



Four-Week Review — Phase 1: Pre-Season Foundation (Weeks 1–5)

A structured checkpoint, completed by the coach using the evidence gathered across Weeks 1–5, before Phase 2 begins in Week 6.

This review follows the same rhythm every four-to-six-week block will use for the rest of the season (next due after Week 11, then Weeks 17, 23, 29, and the season close after Week 36). Filling it in properly — honestly, with specific examples rather than general impressions — is what makes the next block's coaching decisions evidence-based rather than guesswork.

1. Principles Covered

WEEK	PRIMARY PRINCIPLE	SECONDARY PRINCIPLE
1	Support & passing angles	Communication language & team standards
2	Width & depth	Support & passing angles (revisited)
3	Pressure, cover, balance	Compactness — vertical and horizontal
4	Recognise the picture before playing (transition to attack)	The nearest players react first (transition to defence)
5	All Phase 1 principles, consolidated	Attacking corners (first set-piece routine)

By the end of Phase 1, the squad has been introduced to five of the season's fourteen formation-neutral principles (Season Architecture, Section 2), the season's foundational communication language (fourteen calls: Time, Turn, Hold, Drop, Squeeze, Step, Cover, Delay, Travel, Switch, plus the set-piece organisation vocabulary from Week 5), and the club's first fixture-ready set-piece routine.

2. Evidence of Progress

(Complete using direct observation from Weeks 1–5, particularly Week 5's "Phase 1 Final" conditioned match, which was deliberately designed as a diagnostic practice.)

- What specific moment, from any of the five weeks, best demonstrated the team playing as this club intends to play? Name the week, the practice, and what happened.
- Compare Week 1's "Third Angle" rondo to Week 5's "Complete Picture" practice — is the same underlying skill (finding and using an angle) visibly stronger?
- Compare Week 3's early pressing work to Week 5's conditioned match — are presses still isolated, or consistently supported?
- Did the team organise its own shape without instruction during Week 5's least structured practices? If so, note who led that.

3. Recurring Technical Problems

(List any technical issue — passing weight, first touch, delivery technique, finishing — that appeared in more than one week's coach review, e.g. the "Common Problems and Corrections" tables in Weeks 1–5. A problem seen once is noise; a problem seen three times across five weeks is signal.)

4. Recurring Tactical Problems

(Same approach — cross-reference the "Common Problems and Corrections" tables and the weekly Coach Review sections. Common candidates to check specifically, given what Phase 1 targeted: isolated pressing reappearing under fatigue, width collapsing under pressure, forced forward passes immediately after a regain, slow or mixed reactions after losing the ball.)

5. Physical Observations

Pre-season load rose across Weeks 1–5 as planned (Season Architecture, Section 7), peaking in Week 5's "Phase 1 Final" session. Record:

- Did the squad tolerate the rising load without signs of excessive fatigue (flat running, technical breakdown late in sessions, dips in communication)?
- Were the attendance-based physical adjustments (players with 75+ match minutes vs. fragments vs. unused vs. returning from injury) applied consistently, and did they seem to matter?
- Any individual players who need a different physical entry point into Phase 2 — either because they've missed significant training, or because they're carrying more load than the group?

(This section is observational, not diagnostic. Any player showing signs of possible injury, overtraining, or a health concern should be referred to qualified medical or sports-science support rather than managed through this review.)

6. Communication Development

Ten pieces of shared language were introduced across Phase 1: *Time, Turn, Hold, Drop, Squeeze, Step, Cover, Delay, Travel, Switch*.

- Which calls are used accurately and without prompting?
- Which calls are still infrequent or inaccurate?
- Is the language being used *early* (before an action, shaping it) or only *afterward* (describing what already happened)? Early use is the actual goal.

7. Leadership Development

Phase 1 built in small, deliberate opportunities for player ownership: the rotating "adjudicator" role in Week 1's angled-SSG, the goalkeeper's organisational role (introduced Week 1, developed through Weeks 3–5), and the largely coach-silent practices in Week 5.

- Who has stepped into an organisational role without being asked?
- Is it the same one or two players every time, or is leadership beginning to

distribute across the squad?

- What is the specific, concrete opportunity to hand more ownership to players in

Phase 2 (Season Architecture, "Player Leadership" — reducing coach control as understanding improves)?

