Business Case Investment – Mary Peters Trust Athlete Investment (2026-30)

Equality Impact Assessment and Screening

Sept 2026

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.

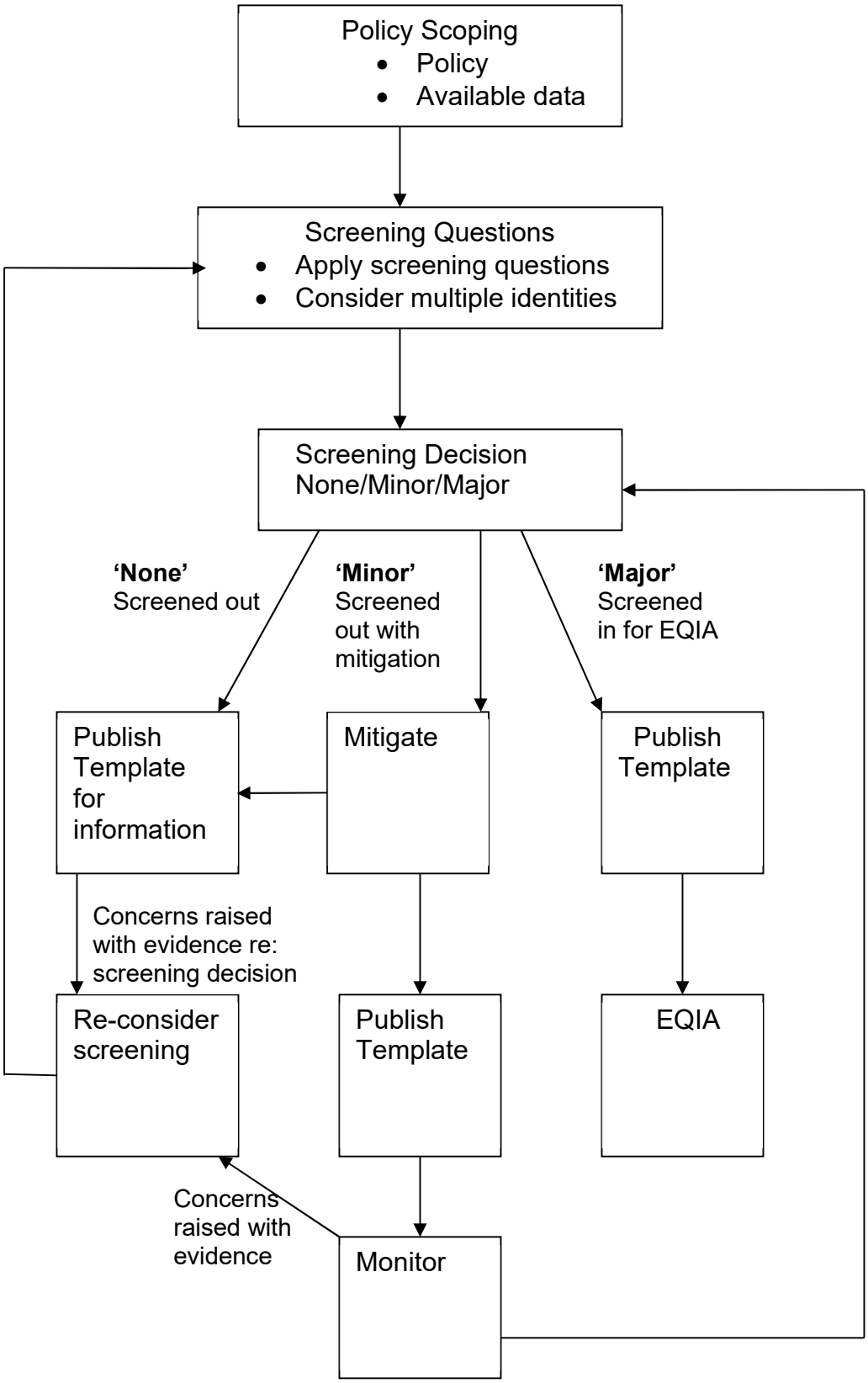
Part 2. Screening questions – asks about the extent of the likely impact of the policy on groups of people within each of the Section 75 categories. Details of the groups consulted and the level of assessment of the likely impact. This includes consideration of multiple identity and good relations issues.

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.


Policy Scoping
Policy
Available data
Screening Questions
Apply screening questions
Consider multiple identities
Screening Decision
None/Minor/Major
'None'
Screened out
'Minor'
Screened out with mitigation
'Major'
Screened in for EQIA
Publish Template for information
Mitigate
Publish Template
Concerns raised with evidence re: screening decision
Re-consider screening
Publish Template
EQIA
Concerns raised with evidence
Monitor

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

Investment into the Mary Peters Trust – Athlete Investment 2026-30

Is this an existing, revised or a new policy?

New

What is it trying to achieve? (intended aims/outcomes)

The investment enables the Mary Peters Trust (MPT) to deliver targeted support to athletes within the Northern Ireland performance pathway. This contributes directly to Sport NI's strategic objectives relating to athlete development, performance pathway enhancement, and the creation of a more inclusive and accessible high-performance system.

Benefits:

- Create a more integrated and connected performance pathway system in Northern Ireland.
- Reduce barriers to participation and progression in performance sport.
- Strengthen strategic relationships and model effective partnership practice across the sporting sector.
- Provide hardship funding for athletes whose sports traditionally fall outside Olympic, Paralympic, or Commonwealth Games investment but who can demonstrate international-level performance, thereby extending the reach of performance support across Northern Ireland.
- Amplify advocacy, policy influence, and sector-wide collaboration.
- Nurture talent and promote excellence within the Northern Ireland performance pathway.
- Create sustainable pathways linking schools, clubs, and communities, ensuring lifelong participation opportunities in line with the Active Living Strategy
- Support performance progression, enabling talented athletes from all areas, including rural communities, to move from grassroots to elite levels

Supporting:

- **Active Living Strategy (2022)** – promoting participation, inclusion and excellence in sport.
- **Sport NI Corporate Plan – Power of Sport 2021–26** – driving sustained participation and athlete excellence.
- **Sport NI Athlete Award Programme** - This investment complements Sport NI's Athlete Award Programme by funding athletes at earlier stages of the performance pathway, strengthening their development, and enabling a more seamless transition onto the Athlete Award Programme

and subsequently into senior national programmes. This ensures a coherent and connected system of athlete support from emerging talent through to high-performance representation.

