



Covid-19 Survey

Understanding the
Current Sporting Landscape
in Northern Ireland

June 2020

Introduction

Sporting organisations have responded tremendously during the Covid-19 global pandemic, with many still playing a pivotal but quite different role within their communities. However we know that some organisations are still facing difficult challenges and that these organisations need our support.

On 29th May 2020, Sport NI launched the 'COVID-19 Survey: Understanding the current sporting landscape in Northern Ireland' survey to better understand the range of current and future challenges. The survey was designed to be completed by any organisation providing sport services operating in Northern Ireland, including National and Regional Governing Bodies of Sport, sports clubs, charitable sporting organisations, voluntary and community organisations and social enterprises. The survey closed at midnight on Sunday 7th June 2020.

The results of the survey will help inform Sport Northern Ireland's continued responses to Covid-19.



Survey Respondents

A total of 456 surveys were completed and submitted through the Citizen Space online portal, of which the following classed themselves as:

- 76%** ⁽³⁴⁷⁾ Sports Clubs
- 6%** ⁽²⁸⁾ National Governing Body of Sport
- 5%** ⁽²⁵⁾ Community/Voluntary Sector Organisation
- 5%** ⁽²³⁾ Charitable Organisation
- 4%** ⁽²⁰⁾ Regional Governing Body of Sport
- 2%** ⁽⁷⁾ Local Authority

Other respondents (less than 1%) were classed as social enterprise, commercial facility or commercial provider/organisation.

87% of respondents (398) indicated that the organisation has a registered NI postcode, delivering activities across all 11 District Council areas, as shown in figure 1 below:

