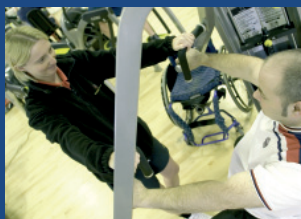


Women in Sports Leadership

Research Report - Summary 2005



SPORTS
COUNCIL NORTHERN IRELAND

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1. **Background & Objectives.**

- 1.1 Sports Council for Northern Ireland (SCNI) has a broad-ranging remit as a Non-Departmental Public Body reporting to the Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL), including the need to fulfil their vision that they will help,

“through sport, to contribute to an inclusive, creative, competent, informed and vibrant community”.

Within this there is a need to “provide people, especially young people and underrepresented groups, with pathways and options for life long sporting and personal development”¹.

- 1.2 This approach explicitly accepts the role of sport as a social facilitator, bringing people together. As noted by DCAL “as players, parents, teachers, volunteers, and spectators, sport connects with almost everyone at some point in their life”².
- 1.3 An important part of the recognition of the social role of sport is the

understanding that this entails meeting certain social obligations, including the crucial need to ensure equality of access and opportunity for individuals from all backgrounds. This was recognised within “Staying Well, Staying Involved and Striving for Excellence”, (Strategy for Sport, 1997-2005) with it being mentioned that the strategy should lead to a vibrant sporting culture “in which as many people as possible, across all classes and creeds, have opportunities to take part in the sport(s) of their choice” and that sport should embody “respect for the individual and acceptance of diversity and difference”.

- 1.4 However, there is an acknowledgement within “Staying Well, Staying Involved and Striving for Excellence” of the marginalisation of certain sectors in society with regards to participation in sport with this including “young girls, women, people with disabilities and those economically disadvantaged”.

Evidence from elsewhere in the UK suggests that there are a range of particular barriers and constraints that inhibit female involvement in sport. These include women in more affluent families having to juggle demanding jobs and responsibility for children, lack

¹Quoted in Terms of reference for Women in Sport Leadership Research
²<http://www.dcalni.gov.uk/allpages.asp?pname=sport>



of time, family commitments, transport, cost and lack of self-confidence among young women. There is therefore a challenge at a broad level to increase female participation in sport.

1.5 Having an equitable spread of genders in leadership roles in sport is seen as one way of contributing to increasing female participation in sport, as well as being necessary in its own right.

1.6 In order to understand the current position of women in sports leadership roles within Northern Ireland, Sports Council Northern Ireland commissioned George Street Research to undertake research into the subject. This research was to include both desk and quantitative research to ensure that the subject was fully evaluated. Details of the study design are contained within the following section of the report.

2. Methodology & Sample

2.1 There were seven different groups that formed the overall sample:

- **Governing Bodies of sport.** These are mainly volunteer managed organisations that provide the rules and regulations for their sport,

organise competition, select and train regional/provincial teams and work to develop and promote their sport.

- **District Councils.** District Councils in Northern Ireland are major providers of statutory sports facilities and opportunities through facility provision, sports development and school sport.
- **Sports Advisory Councils.** These organisations bring together sporting representatives within a particular area to work jointly for the benefit of sport. In many cases they have a symbiotic relationship with the District Councils and are also providers of community development.
- **Sports Clubs** include a wide range of organisations whose primary purpose is normally to provide their members with opportunities to take part in sport.
- **Community/Voluntary groups.** This included organisations with a specific focus or remit on sports provision & development in NI.

- **Sports Institute.** The Sports Institute Northern Ireland (SINI) has as its core purpose to “to create an environment that nurtures and leads elite athletes and coaches through the provision of facilities, services and expertise”³.

- **Sports Council Northern Ireland** is the national agency dedicated to promoting sporting opportunities for all those living in Northern Ireland at all levels. SCNI distributes lottery funding and an annual government grant, works in partnership with all other 6 organisational groups, to develop sport in Northern Ireland.