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

Yes

If so, explain how.

The investment enables the Mary Peters Trust to deliver targeted support to athletes at earlier stages of the Northern Ireland performance pathway, complementing Sport NI's athlete development objectives. Athletes who may benefit from this support are drawn from across the Section 75 categories, as the programme is open to eligible athletes regardless of background, identity, or personal characteristics.

Of particular relevance, the programme may provide increased benefit to:

- Young people, as many emerging and pathway athletes are within school-age or early adulthood and may require financial assistance to progress within performance sport.
- Athletes from lower socio-economic backgrounds, as the hardship element of the funding is specifically designed to reduce financial barriers to training, equipment, travel, and competition.
- Women and girls, given ongoing gender inequalities in access to performance-level opportunities and the continued under-representation of women in some high-performance pathways.
- Athletes with disabilities, where the funding may support costs associated with adapted equipment, competition travel, or specialised training needs for those progressing within para-sport pathways.
- Athletes from minority groups, where financial support and structured progression pathways may help address historic or systemic barriers to participation and advancement.

By providing earlier-stage support and smoothing transition into the Athlete Award Programme and subsequently senior national programmes, this investment widens access to the performance system and promotes greater equality of opportunity across Section 75 groups.

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 dependent on the capability and effectiveness of the Mary Peters Trust in administering and targeting the investment. Additional factors that may influence outcomes include the level of athlete uptake, the capacity of sports to identify eligible athletes within their pathways, and wider external factors such as financial pressures, competition schedules, or access to training and support environments.

Main stakeholders affected

Internal and external stakeholders impacted by the policy include:

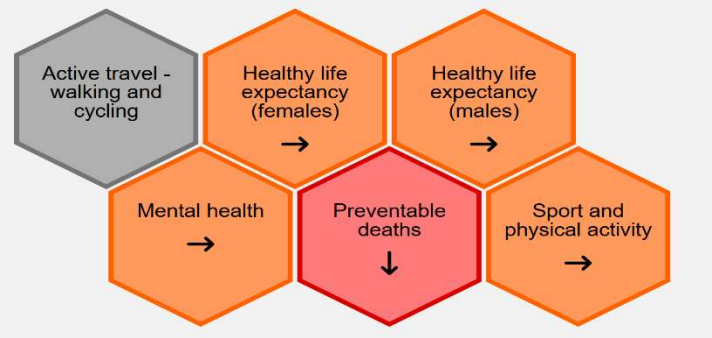
- MPT (directly).
- Governing Bodies of Sport (including umbrella organisations) the contractual organisation.
- Sports Councils (e.g., UK Sport, Sport Wales, Sport England, Sport Scotland, SportsCoach UK and Sport Ireland) strategic partners
- Clubs - the delivery organisation.
- Department for Communities.

Other Policies with a Bearing on this Policy

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

- The 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

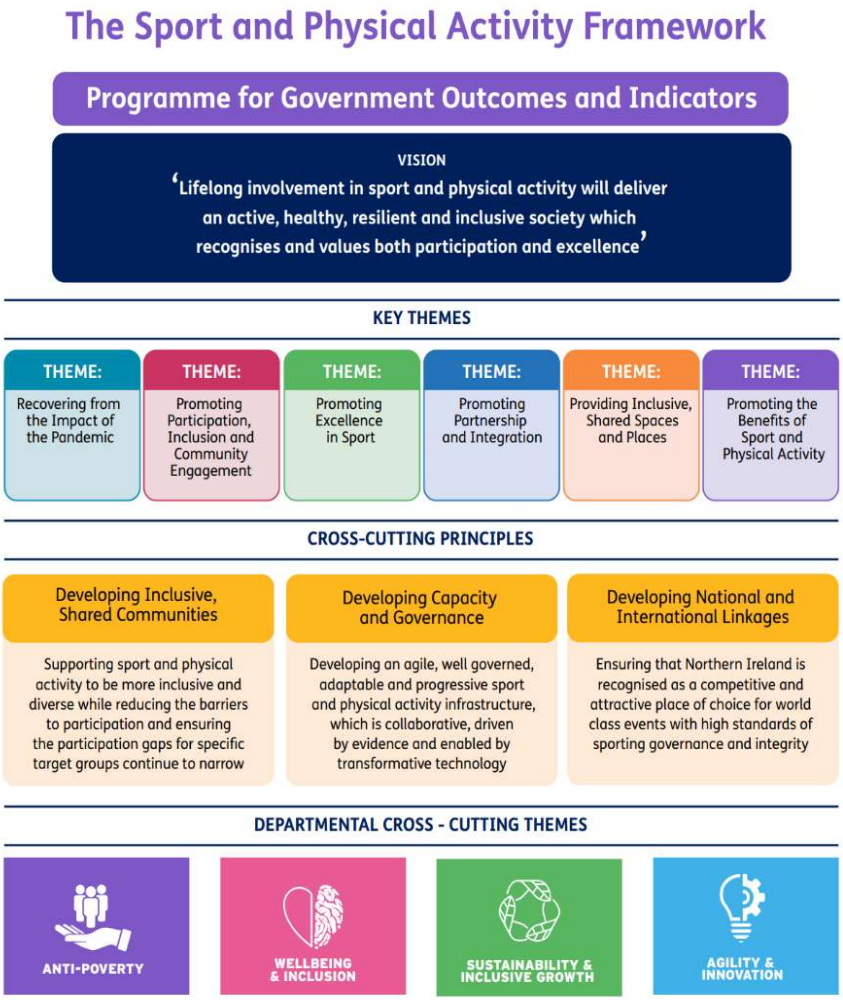
Programme for Government 2024–2027: Of particular strategic importance is consideration of the Programme for Government 2024-2027 'Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most'. On 27 February 2025 the Executive agreed a Programme for Government which outlines our priorities for making a real difference to the 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.



