



# Draft Corporate Plan for Public Consultation 2020-2025

August 2020

# Contents

Foreword	04
Executive Summary	06
About Us	10
Our Vision and Mission Statement	11
The Value of Sport	12
Our Strategic Context	13
A Strong Sporting System	14
Our Approach	16
Our Strategic Outcomes	18
Supporting Our Outcomes	24
Appendices	27



# Foreword

We are pleased to introduce, for public consultation purposes, Sport NI’s proposals for our Draft Corporate Plan 2020-2025. This draft plan has been informed by extensive engagement with our current and potential future partners and stakeholders from the sporting family and from health, education and wider communities. It is also informed by a wide ranging review of current research and Sport NI’s unique insights from our programmes and partnerships. Our plan will align with the new Strategy for Sport and Physical Activity which will replace the current Sport Matters Strategy, the development of which is being led by the Department for Communities.

**The proposals reflect a number of opportunities and challenges, and take account of the unprecedented impacts and learning from the COVID19 pandemic.**

In 2020, before the pandemic, many people were embracing a more individualistic approach to sport and physical recreation and there was a trend emerging towards more informal participation happening in local communities and outside of traditional formal sports club structures. For some, the routes into local sports clubs were not always easy or clear, yet our research and engagement insights told us that the most likely indicator for sustained participation in sport and physical recreation was through membership of a sports club.



**Pictures Above:**

Ballymacash Rangers and some of the work they have been doing in the community over COVID19.

Which included baking buns for the key workers at our hospitals, we delivered 1000 Easter Eggs to the community over Easter, also our first team coaches and players have been making training videos to share on our social media.

However, the critical role of sports clubs, at the very heart of our communities has been clearly evidenced in the COVID19 response efforts, with clubs providing a vital role in the community voluntary support effort; ensuring protection, inclusion and support of the vulnerable and community connectivity and resilience. The need for community connection, protection, inclusion and support has become more important in our society than ever for our personal and community wellbeing, and the club offering, at the very heart of our communities, is critical to this during COVID19 and as we emerge to build back better our valued sporting family, system and society. You have told us that the club therefore needs to be supported to fulfil this role, in the areas of people development, culture and inclusion, business planning and modernisation.

We also know that while participation in sport and physical recreation has increased in recent years, there still remains a significant gap from general population participation rates to those participation rates of women, people with a disability or those living in the most deprived areas (as measured by the Continuous Household Survey data).

Sport NI wants to harness the opportunity to close that participation gap, and to ensure that equality and inclusion are mainstreamed throughout this Corporate Plan, and at all levels of the sporting system; for women, people with a disability, those living in the most deprived areas, and for black and ethnic groups, LGBTQ+ communities. Inclusion and equality is therefore a fundamental cornerstone of all of our work.

Sport NI has also a key responsibility to support sports to allow them to achieve at their highest level. As we plan for the next five year period, we look to the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo 2021, in Paris 2024 and to the Birmingham Commonwealth Games 2022, as key opportunities to showcase the best of who we are as a sporting region.

The sports sector has also grown considerably in recent years, with many more sports having a professional staffing structure and high performance and participation strategies that have supported real growth. Sport NI will continue to add value to a strong family sector here and we are committed to supporting our two strategic outcomes by co-designing with stakeholders and partners,

a sporting system; reflective of our ambitions by 2025 and our relationships in the UK and Ireland. This will further strengthen a sporting family sector which puts people – participants, athletes, teams, coaches, volunteers and leaders – at the heart of what we do.

Sport NI is conscious of the finite resources available to us and the responsibility we share with others to make the best use of the public money that we steward. We are passionate about maximising the power of sport to change lives and we know of its enduring ability to support health and wellbeing, educational attainment, cohesive communities, and instilling pride in our region when athletes perform. We will ensure that sports infrastructure draws on the latest and most sustainable innovations in design, build and management and that sports events give our athletes the best chance of winning. Real and meaningful partnerships are required to maximise the power of sport.

