



System Partners Investment

Draft Equality Impact
Assessment and Screening
Flowchart

September 2025

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND Screening flowchart and template (taken from Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 – A Guide for public authorities April 2010 (*Appendix 1*)).

Introduction

Part 1. Policy scoping – asks public authorities to provide details about the policy, procedure, practice and/or decision being screened and what available evidence you have gathered to help make an assessment of the likely impact on equality of opportunity and good relations.

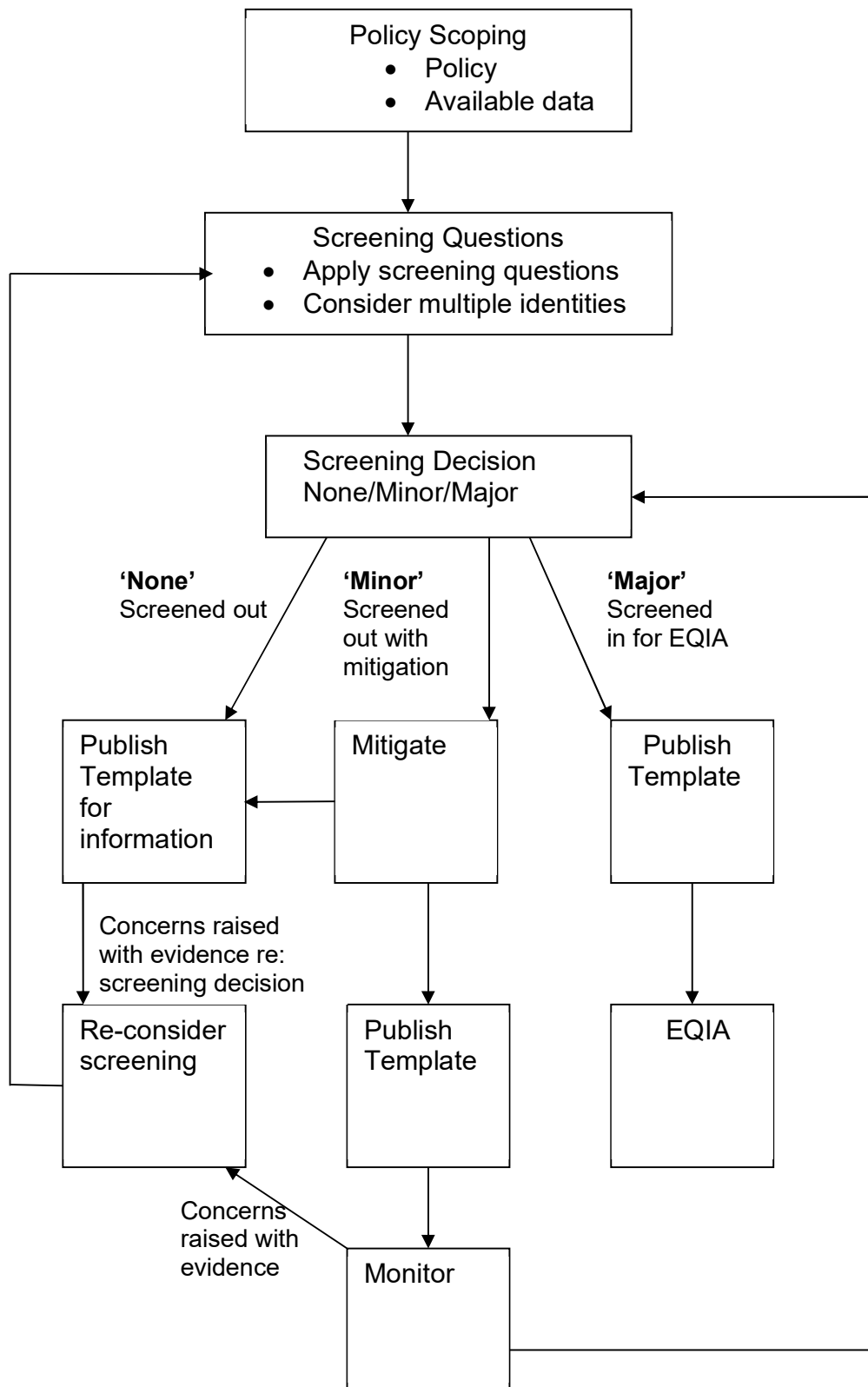
Part 2. Screening questions – asks about the extent of the likely impact of the policy on groups of people within each of the Section 75 categories. Details of the groups consulted and the level of assessment of the likely impact. This includes consideration of multiple identity and good relations issues.

Part 3. Screening decision – guides the public authority to reach a screening decision as to whether or not there is a need to carry out an equality impact assessment (EQIA), or to introduce measures to mitigate the likely impact, or the introduction of an alternative policy to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations

Part 4. Monitoring – provides guidance to public authorities on monitoring for adverse impact and broader monitoring.

Part 5. Approval and authorisation – verify the public authority's approval of a screening decision by a senior manager responsible for the policy.

A screening flowchart is provided overleaf.



Executive Summary:

This screening has identified no adverse impacts across Section 75 categories; positive impacts are anticipated, particularly for groups under-represented in sport, and a full Equality Impact Assessment is not required at this stage, though equality impacts will continue to be monitored and reviewed as the programme develops.

Part 1. Policy scoping

The first stage of the screening process involves scoping the policy under consideration. The purpose of policy scoping is to help prepare the background and context and set out the aims and objectives for the policy, being screened. At this stage, scoping the policy will help identify potential constraints as well as opportunities and will help the policy maker work through the screening process on a step-by-step basis.

Public authorities should remember that the Section 75 statutory duties apply to internal policies (relating to people who work for the authority), as well as external policies (relating to those who are, or could be, served by the authority).

Information about the policy**Name of Policy**

SYSTEM PARTNERS INVESTMENT – (National Governing Bodies Programme)

Is this an existing, revised or a new policy?**New Policy****Purpose**

This policy directs investment into National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs) in Northern Ireland to ensure they have the organisational strength, capacity and accountability to deliver outcomes that align with national priorities for health, inclusion, participation and support athlete development in inclusive and sustainable ways.

Programme Objectives

1. **Participation** – Enable NGBs to increase access, inclusion and sustained involvement in sport, particularly for groups who are under-represented or face barriers.
2. **Performance** – NGB-led pathways that are supportive, inclusive and sustainable, enabling NI athletes to reach their potential and represent on the world stage.

Are there any Section 75 categories which might be expected to benefit from the intended policy?

Yes

If so, explain how.

The System Partners Investment – NGB Programme is structured around two strands:

Participation and **Performance**, supported by a Core Support Allocation. Both strands are designed to address inequalities identified in the consultation information booklet, ensuring that investment delivers tangible benefits across Section 75 categories.

- Under the **Participation strand**, benefits are expected for groups who are least active and most excluded from sport. This includes:
 - **Ethnic minority communities**, who experience cultural and structural barriers to engagement.
 - **Older people**, particularly those aged 55+, who face health-related and social barriers to sustained participation.
 - **Women and girls**, who continue to report lower participation and retention rates.
 - **Disabled people and those with long-term conditions**, who face accessibility and programme design barriers.
 - **People in areas of high deprivation**, where poverty and health inequalities limit access.
 - **Rural and isolated communities**, where limited facilities and transport restrict opportunities.
- Under the **Performance strand**, benefits are expected for groups who have historically been under-represented in talent pathways and elite sport. This includes:
 - **Athletes from ethnic minority communities**, where representation in NI performance pathways has been limited.
 - **Young people from low-income backgrounds**, for whom financial pressures restrict access to development opportunities.
 - **Women and girls**, who face structural barriers to progression in coaching, leadership, and high-performance roles.
 - **Disabled athletes**, who require inclusive performance systems and adapted progression opportunities.

By directing investment into NGBs and requiring them to evidence inclusion across both Participation and Performance strands, this policy will create more equitable opportunities. Monitoring and assessment will ensure that **Section 75 categories are not only included but prioritised**, in line with the aims set out in the programme information booklet.

Who initiated or wrote the policy?

Sport NI

Who owns and who implements the policy?

Sport NI

Implementation factors

Are there any factors which could contribute to or detract from the intended aim/outcome of the policy?

Yes.

Explanation:

The success of the programme is dependant on how effectively National Governing Bodies (NGBs) use the resources provided to deliver against the agreed outcomes. Investment is directed into NGBs, who are responsible for enabling the equality and inclusion across participation and performance outcomes supported by Sport NI. Monitoring and evaluation will ensure that NGBs are accountable for demonstrating progress in these areas.

Research is attached within appendix a.