Sport NI through our portfolio of programmes and work with partners can make a significant contribution to many of the domains, but in particular through this programme to "**we all enjoy long healthy active lives**" as it will address those most negatively impacted by the cost-of-living crisis, poverty and deprivation driven health inequalities; to realise the value of sport to improve their physical, emotional and mental health, reduce preventable deaths and increase life expectancy as measured in the indicators at this link **PfG Wellbeing Framework - Healthier Lives** or summarised adjacent.

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.



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 MPT, and its contribution towards NGBs, underpins delivery of this vision, ensuring that resources are available to positively impact organisations responsible for governing and growing sport.

Available Evidence

Evidence to help inform the screening process may take many forms. Public authorities should ensure that their screening decision is informed by relevant data. The Commission has produced this guide to signpost to S75 data.

What evidence/information (both qualitative and quantitative) have you gathered to inform this policy? Specify details for each of the Section 75 categories.

Data and Research Sources

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 appendices A, B and C.

- Equality-Impact-Assessment-Sport-NI-Corporate-Plan.pdf (Appendix A).
- Desk based review of evidence to inform programme design (Appendix B).
- Women in Sport Evidence Base (Appendix C).

A. Religious Belief

Evidence relating to religious belief is drawn from the Continuous Household Survey 2024/25, 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 2024/25 | Department for Communities

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

Other evidence includes Sport and Community Relations in Northern Ireland, by John Sugden and Scott Harvie, Published by the University of Ulster, Coleraine 1995 4.125. Source: Citations: Sport and community relations in Northern Ireland

Ref 26/01 Wednesday, 10 October 2001 SECTARIANISM AND SPORT IN NORTHERN IRELAND https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/sport/docs/rlsnia101001.pdf 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 & . 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.

B. 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

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.

C. 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

Further data may be extracted from Children's Sport and Physical Activity Survey 2022(CSPPA Reports – CSPPA.ie), the Children's Report Card 2022 (PA-Report-card-full-report-final.pdf)), the UK Coaching Survey 2025 (Coaching in the UK | Our Research - UK Coaching), Kids Life and Times and Young People Life and Times (Northern Ireland Kids Life and Times Survey: 2023 and (Young Life and Times Survey: Sport) and Outdoor Motivations for Sport 2025 and POMNI (POMNI 2025: Who's Getting Outdoors – and Who's Missing Out? - Outscape).

D. Age

The 2024/25 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 2024/25 | Department for Communities.

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.

Further data may be extracted from Children's Sport and Physical Activity Survey 2022(CSPPA Reports – CSPPA.ie), the Children's Report Card 2022 (PA-Report-card-full-report-final.pdf)), the UK Coaching Survey 2025 (Coaching in the UK | Our Research - UK Coaching), Kids Life and Times and Young People Life and Times (Northern Ireland Kids Life and Times Survey: 2023 and (Young Life and Times Survey: Sport) and Outdoor Motivations for Sport 2025 and POMNI (POMNI 2025: Who's Getting Outdoors – and Who's Missing Out? - Outscape).

E. Marital Status

The 2024/25 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 2024/25 | Department for Communities.

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.

(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

F. 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. 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.

G. Men and Women

The 2024/25 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 2024/25 | Department for Communities.

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

Further data may be extracted from Children's Sport and Physical Activity Survey 2022(CSPPA Reports – CSPPA.ie), the Children's Report Card 2022 (PA-Report-card-full-report-final.pdf)), the UK Coaching Survey 2025 (Coaching in the UK | Our Research - UK Coaching), Kids Life and Times and Young People Life and Times (Northern Ireland Kids Life and Times Survey: 2023 and (Young Life and Times Survey: Sport) and Outdoor Motivations for Sport 2025 and POMNI (POMNI 2025: Who's Getting Outdoors – and Who's Missing Out? - Outscape).

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

H. Persons with a Disability

The 2024/25 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 2024/25 | Department for Communities.

Further data may be extracted from Children's Sport and Physical Activity Survey 2022(CSPPA Reports – CSPPA.ie), the Children's Report Card 2022 (PA-Report-card-full-report-final.pdf)), the UK Coaching Survey 2025 (Coaching in the UK | Our Research - UK Coaching), Kids Life and Times and Young People Life and Times (Northern Ireland Kids Life and Times Survey: 2023 and (Young Life and Times Survey: Sport) and Outdoor Motivations for Sport 2025 and POMNI (POMNI 2025: Who's Getting Outdoors – and Who's Missing Out? - Outscape).

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.

I. Persons with Dependants

The 2024/25 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 2024/25 | Department for Communities

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:

Religious Belief

The 2024/25 Continuous Household Survey (CHS) provides the most recent data on participation in sport across different religious backgrounds in Northern Ireland. Source: Experience of sport by adults in Northern Ireland 2024/25 | Department for Communities

A wealth of distinguished research exists regarding the issue of sectarianism and sport in Northern Ireland. The majority of this research concentrates upon how sport in Northern Ireland is used as an expression of cultural identity and emphasises in particular how sectarianism impacts upon two of Northern Ireland's largest sporting bodies, that is, the Gaelic Athletics Association (GAA) and the Irish Football Association (IFA).

Below is a brief review of some of the current research into sectarianism and sport in Northern Ireland: McGinley et al (1998) "Socio-cultural identity and attitudes to sport in Northern Ireland".