Public sector bodies can no longer afford to work in isolation, therefore, we are focused on sharing our resources with others to optimise common outcomes, so that all of society benefits. We will build coherent partnerships to ensure our communities thrive. This draft Corporate Plan consultation document sets out our priorities, as informed by sports, stakeholders and wider communities, and supported by evidence from our insights and research. It provides high level proposed actions we aim to take to maximise opportunities and address gaps. We welcome this opportunity to engage with you and welcome the feedback you give so that together, we can build back better a society for all.



**George Lucas**  
Chair person, Sport NI



**Antoinette McKeown**  
Chief Executive, SportNI



1.



2.



3.

**Pictures:**

1. Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Council – Dance Home Workout. ABC Council came up with many home workouts during COVID19 to help people stay active at home. They did this through their main social media page GetactiveABC.com
2. Clann Éireann Community Aid and several other GAA clubs, sporting organisations, businesses and community groups. Collectively we became 'Lurgan Area Community Aid'. They distributed flyers to all households in Lurgan to identify people who needed support. We teamed up with the pastoral teams in local schools and built a database of families that would benefit from our help. We supplied almost 700 households weekly with food parcels. In addition, we have provided health and well-being support in the form of counselling, befriending and buddy services. We also introduced our elderly community members to horticultural therapy.
3. Midland Boxing club who were part of the SHF helped to deliver food packages to the vulnerable and elderly around their community to help them get through COVID 19.

# Executive Summary

Our mission statement:

**We are passionate about maximising the power of sport to change lives. By 2025, we want the power of sport to be recognised and valued by all.**

## The Value of Sport

The Value of Sport and physical recreation makes an invaluable contribution to individual emotional, mental and physical well-being. Sport and physical recreation provides essential capabilities such as a growth mind set, higher levels of physical literacy, improved emotional states, and a sense of belonging and connection. Indeed, by changing many individual lives, the power of sport can be realised societally; in its contribution to health and well-being, educational attainment, community cohesion, as well as the economic impact realised from associated jobs and events. As we emerge from the COVID19 pandemic, the outcomes and benefits of sport have never been more important to realise for our society.

## Our Strategic Context

This plan seeks to build on the success of previous Sport NI corporate plans, on 'Sport Matters, the Executive Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2009-2019', and is firmly aligned to the Draft Programme for Government 2016- 2021.

The Community Planning Partnerships provide a strategic opportunity to enable a more accessible and connected approach to delivery of the sporting system locally; to improved sustained participation in sport and recreation generally, and specifically from under-represented groups.

While we are more successful than ever in terms of sustaining participation in sport and physical recreation, (Continuous Household Survey 2018/19 noted a 2% rise in overall sports participation numbers to 56%, which was sustained in 2019/20), there are barriers that still exist for many in our society. Challenges remain for people with a disability, women and girls, older people, carers, black and minority ethnic communities and our LGTBQ+ communities. Whilst we have seen an increase in the support for, and the profile of, women in sport, there is much still to do which we aim to address within the next period. Consequently, the participation rates for these groups remain significantly below the general rates of participation. We know there are critical points in people's lives when, for a range of reasons, they are at risk of dropping out of participation. We will continue to work to mitigate these drop outs. Whilst the general up-turn in participation

rates must be celebrated, recent research has unearthed worrying trends particularly amongst younger people. The Children's Sport and Physical Activity Study (2018) highlights a worrying decline in children's participation in sport, physical recreation and physical education. When taken in conjunction with rising obesity levels amongst children, this paints a worrying picture for life-long activity rates and health enjoyment. Additionally, we know that there is a growing trend to participate more informally and autonomously in sport and physical recreation outside the club structure. We must retain an inclusive offering so that people can remain physically active in the way that best suits them.