Main stakeholders affected

Internal and external stakeholders impacted by the policy include:

- Governing Bodies of Sport (including umbrella organisations) the contractual organisation
- Existing informal and formal participants, members, athletes, coaches, officials, administrators.
- Representative bodies and target groups and non-members and participants.
- Sports Councils (e.g., UK Sport, Sport Wales, Sport England, Sport Scotland, SportsCoach UK and Sport Ireland) strategic partners
- Department for Communities (DfC),
- Community Planning Partnerships, councils, local schools, health providers, community organisations

Other Policies with a Bearing on this Policy

The implementation and success of this policy is closely aligned with and supported by:

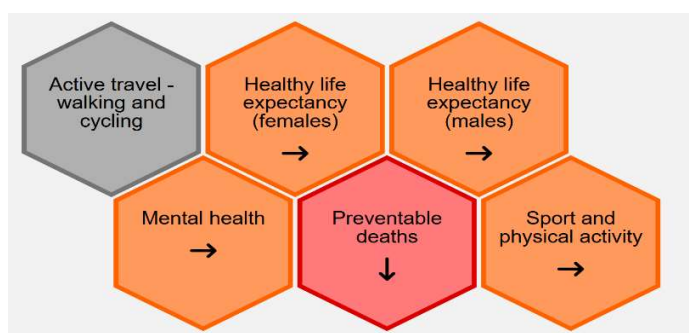
- Programme for Government
- Active Living Strategy for Sport
- Sport NI Corporate Plan
- Sport NI Equality Scheme and annual action plan
- Sport NI Equality Delivery Plan

Strategic Alignment

Programme for Government 2024–2027

The Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government (PfG) sets out a vision for “long, healthy, active lives” as a central wellbeing outcome ([PfG Wellbeing Framework](#)). Sport is recognised as a critical enabler of this mission, with clear links to improving health, tackling inequalities and strengthening social cohesion. Direct investment into NGBs ensures that governing bodies are equipped to deliver local action that supports this national priority, particularly among groups most affected by health and social inequalities.

Of particular strategic importance is consideration of the Programme for Government 2024-2027 ‘Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most’. On 27 February 2025 the Executive agreed a Programme for Government which outlines our priorities for making a real difference to the lives of people here. The Wellbeing Framework (accessible here: [PfG Wellbeing Framework](#)) is a combination of social, environmental, economic, and democratic factors which are essential for society to flourish. These factors align to the Missions of People, Planet, Prosperity and the cross-cutting commitment to Peace.



Active Living: More People, More Active, More of the Time

The Active Living Strategy for Sport and Physical Activity (2022) sets a vision for lifelong involvement in sport and physical activity, recognising the contribution of sport to a healthier, more resilient and more inclusive society ([Active Living Strategy](#)). It highlights the importance of tackling inactivity and reducing inequalities by creating accessible and welcoming opportunities for all. Investment into NGBs ensures that the organisations at the heart of sports delivery are resourced to turn this vision into a reality, embedding the principles of inclusion, accessibility and community outreach.

The strategic vision is: ***‘Lifelong involvement in sport and physical activity will deliver an active, healthy, resilient and inclusive society which recognises and values both participation and excellence.’*** The framework is outlined below. This programme directly supports our strategic goals by enhancing governance and capability within sport governing bodies and their affiliated clubs. It also advances accessibility and inclusion in sport and physical activity for under-represented groups—those most likely to benefit socially and economically—while fostering collaborative partnerships and integrated strategic approaches.

The Sport and Physical Activity Framework



Sport and Physical Activity Framework

The Sport and Physical Activity Framework identifies the structural role of NGBs as system leaders responsible for governance, pathways, coaching standards and safeguarding. It emphasises the importance of capacity and capability within governing bodies to ensure that participation and performance pathways are sustainable and inclusive. Direct investment in NGBs therefore aligns with this framework by strengthening the governance and delivery mechanisms required to make sport both effective and equitable.

Sport NI Corporate Plan 2021–2026

Sport NI’s Corporate Plan *The Power of Sport* commits to maximising the impact of sport to change lives ([Corporate Plan](#)). It recognises equality, diversity and inclusion as core priorities, and sets out a vision that “lifelong involvement in sport and physical activity will deliver an active, healthy, resilient and inclusive society.” Investment into NGBs underpins delivery of this vision, ensuring that resources flow directly to the organisations responsible for governing and growing sport.

Portfolio of Programmes

System Partners Investment – National Governing Bodies (NGB) Programme represents one programme, investing into governing bodies of sport as a coordinated approach to deliver meaningful societal change through sport and physical activity.

Available Evidence

Evidence used to inform this screening process includes both quantitative and qualitative data. Sport NI has drawn on a wide range of quantitative and qualitative research, programme performance data, stakeholder engagement and consultation activities, to ensure that investment decisions are informed by robust evidence and aligned with equality considerations. Some of the primary research is included in this form and the wider evidence base is attached in appendix A.

Data and Research Sources

- [Equality-Impact-Assessment-Sport-NI-Corporate-Plan.pdf](#) (Appendix A).
- Desk based review of evidence to inform programme design (Appendix B).
- [Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2017 \(NIMDM2017\) | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency](#)
- [Health inequalities annual report 2024 | Department of Health](#)
- [Latest Household Expenditure Tracker reveals lowest earning households continue to be worst affected during the cost of living crisis | Consumer Council](#)
- [Experience of sport by adults in Northern Ireland 2023/24 | Department for Communities](#)
- [CSPPA Reports – CSPPA.ie](#)

Religious Belief

Evidence relating to religious belief is drawn from the Continuous Household Survey 2023/24, which captures data on religious identification within the population and their engagement with sport and physical activity.

Source: [Experience of Sport by Adults in Northern Ireland 2023/24](#)

Additionally, the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) for Sport NI's Corporate Plan highlights the importance of supporting sports to develop more mixed and inclusive participant bases that are not segregated along religious lines.

Source: [Equality Impact Assessment – Sport NI Corporate Plan](#)

Sport and Community Relations in Northern Ireland, by John Sugden and Scott Harvie, Published by the University of Ulster, Coleraine 1995 4.125

Other sources of data related to Research Papers

26/01 Wednesday, 10 October 2001 SECTARIANISM AND SPORT IN NORTHERN IRELAND for the NI Assembly reviewed: Bairner, A. (2000) "After the War? Soccer, Masculinity and Violence in Northern Ireland" pp176-194 in J. McKay; Michael. A. Messner & Don Sabo (eds) Masculinities, Gender Relations and Sport. California: Sage. Bairner, A. & Darby, P (2000) "Divided Sport in A Divided Society: Northern Ireland" pp51-72 in J. Sugden & A. Bairner (eds) Sport in Divided Societies. Oxford: Meyer & Meyer Sport Ltd. Cronin, M. (1999) Sport and Nationalism: Gaelic Games, Soccer and Irish Identity since 1884. Dublin: Four Courts Press Ltd. Guelke, A. & Sugden, J. (2000) "Sport and the 'Normalising of the New South Africa" pp73-96 in J. Sugden & A. Bairner (eds) Sport in Divided Societies. Oxford: Meyer & Meyer Sport Ltd. Hargreaves, J (2000) "Spain Divided: The Barcelona Olympics and Catalan Nationalism" pp13-30 in J. Sugden & A. Bairner (eds) Sport in Divided Societies. Oxford: Meyer & Meyer Sport Ltd. Harvey, J (2000) "Sport and Quebec Nationalism: Ethnic or Civil Identity" pp31-50 in J. Sugden & A. Bairner (eds) Sport in Divided Societies. Oxford: Meyer & Meyer Sport Ltd. McDonald, I. (2000) "Between Salem and Shiva: The Politics of Cricket Nationalism in "Globalising" India" pp213-

234 in J. Sugden & A. Bairner (eds) *Sport in Divided Societies*. Oxford: Meyer & Meyer Sport Ltd. McGinley, M; Kremer, J; Trew, K & Ogle, S (1998) "Socio-cultural identity and attitudes to sport in Northern Ireland". *The Irish Journal of Psychology*, 1998, 19, 4, 464-471. Merkel, U. (2000) "Sport in Divided Societies – The Case of the Old, the New and the Re-united Germany" pp139-166 in J. Sugden & A. Bairner (eds) *Sport in Divided Societies*. Oxford: Meyer & Meyer Sport Ltd. Sugden, J. (1993) *Sport, Sectarianism and Society in A Divided Ireland*. New York: St Martin's Press Inc. Sugden, J. (1995) "Sport, Community Relations and Community Conflict in Northern Ireland, pp199-214 in Seamus Dunn (ed) *Facets of the Conflict in Northern Ireland*. London: McMillan Press Ltd. Sugden, J. & Harvie, S. (1995) *Sport and Community Relations in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: Centre for the Study of Conflict. Vanreusel, B.; Renson, R & Tollenner, J. (2000) "Divided Sports in a Divided Belgium" pp97-112 in J. Sugden & A. Bairner (eds) *Sport in Divided Societies*. Oxford: Meyer & Meyer Sport Ltd. (2016) David Mitchell, Ian Somerville and Owen Hargie, *Sport and Social Exclusion*.

Political Opinion

The EQIA for Sport NI's Corporate Plan also references research (2016) which identified the symbolic nature of sport in Northern Ireland's divided society, where some sports can reflect religious, cultural, and political allegiances. However, the same research suggested that the politicisation of sport may be gradually weakening, indicating a potential shift toward greater inclusivity across political divides.

Source: [Equality Impact Assessment – Sport NI Corporate Plan](#)

Other research sources include;

The Contested Identities of Ulster Catholics pp 127-142, *Sport, Politics and Catholics in Northern Ireland*, David Hassan, .Conor Murray

(2018) Northern Ireland Peace Monitoring Report, Number Five October 2018 Ann Marie Gray, Jennifer Hamilton, Gráinne Kelly, Brendan Lynn, Martin Melaugh and Gillian Robinson

Racial Group

This gap in data was explicitly identified through Sport NI's participation in the 2021 'Tackling Racism and Racial Inequality in Sport' collaborative study, conducted alongside the other UK Sports Councils.

