

## Appendix I - Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA) Template

### SECTION 1 - Defining the activity subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016

#### 1A. Name of Public Authority.

Sport Northern Ireland (Sport NI)

#### 1B. Please provide a short title which describes the activity being undertaken by the Public Authority that is subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016.

Mary Peters Trust-Athlete Investment 2026-27

#### 1C. Please indicate which category the activity specified in Section 1B above relates to.

Developing a	Policy <input type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input type="checkbox"/>
Adopting a	Policy <input type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input type="checkbox"/>
Implementing a	Policy <input type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Revising a	Policy <input type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input type="checkbox"/>
Designing a Public Service	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Delivering a Public Service	<input type="checkbox"/>		

#### 1D. Please provide the official title (if any) of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service document or initiative relating to the category indicated in Section 1C above.

Mary Peters Trust-Athlete Investment 2026-27

#### 1E. Please provide details of the aims and/or objectives of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service.

The Mary Peters Trust (MPT) was founded to support young athletes with potential but limited financial means. The Trust awards £200–£3,000 per athlete annually, covering around 32 sports and prioritising those not yet eligible for higher-tier programmes, with a focus on financial hardship. Sport NI proposes investing £20,000 to strengthen the partnership, aiming to improve system alignment, reduce fragmentation, and support equitable access for athletes facing financial barriers. The investment is intended to optimise resources, enhance collaboration, and support a diverse pipeline of athletes, ultimately improving the sustainability and effectiveness of the athlete development system in Northern Ireland.

**1F. What definition of 'rural' is the Public Authority using in respect of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?**

Population Settlements of less than 5,000 (Default definition).

Other Definition (Provide details and the rationale below).

A definition of 'rural' is not applicable.

*Details of alternative definition of 'rural' used.*

N/A

*Rationale for using alternative definition of 'rural.'*

N/A

*Reasons why a definition of 'rural' is not applicable.*

N/A

## SECTION 2 - Understanding the impact of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

### 2A. Is the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service likely to impact on people in rural areas?

Yes  No  If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **2E**.

### 2B. Please explain how the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas.

The Mary Peters Trust-Athlete Investment 2026-27 is expected to have a significant positive impact on athletes who apply for the programme living in rural areas, within performance pathways ([Sport NI Strategic Context](#)). By investing strategically in the Mary Peters Trust, Sport NI will support athletes to address the challenges facing athletes in rural communities in several ways through targeted investment to athletes who have successful funding applications:

#### Improving inclusion and diversity for athletes who live in rural areas

Rural communities can play a crucial role in extending opportunities to underrepresented groups. Programme investment will support MPT in adapting provision to ensure women and girls, disabled people, ethnic minority communities, and older adults can apply for the programme to receive funding towards their journey in high performance sport. This aligns with Section 75 duties under the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and builds on Sport NI's Women in Sport and Disability Sport action plans. The programme requires MPTs to demonstrate how rural women, girls, and disabled people are being actively engaged through adapted provision and targets investment to support athletes onto higher levels of performance sport.

#### Creating sustainable performance opportunities

By increasing performance opportunities the programme will help athletes in rural areas to develop towards higher levels of sport through targeted investment. This can increase visibility of rural areas with athletes gaining the opportunity to compete at higher level competition. This will contribute directly to NI Executive outcomes on healthier communities, reduced inequalities, and stronger rural economies.

#### Removing barriers to access

The investment would allow successful applicants of the award to receive targeted investment at certain points of their journey through performance sport. This may in turn reduce barriers to access by using this investment towards transport, access to facilities, equipment etc that may be more difficult without funding.

In summary, rural communities are explicitly considered in the design and delivery of this programme. The programme will help reduce the gap between rural and urban representation, enhance local resilience, and position sport as a driver of well-being, inclusion, and social capital in rural Northern Ireland and support athletes living in these areas towards higher levels of sport.

### 2C. If the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently from people in urban areas, please explain how it is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently.