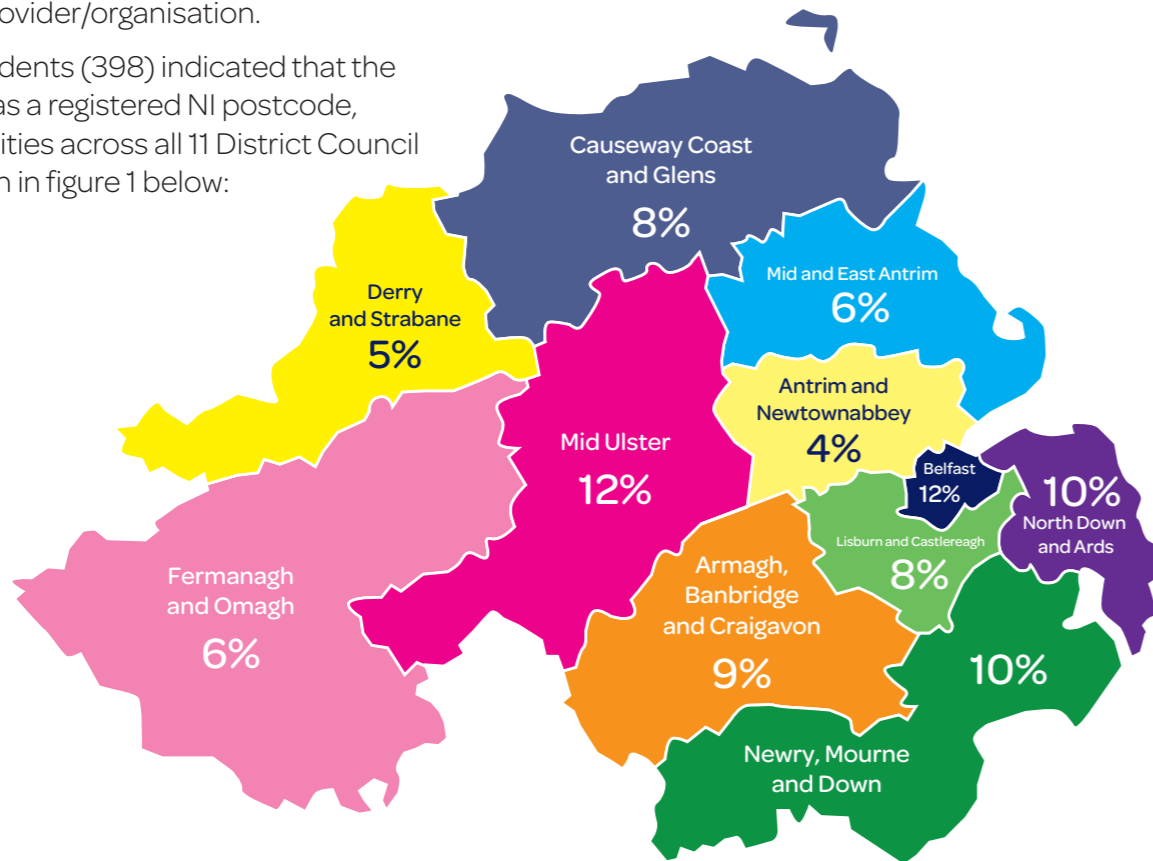
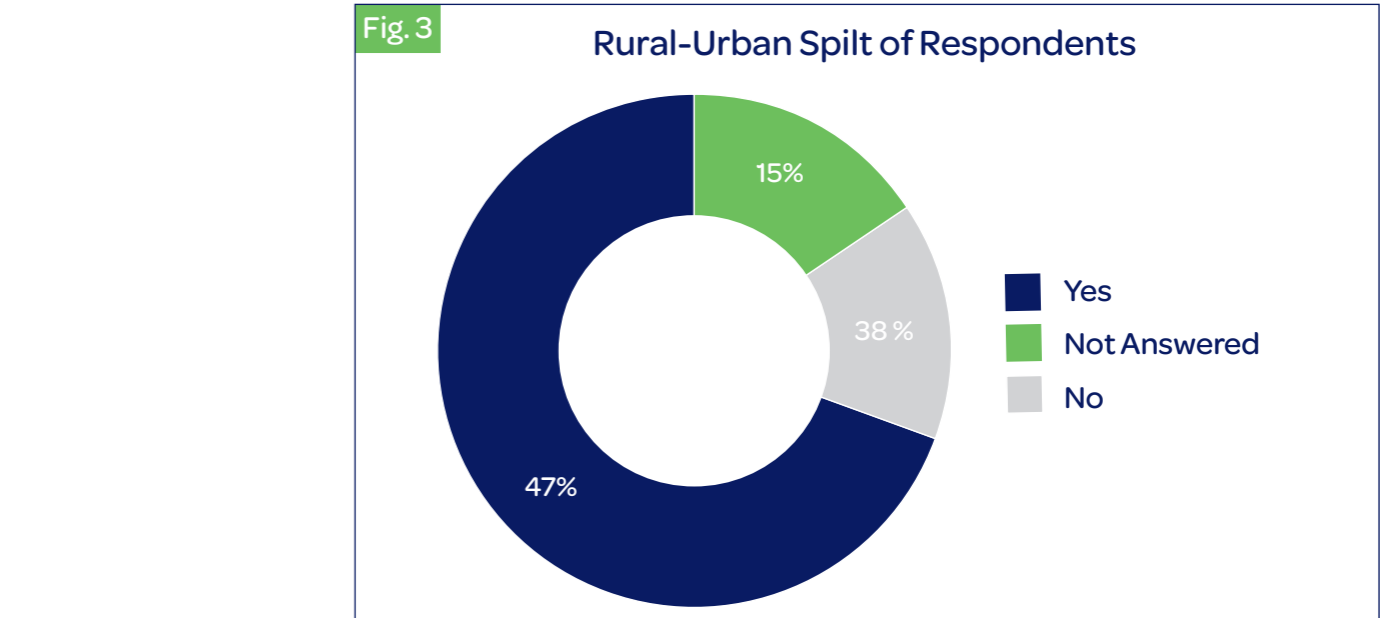
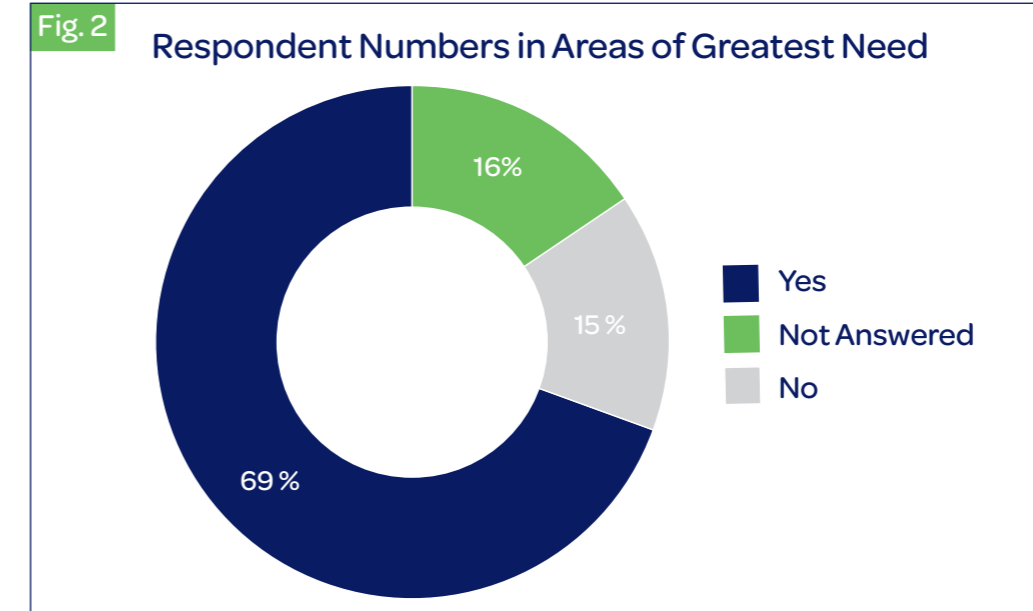