Source: [Tackling Racism and Racial Inequality in Sport Review 2021](#)

A key finding for Northern Ireland was that a lack of available data and insight into the racial diversity of participants in sport makes it difficult to measure progress or identify specific barriers faced by ethnically diverse communities.

The study's lived experience component — *#TellYourStory* — further highlighted this issue, stating that:

"The final numbers provide sufficient data for the England analysis, but the in-depth one-to-one interviews conducted in Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales offer only initial insights for these countries. Low engagement may also reflect weaker networks and relationships between the Sports Councils and ethnically diverse communities at local level."

Further contextual evidence can also be drawn from the Northern Ireland Assembly's paper on grassroots sport, which outlines general participation trends and potential challenges across communities.

Sources: [Grassroots Sport in NI: A Summary of Participation and Potential Challenges](#) & [Tackling Racism and Racial Inequality in Sport Review 2021](#)

Age

The 2023/24 Continuous Household Survey (CHS) provides the most up-to-date data on participation in sport across different age groups in Northern Ireland. Findings are available at: [Experience of Sport by Adults in Northern Ireland 2023/24](#).

In addition, the 2022 the Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Survey ([CSPPA Reports – CSPPA.ie](#)), the 2022 Children's Report Card ([PA-Report-card-full-report-final.pdf](#)) the 2023 Kids' Life and Times Survey (focused on P7 pupils) and the Young People Life and Times Survey (focused on 16-year-olds) offer valuable insights into participation patterns and attitudes towards sport and physical activity among children and young people ([Northern Ireland Kids Life and Times Survey: 2023](#) and [Young Life and Times Survey: Sport](#)). These surveys highlight a clear decline in participation levels as children transition from primary to post-primary education, indicating the importance of targeted interventions to sustain participation into adolescence and adulthood.

Marital Status

The 2023/24 Continuous Household Survey (CHS) also provides insight into sport participation rates based on marital status. This evidence helps Sport NI better understand how relationship status may influence participation. Findings can be accessed at: [Experience of Sport by Adults in Northern Ireland 2023/24](#).

This evidence is supplemented by the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) for Sport NI's Corporate Plan, which reviewed broader research and data on participation patterns across different Section 75 groups, including marital status.

Other research sources include:

(2006) Influence of Marital Status on Physical Activity Levels among Older Adults PETTEE, KELLEY; BRACH, JENNIFER; KRISKA, ANDREA; BOUDREAU, ROBERT; RICHARDSON, CAROLINE; COLBERT, LISA; SATTERFIELD, SUZANNE; VISSER, MARJOLEI; HARRIS, TAMARA; AYONAYON, HILSA; NEWMAN, ANNE.

(2011) Family structure, time constraints, and sport participation, Jane E. Ruseski, Brad R. Humphreys, Kirstin Hallmann & Christoph Breuer, European Review of Aging and Physical Activity

(2006) Does marital status and marital status change predict physical health in older adults? K Bennett, University of Liverpool, Liverpool, UK

Marital status effects on health: are there differences between never married women and divorced and separated women? I Waldron , C C Weiss, M E Hughes

The desk based review of evidence to support this programme and notes the impact of poverty most felt by single parents.

Sexual Orientation

Currently, Sport NI does not hold robust quantitative data on sport participation rates disaggregated by sexual orientation, largely due to the absence of this data in standard population-level surveys.

However, evidence gathered through extensive consultation for the Corporate Plan highlighted a number of barriers faced by LGBTQIA+ people in sport, including:

- The invisibility of LGBTQIA+ identities within many sporting environments.
- The absence of visible role models and a reluctance among athletes to come out.
- Homophobic microaggressions and unreported hate incidents creating hostile environments in some sports settings.
- Specific challenges faced by single-identity LGBTQIA+ teams, particularly around sustainability and broader acceptance.

These insights are captured within the Corporate Plan's Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) and demonstrate the ongoing cultural and structural barriers impacting LGBTQIA+ inclusion in sport.

Men and Women

The 2023/24 Continuous Household Survey (CHS) provides gender-disaggregated data on sport participation, enabling Sport NI to track differences in participation rates between men and women.

The data is available at:

[Experience of Sport by Adults in Northern Ireland 2023/24](#).

In addition to participation rates, consultation evidence from the development of the Corporate Plan highlighted gender-specific barriers to participation, including:

- Caring responsibilities, which disproportionately impact women.
- Concerns around personal safety, particularly when accessing facilities or participating in sport after dark.
- Gendered stereotypes affecting perceptions of access to sport and certain activities appropriate for specific genders.

[Coaching in the UK | Our Research - UK Coaching](#)

A desk-based review of women in sport is attached at Appendix C.

Persons with a Disability

The 2023/24 Continuous Household Survey (CHS) also captures participation rates for disabled and non-disabled people, providing a key evidence base for understanding disparities in participation.

This data can be accessed at:

[Experience of Sport by Adults in Northern Ireland 2023/24](#).

Alongside this quantitative data, Sport NI continues to engage closely with Disability Sport NI, gathering practical insights into the lived experiences of disabled athletes, participants, coaches, and volunteers. This qualitative evidence helps contextualise participation data and highlights barriers such as:

- Accessibility of facilities and equipment.
- Limited availability of inclusive programmes.

- Gaps in awareness and understanding among coaches and volunteers.

Persons with Dependants

The 2023/24 Continuous Household Survey (CHS) provides further evidence on participation in sport among individuals with caring responsibilities. This data helps identify the impact of dependants on levels of participation, particularly for parents of young children, lone parents, and carers of disabled or older relatives.

Data is available at:

[Experience of Sport by Adults in Northern Ireland 2023/24.](#)

Consultation for the Corporate Plan further reinforced how caring responsibilities create a significant barrier to regular participation, particularly for women. Issues raised include:

- Lack of affordable childcare.
- Timetabling of sessions, which may not be compatible with family schedules.
- Limited availability of family-friendly sport and physical activity options.

The evidence base for this programme contains poverty impacts on single parents

Needs, Experiences and Priorities

Taking into account the information referred to above, what are the different needs, experiences and priorities of each of the following categories, in relation to the particular policy/decision?

Specify details of the needs, experiences and priorities for each of the Section 75 categories below:

Sport NI's analysis identifies persistent inequalities in sport participation, reinforced by both survey data and consultation evidence. The needs of Section 75 categories are not uniform; they vary across life stages, communities, and contexts, and they often overlap.

Overarching Needs Identified

- Representation and role models: The under-representation of women, disabled people, and ethnic minorities in coaching, governance, and leadership perpetuates exclusion. The programme aims to strengthen opportunities for wider representation across the sporting system.
- Sustained participation across the life course: Drop-off during adolescence and older adulthood is a recurring trend. The programme encourages approaches that support early entry, retention of teenagers, and re-engagement of adults and older people.
- Accessible, affordable sport: Cost, childcare, and transport remain cross-cutting barriers. The programme is designed to take account of these challenges and to support models of delivery that reduce financial and practical barriers where possible.
- Safe and welcoming environments: Facilities and clubs must be neutral, inclusive, and visibly supportive of diversity. Funded activity should promote environments that are welcoming and culturally sensitive.
- Intersectional barriers: For example, disabled women or ethnic minority young people in rural communities often face *layered disadvantage*. The programme design allows for flexibility to reflect multiple and overlapping needs.

Religious Belief

Current Participation Patterns

The 2023/24 Continuous Household Survey (CHS) provides the most recent data on participation in sport across different religious backgrounds in Northern Ireland. According to the survey:

- 46% of people identifying as Catholic participated in sport at least once in the previous seven days.
- 47% of people identifying as Protestant participated in sport at least once in the previous seven days.
- 56% of people identifying as 'Other' or having no religion participated in sport at least once in the previous seven days.

Source: [Experience of Sport by Adults in Northern Ireland 2023/24](#)

Evidence from the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) for Sport NI's Corporate Plan references a 2016 study (Mitchell, Somerville & Hargie) on Sport and Social Exclusion. This research found:

- Strong public support (86%) for the principle of sport as a peacebuilding tool in Northern Ireland.
- Both Protestant and Catholic communities expressed a desire for sports to become more mixed in terms of participation and support bases.

Source: Sport NI Corporate Plan EQIA

Through Sport NI's extensive public consultation for the 2021-2026 Corporate Plan, further religious and cultural considerations were identified:

- Religious and cultural practices impact participation, particularly for some women and girls from specific faith backgrounds.

Issues raised included the need for:

- Female-only sessions.
- Private changing facilities for those unable to use communal spaces.
- The need for dedicated development officers to support participation within culturally diverse communities, helping sustain engagement and facilitate progression within sport.

The Department for Communities (DfC) screening of the Active Living Strategy reinforces these priorities, highlighting:

- Facility access at times that respect religious observances.
- Programming of gender-specific sessions to align with religious and cultural requirements.

In summary:

Sport NI also acknowledges that community background continues to influence sporting preferences and participation. This reality should inform the allocation of resources and the design of inclusive programmes.

Further, Sport NI respects the personal choice of athletes in relation to national representation, recognising the diverse identities within Northern Ireland's sporting landscape.

Political Opinion

Historical Context and Evolving Trends

The EQIA for Sport NI's Corporate Plan references evidence (Mitchell, Somerville & Hargie, 2016) that highlights the historical politicisation of sport in Northern Ireland, where certain sports became associated with particular political, religious and cultural identities.