2.2 A number of different questionnaires were designed to cover these groups, covering the following questions:

- Quantitative profile of membership, split by numbers of males and females
- Profile of coaches (gender, level and age group coached) where relevant
- Profile of leadership roles (by gender)

- Respondents’ personal views on the gender balance in sports leadership roles in their organisation
- Views on gender balance in sports leadership roles in sport in Northern Ireland.

2.3 Each questionnaire was based upon previous questionnaires used for a similar study conducted by George Street Research on behalf of **sportscotland**.

Relevant knowledge (in particular in terms of the range of relevant leadership or coaching roles) was provided either by SCNI staff or by other individuals with knowledge of sport in Northern Ireland.

Each questionnaire was first piloted among actual respondents before being finalised to ensure that the content was fully relevant to all likely respondents.

In addition, all questionnaires were made available on line to enable interviewees to respond electronically. Copies of the questionnaires are contained in the full report.

³ <http://www.sini.co.uk/aboutus/>



2.4 The following section explains the particular details of how each separate group was surveyed.

2.5 CLUBS

2.5.1 The most important factor was to ensure that the clubs that were surveyed were representative of sports clubs in Northern Ireland. To achieve this it was necessary to compile a database of relevant clubs from which our sample of approximately 500 clubs could be drawn. There were three basic sources of this information:

- A sample of sports clubs was obtained from Yellow Pages. This contained a wide range of clubs in Northern Ireland, from which non-relevant organisations were then removed.
- SCNI contacted a range of governing bodies asking for a list of affiliated clubs (details were only provided by the governing body dealing with Gymnastics).
- SCNI forwarded details of clubs for which they had

records (primarily those having gone through the Clubmark accreditation scheme).

2.5.2 All clubs were then added into a database, which was sorted to remove all duplicate clubs and all clubs that participated in activities that were not considered to be sports for the purposes of this study. This resulted in a database containing the contact details of approximately 952 clubs. Each club was classified according to the main sport in which it participated.

2.5.3 The profile, in terms of main sport, of the 952 clubs was then drawn up, with the selection of the final 509 clubs ensuring that the same basic profile was kept⁴.

2.5.4 Each club was sent a copy of the questionnaire in a paper format by post, along with a reply-paid envelope and a letter asking them either to complete the paper questionnaire or the Internet version. A prize draw (with three prizes of £100 sports equipment vouchers) was used as an incentive to clubs.

⁴ This may have meant a slight bias towards gymnastics clubs and those with Clubmark accreditation due to the original sample sources for which there was no suitable means of correction.

2.5.5 Those clubs that had not replied within a week were either contacted by phone or post and reminded that their participation in the survey would be welcome. In total, 100 clubs replied to the survey representing a response rate of 20%.

2.6 GOVERNING BODIES OF SPORT

2.6.1 Questionnaires were sent to 82 governing bodies, with contact details provided by SCNI. To encourage response rate, a prize draw of a £100 sports equipment voucher was offered. A telephone or postal reminder sent to all those who had not replied. At the end of the study, 31 governing bodies had responded, a response rate of 38%.

2.7 DISTRICT COUNCILS

2.7.1 In total, a named individual⁵ at 25 district councils within Northern Ireland was sent a questionnaire by post, again with a reply-paid envelope. In total, 5 questionnaires were returned, representing a response rate of 20%.

⁵ These named individuals were taken from a contact list provided by SCNI and primarily included Directors of Leisure, Chief Leisure Officers, Sports Development Officers or Managers and various Directors of services.

2.8 SPORTS ADVISORY COUNCILS

2.8.1 Details of the 20 sports advisory councils throughout Northern Ireland were provided to George Street Research by SCNI. Each of these Councils was then sent a questionnaire by post (with reply-paid envelope); with non-replying respondents sent the questionnaire again with a reminder letter or telephoned to encourage participation. In total, 2 respondents replied, representing a response rate of 10%⁶.