The impacts of COVID 19 pandemic, including: the temporary cessation of all sporting activities and the associated loss of income for the sector; the critical role of governing bodies and sports clubs in the community voluntary response efforts; the transition of the sports sector to digital platforms, to maintain communications and connectivity; the restricted exercise regulations that realised an increase in running and cycling activities, have all been considered in Sport NI's response to the crisis, and in optimising the opportunity to emerge with resilience and strength and build back better.

## We have listened to you and you have told us as we developed this draft Corporate Plan that:

- The provision of accessible sport and physical recreation opportunities needs to transition effectively into connected pathways within the sporting system, in order to sustain participation generally and for underrepresented groups;
- A warm, welcoming, inclusive environment and quality coaching is key to sustaining participation, along with a diverse product offering to meet people's changing needs;
- Physical literacy in young people and others needs to be improved; • People development is central to an effective sporting system;
- Equality and inclusion needs to be mainstreamed throughout the sporting system;

- The administrative burden on volunteers needs to be alleviated, to allow an increased focus on culture and practice; and
- A holistic view is needed to achieve the best outcomes for all who participate in sport and physical recreation, so that we can celebrate all of the sporting achievements.
- There needs to be business planning, modernisation and improved utilisation of digital technologies to adapt to a dynamic and challenging environment.

Specifically in relation to the COVID19 crisis, you have told us:

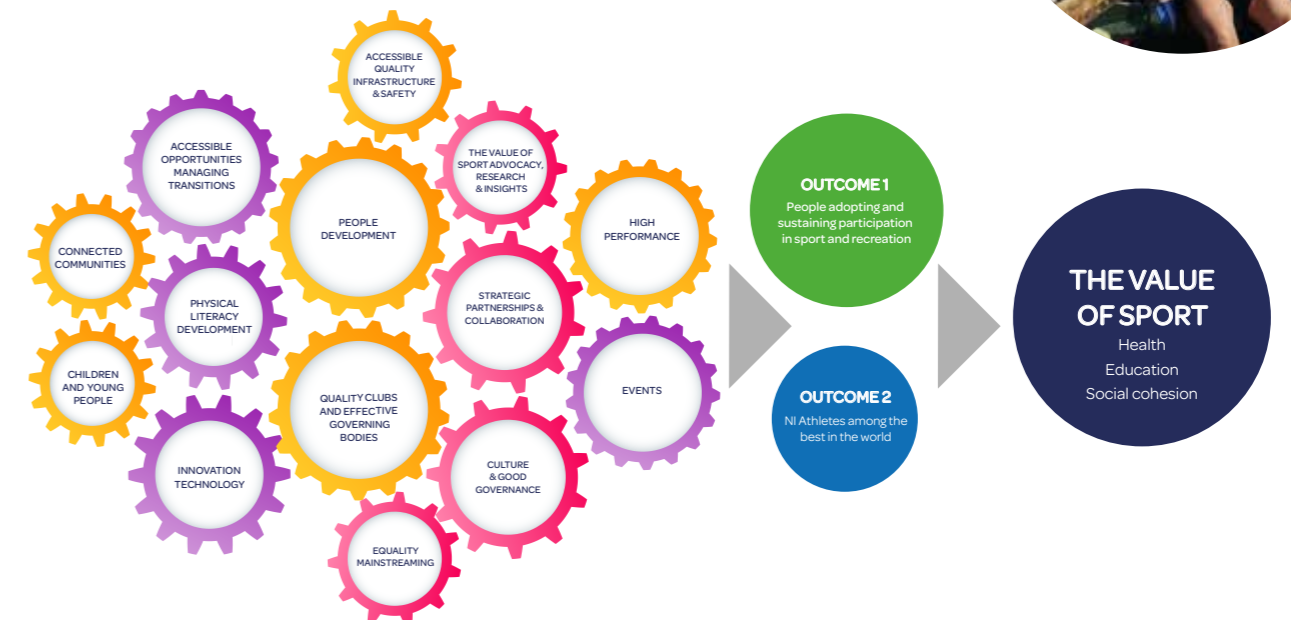
- Immediate and short term advice and guidance is required to help the sporting sector with implementing social distancing and understanding the process of easing lockdown.
- Consideration should be given on how to guide 'people development' through initiatives designed to include support for volunteers, coaches, leaders and official to enable to provision of a quality sporting experience for all.
- The impact of Covid-19 on children and young people, their health and wellbeing and participation in sport should be included in the response. Future investment should consider clubs and organisations who have not been able (to date) to access any Covid-19 related funding opportunities.