Fig. 1

While 8% of respondents (36) stated that they pay rates over a rateable value of £51k per annum, the majority (77%) were not in this rates band, 9% (41) were unsure and 7% (30) did not answer this question.

16% of respondents recorded that their organisation is based in an area of greatest need¹ (figure 2), and 47% of respondents are classed as in an urban area and 38% in a rural area² (figure 3).



Individuals responding to the survey on behalf of organisations held a number of different positions including Secretary (44%), Chair Person (18%), Treasurer (7%), Committee Members (4%), and Coach (4%). These positions include respondents that have identified as acting or honorary within their organisation. Chair persons also include respondents that identify as vice chair. Other significant positions identified include CEO (2%), General Manager (2%), Director (2%)

and Development Officer (2%). The remaining positions identified by respondents make up 54 different roles within their organisations.

Some respondents (9%) marked multiple positions within their organisation. Just under half of these respondents identified their secondary role as that of a coach at their organisation.

¹Areas of greatest need are identified by postcodes within the top 25% of the NISRA NI Multiple Deprivation Measure 2017.
²Rural and urban areas are identified by settlement 15 bands (A-H) from the Central Postcode Directory (Jan 2019).

Headline Findings

95% indicate that the pandemic has had a damaging effect on their organisation.

65 organisations were successful with applications to the Coronavirus Job Retention scheme.

The biggest challenges for organisations (as prioritised by respondents) is finance and income, managing social distancing and the easing of lockdown restrictions, athletes/players and competitive uncertainty.

Easing lockdown and implementing social distancing are the highest short terms priorities for knowledge and learning.

A number of respondents identified a requirement for 'non-capital' and 'capital' works to enable their facilities to re-open safely.

Organisations responding to the survey had accessed 233* Covid-19 related funding opportunities.
* Respondents could tick more than one option for this question

62% have looked at methods of reducing expenditure with 60% seeking to retain membership.

47% reported a negative impact on club membership or service use.
21% no change.
5% had a positive impact.

Advice, support and guidance is needed in managing social distancing, the easing of lockdown restrictions and finance.

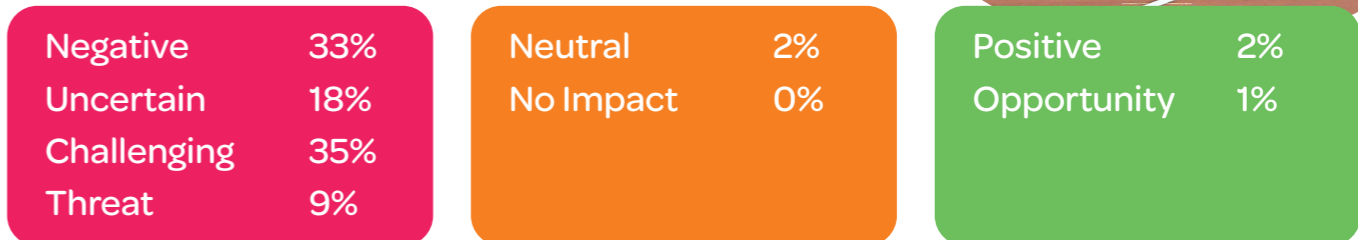
Positive effects of Covid-19 included clubs and organisations being able to connect more with the community and engage in the emergency response e.g. food parcel deliveries, learning how to use new technology and some increases in golf club memberships.