The Irish Journal of Psychology, 1998, 19, 4, 464-471. This is a survey of 1007 adults in Northern Ireland which aimed to provide a broad view of popular opinion regarding sport and cultural identity. The survey results highlighted that religious belief and community affiliations effected decisions in relation to all aspects of sporting life in Northern Ireland. For example: in relation to sports funding, 73% of respondents were not opposed to funding sports facilities on an "all-Ireland" basis, however, Protestants were three times more likely than Catholics to state that the UK National Lottery Funds should not be invested in all-island facilities; in regards to which sporting events were important to them, Catholics were more likely to state Gaelic football or hurling finals, Protestants were more likely to choose sporting events such as the Rugby World Cup, the World Snooker Championships or Wimbledon. Protestants were more likely to support competitors and teams from Great Britain, Catholics were more likely to support competitors and teams from the Republic of Ireland. The survey highlighted that the types of sports people participate in and the teams they support usually reflect their community background and perceived political and cultural allegiances. For example, Catholics are more likely to participate in sports which celebrate the Irish tradition (Gaelic football, hurling) whilst Protestants are more likely to engage in sports which celebrate the British tradition (hockey, cricket, rugby etc). When asked to identify the ways in which sport has been effected by the troubles, 46% of respondents stated spectator violence and 36% stated that the troubles had effected travel to venues. 25% of respondents believed that soccer was influential in building bridges across the divide. Sport perceived as reinforcing divisions included Gaelic football (27% of respondents), hurling (15%) and soccer (14%).

Alan Bairner (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 (2000) explores the relationship between working class loyalist males and football in Northern Ireland. He argues, that instead of displacing aggression, spectator sports such as football can feed hegemonic masculinity which in turn can lead to patterned male violence in Northern Ireland (Bairner, 2000:176). Football is dominated by the Protestant community in Northern Ireland.

Catholic involvement in top-level soccer has declined, a factor in this being the withdrawal from the Irish League of clubs with a large Catholic following such as Belfast Celtic (1949) and Derry City (1971). However, Catholic support of Irish League has also declined because they often feel intimidated while attending matches because of loyalist chants and the display of support for loyalist paramilitaries (Bairner, 2000:182). Football spectatorship is a means by which working class loyalist males can assert their hegemony. Bairner (2000:191) suggests that the increase in sectarian tension at football games could be associated with a "crisis" of masculinity within working class Protestant areas because of the peace process. That is, many loyalists may feel that their identity is being undermined and are using football spectatorship as a means of reasserting both their masculine and community identity. John Sugden (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 (1995) examines, amongst other things, the role of the school's sports curriculum in perpetuating community conflict. He argues that the games curriculum in schools in Northern Ireland is highly dependent upon whether the school is Catholic or Protestant. For example, Gaelic Games predominate in Catholic schools whilst rugby, cricket and hockey are predominantly played in Protestant schools. This ensures that there is very little cross community contact between schools regarding sport. When schools do participate in a common game such as football, Protestant and Catholic children rarely play in the same team, it is more common for them to play against each other which can lead to conflict both on and off the pitch. McLaughlin (1993) argues that whilst there have been several cross-community sports programmes in schools, many of these are simply 'one-off' events and that there still exists considerable resistance to any long-term alteration of the school games curriculum to meet the objectives of community relations (Sugden, 1995:201). Within this chapter Sugden (1995:202-212) also conducts a comprehensive examination of the historical development of the GAA, rugby union, boxing and association football and explores the role that these sports play regarding community relations and community conflict. John Sugden & Scott Harvie (1995) Sport and Community Conflict in Northern Ireland. Belfast: Centre for the Study of Conflict. This study examined the views of 16 sport's governing bodies in Northern Ireland examining how their structure, their attitudes to the use of flags, emblems and anthems, their opinion on how the conflict has affected their sports and their attitude to community relations programmes. Surprisingly the study highlighted that very few sports' governing bodies, particularly those which are dominated by one section of the community (e.g. rugby, GAA), admitted that community divisions impacted upon recruitment to their sport. Sugden & Harvie (1995:48) advocate that there may be a reluctance amongst sport governing bodies, particularly those dominated by one religion or the other, to admit that community divisions have affected recruitment to their sport for fear that this admission would be interpreted as an admission that their sport was in some way sectarian. The survey also highlighted that sport's governing bodies tended to exaggerate the extent of contact between Catholics and Protestants in their sports, perhaps because they were eager to reinforce the image of their sport as anti-sectarian (Sugden & Harvie, 1995:59). The report noted that only three sports out of the sixteen examined had undertaken formal cross-community initiatives - basketball, Providing research and information services to the Northern Ireland Assembly 2 Northern Ireland Assembly, Research and Library Service rugby, GAA. However, these initiatives were mostly directed at children, there were no formal efforts to increase cross-community contact in sport amongst adults. (Sugden & Harvie, 1995:69). Evidence from the survey suggests that most sports governing bodies do not include and have no desire to include community relations themes in their constitution or coaching programmes. Sugden and Harvie believe that "at present, community relations themes appear to hold negative associations for a number of sports, related to fears that since their activity may be played largely by one community they may be identified as in some way sectarian or bigoted. This suggests that any effort to introduce community relations into their activity would be met with hostility." Mike Cronin (1999) Sport and Nationalism: Gaelic Games, Soccer and Irish Identity Since 1884. Dublin: Four Courts Press. Cronin (1999) examines the role of Gaelic sports in Irish nationalism and explores the origins and historical development of soccer and Gaelic games in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. In addition to this, Cronin also investigates the role of Gaelic Athletics Association (GAA) in the Nationalist/Catholic community and examines the controversial Rule 21 which prohibits the security forces from membership of the GAA.

Evidence gathered within the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) for Sport NI's Corporate Plan 2021-26 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, namely 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 and programming of gender-specific sessions to align with religious and cultural requirements.

Political Opinion

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 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. Source: Sport NI Corporate Plan EQIA.

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.