## The Sporting System and Culture

The sporting system is comprised of many different elements that operate interdependently and require the support of multiple partners in order to thrive. We will work with our partners to develop a sporting system, which is appropriate for this region's development needs and which supports the implementation of an inclusive and supportive sporting culture. We will move from a culture that is focused on compliance and targets, to one that facilitates the cultural practices of 'participant focused' positive experiences. In particular, we are committed to much needed transformative change in how sports, the media, general public and young people view female sport, ensuring cultural and structural barriers are removed as we change mind-sets in this critical area of sports development.



## The Sporting System



### Our Approach

The delivery of this draft Corporate Plan requires leadership from Sport NI and our partners, as we work with the finite resources available to the public sector.

We will influence strategically and build partnerships.

We will deliver expertise.

We will make outcome focused investments.

Sport NI will continue to rely on our strong values in all that we do and we will remain committed to doing what we do best; developing sports and bringing expertise, knowledge and experience to partners and the sector.

You have told us that we should work more in partnership with district councils, education, communities and clubs to get people active, keep them active and support them into sustained participation in sport and physical recreation.

Sport NI wants to further encourage and support collaboration towards strategic outcomes by taking a holistic view on delivery within the next five years – working within a strong sporting system.

### Our Strategic Outcomes

This Corporate Plan has proposed two outcomes for Sport NI over the next five years:

#### Outcome 1

People adopting and sustaining participation in sport and recreation.

#### Outcome 2

NI Athletes among the best in the world.

### WE NEED YOUR FEEDBACK

Are these the right outcomes for our Corporate Plan?

Do the broad actions support your needs?

Is there anything missing?

Is there anything else that you feel Sport NI should be leading or delivering on to support you?

Is our approach the right one?



# About Us

Sport NI is the lead development public body for sport and physical recreation in Northern Ireland. We are established under the Recreation and Youth Service Order 1986 for the furtherance of sport and physical recreation in Northern Ireland (see appendix one).

Sport NI is the main statutory body, through which public funding for sports in Northern Ireland is channelled. Sport NI is primarily funded by grant in aid from the Department for Communities and the National Lottery.

Sport NI works with a wide range of partners and stakeholders to ensure we meet our obligations in relation to the above.

## Tollymore National Outdoor Centre

Tollymore National Outdoor Centre (TNOC) is the only recognised National Outdoor Centre on the island of Ireland. As part of a wider network of UK National Outdoor Centres, TNOC plays a key role in leading and assisting the development of outdoor adventure sports, working with and supporting a range of partners including governing bodies of sport, private sector providers and various sectoral training bodies such as Mountain Training UK and the Mountain Training Board of Ireland. TNOC is unique within Sport NI in that it provides a range of services direct to the public which in turn provides insights into their experience of sport and the shifting patterns and trends in participation in sport and physical recreation. Tollymore's 'reach' extends far beyond those who visit the Centre each year, so those who complete skills and leadership training at the Centre providing cascade benefits to thousands more individuals every year over many years.

## The Sport Northern Ireland Sports Institute

The Sports Institute (SNISI), based at Jordanstown, focuses on improving sport performance through the provision of science, medicine and programme support to National Governing Bodies. Institute staff work directly with coaches and athletes to maximise the training gains needed to enhance performance. The Institute's work demonstrates strong collaboration with other institutes within the UK and Ireland; reflecting NI's unique position at the intersection of both UK and Irish pathways.