8. Set-Piece Progress

Phase 1 delivered the pathway's first milestone (Season Architecture, Section 8): one attacking corner routine (*Near Post Front, Far Post Finish*), a defensive corner structure, and restart discipline from Week 1's goal-kick work.

- Was the attacking corner routine executed correctly in Week 5's live practice?
- Did the defensive corner structure hold up, including the non-negotiable rest-defence / out-ball rule?
- Note anything to refine before Phase 2 adds the next layer (defensive set-piece formalisation, a wide free-kick routine, and throw-in patterns, due Weeks 8–10).

9. Match Transfer

(This is the most important section — everything above is only useful if it's changing what happens on a Saturday.)

- Across the pre-season fixtures played during Phase 1, what evidence exists that training content is showing up in matches specifically (not just "the team played well," but a named principle visible in a named moment)?
- Did the Match Review and Weekly Adjustment routes (A/B/C) get used accurately each week — is the record of which route applied, and why, still available for reference?

10. Priorities for the Next Block (Phase 2, Weeks 6–11)

Based on the above, name (in order) the two or three things Phase 2 most needs to address before its own review at Week 11. Phase 2's planned content (build-up principles, progressing through pressure, collective pressing triggers, and further set-piece development) assumes Phase 1's foundations are reasonably secure — if they are not, say so here rather than letting Phase 2 proceed on an assumption that hasn't been tested.

Adjusting the Route Into Phase 2

Use whichever of the five scenarios below actually describes the squad — more than one may apply in different areas (e.g., results could be good while a specific principle is still shaky).

IF THE TEAM IS AHEAD OF SCHEDULE

Increase complexity rather than simply repeating Phase 1 content into Phase 2. This might mean introducing Phase 2's practices at their fuller progressions from the start (e.g., live opposition immediately rather than passive-to-live progressions), combining two principles inside a single practice earlier than Week 12's schedule assumes, or bringing forward a light version of Phase 3 content (unit relationships, overloads) as an extension inside an already-strong week. Do not mistake "ahead of schedule" for "finished" — continue revisiting Phase 1 principles inside Phase 2's practices, as the Season Architecture requires throughout.

IF THE TEAM IS BEHIND SCHEDULE

Identify specifically which Phase 1 principle is weakest (Section 4 above) and give it additional, targeted time inside Phase 2's Tuesday sessions — most Phase 2 practices can absorb an extra five minutes of the relevant Phase 1 idea without abandoning their own week's content, since Phase 2 is explicitly built on Phase 1's foundations. Do not delay Phase 2's start; instead, simplify Phase 2's own practices (using the regressions already written into each one) until the gap closes.

IF ATTENDANCE HAS BEEN INCONSISTENT

Consolidate rather than expand. Phase 2 introduces genuinely new tactical content (build-up structures, collective pressing triggers) that depends on a shared understanding among whoever is present. Where attendance has been patchy, spend Week 6's Tuesday session explicitly re-establishing Phase 1's core language and principles with whichever group shows up, rather than assuming continuity that may not exist. The contingency sections built into every practice (low/high attendance, restricted space) exist precisely for this situation.

IF RESULTS ARE POOR BUT PERFORMANCES ARE IMPROVING

This is a normal, expected pattern in pre-season and early competitive fixtures, and should not trigger panic changes to the season plan. Maintain the players' confidence explicitly — name the specific improvements visible in matches (Section 9), even where results haven't followed yet, and continue the development process as planned. Results tend to follow performance with a lag, not a lead; changing the plan reactively before that lag has played out usually costs more than it gains.

IF RESULTS ARE GOOD BUT PERFORMANCES ARE WEAK

This is the more dangerous pattern, because it invites complacency. Do not let good results in pre-season friendlies (which often carry weaker opposition or unrepresentative conditions) substitute for the honest evidence gathered in Sections 2–8 above. If Week 5's "Phase 1 Final" showed genuine gaps despite good results, address those gaps directly in Phase 2 exactly as planned — the review process exists specifically to catch this pattern before it becomes comfortable.

Written by Alan Cunningham with Claude AI · Castlewellan Town FC — Senior Coaching Curriculum · Phase 1 Review, covering Weeks 1–5. An independent club resource, not an official UEFA or Irish FA publication and not endorsed by either.