The Mary Peters Trust – Athlete Investment 2026–27 programme is designed to build a more inclusive and sustainable performance sport system across Northern Ireland through targeted support for individual athletes. While the programme aims to benefit athletes in all locations, its impact is likely to differ between rural and urban areas due to distinct structural, geographic, and demographic factors.

The impact is likely to be realised through the utilisation of grant by athletes in rural areas to address barriers such as funding for accessibility and travel, for connectivity, but most specifically access to Performance Pathways. Rural athletes may benefit from clearer progression routes and improved support structures, although geographic and resource constraints could still influence access (<https://www.sportni.net/sport-research/uk-wide-talent-and-performance-pathway-inclusion-research-project/strategic-context/>).

The Mary Peters Trust – Athlete Investment 2026–27 programme is likely to impact rural athletes differently and more significantly than urban athletes because it directly addresses unique rural barriers related to travel, access to facilities, connectivity to performance pathways, and cost of participation. While the programme benefits athletes across Northern Ireland, its design has the potential to narrow the gap between rural and urban representation in performance sport.

**2D. Please indicate which of the following rural policy areas the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to primarily impact on.**

Rural Businesses	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rural Tourism	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rural Housing	<input type="checkbox"/>
Jobs or Employment in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Education or Training in Rural Areas	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Broadband or Mobile Communications in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Transport Services or Infrastructure in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health or Social Care Services in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Poverty in Rural Areas	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Deprivation in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rural Crime or Community Safety	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rural Development	<input type="checkbox"/>
Agri-Environment	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (Please state)	<input type="text" value="Sport participation/development opportunities and retention within performance pathways"/>

**If the response to Section 2A was YES GO TO Section 3A.**

**2E. Please explain why the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is NOT likely to impact on people in rural areas.**

N/A

## SECTION 3 - Identifying the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas

**3A. Has the Public Authority taken steps to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas that are relevant to the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?**

Yes  No  If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **3E**.

**3B. Please indicate which of the following methods or information sources were used by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.**

Consultation with Rural Stakeholders	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Published Statistics	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Consultation with Other Organisations	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Research Papers	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Surveys or Questionnaires	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other Publications	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other Methods or Information Sources (include details in Question 3C below).			<input type="checkbox"/>

**3C. Please provide details of the methods and information sources used to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas including relevant dates, names of organisations, titles of publications, website references, details of surveys or consultations undertaken etc.**

**Sport NI has considered the following information on rural needs:**

Sport Northern Ireland has drawn on a range of quantitative data sources, qualitative evidence, and stakeholder consultation to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas relevant to the System Partners Investment – NGB Programme (2026–2031). Through analysis of research, survey data, programme monitoring returns, consultation feedback, and policy analysis, Sport NI has developed a robust evidence base on rural needs. This ensures that the programme is informed not only by statistical trends but also by the lived experiences of rural communities and the organisations that serve them. The key methods and sources include: Rural Related Research, Publications and Other Information; [Urban-Rural Health Inequalities in NI](#) (November 2022); [Equality-Impact-Assessment-Sport-NI-Corporate-Plan.pdf](#); DAERA - [Key Rural Issues 2024](#); DAERA - [Key Rural Issues 2023](#); Continuous Household Survey 2023/24: Rural v Urban Participation: [experience-of-sport-by-adults-in-northern-ireland-202324.xlsx](#); Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland (DAERA, 2022): Identified access to services, transport, digital connectivity, and community sustainability as key cross-cutting priorities, which were factored into this RNIA ([DAERA Rural Policy Framework](#)).

NISRA Data ([Census Area Explorer](#); [Northern Ireland Local Statistics Explorer](#); [PfG Wellbeing Framework](#); [Making Life Better | NISRA](#); [Social, Economic and Environment Indicators](#)).

**Sport NI has considered the engagement and consultation data:** Consultation Workshops with Governing Bodies (July–September 2025); NGB representatives highlighted key challenges in rural delivery, including travel distances, volunteer reliance, and access to suitable facilities. Direct engagement with rural clubs, local authorities, and community organisations provided qualitative insights into barriers such as affordability, facility access, and digital connectivity.