Health Survey NI 2017/18 reported that 17% of children under 15 years were classified as overweight, 8% were classified as obese, 37% of adults were classified as overweight and 27% were obese.

The Chief Inspectorate 2018 report noted that while the statutory minimum for PE is two hours per week, the provision is substantially lower.



# Our Vision and Mission Statements

## Vision Statement

The vision of 'Sports Matters: The Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2009-2019' sets a vision for

**'...a culture of lifelong enjoyment and success in sport'**

## Mission Statement

**We are passionate about maximising the power of sport to change lives. By 2025, we want the power of sport to be recognised and valued by all.**



# The Value of Sport

1

Participation in sport and physical recreation has been shown to be effective for reducing:

- Depression;
- Anxiety;
- Psychological distress; and
- Emotional disturbance

Sport and physical recreation is linked to reduced risk of over 20 illnesses, including cardiovascular disease and some cancers.

Source:  
UK Chief Medical Officers' Physical Activity Guidelines, 2019.

3

The CASE programme with over 12,000 studies on engagement in culture and sport found:

- Young people's participation in sport improves their numeracy scores by 8% on average above non-participants.
- Underachieving young people who take part in sport see a 29% increase in numeracy skills and a 12 to 16% rise in other transferable skills.
- Returns on investment in sports programmes for at-risk youth are estimated at £7.35 of social benefit for every £1 spent – through financial savings to the police, the criminal justice system and the community.

Source:  
The Physical Inactivity and Sedentary Behaviour Report, British Heart Foundation, 2017.

2

The estimated direct cost of physical inactivity to the NHS across the UK is **£1.06 billion (anticipated to be much higher in 2020)**

Source:  
CASE: joint programme of strategic research led by DCMS in collaboration with Arts Council England, English Heritage and Sport England, 2013.

4

The benefits of Outdoor Recreation in Northern Ireland:

- Taking the central and local government as a whole, spending of £47m is associated with a generated income of £83m, a surplus of 43%.
- For every £1.00 that the public sector invests there is a return of £1.77

Source:  
Sport Northern Ireland and Sheffield Hallam, the Benefits of Outdoor Recreation, 2019.

**Sport NI is committed to telling the compelling story of the value of sport, working with our partners from a strong evidence base.**

# Our Strategic Context

As we go into the next five years, the impact of the COVID19 pandemic, Brexit and a number of strategic and policy matters will impact on our work and the way in which we work. They include:

## The Draft Programme for Government

The draft Programme for Government Framework 2016-21 contains 14 strategic outcomes which, when taken together, set a clear direction of travel for the Executive. The outcomes touch on every aspect of government, including the attainment of good health and education, economic success and confident and peaceful communities. Sport NI's Corporate Plan 2020 – 2025 will align with the Programme for Government and we will remain adaptable to best fit future iterations.

## New Decade New Approach

The 'New Decade, New Approach' Deal established the basis for the restoration of the Executive in January 2020. It promises significant changes and investment in almost every sector, including sport and physical recreation.

'Sport Matters: The Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2009-2019' and 'Strategy 2020: a new Strategy for Sport and Physical Activity in NI 2020-30':

Sport NI's partner department, Department for Communities (DfC), is developing a new strategy for sport and physical activity in NI and Sport NI continues to play our part in supporting this critical development. Sport Matters set a vision for 'a culture of lifelong engagement and success in sport' and provides a solid strategic framework in the interim period. Sport NI continues to work closely with our DfC colleagues as we operate under the strategic framework of Sports Matters and transition to a new strategy for sport.

## Community Planning Partnerships

Community Planning aims to improve the connection between all the tiers of Government and wider society through partnership working to jointly deliver better outcomes for everyone. Community Planning Partnerships have been established in each of the 11 council areas comprising of the council, statutory bodies, agencies and the wider community - including the community and voluntary sector. Sport NI is a Community Planning Statutory Partner. The partners develop and implement a shared plan for promoting the well-being of an area; improving community cohesion and the quality of life for all citizens.