2.9 COMMUNITY/VOLUNTARY

2.9.1 Details of 31 selected community or voluntary groups in Northern Ireland were provided to George Street Research by SCNI. Each of these bodies was then sent a questionnaire by post (with reply-paid envelope), with non-replying respondents sent the questionnaire again with a reminder letter or telephoned to encourage participation. In total, 12 respondents replied, representing a response rate of 39%.

⁶ The Sports Advisory Councils and District Councils that responded were based in different areas.



2.10 INSTITUTE OF SPORT

2.10.1 Contact details for the Sports Institute Northern Ireland were provided by SCNI. A named individual was posted a questionnaire, followed up with a telephone reminder. The questionnaire was then completed and returned.

2.11 SCNI

2.11.1 Details of the gender balance in leadership roles in SCNI and comments on this balance were provided by SCNI's Human Resources department and other SCNI staff members.

3. **Summary of Results, Conclusions & Recommendations.**

This section details the most important findings from each section of the report.

3.1 CLUBS

3.1.1 Most clubs responding to the questionnaire, consisted primarily of male members (71%) than of female members (29%).

3.1.2 Two-thirds of clubs (65%) employed (whether paid or unpaid) sports coaching staff, with 72% of the coaches employed being male and 28% being female.

More male than female coaches are being employed in total.

A similar bias towards male coaches was seen regardless of the qualification of the coach and the age group that was being coached.

Just over one in three clubs (38%) had at least one unqualified coach.

3.1.3 Clubs had more males than females in virtually all the senior board positions, particularly for chairs and chief/head coaches.

The only position with relatively similar numbers of males and females was the post of child protection officer (56% of clubs with, on average, 1.1 females in the role, compared with 49% with an average of 1.2 males in the role).

3.1.4 There were more males than females in leadership roles among clubs with a mainly male membership, than there were females in leadership roles amongst clubs with mainly female memberships.

3.1.5 Clubs were generally satisfied (68%) rather than dissatisfied (26%) with the gender balance in leadership roles in their organisation.

The main reasons given by those who were satisfied were that the number of leaders was representative of the organisation/players as a whole (18%), that there was a good balance (18%) and they were mainly a male club (16%) and this was reflected in leadership roles.

Due to the small base sizes involved it was not possible to ascertain the extent to which this was due to respondents being male rather than female. A small number of respondents explicitly linked the gender balance in participation with that in leadership.

3.1.6 The 26 (number or percentage) clubs who were not satisfied tended to reflect mainly on:

- the fact they were mainly male clubs (27%),
- that women were not interested in taking up leadership roles (23%),
- that there were historical or cultural reasons for a negative balance (15%), or,

- that women didn't have time to take up leadership roles (12%).
- Eight percent (i.e. two clubs) did mention that there were either no or not enough female coaches.

3.2 GOVERNING BODIES

3.2.1 Almost all (92%) of the governing bodies that were surveyed employed at least one male coach, with less (77%) having at least one female coach.

In total, 63% of coaches were male and 37% were female, less of a bias than was seen for clubs.

Males tended to be employed more than females at each qualification level and for teaching those aged 13 and over, although there was more of an equal balance of coaching those aged 12 or under and there were more part-time females than males.

3.2.2 As with clubs, leadership roles in governing bodies tended to be males rather than female, with the sole exceptions being the higher proportion with female secretaries,



admin managers and membership secretaries.

- 3.2.3 In total, 44% of governing bodies were either very or fairly satisfied with the gender balance in their leadership roles, with approximately a third (38%) being fairly or very unsatisfied

3.3 COMMUNITY/VOLUNTARY GROUPS

- 3.3.1 There were more male than female part-time and voluntary staff in community/voluntary organisations but more female full-time and paid staff across the 12 organisations responding.

- 3.3.2 Two-thirds of the community groups who responded employed specialist coaching staff.

