



**Sport Matters 'Participation' Implementation Group  
Tuesday 21 October 2014**

**Update on the Northern Ireland Assembly All Party Group on Visual Impairment's  
Discussion on sports opportunities for blind & partially sighted people held on the 10th  
June 2014**

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## **1. Introduction**

The purpose of this update is to brief members of the Sport Matters 'Participation' Implementation Group on the Northern Ireland Assembly All Party Group on Visual Impairment's discussion on sports opportunities for blind and partially sighted people on the 10th June 2014.

## **2. Background**

The Northern Ireland Assembly All Party Group on Visual Impairment (APGVI) was established by MLAs to oversee and provide political support for the implementation of the RNIB NI Pledge and National Vision Strategy which aims to improve the lives of blind and partially sighted people in Northern Ireland. The key action areas of the strategy are educational attainment, accessible information, employment, maximising independence and ending exclusion.

The Chairperson of the group is Jim Wells MLA and the Vice-Chairperson is Pat Ramsey MLA.

## **3. APGVI Meeting, 10<sup>th</sup> June 2014.**

The main agenda item at the APGVI's meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> June, 2014 was a discussion on sports opportunities for blind and partially sighted people in Northern Ireland.

This involved a joint presentation to the group by the CEO of Disability Sport NI, Kevin O'Neill and the Chairperson of the Blind Sports Network NI, Jan Dinsdale MBE, with additional contributions from representatives of the RNIB NI, Guide Dogs NI and Blind athlete and Paralympic Gold medallist Kelly Gallagher MBE.

## **4. The Presentation**

In summary the presentation to the APGVI highlighted two key facts:

That people with disabilities as a group were half as likely to participate in sport as non disabled people, however blind and partially sighted people were even less likely to participate in sport than other people with disabilities. As such blind and partially sighted people were one of the most disadvantaged groups in Northern Ireland in relation to participation in sport and physical recreation.

That participation in sport and physical recreation at any level is a positive and transformational experience for blind and partially sighted people. Sport not only provides opportunities to improve the health and fitness but also provides a way of enhancing the overall quality of life of blind and partially sighted people by providing fulfilment, enjoyment and the opportunity to socialize and make friends. In addition in a society where blind and partially sighted people often lead marginalised lives, participation in sport can help build confidence and self-esteem and create opportunities for people to play an active role in their local community.

## **5. Key Asks**

The 'key asks' of the groups representing blind and partially sighted people were summarised as follows:

### **5.1 DCAL**

To prioritise the disability element of the 'Sport Matters' Strategy for Sport 2009 -2019, Target PA10, a 6 percentage point increase in participation in sport by people with disabilities and to implement the proposal to appoint a network of 18 'Disability Sports Officers'.

### **5.2 Sport NI**

To prioritise disability sport by maintaining and increasing investment in Disability Sport NI's programmes, to include the funding of 'Impairment specific' programmes targeting blind and partially sighted people and the other 'hardest to reach' groups.

To increase the disability target for the Sport NI funded Active Communities Programme from 10% to 20% and to encourage the District Councils who manage the programme to actively target blind and partially sighted people and other 'hardest to reach' groups.

### **5.3 District Councils and Health & Social Care Trusts**

Local authorities and Trusts to work in partnership to establish 11 'disability active' projects in each of the 11 new local authority areas, concerned with improving the health and wellbeing of people with disabilities through sports and physical recreation programmes.

### **5.4 OFMDFM**

To contribute to 'Strategic Priority 18' of the Northern Ireland Disability Strategy 2012 -15 'To improve access to sport, arts, leisure and other cultural activities so that people with a disability have equal access to community life' by coordinating the development of an interdepartmental plan concerned with increasing the health and wellbeing of people with disabilities, including blind and partially sighted people, through sport.

### **5.5 NISRA**

To work with DCAL and Sport NI on the development of a research programme designed to establish the participation levels of different 'impairment groups' (including blind and partially sighted people) in sport and physical recreation.

## **6. Question & Answer Session**

The presentation was followed with a question and answer session with representatives of DCAL (Sinéad McCartan), Sport NI (Andrew Sloan) and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Michael Sweeney).

## **7. Outcome**

The outcome of the meeting was that the Chairperson undertook to write to DCAL, Sport NI, the Department of Health, Social Services & Public Safety and the NI Assembly Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure asking them to address the issues raised.