The Community Planning Partnerships continue to be a valuable asset for Sport NI in the delivery of sport and physical recreation. We will continue to seek out agreed action to deliver on our outcomes and deliver maximum benefit within each council area.

## We have listened

You have also told us as we developed this draft Corporate Plan that:

- The provision of accessible sport and physical recreation opportunities needs to transition effectively into connected pathways within the sporting system, in order to sustain participation generally and for underrepresented groups;
- A warm, welcoming, inclusive environment and quality coaching is key to sustaining participation, along with a diverse product offering to meet people's changing needs;
- Physical literacy in young people and others needs to be improved;
- People development is central to an effective sporting system;
- Equality and inclusion needs to be mainstreamed throughout the sporting system; and
- The administrative burden on volunteers needs to be alleviated, to allow an increased focus on culture and practice.
- A holistic view is needed to achieve the best outcomes for all who participate in sport and physical recreation, so that we can celebrate all of the sporting achievements.
- There needs to be business planning, modernisation and improved utilisation of digital technologies to adapt to a dynamic and challenging environment.



# A Strong Sporting System

A strong sports system is a widely used and understood concept in sport development across the world and it enables nations and regions to develop an effective set of standards that define what is “good”. It also enables bench learning with other sporting bodies. A sports system for Northern Ireland will reflect the fact that we operate across two sporting jurisdictions (UK and Ireland) and as such, we will wish to capitalise on the strengths of both systems and give them due regard.

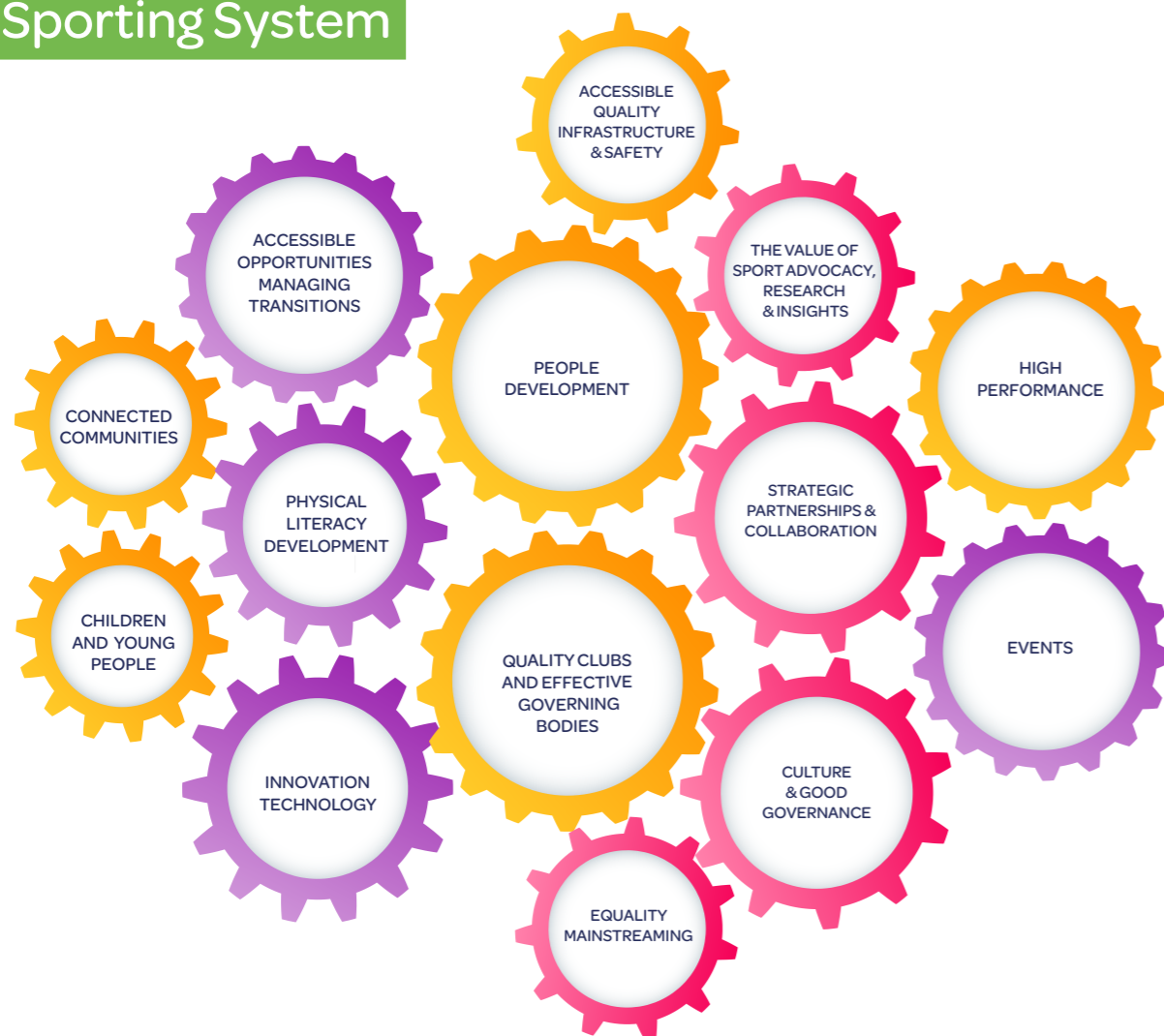
The sporting system is comprised of many different elements that operate interdependently and require the support of multiple partners in order to thrive.