**Sport NI Programme Monitoring Data has been considered:** Athlete Awards, Nationally Funded Athletes, Pathway data, System Investment in Governing Bodies (SSIGB) Monitoring Data 2024–25 has been considered

**Sport NI Insight Reports and Research has also been considered:**

Sport NI's funded research has also been considered.

**3D. Please provide details of the social and economic needs of people in rural areas which have been identified by the Public Authority?**

- **Participation Inequalities**  
Rural participation rates remain lower than urban areas [experience-of-sport-by-adults-in-northern-ireland-202324.xlsx](#)
  - 3% greater participation in urban areas within past year, with a 2% greater participation in urban areas within past four weeks
  - 3% greater participation and walking in urban area within past year, with a 4% greater participation and walking in urban area within past year
- **Reduced Athlete Support from Club Sustainability**  
reduced club support for rural athletes. Smaller rural clubs face financial fragility due to limited income streams and reliance on modest fees (<https://www.sportni.net/sports-strategy/>).
- **Travel & Transport Barriers**  
Longer distances and higher costs restrict access to training and competition (<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/rural-policy-framework-northern-ireland>).
- **Reduced support from Volunteer Pressures**  
Athletes have reduced support in rural areas. Heavy dependence on volunteers, compounded by ageing populations and recruitment challenges (<https://www.sportni.net/volunteering/>).
- **Facilities & Access**  
Athletes have limited access to dedicated facilities; reliance on shared spaces reduces quality and availability (<https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/data-zone-boundaries-gis-format>).and the need to travel is greater.
- **Digital Connectivity**  
Poor broadband limits online learning and club management (<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/key-rural-issues-2024>).
- **Cost of Participation**  
Travel, equipment, and facility hire costs disproportionately impact rural families (<https://www.sportireland.ie/ism-2024>).

**If the response to Section 3A was YES GO TO Section 4A.**

**3E. Please explain why no steps were taken by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas?**

N/a.

## **SECTION 4 - Considering the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas**

**4A. Please provide details of the issues considered in relation to the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.**

Mary Peters Trust grants may be used by successful applicant athletes to support the issues and costs associated with rural isolation. This may include travel, connectivity, access to facilities, costs of participation and other necessary support not acquired easily in rural areas.

## SECTION 5 - Influencing the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

**5A. Has the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, been influenced by the rural needs identified?**

Yes  No  If the response is **NO GO TO Section 5C.**

**5B. Please explain how the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, has been influenced by the rural needs identified.**

The Mary Peters Trust grant financially assists talented individuals from Ulster in respect of their preparation, development, training and competition in sporting activities recognised by the Trust or by organizations who have appointed the Trust as their representative. They will fund those competitors of proven ability at junior and senior levels whose standing judged against World, British and Irish standards indicates the potential to compete with credit at national level, international, with distinction in British and Irish Championships. Applicants must be aged 12 and over other than in exceptional circumstances which will be considered at the discretion of the Directors. The award must be used in accordance with the targeted event detailed by the applicant and governing body in the application form.

Therefore athletes from rural areas will be able to access funding for their preparation, development, training and competition costs, including the aforementioned rural needs.

If the response to Section **5A** was **YES GO TO Section 6A.**

**5C. Please explain why the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or the delivery of the Public Service, has NOT been influenced by the rural needs identified.**

N/a

## SECTION 6 - Documenting and Recording

**6A. Please tick below to confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained by the Public Authority and relevant information on the Section 1 activity compiled in accordance with paragraph 6.7 of the guidance.**

I confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained, and relevant information compiled.

<b>Rural Needs Impact Assessment undertaken by:</b>	Tiernan Elliott and Amy Foster
<b>Position/Grade:</b>	Staff Officer
<b>Division/Branch</b>	Sport NI
<b>Signature:</b>	<i>Tiernan Elliott; Amy Foster</i>
<b>Date:</b>	3/03/2026
<b>Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:</b>	Rebecca Hope
<b>Position/Grade:</b>	Interim Director of Sport
<b>Division/Branch:</b>	Sport NI
<b>Signature:</b>	<i>R Hope</i>
<b>Date:</b>	09/03/26