staff and other volunteers.
- Strengthen domestic pathway for women's cricket.
- Enhance grants and practical support for the improvement of facilities.

#### Planned Outcomes

- Increasing number of schools participating in NCU programmes and playing inter-school cricket.
- Increasing number of clubs with effectively structured school links.
- Increasing number of players progressing from school to regular club cricket.
- More people of both sexes playing cricket at all levels.
- Clubs gaining strength through implementing agreed development plans.
- Successful initiatives supported through partnership with external organisations.
- Wider variety of adult and youth competitions attracting increasing entries.
- Increasing numbers of more knowledgeable and better skilled active officials, teachers, coaches, ground staff and other volunteers.
- Improving infrastructure of facilities in clubs and schools across the region.

### TALENT AND PERFORMANCE PATHWAY

Developing our talent and performance pathway systems to support players to reach their full potential

#### Headline Initiatives

- Strengthen talent pathway and Academy programmes.
- Provide high-quality competitive opportunities for talent pathway groups.
- Enhance training and competition programmes for Senior Knights (Men and Women).
- Enhance player support systems.
- Enhance indoor and outdoor facilities for regional hubs.
- Develop coaching workforce CPD programme.

#### Planned Outcomes

- Improved development of pathway and Academy players.
- Improved competitiveness of Senior Knights teams (Men and Women).
- More NCU players representing Ireland at all stages of the player pathway.
- Larger pools of appropriately trained coaches and support personnel.
- Improved regional infrastructure of training and support facilities.

### EXCELLENCE IN GOVERNANCE AND CULTURE

A high performing organisation that is culturally welcoming and displaying good practice in all of our operations

#### Headline Initiatives

- Improve financial planning systems.
- Adopt new commercial and income generation strategy.
- Review governance structures and systems.
- Diversity and inclusion initiatives.
- Introduce Board/directorate/committee succession planning.
- Introduce development programmes for staff and volunteers.

#### Planned Outcomes

- Financial stability and security.
- Increasing proportion of self-generated income.
- Governance arrangements that are fit for purpose and comply with recommended best practice.
- Open and transparent decision-making processes.
- Board and directorate/committee membership that better reflects the population within which we operate.
- Culturally welcoming organisation that provides an environment open to all.
- Sustainable supply of people equipped to take on key staff and volunteer roles.

### SHOWCASING THE GAME

Raising our profile through use of new technologies and broader partnerships to maximise our brand

#### Headline Initiatives

- Implement new IT systems.
- Development of digital strategy including live streaming and on-line scoring.
- Deliver showcase events.
- Maximise NCU and Knights brand awareness and exposure.
- Implement an on-line player registration system.
- Improve arrangements for collecting data on other participants.

#### Planned Outcomes

- Improved operational efficiency and effectiveness.
- Heightened public profile of the local game and its sponsors.
- Partnerships established with new sponsors and funding bodies.
- Improved accuracy and visibility of player registrations.
- More complete and up-to-date information covering the totality of people involved in the game.





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