We will work with our partners to implement an inclusive and supportive sporting culture that ensures that the sporting system is accessible to all and specifically to people with a disability, women and girls, older people, carers, black and minority ethnic communities and our LGBTQ+ communities.

We will move from a culture that is focused on compliance and targets to one that facilitates the cultural practices of participant focused positive experiences. Therefore, to continue to improve sustained participation in sport and physical recreation in the general population and specifically for underrepresented groups, Sport NI must work strategically with partners to improve the accessibility, connectivity and quality of the sporting system.



## The Sporting System





# Our Approach

Sport NI has undergone significant positive change in recent times, as we continue to learn and grow as an organisation, responding dynamically to the demands of sport in the 21st century environment.

## The Cornerstones

In order to ensure that any strong sporting system remains equitable and inclusive for all, we have established foundational cornerstones for our work. We remain focussed on our need to promote, embed and reinforce inclusivity and well-being.

We will:

- Build a positive and inclusive sports culture;
- Promote wellness and well-being;
- Retain a duty of care to all those engaged in the sporting system and;
- Target sport in rural communities, in disadvantaged areas and with under-represented groups.

## Our Guiding Principles

This work will be characterised by a series of guiding principles. Sport NI will:

- Be focused on sporting outcomes;
- Be culture and value driven in our work;
- Value add and capacity build across the sports sector;
- Strategically engage with partners to lever the value of sport;
- Lead where appropriate, contribute where more appropriate;
- Be ambitious and smart about the choices we make and impact we have;
- Be confident and creative and;
- Make evidence based decisions.

## We will Advocate and Evidence the Value of Sport

We have heard, loudly and clearly, the need for Sport NI to advocate and evidence the value of sport and we will increase our research, evidence and insights accordingly.

## We will Influence Strategically and Build Partnerships

Sport NI recognises the diverse mix of skills, experience and insight that our current and future partners bring. We are committed to engaging and working with each of them in a meaningful way so that we all play our part in enabling the power of sport to change lives for the better.

Sport NI will also work at a more strategic level with partners to advocate the value of sport and to influence and co-design policy and strategy that impacts on the sport system, in order to address the blockages and issues that you have told us exist. We will work more in partnership with district councils, health and education partners, governing bodies of sport, clubs and communities, to understand and address perceived or actual barriers and improve pathways into sustained participation in sport and physical recreation.