Findings in Detail

Initial effect of Covid-19

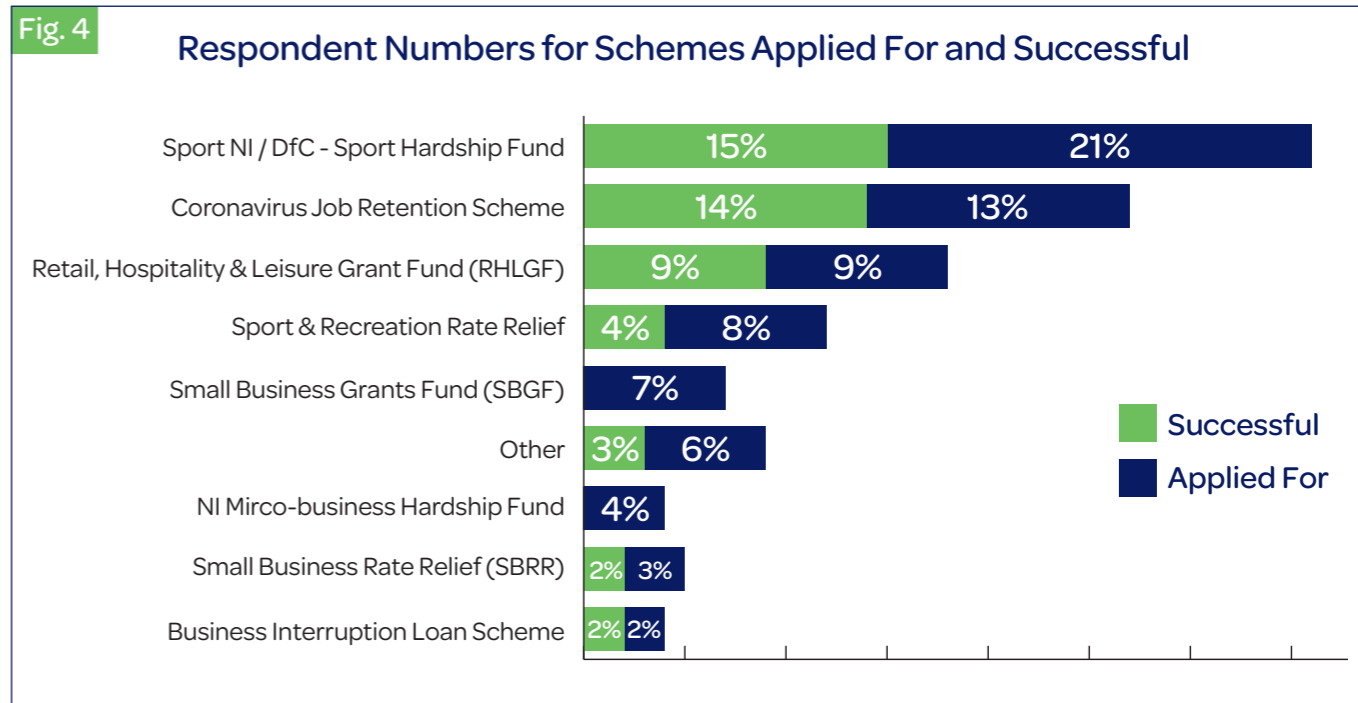
When asked to describe how the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has affected their organisation respondents selected the following:



Accessing Covid-19 related funding

Organisations responding to the survey indicated that they had been successful in accessing Covid-19 related funding (figure 4), including the Sport NI/Department for Communities Sports Hardship Fund, Small Business Grants Fund (SBGF) (£10,000), Retail, Hospitality and

Leisure Grant Fund (RHLGF) (£25,000), NI Micro-business Hardship Fund, Business Interruption Loan Scheme, Small Business Rate Relief (SBRR) and Sport and Recreation Rate Relief. However, the majority of respondents did not answer this questions.



Other funding applied successfully for included IRFU Club Community Fund (€5,000), Motorsport UK Covid Hardship Scheme (£10k), Bounce Back Business Loan, and Swimathon Fund. Local Government specific funding that were successfully applied for by organisations include the Mid Ulster District Council

Community Coronavirus Fund and Rates and Lease relief for an initial 3 months. 65 respondents indicated that they have been successful with applications to the Coronavirus Job Retention scheme.