Racial Groups

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. Sources: Tell Your Story, Tackling Racism and Racial Inequality in Sport, 5 Common Themes for Action. The following needs and experiences were identified:

- 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

The five common themes for action that may be embedded into this programme include:

- Our internal structures and systems:
  (a) We will look at our overall grant, investment and supply-chain arrangements, to ensure fairness, creativity and representation are at the heart of the way funding and contracts are awarded.
  (b) Through our respective frameworks and strategies, we will look at how we can ensure that we and our funded organisations have or are putting in place policies and procedures that support inclusion, in areas such as;
  (c) Challenging racism and racist behaviour within our respective areas of responsibility
  (d) Reviewing recruitment practices as well as the design of guidelines, programmes and interventions to help engage and attract more diverse people.
  (e) Supporting ongoing training and education to understand racism and the impact it has on individuals and our sector.
  (f) Engaging with relevant support networks and partners to challenge racism and championing anti-racist behaviours and practices.
- Improving representation:
  (a) Under-representation of diverse ethnic communities within sporting structures is a recurrent theme within the research. We want to see increased representation at all levels of sport, whether that's in participation, administration, volunteering or recruitment. We will therefore place greater emphasis on understanding the negative impact of racial inequalities in sport and how better representation can help create an inclusive and more diverse environment, reflective of UK society. We will work to embed the connection between improved representation and better strategic and operational decision making. We will work with partner organisations to share good practice, paying particular attention to actions aligned to longer term equality, diversity and inclusion planning and implementation. We will be clear where we want our partners to do more, work with allies to create an environment that offers positive experiences, tackles discrimination and empowers individuals to reach their full potential.
- People – our workforce: The research has identified issues which contribute to racial inequalities in the paid and voluntary workforce. It has also pointed to the need to improve practices such as the gathering and analysis of workforce data to inform action plans and determine measurable outcomes. We will therefore work to improve how and where data is collected across our workforce so that we can have a much clearer picture of the inequalities that have been identified through this review. We will take a proactive approach to identifying the existing systems and structures currently acting as barriers for people from ethnically diverse communities and it will be our priority to make improvements to processes in workforce recruitment, development and retention. This will include embedding the approaches which mean we can begin to address this area from the perspective of individuals, groups, leadership and broader society.
- Insight: The research has given us rich insight that should challenge us to rethink how we approach the delivery of sport. It has also highlighted that we need more and better information about diverse ethnic communities in sport if we are to be truly effective in understanding and tackling racial inequalities. This includes further analysis of high-quality data sources that are yet to be fully investigated; exploring means of achieving greater granularity of data between and within different ethnic groups; developing further insights about the interplay of race, socioeconomic status and deprivation; and furthering our understanding of the lived experiences of ethnically diverse groups. As a group of Sports Councils, we will look to be more systematic in the way we collate data; in the research we commission around inequality and inclusion; and

in measuring and tracking the progress we are able to make. We will proactively engage and share reports with key partners, supporting them with digesting, understanding and reflecting on the findings with a view to challenging what this means for their own ways of operating. 5. Investment What we invest in and how we invest are key factors in how we reach communities and drive change in engaging positively with sport and physical activity. We acknowledge that more should and will be done to get investment to where it is needed by working with new and existing partners as part of our wider priorities to tackle inequalities of which racial inequality is part. We will work with communities to understand their needs and target investments to help address these needs. Where relevant, we will continue to invest in targeted programmes that reach ethnically diverse communities and continually measure the impact of our investments to ensure that it brings about the necessary change we want to see.

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.

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

Age

NISRA predictions based on census data (Appendix B) informs us that we will have an increasingly aging population with estimated increases in young immigrants, and people with disabilities.

NISRA Summary:

- The NI population is estimated to be 1,949,269 by 1st July 2025.
- Census 2021 population is recorded at 1,903,175 people, which was increased from 1,810,863 people in 2011.
- The number of people aged 65 or more rose by over 60,000, to nearly one-third of a million people in Census 2021; a near 25% increase on 2011.
- The ageing of the population can also be seen in the median age of the population (the age at which half the population are above or below), which over the last decade has increased by two years from 37 in 2011 to 39 in 2021.
- 3.4% of the population, or 65,600 people, belonged to minority ethnic groups. Within this classification, the largest groups were Mixed Ethnicities (14,400), Black (11,000), Indian (9,900), Chinese (9,500), and Filipino (4,500) residents. This is around double the 2011 figure (1.8% – 32,400 people) and four times the 2001 figure (0.8% – 14,300 people). This increasing diversity is evident to a greater or lesser degree across all 11 Local Government Districts. The most diverse Local Government Districts are Belfast (7.1% of the population with a minority ethnic group), Mid Ulster (4.0%) and Lisburn and Castlereagh (3.9%).
- The School Census showed there are nearly 21,000 'newcomer' pupils, compared with 8,700 in 2011. In some primary schools, the proportion of such pupils exceeds 50 per cent of the total school population.
- Net migration is projected to cause a population increase of 53,800 while natural change is projected to cause a population decrease of 32,400 people between mid-2022 and mid-2047.
- There are 463,500 projected births and 495,900 projected deaths over the period. While birth rates continue to fall, death rates are rising sharply, and by 2035, the number of deaths is expected to exceed the number of births.
- With an ageing population, and a growing shortage of young people moving into the labour market, a regular flow of young international migrants will be essential to maintain public services and the economy.
- The proportion of disabled people is likely to increase with an ageing population and if the increase in obesity and related health issues is not corrected, this will increase further, with mobility impairment representing over half of the reported disabilities.

The 2024/25 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 2024/25 | Department for Communities.

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.