However, this research also found emerging evidence that the politicisation of sport may be gradually weakening, with some sports becoming more cross-community in character.

Consultation Feedback and Strategic Priorities

Through consultation on Sport NI's Corporate Plan (2021-2026) and the Department for Communities' Active Living Strategy, the following needs and experiences were identified for people of differing political opinions:

- Neutral and accessible facilities: Facilities should be seen as welcoming to all and free from political or sectarian symbolism that could discourage participation.
- Safe and inclusive environments: Participants highlighted the importance of feeling safe and secure when using facilities, venues, and open spaces.
- Avoidance of territorial markings: Facilities should be free from flags, emblems, murals, or other territorial markers that could alienate potential users.

In summary:

Sport NI also recognises the importance of respecting personal choice in relation to international representation, acknowledging that some athletes may choose to represent Northern Ireland, Ireland, or the UK — and that this choice should be fully supported within the system.

Racial Groups

The Tackling Racism and Racial Inequality in Sport (TRARIIS) review (2021) identified systemic barriers for ethnically diverse communities, including lack of role models, cultural exclusion and under-representation in leadership ([TRARIIS Report](#)).

Current Evidence and Research Insights

Sport NI, alongside the other Home Country Sports Councils, commissioned an extensive quantitative and qualitative research programme to better understand racial inequalities and racism in sport across the UK. This resulted in two key reports:

- “Tell Your Story” (2021) – capturing the lived experiences of people from ethnically diverse communities within sport, highlighting racism, microaggressions and structural inequalities.
- “Tackling Racism and Racial Inequality in Sport” (TRARIIS) – bringing together existing data to map inequalities in participation, representation, and experience within sport and physical activity.

Headline Findings:

- People from ethnically diverse backgrounds consistently report lower participation rates in sport and physical activity compared to White British/White Irish populations.
- Structural and cultural barriers, including language barriers, lack of visible role models, experiences of overt racism and microaggressions, contribute to lower engagement.
- Inequalities exist across all levels of sport – from grassroots participation through to elite performance and leadership roles.
- The research identified five common themes for action, which guide Sport NI's approach:
 - Representation and Leadership
 - Embedding Anti-Racism
 - Education and Cultural Awareness
 - Data and Insight
 - Systems and Accountability

Sources: [Tell Your Story](#), [Tackling Racism and Racial Inequality in Sport](#), [5 Common Themes for Action](#)

Consultation Feedback and Community Insights

Through consultation on Sport NI's Corporate Plan 2021-2026 ('The Power of Sport'), alongside the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) for the Plan, the needs, experiences and priorities of ethnically diverse communities were explored in greater detail.

Key messages from consultation included:

- *Inclusive Culture*: Participants highlighted the need for a genuinely open, welcoming and inclusive sporting culture that actively promotes wellbeing and inclusion, rather than simply expecting participation.
- *Cultural and Language Barriers*: Stakeholders proposed practical tools to overcome cultural and language barriers, including:
 - A multi-language app to support signposting, tailored to different confidence levels, sports and local club options.
 - Welcome videos from relatable participants to challenge stereotypes and misconceptions around sport being elite-focused.
- *Tackling Racism and Bias*: Participants reported both blatant racism and subtle microaggressions in sporting environments. This aligns with the findings of the TRARIIS research and further emphasises the need for:
 - Anti-racism training for clubs, officials and coaches.
 - Stronger policies and enforcement mechanisms to challenge discrimination when it occurs.
- *Targeted Development and Pathways*: Feedback highlighted the need for culturally diverse development officers, who can act as bridges between communities and the sporting system, helping build trust and sustained engagement.
- *Affordability and Accessibility*: Cost was consistently raised as a barrier to participation. This includes not only membership fees, but also kit, equipment and transport costs. Clubs and governing bodies were encouraged to explore more flexible pricing structures and targeted outreach programmes to remove these barriers.

- *Pathways to Leadership and Representation:* Feedback highlighted the lack of ethnically diverse representation within coaching, officiating and governance roles. Clear pathways to leadership were seen as essential, alongside targeted mentoring and outreach.
- *'Who You Know' Culture:* A strong theme across consultations was frustration at the informal networks that often shape access to development and leadership opportunities within Northern Ireland sport. More transparent recruitment and targeted outreach to ethnically diverse communities were identified as a critical priority.

Broader Strategic Alignment

The Sport NI EQIA also referenced the Sport England “Sport for All” study (2020), which provides further evidence that:

- Different ethnic communities have diverse needs and preferences, which should inform programme design.
- People’s experiences are shaped by multiple factors, including age, gender, disability, faith, sexual orientation — meaning solutions must account for these intersecting identities.
- Systemic change requires collective action across the whole sporting system, not just at club or governing body level.
- Source: Sport for All: Why Ethnicity and Culture Matters

In summary:

Evidence highlights systemic exclusion, pointing to the importance of inclusive cultures, diverse representation, and improved outreach.

Age

The 2023/24 Continuous Household Survey (CHS) provides the most up-to-date data on participation in sport across different age groups in Northern Ireland. Findings are available at:

[Experience of Sport by Adults in Northern Ireland 2023/24](#).

In addition, the 2022 the Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Survey ([CSPPA Reports – CSPPA.ie](#)), the 2022 Children's Report Card ([PA-Report-card-full-report-final.pdf](#)) the 2023 Kids' Life and Times Survey (focused on P7 pupils) and the Young People Life and Times Survey (focused on 16-year-olds) offer valuable insights into participation patterns and attitudes towards sport and physical activity among children and young people ([Northern Ireland Kids Life and Times Survey: 2023](#) and [Young Life and Times Survey: Sport](#)). These surveys highlight a clear decline in participation levels as children transition from primary to post-primary education, indicating the importance of targeted interventions to sustain participation into adolescence and adulthood.

Sport NI has reviewed a range of research and data to understand how age affects people’s participation in sport and physical activity. Key sources include the 2023/24 Continuous Household Survey, the Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study (CSPPA), and the Kids Life and Times (KLT) and Young Life and Times (YLT) surveys.

What we know from the data:

- Sport participation declines as people get older, particularly between primary and post-primary school.

- 17% of students aged 10-18 in Northern Ireland meet the recommended 60 minutes of daily physical activity.
- Boys are more likely to meet this target than girls.
- Participation rates are lower for children with disabilities and children from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- 92% of primary pupils and 76% of post-primary pupils take part in school sport outside of PE at least once a week.

What older people told us:

- They want more adapted sports like walking football, table tennis and bowls.
- Transport, costs and lack of local facilities are big barriers, especially in rural areas.
- Better communication and promotion of activities is needed.
- Feeling self-conscious about going to classes alone puts people off.
- Health concerns, lack of changing facilities and digital barriers (for online classes) also affect participation.
- There is strong support for fun, social and non-competitive activities.
- Linking with initiatives like Age Friendly programmes and ensuring sports facilities meet accessibility standards was highlighted.

What children and young people told us:

- There is strong demand for better quality PE in schools, with more focus on skill development and physical literacy, not just competition.
- Early focus on competitive sports leaves many children feeling excluded.
- School-to-club pathways need to improve to help children stay involved.
- After-school activities are often unaffordable for low-income families.
- Young people want a wider range of sports and more adventure-style activities, especially in rural areas.
- Transport, self-confidence, and stereotypes around which sports are for boys or girls are barriers.
- 17/18-year-olds feel there are fewer suitable activities for them locally.

What parents, early years staff and community workers told us:

- Early years play and fundamental movement skills are crucial but often overlooked.
- Many parents lack the knowledge or confidence to encourage physical activity at home.
- Financial pressures, lack of local support, and digital exclusion all affect family participation.
- Outdoor play and using natural environments should be encouraged, but weather is often seen as a barrier.
- Costs of clothing, equipment and club fees can exclude families.
- There's a need for better partnerships between clubs, schools and local community groups to offer low-cost options.
- Messaging should focus on fun, health and wellbeing rather than competition.

In summary:

There is clear evidence that participation levels change across the life course, with steep declines during adolescence and into adulthood. Different age groups face distinct barriers, from the cost of after-school sport for children, to transport and health concerns for older adults. The consultation highlighted strong support for improving PE in schools, providing affordable community sport for all ages, and ensuring that messaging, facilities and programmes are truly inclusive.

Marital Status

Overview

The 2022/23 Continuous Household Survey (CHS) gathered data on participation in sport. Findings related to marital status are available in the published tables: [engagement-culture-arts-heritage-sport-by-adults-in-northern-ireland-202223.xlsx \(live.com\)](#).

Participation levels by marital status were as follows:

- Married / Cohabiting: 50%
- Single: 52%
- Widowed: 21%
- Separated / Divorced: 36%

More recent data from the 2023/24 Continuous Household Survey (CHS) indicates:

- 51% of married people had participated in sport within the previous 7 days.
- 54% of single people had participated in sport within the previous 7 days.

Needs, Experiences and Priorities

The Department for Communities' screening assessment on the Active Living Strategy highlights several factors affecting participation across different marital status groups:

- Access to facilities at times that fit around family and work commitments.
- Encouraging parental involvement in children's sports and physical activity.
- Childcare issues are a significant barrier for many parents, particularly those in dual-working households.
- Cost is a limiting factor, particularly for those on lower incomes.