In total, 89 coaches were employed, 55 of whom were male (62%) and 34 were female (38%), representing a similar proportion to those employed by governing bodies.

- 3.3.3 Males were found in leadership roles more often than females, particularly for the more senior roles. The sole exceptions were, as for governing bodies, administrators and secretaries,

who were more likely to be female than male.

- 3.3.4 The vast majority (88%) of community or voluntary groups were satisfied with the gender balance in their organisations, with the remaining two of the twelve respondents feeling it was fairly unsatisfactory.

3.4 DISTRICT COUNCILS

- 3.4.1 All five district councils who responded stated that they employed specialist coaching staff – only three provided details meaning a comprehensive examination of the gender balance of coaches was not possible.

- 3.4.2 Most councils had unique patterns in terms of the gender balance in leadership roles.

Two had roughly equal numbers of males and females employed (with both genders being in similar roles).

One had slightly more males although they had a female and male chair and vice-chair. One had notably more males, while the last had more females although eleven of the twenty females

(compared to none of the fourteen males) were administrators⁷.

- 3.4.3 Four of the five district councils found the gender balance in leadership roles in their organisation fairly satisfactory and one found it very satisfactory.

3.5 SPORTS ADVISORY COUNCILS

- 3.5.1 Only two sports advisory councils responded. Full results can be found in the full report.

3.6 OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH GENDER BALANCE IN SPORT IN NORTHERN IRELAND

- 3.6.1 Over a third (36%) of respondents stated that they did not know whether they were satisfied with the gender balance in sport in Northern Ireland.

Roughly equal proportions stated they were either very or fairly satisfied (30%) or very or fairly unsatisfied (34%).

There was some correlation, as may have been expected, between people

being satisfied with the gender balance at their organisation and satisfied with the gender balance in Northern Ireland as a whole.

- 3.6.2 Some of those who were satisfied were content with the existing balance (13%), although some did comment on:

- that there was a lack of females in most senior roles (7%),
- there were more males than females (7%), and,
- that there was a lack of female participation (9%).

Others did feel there was a good balance or even distribution across genders (9%), although 7% said they were satisfied as positions were appointed on the basis of 'best person for the job'.

- 3.6.3 Only two reasons were noted by more than a tenth of the 51 respondents who were unsatisfied with the current gender balance. These were,

⁷ Respondents were asked to list everyone in sports leadership roles and were given a prompted list with an other option. The exact position or role of administrators was not noted by respondents.



- that there were more males than females in sport (35%) and,
- that there were historical and cultural factors affecting this imbalance (14%).

3.7 SPORTS COUNCIL NORTHERN IRELAND

3.7.1 The most senior roles (chief executive, director Heads of Department) in SCNI are more likely to be held by males than females. There are the same number of males as females in the less senior leadership roles, namely as staff managers.

3.8 ACTIONS SUGGESTED TO ADDRESS ISSUES

3.8.1 A range of different actions have been suggested in the final section of the full report.

These tend to fit within two separate approaches – either prioritising getting an equal gender balance in membership (with this leading to an equal balance in leadership roles) or vice-versa.

3.8.2 It was therefore suggested that specific approaches focus on increasing female participation as members and leaders. These include examination of reasons for drop-out, provision of family-friendly options; encourage participation from an early age and ensuring that senior organisations set a clear example of best practice.

Case-studies can play a role as a means of disseminating this information, particularly if they include positive examples of recent change.

3.8.3 Positive action measures to increase female participation should also be investigated.

3.8.4 In order to address the issues raised in this research, there is a need to invest in delivering against strategies through programmes and interventions, which aim to promote women in sport, e.g. UK Strategy Framework for Women and Sport, Women into High Performance Coaching.

3.8.5 Finally, there is a suggestion that further research should be carried out to examine the possibility that having an equal balance in leadership roles can lead to an increased membership.

Notes



Notes

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