CSPPA 2022 found:

- Seventeen percent (17%) of students in Northern Ireland report participating in at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity a day (21% primary and 16% post-primary students). These proportions are higher than in 2018, when 13% reported being active daily (20% primary and 11% post-primary students).
- Forty-four percent (44%) of primary and 42% of post-primary school students report meeting the muscle strengthening guidelines. This was measured for the first time in 2022.
- Seventy-three percent (73%) of primary and 71% of post-primary school students reported participating in community sport at least once a week, compared to 65% and 49% respectively in 2018. The proportion of post-primary school students who reported never participating in community sport decreased from 47% in 2018 to 16% in 2022.
- Ninety-two percent (92%) of primary and 76% of post-primary school students reported participating in school sport at least once a week. This represented an increase at both primary (65%) and post-primary school (58%) levels since 2018.
- Eight percent (8%) of primary and 20% of post-primary school students reported meeting the Physical Education guidelines of at least 120 minutes/week. In 2018, 40% of postprimary students reported meeting the guidelines and this was not reported for primary school students.
- Forty percent (40%) of primary and 18% of post-primary school students reported active travel to or from school. This represents an increase at primary school level (36%) and the proportions remain unchanged for post-primary school students since 2018

The consultation on the Sport NI Corporate Plan with older people found:

- 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.

Marital Status

Overview

The 2024/25 Continuous Household Survey, Experience of sport by adults in Northern Ireland indicates:

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. The following sources were also reviewed: Sources: (2016) Outstanding in your field: Exploring the needs of LGB&T people in rural Northern Ireland, Rainbow Project. (2015) Through Our Eyes: Housing and homelessness experiences of LGBT people in Northern Ireland, Rainbow Project & Council for the Homeless NI. (2013) Through Our Minds: Emotional health and wellbeing of LGBT people in Northern Ireland, Malachai O'Hara. (2012) Multiple Identity; Multiple Exclusions and Human Rights, Disability Action & Rainbow Project. (2012) All Partied Out: Substance use in Northern Ireland's LGBT community, Eoin Rooney. (2011) Making this Home my Home: Inclusive nursing/residential care for older LGBT people, AgeNI & Rainbow Project. (2011) Left Out of the Equation: Experiences of LGB young people at school, Gavin Boyd. (2011) Through Our Eyes: Experiences of LGB people in the workplace, Matthew McDermott. (2009) Through Our Eyes: Perceptions and experiences of LGB people towards homophobic hate crime and policing, John O'Doherty.

However, evidence gathered through extensive consultation for the Corporate Plan highlighted several 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.

Findings from the Department for Communities Active Living Strategy screening assessment (through pre-consultation focus groups) further illustrate the barriers faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in sport:

- The need for exclusive access sessions for LGBTQ+ participants and appropriate changing facilities.
- A lack of understanding and awareness of LGBTQ+ needs within the sport sector.
- LGBTQ+ participants often feel they need to belong to be motivated to join groups — many feel isolated because of their sexual orientation.
- Fears of judgement at facilities such as gyms.
- Transphobic abuse experienced during outdoor exercise, with some feeling safer walking in different areas.
- Transgender inclusion is a cross-sport issue, requiring sector-wide consideration.
- Separate sessions with dedicated changing facilities for trans participants were requested.

The public consultation on Sport NI's Corporate Plan 2021-2026 reinforced these insights:

- Marginalised and under-represented groups consistently emphasised the need for an open, welcoming, inclusive sporting culture, one that promotes wellbeing.
- Many felt this welcoming culture does not currently exist across the sporting landscape.
- Specific solutions proposed by focus groups (including the Celebrating Diversity Panel, Young Persons Panel, and Women's Panel) will be integrated into future plans.
- Organisations such as Stonewall, Rainbow Project, and Sporting Mermaids supported the idea of clubs actively indicating their LGBTQ+ inclusivity via this app.
- LGBTQ+ groups (along with others) reported a significant lack of signposting to development opportunities — reinforcing Northern Ireland's perceived 'who you know' culture. Outreach via non-traditional channels was suggested to better engage underrepresented communities.
- Racist and homophobic aggressions in sport — both blatant and subtle microaggressions.
- Outing of young people/athletes transitioning.
- Wheelchair athletes being deemed health and safety risks in some school settings.

Men and Women

The 2024/25 Continuous Household Survey indicated.

CSPPA 2022 identified that the proportion of students taking part in 60 minutes of daily aerobic physical activity by gender. For both primary and post-primary level, a greater percentage of boys participated in 60 minutes of physical activity daily compared to girls. Reported daily physical activity levels for primary school girls decreased from 19% in 2018 to 16% in 2022. Levels of physical activity were higher for boys at both school levels and for girls at post-primary level in 2022 compared to 2018. The greatest difference was in post-primary boys which increased from 14% to 22%.

At primary school level, self-reported physical activity levels only differed by gender, with boys the most physically active. At post-primary level, self-reported daily physical activity levels differed significantly by gender, school location, disability status, socio-economic status, percentage of free school meals and age group.

At both primary and post-primary level, there was a significant difference in meeting the muscle strengthening guidelines by gender, with a greater percentage of boys meeting the guidelines. Over half of boys in primary and post-primary school meet the guidelines.

There was no significant difference in community sport participation by gender at primary school level. At post-primary level, a significantly higher percentage of boys (73%) reported participating in community sports at least once a week than girls (70%) or students who identify as other (50%).

CSPPA 2022 Report – CSPPA.ie

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.

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.
- 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.
- 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.

The **Department for Communities' screening assessment** of the **Active Living Strategy** identified specific needs for men and women as: safe, affordable, welcoming facilities; wide range of sports and opening hours; clear coaching pathways and opportunities for progression; and innovative use of technology to support engagement. Pertaining to women and then to men, the following needs were identified:

Women:

- Increased visibility of female role models.
- Challenge unconscious bias in clubs to ensure equal opportunities.
- Targeted recruitment and training of female coaches.
- Address transport barriers and rural access issues.
- Improved promotion and advertising of available opportunities.
- Build confidence and self-esteem, especially in gym and changing environments.
- Encourage buddy systems for new participants.