Sexual Orientation

Currently, Sport NI does not hold robust quantitative data on sport participation rates disaggregated by sexual orientation, largely due to the absence of this data in standard population-level surveys.

However, evidence gathered through extensive consultation for the Corporate Plan highlighted a number of barriers faced by LGBTQIA+ people in sport, including:

- The invisibility of LGBTQIA+ identities within many sporting environments.
- The absence of visible role models and a reluctance among athletes to come out.
- Homophobic microaggressions and unreported hate incidents creating hostile environments in some sports settings.
- Specific challenges faced by single-identity LGBTQIA+ teams, particularly around sustainability and broader acceptance.

These insights are captured within the Corporate Plan's Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) and demonstrate the ongoing cultural and structural barriers impacting LGBTQIA+ inclusion in sport.

Evidence from the Rainbow Project highlights barriers such as lack of role models, unsafe environments and invisibility in sporting structures ([Rainbow Project Research](#)).

In Summary:

LGBTQIA+ people benefit from visible inclusion in policies, campaigns, and safe spaces, with supportive club cultures reducing barriers to participation.

Men and Women

Participation Data (2022/23 and 2023/24)

The 2022/23 **Continuous Household Survey (CHS)** examined participation in sport by gender. Findings are available in the report: [Engagement in Culture, Arts, Heritage & Sport by Adults in Northern Ireland 2022/23](#).

Key findings:

- 55% of males participated in sport at least once in the previous year compared to 40% of females (2022/23).
- Males participated in a wider range of sports, while females were more likely to participate in activities such as keep-fit, aerobics, dance exercise, yoga, and weight training (26% of females compared to 22% of males).

The **2023/24 Continuous Household Survey** indicated similar patterns:

- In the past 7 days, 55% of males participated in sport compared to 42% of females.
- Full findings available here: [Experience of Sport by Adults in Northern Ireland 2023/24](#).

Women's Participation – Sport NI Insights

Sport NI's **2019 Club Survey** highlighted ongoing gender disparities in club membership:

- 65% male, 35% female membership split.
- Female representation was particularly low among ages 19-49, with 71% male and only 29% female.
- Among club coaches, 69% were male and 31% female. This disparity worsened with age, as women aged 31-49 accounted for just 11% of all coaches.

Sport NI's **Women and Girls in Sport** research (November 2022) identified these key challenges for females:

- Lower participation rates, declining further with age, social class, and disability.
- Preference for recreational activities over competitive sport.
- Reduced visits to outdoor spaces (2020/21).
- Under-representation in club participation, coaching, performance, and leadership roles.
- Declining enjoyment and participation at post-primary school level.

Sporting System – Women's Focus Group Findings

Women's focus groups identified the need for gender-specific approaches to participation:

- Inactive girls are more influenced by friends and social media; therefore, initial activities must align with their existing social habits.

- Lack of confidence and competence (physical literacy) was a barrier, with issues stemming from both school PE and traditional club environments.
- Women preferred flexible, family-friendly club offerings rather than rigid competitive structures.
- Greater visibility of relatable female role models, particularly on social media, is needed.
- Short-term funded projects were deemed ineffective in driving sustained change.

High Performance – Women’s Pathway Challenges

Women’s groups also highlighted barriers in the high-performance pathway:

- Lack of female role models in performance and coaching roles.
- Need for empathetic coaching, life skills training, and post-athlete career support.
- Low media coverage of female athletes reduces visibility and aspiration.

People Development – Addressing the Coaching Gap

There is a clear need to develop coach education to:

- Recognise women’s different learning styles.
- Embed empathetic, athlete-centred coaching approaches.
- Improve safeguarding and wellbeing provisions, particularly in female sports.
- Remove barriers to female coaching and volunteering, such as rigid qualification processes and time commitments.

Department for Communities – Active Living Strategy

The **Department for Communities’ screening assessment** of the **Active Living Strategy** identified specific needs for men and women, summarised below.

Common Needs for Both Genders:

- Safe, affordable, welcoming facilities.
- Wide range of sports and opening hours.
- Clear coaching pathways and opportunities for progression.
- Innovative use of technology to support engagement.

Gender-Specific Needs and Priorities

In Summary:

Family-friendly, flexible, and affordable provision is key. Lone parents and carers experience distinct financial and time barriers.

Persons with a Disability

Disabled people remain significantly less active, with CHS showing persistent gaps. DSNi’s Impact Report 2024 highlights barriers such as inaccessible facilities, limited inclusive provision, transport and cost ([DSNi Impact Report](#)).

The 2022/23 Continuous Household Survey (CHS) included questions on participation in sport by adults with disabilities. Findings are presented in the report available at: [NISRA Data Visualisation](#).

The report highlighted a significant participation gap between disabled and non-disabled adults. In 2022/23, only 26% of adults with a disability participated in sport over the previous year, compared to 56% of adults without a disability. This pattern was also evident when looking at participation within the previous four weeks — only 21% of disabled adults took part, compared to 48% of non-disabled adults.

The 2023/24 CHS (available at: [Experience of Sport by Adults in NI](#)) revealed a slight improvement in participation rates among disabled adults, rising to 30%, but this remained significantly lower than the 59% participation rate of non-disabled adults.

Barriers and Challenges

Disability Sport NI (DSNI) has highlighted the complex range of factors contributing to lower participation rates among disabled people. These include:

- The lasting negative impact of COVID-19 on participation habits.
- Reduced provision of disability-specific sports opportunities by District Councils.
- Disruption to Governing Body programmes during the pandemic.
- Financial pressures due to the cost-of-living crisis, making it harder for disabled people to afford participation fees and travel costs.

DSNI expressed particular concern about this decline, as it follows a period of steady progress up to 2019/20 when disabled sports participation was at its highest. This progress had been driven by targeted programmes delivered by Sport NI, District Councils, and Governing Bodies across Northern Ireland.

Research Findings and Insights

The **Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Information Service (2015)** examined sports provision for disabled people and found that disabled adults were far less likely to engage in regular physical activity than their non-disabled peers (19% compared to 37%).

Disability Sport NI estimates that approximately 20% of Northern Ireland's population — around 360,000 people — live with a long-term limiting illness, which is the current working definition of 'disability'.

Consultation Feedback and Recommendations

Consultation on **Sport NI's 2021-2026 Corporate Plan: The Power of Sport**, and the Department for Communities' screening assessment on the **Active Living Strategy**, identified several critical themes from the disability sector:

- Marginalised and under-represented groups, including disabled people, stressed the need for an open, welcoming, inclusive sporting culture, which promotes both wellness and wellbeing.
- Participants reported that many sports environments still feel unwelcoming and inaccessible.
- There was evidence of **underreporting** of disability, meaning some disabled people's needs may go unrecognised in sport participation data.
- A **targeted focus on inactive people** (rather than just those identifying as disabled) was seen as a more effective engagement strategy.
- Inconsistent accessibility support across Councils was noted, with accessibility provisions appearing to decline in recent years as capital asset management became a higher priority.

- There were calls for a more **diverse leadership** within sports organisations, noting that cognitive bias at Board and committee level can perpetuate exclusion.
- Limited **data quality and granularity** on disability participation makes it harder to design effective policies and programmes.
- The importance of **advocacy, awareness raising, storytelling, training, and the integration of inclusivity requirements into funding criteria** was strongly emphasised.

Specific Needs and Barriers

The **Department for Communities screening assessment** on the **Active Living Strategy** further highlighted several specific needs and barriers for disabled people:

- Tailored approaches for different types of disability — physical, mental health, sensory, and learning disabilities.
- **Transport and accessibility barriers**, especially in rural areas.
- **Financial barriers**, including the cost of public transport and sports services — with community-based options seen as more accessible.
- Lack of awareness and **poor promotion** of available services and opportunities.
- **Low confidence, motivation and self-esteem**, along with fears of being judged, create psychological barriers to participation.
- The importance of **peer support** — disabled people were more likely to engage if attending with someone they know.
- The need for **advocates or support workers** to help individuals build motivation and confidence to take part.

In Summary:

Accessibility and inclusivity remain critical, requiring investment in adapted provision, equipment, and awareness in mainstream sport as well as disability-specific opportunities.

Persons with Dependants

The 2022/23 Continuous Household Survey (CHS) also gathered data on sporting participation levels among adults with dependants. Findings are available in the associated data tables: [Engagement in Culture, Arts, Heritage & Sport by Adults in NI 2022/23](#).

In 2022/23, participation rates were slightly higher among adults with dependants (50%) compared to adults without dependants (46%).

In 2023/24, this gap widened slightly, with 54% of adults with dependants participating in sport, compared to 49% of those without dependants.

This indicates that having dependants is not necessarily a barrier to participation in sport, and may in some cases act as a motivator, potentially linked to family-based or child-led activity programmes. However, further exploration is needed to understand the nature of these activities and whether they provide meaningful opportunities for sustained engagement.

In Summary:

Family-friendly, flexible, and affordable provision is key. Lone parents and carers experience distinct financial and time barriers.

Why Investment in NGBs is Critical

The evidence demonstrates that inequalities in sport are persistent and systemic. The System Partners Investment Programme has been designed with these issues in mind and provides a framework for funded organisations to respond to them. While impacts are expected to be positive, the exact approach will depend on how individual organisations use resources to widen access, improve representation, and reduce barriers for Section 75 groups.

