

# Disability in Sport

## Engagement and Delivery Plan: 2024-2026

This plan is to influence the sector to actively promote 'Disability in Sport' over the course of two years to March 2026. The Engagement & Delivery Plan will be further developed by and led by the Sports, Culture & Integrity Team, and will be actioned by programmes and staff across the organisation

### Background - Strategic Context:

Sport NI's Corporate Plan 2021-26 'The Power of Sport' targets sustained participation in sport and activity generally, and specifically from under-represented groups, contributing to improving physical activity in communities.

While, prior to the pandemic, we were seeing improvements in terms of the percentage of people who were participating in sport and physical activity, (The NI Continuous Household Survey 2020-21 notes a 3% rise in overall sports participation numbers to 59%), barriers clearly still exist for many in our society. Challenges remain for people with a disability, women and girls, older people, carers, ethnically diverse communities and those from the LGBTQ+ community. Whilst we have seen an increase in the support for, and the profile of, women in sport and those with a disability, there is much still to do which we aim to address through this corporate plan. Consequently, the participation rates for these groups remain significantly below the general population rates for participation in sport and physical activity.

### Current Context:

One in four people in Northern Ireland has a disability or long-term health condition. This equates to approx. 463,000 people or notable 24.3% of the population (*2021 NI Census*). With that said, participation in sport in Northern Ireland is significantly lower for those with a disability. Disabled people in Northern Ireland remain half as likely to participate in sport and active recreation as non-disabled people (*DSNI strategic plan 2020-2024*).

Findings from the *Continuous Household Survey 2022-2023 (NISRA)* recorded that adults with a disability were less likely to participate in sport in the previous year (26%) compared to adults without a disability (56%). Similarly, when looking at participation rates over the previous four weeks, just over one in five (21%) of those with a disability had taken part in sport compared to almost half of all adults without a disability (48%). This represents a 7% drop in participation from 2019/20 (28%).

People with disabilities in Northern Ireland also have the lowest sport participation rates compared with other jurisdictions in the UK and Ireland. This is evident for the younger generation with a disability who are failing to meet their physical activity guidelines. According to the *2019 Young Person's Behaviour and Attitudes Survey*, young people who have a disability are less likely (54%) to participate in 2 hours or more of school PE lessons, compared to young people without a disability (64%).

The gap between disabled and non-disabled members of sports clubs is also widening. The 2019 Sport NI Club survey reported that 3% of 128,587 club members were people with disabilities. Disabled people are significantly less likely to be a member of a sports club or organisation, i.e. 14% of disabled people compared to 27% of non-disabled people (*Experience of Sport in Northern Ireland -findings from the Continuous Household Survey 2018/19*).

Alongside this, disabled people are much less likely to attend a live sports event in Northern Ireland – that's 22% of disabled people compared to 36% of non-disabled people. (*Experience of Sport in Northern Ireland -findings from the Continuous Household Survey 2018/19*)

Research findings from the Sport NI 'Sport Systems Investment – Governing Bodies' programme (2023-2024) identifies that the representation of disability within club membership, coaching workforce, officials, and volunteers is significantly lower than those without a disability. For example, of all club members recorded within this investment period - 433,131 across 36 sports, only 1,916 were disabled club members. It is evident that sporting organisations require an improvement in their data and monitoring collection systems notably for their disabled members. An increased education of disability in sport is required to the wider sports sector as well as a broader awareness of the evidenced disability 'gap' and the importance of capturing and monitoring disability data for their sport.

The reality remains that opportunities for disabled people to participate in sport and active recreation in Northern Ireland are still not being provided on the scale required to give people with disabilities the same opportunities as non-disabled people to live a full, active, and healthy lifestyle (DSNI 2020-2024 Strategic Plan).

For this plan to be effective, Sport NI will need to work closely with relevant external groups and communities, as well as internally across teams and investment strands, to identify potential solutions. The attached Engagement and Delivery plan is intended to support the wider sports sector to understand and recognise the issues and collectively bring about change.

Action Plan Pillar	Action Plan Objective	Action Plan Activity
Leadership	<b>1. Promoting people with a disability in decision making positions in sport - to deliver equitable representation for sports to achieve through current investment.</b>	A. Establish a baseline for people with a disability in decision making roles, including in Sport NI.
		B. Engage with sports to increase awareness of imbalance.
		C. Determine reasonable targets and timeframes.
		D. Ensure investment is focused on creating opportunities.
		E. Measure progress at different intervals.
	<b>2. Promote workforce opportunities for people with a disability to progress in sport i.e. coaches, officials, volunteers - to broaden the base.</b>	A. Establish a baseline for people with a disability in workforce development roles, including in Sport NI.
		B. Engage with sports to increase awareness of imbalance.
		C. Determine reasonable targets and timeframes.
		D. Ensure investment is focused on creating opportunities.
		E. Measure progress at different intervals.
Visibility & Advocacy	<b>3. Research that tracks trends re levels of participation, and underlying factors re people with a disability's participation.</b>	A. Map research ecosystem - Share insights and research on regular basis with Sport NI commentary.
		B. Engage with sector to understand their research/insight needs.
		C. Commission research that closes knowledge gaps.
		D. Monitor awareness of disability gap in sport.
	<b>4. Communications &amp; Advocacy interventions to increase visibility of people with a disability in sport and inspire those with a disability to find their sport.</b>	A. Establish a network of partners for advocacy.
		B. Production and/or dissemination of high-quality articles, publications, case studies which promote good practice associated with Sport NI's Disability Mainstreaming Policy.
		C. Measurement of Comms 'reach' & impact.

Action Plan Pillar	Action Plan Objective	Action Plan Activity
Participation	<b>5. Focused investment to increase engagement in sport and physical activity among disabled people.</b>	A. Build and share understanding of barriers and motivators.
		B. Engage with peers and partners to shape investment.
		C. Deliver focused investment for people with a disability in sport.
		D. Track impact, share best practice and innovations.
	<b>6. Provide structured support to Governing Bodies of Sport, mainstream sports clubs, and community organisations to identify and remove barriers and provide high quality sport and physical activity opportunities for disabled people.</b>	A. Build and share understanding of barriers and motivators.
		B. Provide toolkit to review provision and club culture and resources to enhance the experience of people with a disability in sport.
		C. Collate info on interventions by sports/clubs - showcase best practice.
		D. Track Governing Body membership data.
Sporting Foundation	<b>7. Investment in infrastructure to support greater participation for those with a disability e.g. changing facilities, accessible facilities etc.</b>	A. Understand current infrastructure (Built, natural and equipment) across sport friction points for those with a disability.
		B. Develop design principles that are reflective of those with a disability priorities.
		C. Build and share understanding of how to make infrastructure more reflective of needs of those with a disability.
		D. Require all Sport NI Capital investments to be cross referenced against progressive design principles and require fair and equitable access.