- Address family/work/time commitments.
- Combat societal attitudes towards women in sport.
- Provide women-only swimming/exercise classes.
- Use local, community-based venues rather than large leisure centres.
- Align exercise opportunities with children's activities so parents can participate too.
- Encourage GPs to prescribe physical activity.
- Offer non-competitive, social or fun-based activities.
- Empower women to prioritise their health without guilt.
- Emphasise lifelong participation over competitive success at school level.
- Maximise use of local outdoor spaces and school facilities.
- Expand successful community initiatives such as Couch to 5K and parkrun.
- Develop tailored classes for women with limited mobility.

Men:

- Recognition that not all men are active and some face significant barriers.
- Stronger link between physical activity and health prevention.
- Specific focus on men transitioning into retirement to avoid isolation.
- Address lack of confidence and motivation.
- Use sport as a vehicle for tackling social isolation and mental health.
- Rebrand sport-based interventions as "activities" to reduce intimidation.
- Improve rural facilities (walking paths, lighting).
- Address facility availability and access in disadvantaged areas.
- Improve access to GP referral schemes at affordable rates.
- Encourage greater community use of stadiums and elite sports facilities.
- Foster partnerships between Men's Sheds and sports clubs to promote physical activity.
- Ensure programmes are long-term rather than short interventions.
- Embed mental health support into physical activity initiatives.

Persons with a Disability

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 (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. **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 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.

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.

Persons with Dependants

The 2024/25 Continuous Household Survey (CHS) also gathered data on sporting participation levels among adults with dependants.

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).

   The investment is not focused on delivering any specific impact towards religious belief.

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

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

   The investment will deliver only positive impacts for political opinion, but these are likely to be not of significant impact.

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

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

   The investment is not focused on delivering any specific impact towards radial group. The investment will deliver only positive impacts for racial group, but these are likely to be not of significant impact.

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

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

   The policy is expected to have a minor impact on age, as the investment is primarily directed towards athletes at earlier stages of the performance pathway. This cohort is predominantly made up of children and young people, who are beginning their progression through club, school, and early performance environments. By design, the programme targets emerging and developing athletes, meaning younger age groups will be the principal beneficiaries. The amount of investment has also been considered to determine this is likely to be a minor positive impact.

   The policy aims to:

   - Create a more integrated and connected performance pathway system in Northern Ireland.
   - Reduce barriers to participation and progression in performance sport, particularly for younger athletes facing financial or structural obstacles.
   - Strengthen strategic relationships and model effective partnership practice across the sporting sector, supporting pathway continuity from school to club to performance environments.
   - Provide hardship funding for athletes in sports traditionally outside Olympic, Paralympic, or Commonwealth Games investment, enabling young athletes demonstrating international-level potential to access essential support.

- Amplify advocacy, policy influence, and sector-wide collaboration to strengthen the environment in which young athletes train and compete.
- Nurture talent and promote excellence across the performance pathway, with a strong emphasis on early identification and development.
- Create sustainable pathways linking schools, clubs, and communities, ensuring children and young people have equitable opportunities for lifelong participation in line with the Active Living Strategy.
- Support performance progression, enabling talented athletes from all areas — including rural and geographically isolated communities — to move from grassroots to elite levels.
- Reduce the impact of poverty by increasing opportunities for those in greatest need to access and engage in performance sport.
- Break down barriers and create a more diverse, inclusive, and equitable performance system for athletes at all stages, but especially those entering the pathway at younger ages.

Because younger athletes are the primary target group and the programme directly shapes their access, support, and progression within the performance system, the impact on the *Age* category is assessed as **minor** but positive in terms of increasing opportunities to athletes at this age.

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

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

The investment is not designed to deliver any specific impact relating to marital status. Eligibility for the programme is based solely on athletic performance and pathway criteria, and marital status has no bearing on access, support, or progression. No adverse or differential impact is anticipated for individuals based on whether they are single, married, in a civil partnership, divorced, or widowed.

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

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

The investment is not directed toward delivering any specific impact relating to sexual orientation. The programme is accessible to all eligible athletes regardless of sexual orientation, and no barriers or differential treatment are expected for individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, heterosexual, or otherwise. As such, no adverse or disproportionate impacts are anticipated.

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

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

The investment is not designed to deliver gender-specific outcomes, and no adverse impact on men or women is anticipated. The programme is open to eligible athletes regardless of gender, and therefore its impacts are expected to be minor and positive for both groups.

Positive impacts may arise where gender-specific barriers to participation and progression in performance sport—such as unequal access to pathway opportunities, financial support, or representation in certain sports—are recognised within programme delivery. By reducing financial barriers, strengthening pathways, and widening access to support for emerging athletes, the investment may help address existing inequalities and promote equitable progression for both men and women within the performance system.

Overall, while the programme is not gender-targeted, it has the potential to contribute modestly to improved gender equity in performance sport, and no negative impacts are expected.

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

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

The investment is not designed to deliver a disability-specific intervention, and no adverse impact on people with a disability is anticipated. The programme is open to eligible athletes regardless of disability status, and its aim to reduce financial and structural barriers in the performance pathway may create minor positive impacts for disabled athletes. Positive impacts may arise where disability-specific needs—such as costs associated with adapted equipment, specialised coaching, or travel requirements—are acknowledged within the delivery of the programme. By providing hardship funding and widening access to performance support, the policy has the potential to benefit disabled athletes who meet performance criteria and require additional assistance to progress within the pathway.

Overall, while the primary purpose of the policy is not disability-focused, its design and delivery may generate minor but meaningful benefits for athletes with disabilities, and no negative impacts are expected.

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

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

The investment is not designed to deliver any specific impact relating to dependants. Eligibility for support is based on athletic performance and progression criteria, and having dependants does not affect an athlete's ability to access or benefit from the programme. No adverse, differential, or disproportionate impact is anticipated for individuals with or without caring responsibilities.

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

The investment is directed toward supporting the Mary Peters Trust in delivering athlete-focused financial assistance within the performance pathway. While some under-represented groups may benefit incidentally, for example, young athletes, disabled athletes, or those facing socio-economic barriers, these positive effects are not the primary objective of the investment. The programme is performance-driven, and opportunities to further promote equality of opportunity within Section 75 categories are therefore limited within the scope of this specific intervention.