Findings in Detail

Actions undertaken to sustain organisations

When asked what approaches organisations are taking to sustain themselves through the Covid-19 pandemic, respondents highlighted a range of approaches including:

62% Reducing expenditure	59% Seeking to retain memberships
54% Changing how you interact with members	49% Using financial reserves
34% Delivering regular activities by other means	25% Sponsorship retention effort
21% Seeking alternate income streams	19% Deferment of expenditure / payment holidays

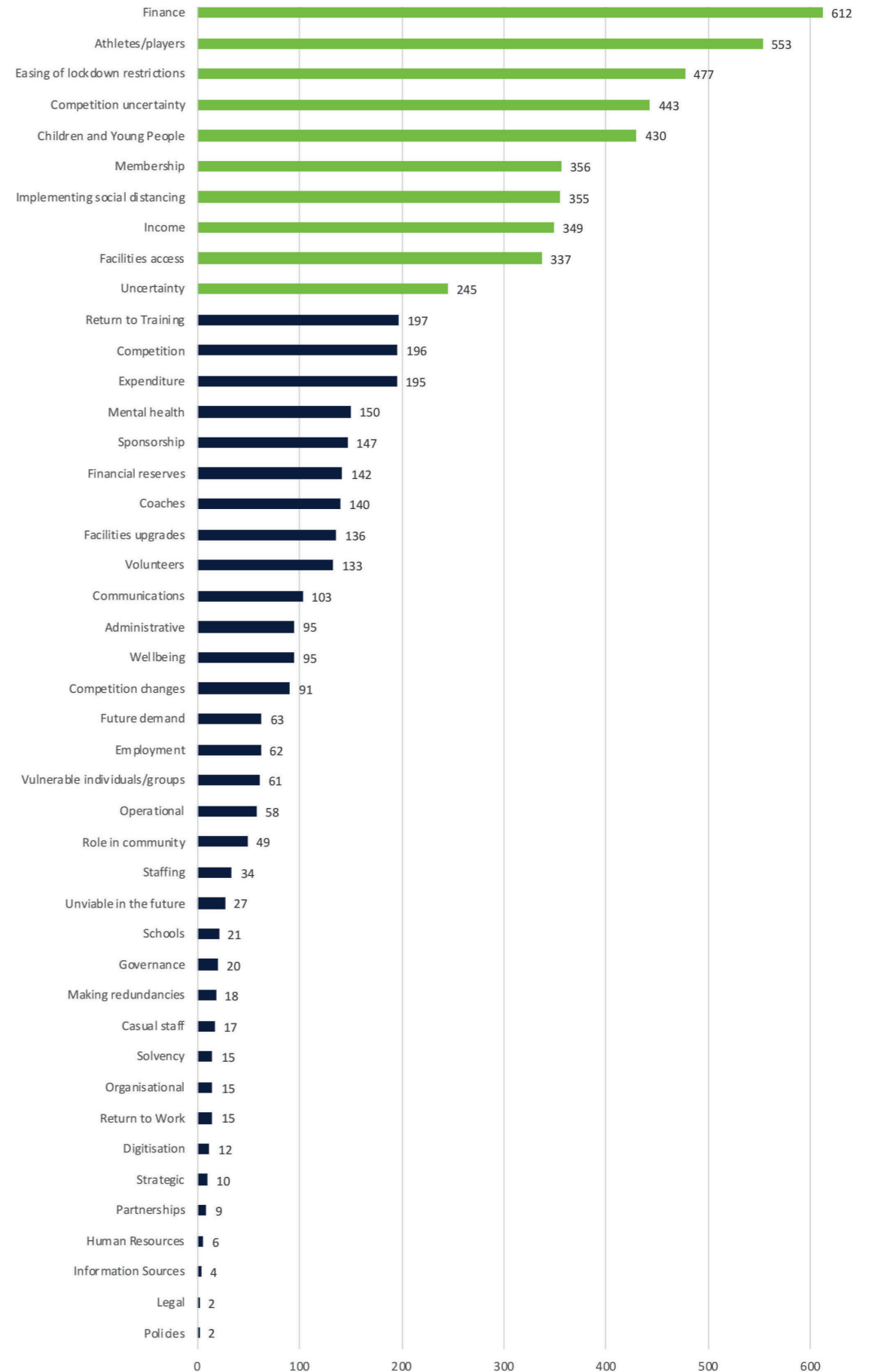
Identifying challenges

The biggest challenges facing organisations included finance and income, managing social distancing and the easing of lockdown restrictions, athletes/players and competitive uncertainty. The weighted responses in identifying the challenges are shown in Figure 5 opposite.