Part 2. Screening questions

Introduction

In deciding as to whether or not there is a need to carry out an equality impact assessment, the public authority should consider its answers to the questions 1-4 which are given on pages 66-68 of this Guide.

If the public authority's conclusion is **none** in respect of all the Section 75 equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, then the public authority may decide to screen the policy out. If a policy is 'screened out' as having no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations, a public authority should give details of the reasons for the decision taken.

If the public authority's conclusion is **major** in respect of one or more of the Section 75 equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, then consideration should be given to subjecting the policy to the equality impact assessment procedure.

If the public authority's conclusion is **minor** in respect of one or more of the Section 75 equality categories and/or good relations categories, then consideration should still be given to proceeding with an equality impact assessment, or to:

- measures to mitigate the adverse impact; or
- the introduction of an alternative policy to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

In favour of a 'major' impact

- a) The policy is significant in terms of its strategic importance.
- b) Potential equality impacts are unknown, because, for example, there is insufficient data upon which to make an assessment or because they are complex, and it would be appropriate to conduct an equality impact assessment to better assess them.
- c) Potential equality and/or good relations impacts are likely to be adverse or are likely to be experienced disproportionately by groups of people including those who are marginalised or disadvantaged.
- d) Further assessment offers a valuable way to examine the evidence and develop recommendations in respect of a policy about which there are concerns amongst affected individuals and representative groups, for example in respect of multiple identities.
- e) The policy is likely to be challenged by way of judicial review.
- f) The policy is significant in terms of expenditure.

In favour of 'minor' impact

- a) The policy is not unlawfully discriminatory and any residual potential impacts on people are judged to be negligible.
- b) The policy, or certain proposals within it, are potentially unlawfully discriminatory, but this possibility can readily and easily be eliminated by making appropriate changes to the policy or by adopting appropriate mitigating measures.
- c) Any asymmetrical equality impacts caused by the policy are intentional because they are specifically designed to promote equality of opportunity for groups of disadvantaged people.

- d) By amending the policy there are better opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

In favour of none

- a) The policy has no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations.
- b) The policy is purely technical in nature and will have no bearing in terms of its likely impact on equality of opportunity or good relations for people within the equality and good relations categories. ☐

Considering the evidence presented above, consider and comment on the likely impact on equality of opportunity and good relations for those affected by this policy, in any way, for each of the equality and good relations categories, by applying the screening questions given overleaf and indicate the level of impact on the group i.e. minor, major or none.

Screening questions

1. What is the likely impact on equality of opportunity for those affected by this policy, for each of the Section 75 equality categories?

Please provide details of the likely policy impacts and determine the level of impact for each S75 categories below i.e. either minor, major or none.

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Religious belief**:

What is the level of impact? Minor / Major / **None** (highlighted as appropriate)

No adverse impacts are anticipated. The programme is expected to provide opportunities that are open and welcoming to people of all religious backgrounds and may encourage cross-community engagement through sport.

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Political Opinion**:

What is the level of impact? Minor / Major / **None** (underlined as appropriate)

No adverse impacts are anticipated. Sport and physical activity are generally regarded as shared spaces, and the programme is expected to encourage delivery that is inclusive and free from political association.

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Racial Group**:

What is the level of impact? **Minor** / Major / None (underlined as appropriate)

We do not expect there to be any adverse impact on people of different racial group. Any impacts of this policy should be minor and positive.

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Age**:

What is the level of impact? **Minor** / Major / None (underlined as appropriate)

No adverse impacts are anticipated. Positive impacts are expected, particularly if delivery reflects different needs across the life course, from early years to older adults.

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Marital Status**:

What is the level of impact? **Minor** / Major / None (underlined as appropriate)

No adverse impacts are anticipated. Positive impacts are expected where provision is flexible, family-friendly, and supportive of people with different household circumstances.

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Sexual Orientation**:

What is the level of impact? **Minor** / Major / None (underlined as appropriate)

No adverse impacts are anticipated. Positive impacts are expected, particularly where delivery is visibly inclusive of LGBTQIA+ people and supportive of safe, welcoming environments.

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Men and Women**:

What is the level of impact? Minor / Major / None (underlined as appropriate)

No adverse impacts are anticipated. Positive impacts are expected, particularly where gender-specific barriers to participation, leadership, and progression are acknowledged in delivery.

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Disability**:

What is the level of impact? Minor / Major / None (underlined as appropriate)

No adverse impacts are anticipated. Positive impacts are expected where delivery is inclusive of disabled people and provision is adapted to remove accessibility barriers.

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Dependants**:

What is the level of impact? Minor / Major / None (underlined as appropriate)

No adverse impacts are anticipated. Positive impacts are expected where activities are flexible and accessible for people with caring responsibilities, including parents and carers.

2. Are there opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity for people within the Section 75 equalities categories?

Yes, and these have been integrated into programme design. The focus of the programme and its assessment methodology and monitoring and evaluation framework is to improve lived experience and increase participation, performance and representation of under-represented groups.

Detail opportunities of how this policy could promote equality of opportunity for people are outlined within each of the Section 75 Categories below and incorporated in the project

Yes. The programme is designed to support and encourage opportunities for NGBs and their partners to:

- Strengthen cross-community outreach and shared participation.
- Deliver culturally competent and anti-racist programming.
- Increase female participation and leadership pathways.
- Develop inclusive and accessible provision for disabled people.
- Improve family-friendly and flexible opportunities for carers and parents.
- Create safe, visible spaces for LGBTQIA+ participation.

Barriers often intersect across multiple Section 75 categories, such as disabled women or young people from ethnically diverse backgrounds living in deprived areas. By embedding equality outcomes in funding agreements, Sport NI ensures that NGBs take account of these overlapping inequalities.

Religious Belief - Yes

The programme promotes equality of opportunity across all religious groups by encouraging participation in sport and physical activity as a shared space, fostering understanding and encouraging cross-community engagement through sport. This approach reflects Sport NI's commitment to supporting inclusive sporting opportunities for everyone, regardless of religious belief or background. Sport and physical activity have long been recognised as valuable vehicles for promoting good relations and fostering mutual understanding between communities in Northern Ireland, particularly in areas where religious and community divisions remain pronounced. The investment will support the delivery of sporting programmes that are deliberately designed to be welcoming, inclusive and reflective of all communities.

Political Opinion - Yes

The programme actively promotes equality of opportunity across all political opinions by ensuring that sport and physical activity programmes are delivered in ways that are inclusive, welcoming and free from political bias, providing safe and accessible environments for all participants. Sport and physical activity, particularly in the context of Northern Ireland, have significant potential to foster understanding, reconciliation, and shared experiences between people of different political backgrounds, especially in communities where political division has historically acted as a barrier to participation.

The programme's focus on building a positive and inclusive sports culture ensures that funded programmes will:

- Deliver a diverse portfolio of sporting opportunities that reflect and attract participants from all political backgrounds. This will include sports with cross-community appeal (e.g., Football, Athletics, Golf, Basketball) as well as sports that might traditionally have stronger associations

with specific community or political identities, with a focus on creating shared and welcoming spaces for all.

- This approach aligns directly with the wider strategic focus on inclusion, equality and removing barriers to participation within the Active Living Strategy and Sport NI's Corporate Plan 2021-2026, recognising that sport can and should act as a neutral and unifying space, irrespective of political identity.

Evidence: Mitchell, Somerville & Hargie (2016); PfG Wellbeing Framework.

Racial Group - Yes

The programme is fully committed to promoting equality of opportunity for people from ethnic minority and culturally diverse backgrounds, ensuring that the sporting system in Northern Ireland is welcoming, accessible, and reflective of our increasingly diverse population. This investment will fund National Governing Bodies (NGBs) and delivery partners to design and deliver programmes that actively encourage participation from ethnically diverse communities, migrant communities, and people from culturally diverse backgrounds, recognising that ethnic minorities remain under-represented in organised sport across Northern Ireland. Specific actions to promote equality of opportunity include:

- Tackling language and communication barriers by encouraging the use of multi-lingual materials where appropriate and partnering with community and cultural organisations who have trusted relationships with diverse racial groups.
- Actively promoting opportunities through diverse channels, ensuring that promotional campaigns reach ethnic minority communities, particularly those who may have less awareness of existing sport and physical activity offers.
- Monitoring participation data by racial group, ensuring robust data capture and analysis to identify gaps, trends, and emerging barriers, allowing for targeted interventions and ongoing improvement.

This proactive approach supports the wider ambitions set out in Sport NI's Corporate Plan 2021-2026 and aligns with the Department for Communities' Active Living Strategy, both of which emphasise the need to break down barriers and tackle inequalities in sport. It also acknowledges findings from previous consultations, where under-represented groups reported a lack of targeted outreach, low visibility of opportunities, and barriers linked to cultural awareness and inclusion.

Age - Yes

The programme promotes equality of opportunity across all age groups, ensuring that people of all ages – from early years to older adults – have meaningful opportunities to participate, progress and excel in sport and physical activity. This programme recognises that engagement in sport and physical activity evolves across the life course, with distinct needs, barriers, and motivators at different stages of life. To ensure lifelong participation, age-inclusive programming will be a core requirement for all funded National Governing Bodies (NGBs) and delivery partners.