Religious Belief – No

Political Opinion - No

Racial Group - No

Age - No

Marital Status - No

Sexual Orientation - No

Men and Women - No

Persons with a Disability - No

Persons with Dependants – No

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.

   The investment's primary purpose is to support athlete development and progression within the Northern Ireland performance pathway. While the programme's marketing and promotion will ensure messaging indicating the support of athletes from different religious belief, political opinion and racial group, it may also bring together athletes from a range of backgrounds through shared training, competition, and pathway environments, however any impact on good relations is expected to be limited. Sport can naturally create shared spaces where individuals from different community backgrounds participate together; however, this is not a core objective of this specific investment. Therefore, any positive impact is likely to be minor and incidental rather than intentional.

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

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

   Athletes from different religious backgrounds participating in shared performance environments may experience minor, incidental positive impacts through increased interaction and shared sporting experiences. Programme messaging will continue to communicate this.

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

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

   The programme does not engage with political identity, but sport often acts as a neutral and shared space. Athletes from different political backgrounds training and competing together may experience minor, indirect benefits to good relations.

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

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

   While racial equality is not a targeted outcome, the programme may support athletes from minority ethnic backgrounds who demonstrate pathway potential. Increased visibility and participation of diverse athletes may contribute to minor positive good-relations impacts.

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:

The investment's primary purpose is to support athlete development within the performance pathway. However, because performance sport often brings together athletes from diverse backgrounds in shared, collaborative environments, there may be limited opportunities for incidental positive impacts on good relations. Positive programme messaging will reflect inclusive approached and funding of diversity of religious belief and ethnically diverse groups.

Religious Belief – No, already developed

Athletes from different religious backgrounds may train, travel, and compete together as part of the performance pathway. These shared environments can help foster mutual understanding and respect, although this is incidental rather than intentional.

Political Opinion – No

The programme is not linked to political identity. Nevertheless, sport provides a neutral and shared space where individuals from varying political perspectives interact. Collaborative training environments, squad selection days, and workshops may indirectly support positive interaction.

Racial Group – No, already developed

The programme may support athletes from minority ethnic backgrounds who qualify through performance criteria. Increased representation and visibility of diverse athletes can contribute to broader inclusion and may indirectly support improved good relations.

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 - Selected

2. Not be subject to an EQIA (with mitigating measures /alternative policies)

3. Be subject to an EQIA

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

Sport NI, on advice from the Equality Commission, has extended this screening to an EQIA. While some minor positive impacts have been identified across certain Section 75 groups, these are incidental rather than intentional and arise from the general nature of performance sport rather than from the design of the investment itself.

The investment is not specifically intended to target or differentially impact any Section 75 group. Its primary function is to support the Mary Peters Trust in providing athlete-focused pathway investment. As such, the policy does not create adverse impacts. The minor positive impacts identified relate to the potential for increased access, reduced financial barriers, and shared sporting environments, but these do not represent substantial or direct equality effects. Nonetheless the MPT programme will communicate messages of inclusion of appropriate S75 groups, within the cohort of athletes selected on performance criteria and they will monitor representation to ensure this is effective.

In line with the requirements of Sport NI's Equality Scheme, Sport NI remains fully committed to ongoing monitoring of the policy's equality impacts. This will include:

- regular review of monitoring and evaluation data,
- continued engagement with relevant Section 75 groups where appropriate, and
- identification of any emerging issues or unintended impacts during programme delivery.

This proactive and embedded approach is considered sufficient to ensure the policy continues to align with Sport NI's statutory equality duties and promotes equality of opportunity where possible.

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.

Priority criterion	Rating (1-3)
Effect on equality of opportunity and good relations	1

Priority criterion	Rating (1-3)
Social need	1
Effect on people's daily lives	1
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.

These ratings reflect that:

- The policy is not expected to create significant equality impacts, either positive or negative.
- Any positive effects identified during screening are minor and incidental rather than intentional or substantial.
- The core purpose of the policy is to support athlete development through investment in the Mary Peters Trust, rather than to influence equality or good-relations outcomes directly.
- The policy does not affect the daily lives of the general population, nor does it constitute a major shift in Sport NI's statutory functions.

Is the policy affected by timetables established by other relevant public authorities?

No

If yes, please provide details. n/a

Screening Decision Statement

As minor positive impacts have been identified and based on advice from the Equality Commission an EQIA has been completed and consultation carried out for eight weeks, noting the business need to maintain GB operations.

Is the policy affected by timetables established by other relevant public authorities?

No

Part 4. Monitoring

Sport NI will monitor equality impacts through its established programme management framework. All funded organisations are be required to collect and report equality data relating to participants, athletes, and workforce. This will include disaggregated data (where available) by gender, age, disability, and other relevant categories.

Where under-representation is identified, organisations are be expected to outline corrective actions within their annual delivery plans. This may include targeted outreach, partnership working with equality organisations, or specific workforce development initiatives.

This structured approach ensures that equality is not a one-off consideration but a continuous, measurable aspect of programme delivery. It demonstrates alignment between identified needs, delivery practice, and outcomes, fulfilling Sport NI's statutory duties under Section 75 and ensuring that the investment contributes meaningfully to equality of opportunity across Northern Ireland.

The monitoring framework for this investment will be reviewed and updated for future investments as some information pertaining to S75 groups are not being collected by Sport NI through the Programme.

If opportunities arise which would allow for greater equality of opportunity to be promoted, we will ensure that the investment is reviewed to determine whether better outcomes for relevant equality groups can be achieved.

Part 5 - Approval and authorisation

Screened by: Stephanie Henderson

Position/Job Title: Performance Programmes Manager

Date: 23/09/2026

Approved by: Rebecca Hope

Position/Job Title: Interim Director of Sport

Date: 28.09.26

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