Fig 5

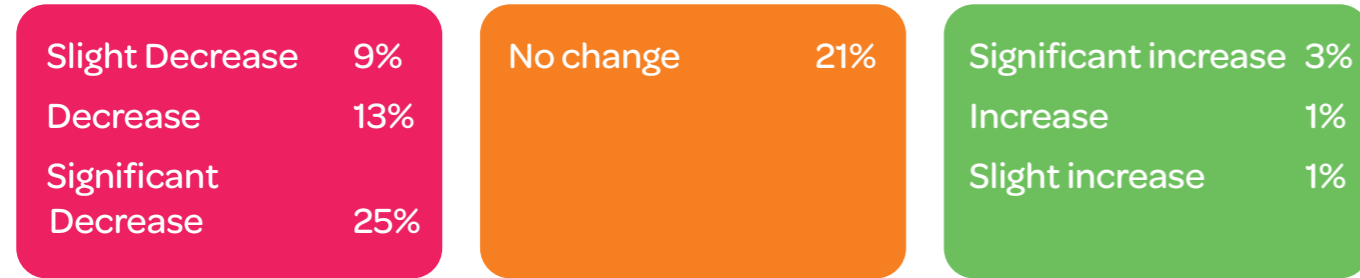
Total weighted responses to challenges



Findings in Detail

Impact on membership and/or service users

Respondents were asked what the impact has been of Covid-19 on their membership and or service users. While a quarter of respondents weren't sure or didn't provide an answer, 47% reported a negative impact, 21% no change and 5% a positive impact as shown below:



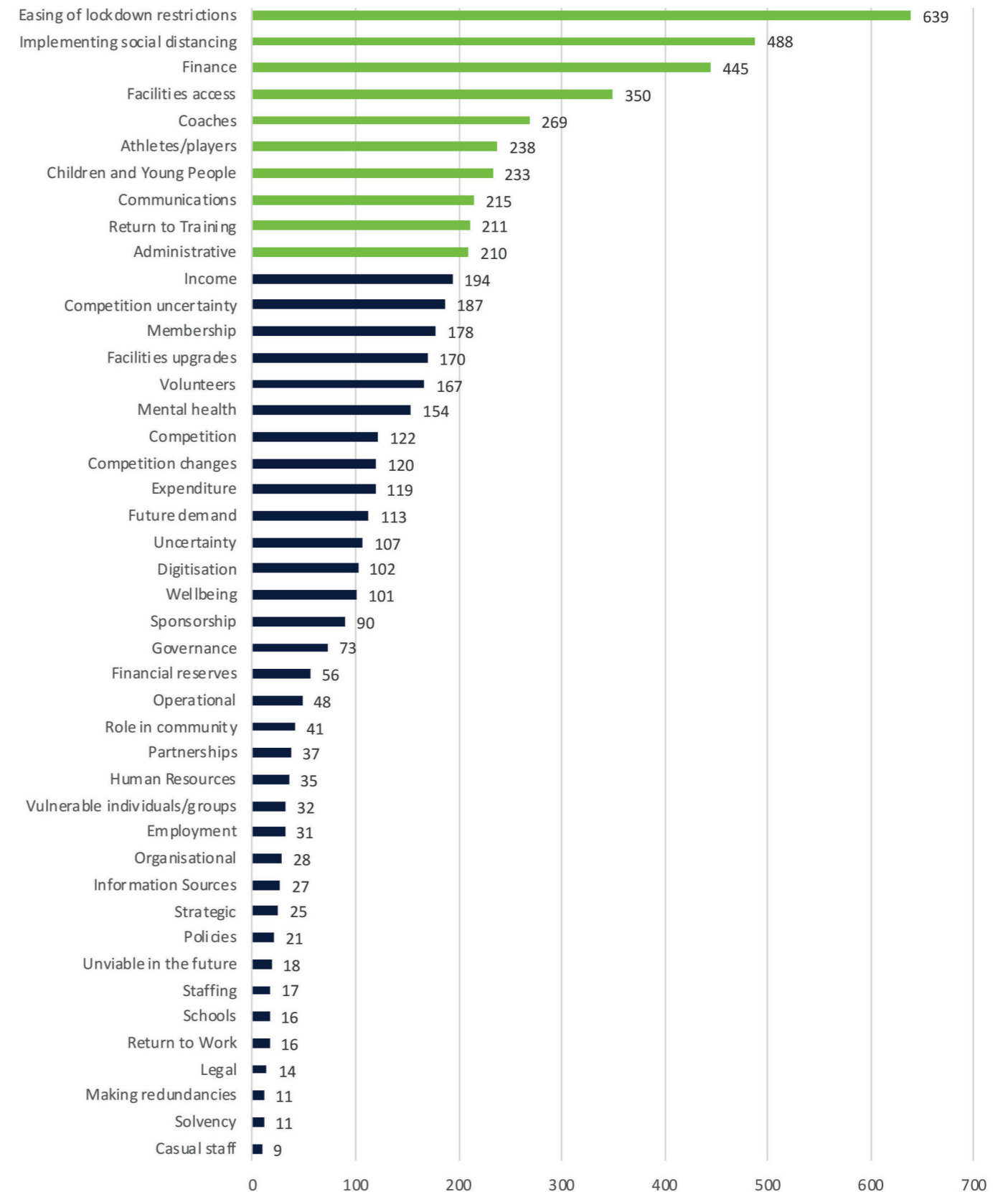
Skills and/or knowledge

When asked about skills and/or knowledge areas that organisations need to be able to access over the next 3 to 9 months to continue and/or reintroduce a service for members/service users, respondents highlighted the 'easing of lockdown measures' and 'implementing social distancing' as their first priority (Figure 6). This included the need for clear guidance on how to operate club activities and facilities within social distancing guidelines. Other areas of knowledge and skills highlighted included revenue raising and financial management, and how to coach or operate club activities within social distancing guidelines. Also notable were the number of responses highlighting the need for knowledge and skills in relation to the retention and re-engagement of coaches and club members, following the enforced break to coaching and participation habits.



Fig. 6

Total weighted for skills/knowledge for next 6/9 months



Building works for organisations

The majority of respondents reported ‘no work required’, with a significant number of respondents highlighting their dependency on local authorities for facility access.

However respondents who did note requirements in this area listed a number of building works that are required before the facility they use could safely reopen. These included minor capital works, small pieces of equipment and health and safety related modifications.

A significant number identified ‘non-capital’ works:

- Signage
- Perspex screens (note that quite a few have commented that Perspex is currently in short supply across the building supply trade – which may push up costs and delivery time)
- Increased cleaning costs (recurrent)
- Reduced facility capacity (limiting scope to provide services)

Of those noting ‘capital’ works, items for consideration include:

- Additional toilets
- Additional and/or reconfigured changing and shower areas
- Installation of cleaning/disinfection stations (different from increased recurrent cleaning costs)
- Reconfiguration of internal common and/or circulation spaces (e.g. one way systems requiring additional/new entrance/exit points)

Respondents were also asked to consider how these items may be funded. A number of golf clubs identify (mostly for works associated with social/bar facilities) a bank or ‘bounce back’ loan as their immediate solution rather than seeking grant aid.

Advice, guidance and support

Respondents identified the 3 most important areas where advice, guidance and support would be most useful.

1. Easing of lockdown restrictions
2. Finance
3. Implementing social distancing

Other areas are shown opposite in Figure 7.

Positive effects of Covid-19

While the majority of sports clubs stated that it was hard to see any positive effects, many highlighted that the pandemic has enabled club to get involved more with the community and engage in schemes such as food banks for the needy, mental health initiatives online and other social media initiatives which have brought the club and the local community closer together.