Specific actions to promote equality of opportunity across age groups include:

- Early intervention and positive experiences in childhood: Supporting high-quality entry points to sport and physical activity for children and young people, ensuring early exposure is fun, inclusive, and confidence-building. This helps establish lifelong positive attitudes towards participation.
- Youth and adolescent retention: Recognising adolescence as a critical dropout point, particularly for girls and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

- The investment also requires funded bodies to capture, monitor and analyse participation data by age group, ensuring that programmes are effectively reaching all age demographics and allowing for targeted action to address any emerging inequalities.

This comprehensive approach is directly aligned to the Sport NI Corporate Plan 2021-2026 and the Department for Communities' Active Living Strategy, both of which stress the importance of sport and physical activity being a lifelong offer, with particular focus on sustaining engagement at key life transitions.

Marital Status - Yes

This programme funding will ask the NGBs to promote equality of opportunity for people of all marital statuses by ensuring that sport and physical activity opportunities are inclusive, accessible and welcoming for everyone, regardless of whether they are single, married, in a civil partnership, separated, divorced, or widowed. The investment recognises that marital status can intersect with other life factors — such as caring responsibilities, financial pressures, social isolation, and time constraints — all of which can influence participation in sport and physical activity. For example:

- Single parents may experience time and financial barriers to participating themselves, or struggle to access affordable childcare to allow them to take part.
- Married or cohabiting individuals may be more inclined to seek family-based or couples' activities, with social connection being a key motivator.
- Widowed or divorced individuals, particularly in older age, may experience social isolation and lack the confidence to engage in sport independently.

To address these needs, the investment will:

- Encourage NGBs to design programmes with flexibility in mind, offering family-friendly options, flexible session times, and low-cost community options that remove practical barriers for those with caring responsibilities or financial pressures.
- Encourage the NGBs to offer a mix of individual, couple and family participation, ensuring that people can engage in ways that reflect their personal circumstances and preferences.
- Capture and review participation data, ensuring that no group is disproportionately underrepresented based on their marital status, and that targeted outreach can be introduced where necessary.

This approach aligns with the Sport NI Corporate Plan 2021-2026, which emphasises the importance of inclusive participation opportunities that reflect real-life circumstances and is further reinforced by the Active Living Strategy's focus on community-led, accessible provision that welcomes all.

Sexual Orientation - Yes

The programme encourages NGBs to promote equality of opportunity for people of all sexual orientations, leading to LGBTQIA+ communities feeling welcomed, supported, and encouraged to participate fully in sport and physical activity. This commitment reflects both the Sport NI Corporate Plan 2021-2026 and the Department for Communities' Active Living Strategy, which emphasise the importance of fostering inclusive sporting environments where everyone feels safe, respected, and valued, regardless of their sexual orientation. The investment recognises that LGBTQIA+ individuals may experience specific barriers to participation, including:

- Fear of discrimination, prejudice or exclusion within traditionally structured sports environments.
- A lack of visible LGBTQIA+ role models in sport, particularly in leadership, coaching, and elite performance roles.
- Limited availability of LGBTQIA+ friendly or targeted programmes, particularly in rural areas.
- Previous negative experiences in sport, especially during school years, which can lead to long-term disengagement.

To address these issues, the investment will:

- Encourage NGBs to actively promote inclusivity through their policies, codes of conduct, and programme design. This includes ensuring that marketing materials, imagery, and language explicitly signal that all sexual orientations are welcome.
- Support NGBs to develop LGBTQIA+ inclusion training for staff, coaches, and volunteers, to embed awareness and allyship within sporting cultures.
- Encourage the creation and promotion of safe, inclusive spaces, such as LGBTQIA+ friendly leagues, social sport groups, and Pride in Sport campaigns, which actively celebrate diversity.

Men and Women - Yes

The programme investment actively promotes equality of opportunity for both men and women, as well as boys and girls, ensuring that all genders are encouraged, supported, and empowered to participate, progress, and excel within sport and physical activity.

This is central to the Sport NI Corporate Plan 2021-2026 and the Department for Communities' Active Living Strategy, both of which emphasise the importance of gender equality within the sporting system — from grassroots participation through to elite performance and leadership.

The investment recognises that gender-specific barriers exist, including:

- Lower participation rates among women and girls, particularly from adolescence onwards, linked to factors such as body confidence, cultural expectations, caring responsibilities, and safety concerns.
- The historic gender gap in access to funding, facilities, and media coverage, particularly for female sport.
- Underrepresentation of women in coaching, leadership, and governance roles, creating a lack of visible female role models at every level of sport.
- Gender stereotyping in sport, which can discourage boys from participating in certain activities perceived as 'feminine' and vice versa.

To address these challenges, the investment will:

- Require NGBs to demonstrate clear strategies to engage, retain and progress both men and women, ensuring balanced, inclusive programming across all sports.
- Encourage targeted interventions to address the specific barriers to participation experienced by women and girls, including initiatives to boost female leadership, coaching development, and mentoring opportunities within sport.
- Support the development of campaigns that challenge gender stereotypes, promoting the message that all sports are for everyone, regardless of gender.

- Ensure gender-disaggregated data is collected and analysed, so that evidence-based decisions can be made to continually improve opportunities and outcomes for all genders.
- Promote success stories from both male and female athletes, raising visibility and celebrating achievements to inspire participation and ambition across all genders.

Through these actions, the programme will work to narrow the gender gap in participation, foster a more equal playing field, and champion gender equality at all levels within Northern Ireland's sporting system.

Persons with a Disability - Yes

The programme places a strong emphasis on promoting equality of opportunity for disabled people, recognising the historic and ongoing barriers that many face in accessing and participating in sport and physical activity. This commitment is fully aligned to the Sport NI Corporate Plan 2021-2026 and the Department for Communities' Active Living Strategy, both of which prioritise inclusive sport and highlight the need to remove barriers and enhance opportunities for disabled people at all levels of sport — from grassroots participation through to performance pathways and leadership roles. The evidence base, including the 2022/23 and 2023/24 Continuous Household Surveys, highlights persistent participation gaps, with adults with disabilities significantly less likely to participate in sport than non-disabled adults. These gaps have been further exacerbated by the lasting impacts of COVID-19, reductions in disability-specific provision by some providers, and the financial pressures created by the cost-of-living crisis, which disproportionately impacts disabled people's ability to afford participation, access transport, and secure personal assistance. In response, the programme will:

- Require NGBs to demonstrate how their programmes will be inclusive of disabled people, with specific actions to engage, welcome, and support disabled participants.
- Continue to fund disability-specific sports, looking at maintaining vital opportunities and striving for continued growth.
- NGBs who receive funding will have to ensure that mainstream sports are fully inclusive, with adaptations, equipment and training provided so that disabled people feel welcomed, safe, and confident to participate.
- Support disability-inclusive performance pathways, so that talented disabled athletes can progress and reach their full potential in high-performance sport.
- Promote inclusive messaging through funded campaigns, to actively challenge stereotypes, highlight the abilities and achievements of disabled athletes, and inspire greater participation.
- The programme acknowledges the diversity within the disabled community — including those with physical, sensory, learning, and mental health disabilities — and is committed to ensuring that programmes are flexible, responsive, and accessible to all.

Persons with Dependants - Yes

The programme promotes understanding and provide greater opportunities for everyone, including those with caring responsibilities, to take part in sport and physical activity. This aligns with the commitment to ensuring lifelong enjoyment of sport and physical activity, regardless of personal circumstances, including caring responsibilities for children, older relatives, or family members with disabilities.

The 2022/23 and 2023/24 Continuous Household Surveys have highlighted that participation rates vary between those with dependants and those without. In 2023/24, 54% of participants had dependants, demonstrating that a significant proportion of the sporting population juggle caregiving responsibilities alongside their participation in sport.

In response, programme will fund NGBs to:

- Deliver programmes that recognise and respond to the needs of those with dependants, including providing family-friendly activities, flexible scheduling, and accessible venues. Where possible.
- Encourage family participation, with opportunities for parents, guardians, carers, and children to participate together, supporting both physical activity and family cohesion.
- Promote inclusive messaging that highlights sport as something that can fit into busy lives, particularly for those with caring responsibilities.
- Ensure that funded programmes actively identify, and address barriers faced by people with dependants, such as childcare costs, time constraints, and transport challenges, particularly in rural areas.
- By embedding consideration of dependants and caring responsibilities into programme design, the investment will support more inclusive access, enabling those with caring roles to benefit from the physical, mental, and social wellbeing that participation in sport and physical activity can provide.

3. **To what extent is the policy likely to impact on good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?**

Please provide details of the likely policy impact and determine the level of impact for each of the categories below i.e. either minor, major or none.

Overview

The policy is expected to have a positive impact on good relations. Sport provides a shared space where people from different backgrounds come together. By resourcing NGBs to deliver inclusive and neutral environments, the investment strengthens trust, breaks down barriers and fosters mutual understanding.

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Religious belief**:

What is the level of impact? Minor / Major / None (underlined as appropriate)

Sport and physical activity provide common ground for people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group to associate. While the investment is likely to have a positive impact on good relations, the targeting of underrepresented groups is a primary driver. The programme targets and prioritises through the assessment methodology racial groups that are under-represented in sport, in terms of participation and performance. This will include some minority religious groups that are under-represented in sport. This is a communicated priority of the programme in the information and guidance booklet, reflected in the assessment methodology and monitoring and evaluation framework and supported by contract documents. The data that exists on under-representation and lived experience of racial groups is also communicated to governing bodies and their clubs as a call to action with recommendations for interventions.

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Political Opinion**:

What is the level of impact? Minor / Major / None (underlined as appropriate)

This is not an assessment methodology criterion as there is no evidence of significant under-representation by a particular group in relation to political opinion. Nonetheless, the programme fully

acknowledges the power of sport and physical activity to bring people together across political divides, fostering positive relationships and encouraging shared experiences between individuals of differing political opinions. Sport naturally provides a neutral space where people can train, play, compete, and socialise regardless of their political background. By promoting inclusive participation and supporting shared, welcoming spaces, the programme actively contributes to good relations between individuals from across the political spectrum. No additional standalone opportunities have been identified at this time.

Sport and physical activity provide common ground for people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group to associate. While the investment is likely to have a positive impact on good relations.

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Racial Group**:

What is the level of impact? Minor / Major / None (underlined as appropriate)

The programme targets and prioritises through the assessment methodology racial groups that are under-represented in sport, in terms of participation and performance. This is a communicated priority of the programme in the information and guidance booklet, reflected in the assessment methodology and monitoring and evaluation framework and supported by contract documents. The data that exists on under-representation and lived experience of racial groups is also communicated to governing bodies and their clubs as a call to action with recommendations for interventions. Sport and physical activity provide common ground for people of different **religious belief, political opinion or racial group** to associate. The programme will measure impact on improving participation and representation by ethnic minority groups.

Conclusion

This policy demonstrates Sport NI's commitment to its statutory duty under Section 75 to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between different communities.

4. Are there opportunities to better promote good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?

Detail opportunities of how this policy could better promote good relations for people within each of the Section 75 Categories below:

Overview

Yes. By making equality and inclusion a condition of investment, Sport NI ensures that NGBs actively contribute to good relations. Opportunities include:

- Delivering cross-community competitions and events that bring people together.
- Providing role models from diverse backgrounds to foster visibility and acceptance.
- Promoting inclusive narratives and campaigns that celebrate diversity in sport.

Religious Belief - Yes

NGBs will be supported to deliver cross-community opportunities and remove cultural barriers to participation.

Political Opinion - No

While no specific under-representation has been identified by political opinion, funded activity will be delivered in neutral, welcoming environments and monitored for cross-community reach. Nonetheless, the programme fully acknowledges the power of sport and physical activity to bring people together across political divides, fostering positive relationships and encouraging shared experiences between individuals of differing political opinions. Sport naturally provides a neutral space where people can train, play, compete, and socialise regardless of their political background. By promoting inclusive participation and supporting shared, welcoming spaces, the programme actively contributes to good relations between individuals from across the political spectrum. This commitment to cross-community sport and inclusive programming is already embedded within the design, delivery and outcomes of the investment, ensuring that the promotion of good relations is a core objective. Therefore, no additional standalone opportunities have been identified at this time.

Racial Group - Yes

The programme targets and prioritises through the assessment methodology racial groups that are under-represented in sport, in terms of participation and performance. This is a communicated priority of the programme in the information and guidance booklet, reflected in the assessment methodology and monitoring and evaluation framework and supported by contract documents. The data that exists on under-representation and lived experience of racial groups is also communicated to governing bodies and their clubs as a call to action with recommendations for interventions. Sport and physical activity provide common ground for people of different **religious belief, political opinion or racial group** to associate. The programme will measure impact on improving participation and representation by ethnic minority groups.

Additional Considerations – Multiple Identity

The programme also acknowledges that many individuals belong to more than one Section 75 category, such as ethnic minority women, young disabled people, or LGBTQIA+ and individuals from rural areas. The investment aims to positively impact all individual Section 75 categories but also recognises the complex intersectionality of identities and the unique challenges this can create in accessing sport and physical activity.

Part 3. Screening decision

In light of your answers to the previous questions, do you feel that the policy should: (please underline one)

1. Not be subject to an EQIA
2. Not be subject to an EQIA (with mitigating measures /alternative policies)
3. Be subject to an EQIA - **Selected**

If 1 or 2 (i.e. not be subject to an EQIA), please provide details of the reasons why:

The System Partners Investment – National Governing Bodies (NGB) Programme has been screened for equality and good relations impacts. Based on the evidence presented, the policy is not expected to have any negative impacts across the Section 75 categories.

The programme is designed to deliver positive equality outcomes by resourcing NGBs to embed inclusive practice, improve participation among under-represented groups, and ensure safe, welcoming environments. While the expected impacts are positive, they are likely to be minor in nature and will vary depending on how effectively individual NGBs implement the investment.

Screening Outcome: None – no adverse impacts identified. Policy screened out without the need for a full Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA).

Justification:

- No adverse impacts have been identified through the evidence reviewed.
- Positive impacts are anticipated across Section 75 categories, with particular benefit expected for groups currently under-represented in sport and physical activity.
- The programme includes mechanisms for review and adjustment, meaning equality impacts will continue to be considered as delivery evolves.

Mitigation

While no adverse impacts have been identified, the programme has the flexibility to respond to equality issues should they emerge. Where challenges are highlighted through monitoring or feedback, proportionate measures may be considered within the programme framework to support inclusion and ensure opportunities remain accessible.

Timetabling and prioritising

Factors to be considered in timetabling and prioritising policies for equality impact assessment.

If the policy has been '**screened in**' for equality impact assessment, then please answer the following questions to determine its priority for timetabling the equality impact assessment.

On a scale of 1-3, with 1 being the lowest priority and 3 being the highest, assess the policy in terms of its priority for equality impact assessment.

Scores reflect the importance of the programme to Sport NI's statutory role and its significant, though not adverse, effects on people's daily lives. The scoring recognises that investment into NGBs has a central role in addressing equality of opportunity and good relations, responds directly to identified social need, and supports health and wellbeing outcomes.

Priority criterion	Rating (1-3)
Effect on equality of opportunity and good relations	2
Social need	3
Effect on people's daily lives	1

Priority criterion	Rating (1-3)
Relevance to a public authority's functions	1

Note: The Total Rating Score should be used to prioritise the policy in rank order with other policies screened in for equality impact assessment. This list of priorities will assist the public authority in timetabling. Details of the Public Authority's Equality Impact Assessment Timetable should be included in the quarterly Screening Report.

Screening Decision Statement

Sport has a unique role in Northern Ireland in creating shared spaces and promoting reconciliation. This investment strengthens the ability of NGBs to deliver inclusive and cross-community participation, supporting good relations as well as equality.

Based on the prioritisation exercise, the System Partners Investment – NGB Programme is assessed as having a medium-high overall priority. The policy demonstrates positive equality impacts, directly addresses social need, and is highly relevant to Sport NI's statutory functions.

However, as no adverse impacts have been identified and appropriate mitigation and monitoring measures are in place, the policy is screened out and does not require a full Equality Impact Assessment.

This screening decision will be kept under review. If monitoring highlights new or unforeseen impacts, Sport NI will revisit this screening and carry out a full EQIA if required.

Is the policy affected by timetables established by other relevant public authorities? **No**

Part 4. Monitoring

The **System Partners Investment – NGB** Programme has been developed with equality and inclusion at its core. While no adverse impacts have been identified through this screening, it is important that the policy remains open to review and adjustment should evidence of new or unforeseen impacts emerge.

- Monitoring will be built into the programme design, with funded organisations required to demonstrate how they are addressing equality and inclusion through their work.
- Funded organisations may be asked to provide equality-related information on participation, leadership, and governance as part of routine reporting.
- The programme will encourage collection of disaggregated data across relevant Section 75 categories where it is available and proportionate to collect.
- Equality and inclusion will be considered as part of ongoing review processes, and learning will inform any future adjustments to the programme.

If gaps or issues are identified, mitigating actions can be explored through dialogue with funded organisations or through refinements in programme guidance.

Conclusion

The screening confirms that the **System Partners Investment – NGB Programme** does not require a full Equality Impact Assessment. No adverse impacts have been identified, and the programme is expected to deliver positive outcomes across all Section 75 categories. Mitigation measures and monitoring arrangements are in place to ensure benefits are realised and risks are managed.

As custodians of organised sport, NGBs are the most effective route for delivering these outcomes, and direct investment ensures they have the capacity to address inequalities, strengthen good relations, and contribute to wider government priorities. This screening confirms Sport NI's continuing commitment to promoting equality of opportunity and good relations in all aspects of sport in Northern Ireland.

Part 5 - Approval and authorisation

Screened by: Robbie Geary

Position/Job Title: Sport Development Manager

Date: 12/09/2025

Approved by: Rebecca Hope

Position/Job Title: Interim Director of Sport

Date: 12.09.25

Appendix A – References

Key Evidence Sources

- Continuous Household Survey (2022/23 and 2023/24), Department for Communities
- *Tackling Racism and Racial Inequality in Sport (TRARIIS)* Review, 2021
- *Tell Your Story* Report, 2021
- Disability Sport NI Impact Report, 2024
- Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity (CSPPA) Survey, 2022
- Kids' Life and Times (KLT) and Young Life and Times (YLT) Surveys
- Sport NI Corporate Plan Consultation, 2021–2026
- Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM), 2017
- Health Inequalities Annual Report, Department of Health, 2024
- Consumer Council Household Expenditure Tracker, 2024



Sport NI
House of Sport
2a Upper Malone Road
Belfast BT9 5LA
info@sportni.net
028 90381222