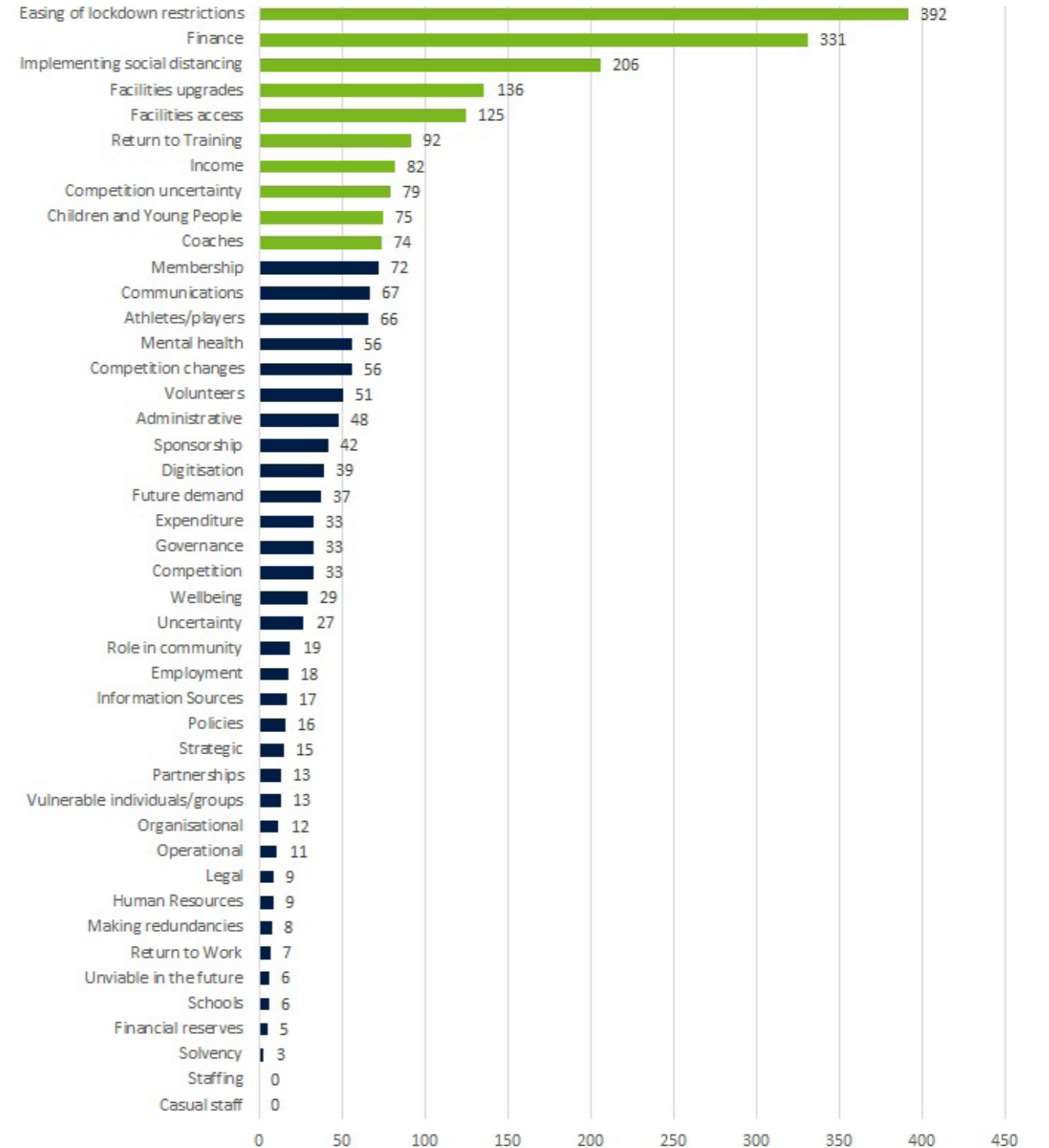
The necessity for keeping in touch has meant that in order to keep operating they have had to be innovative and learn to use technology effectively so that board meetings are carried out remotely and online.

Some sports experienced an increase in membership enquiries and membership seemed to come from the sport of golf which has been one of the first sports to ease lockdown measures.



Fig. 7

Total weighted for advice/guidance that would be useful



Conclusion

Many of the respondents thanked Sport NI for providing emergency hardship funding to clubs, but some clubs who have been unable to meet the criteria for funding felt penalised for being well run and progressive. Sports clubs indicated that they have grave concerns about the future with the lack of certainty around dates for the return to sport and what might the 'new normal' look like. A number of the sports clubs responding to the survey do not own or lease their own facility and are therefore dependent on District Council facility provision. There is a recognition among clubs that many will need to upgrade facilities in line with public health guidance to enable them to be operational – many are uncertain as to what would need to be changed and highlight that they do not have the necessary finances to upgrade their facilities.

The majority of the respondents report that finance is a huge issue from them and while some have stated that they are grateful for any public funding they were able to access it was really only a 'drop in the ocean' in relation to what they actually require in order to stay afloat.

Clubs are also concerned about retaining existing members and recruiting new members. Specifically around children and young people, clubs are concerned around safeguarding and welfare alongside how coaching sessions will be organised for children returning to sport.

Respondents highlighted that keeping in contact with children during this period so they don't feel left out was very important. Issues such as the health and wellbeing of youngsters, lack of social engagement, loss of junior and teenage membership, lack of organised activity and stresses on club retention were of concern.



Recommendations

The following four recommendations are proposed:

Immediate and short term advice and guidance is required to help the sporting sector with implementing social distancing and understanding the process of easing lockdown.

Consideration should be given on how to guide 'people development' through initiatives designed to include support for volunteers, coaches, leaders and official to enable to provision of a quality sporting experience for all.

The impact of Covid-19 on children and young people, their health and wellbeing and participation in sport should be included in the response.

Future investment should consider clubs and organisations who have not been able (to date) to access any Covid-19 related funding opportunities.



This document is available in other accessible formats on request, and online at www.sportni.net

Contact us:

Sport Northern Ireland
House of Sport
2a Upper Malone Road
Belfast
BT9 5LA

T: 028 9038 1222
E: info@sportni.net
W: sportni.net