We will mainstream a coherent systems based approach to achieve the best outcomes for everyone to participate in sport and physical recreation, and to fulfil their potential.

## We will Deliver Expertise

The next period requires Sport NI to make dynamic changes in our approach. This process has already established significant internal improvements in our culture, governance and expertise. Sport NI has also signalled our intention to bring further, much needed expertise to sports including: technology and innovation, sports infrastructure design, data insights, and sustainability in sports. We are committed to acquiring the skills that sports have told us you need. We believe that skills and financial investments will be equally important in providing solutions and achieving the right outcomes. We will address market gaps in sports development by focussing on what we do best in terms of developing sports.



## We will Make Outcome Focused Investments

As we move through the next decade, we will pursue more joint investments to achieve shared outcomes; demonstrating the value of sport and making more effective use of the finite resources that we all have available to us.

## Our Values

Sport NI's Board, leadership, management and staff have invested energy and commitment into defining a culture that reflects our passion for sport and our wish to be a high performing sports team which demands of ourselves what we expect of our local sports communities, volunteers, coaches and our best athletes.

Sport NI's DNA has enabled the organisation to develop a value driven draft strategy and we are committed to embedding a strong sporting culture within the sporting system so that sporting organisations can thrive. Our four values are:



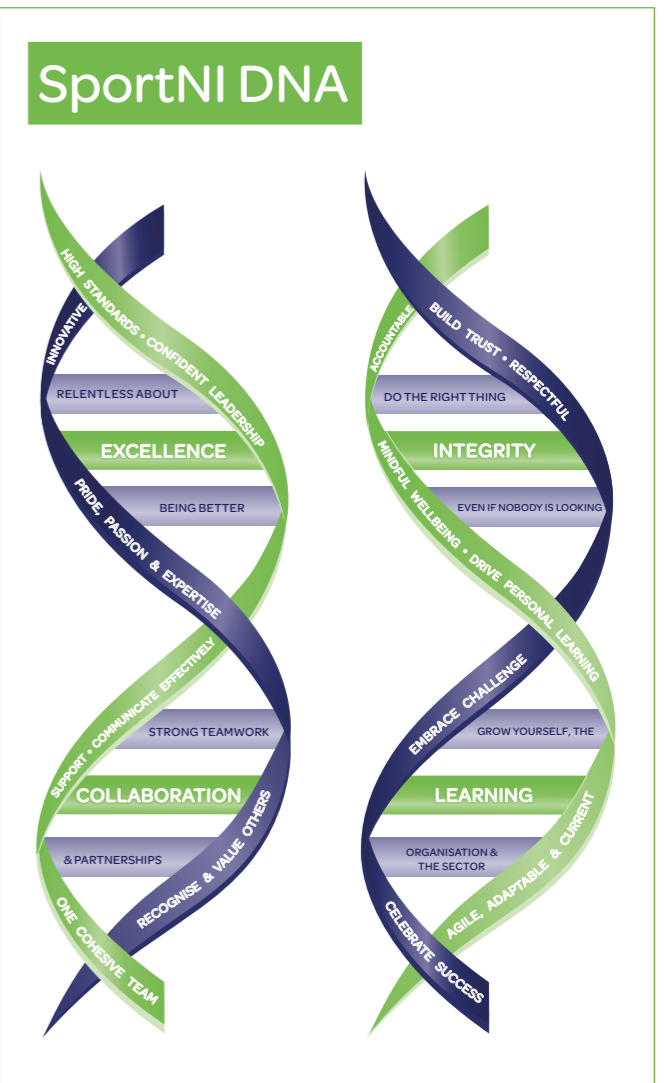
**Excellence**  
Relentless about being better

**Integrity**  
Doing the right thing, even if nobody is looking

**Collaboration**  
Strong teamwork and partnerships

**Learning**  
Growing ourselves, the organisation and the sector

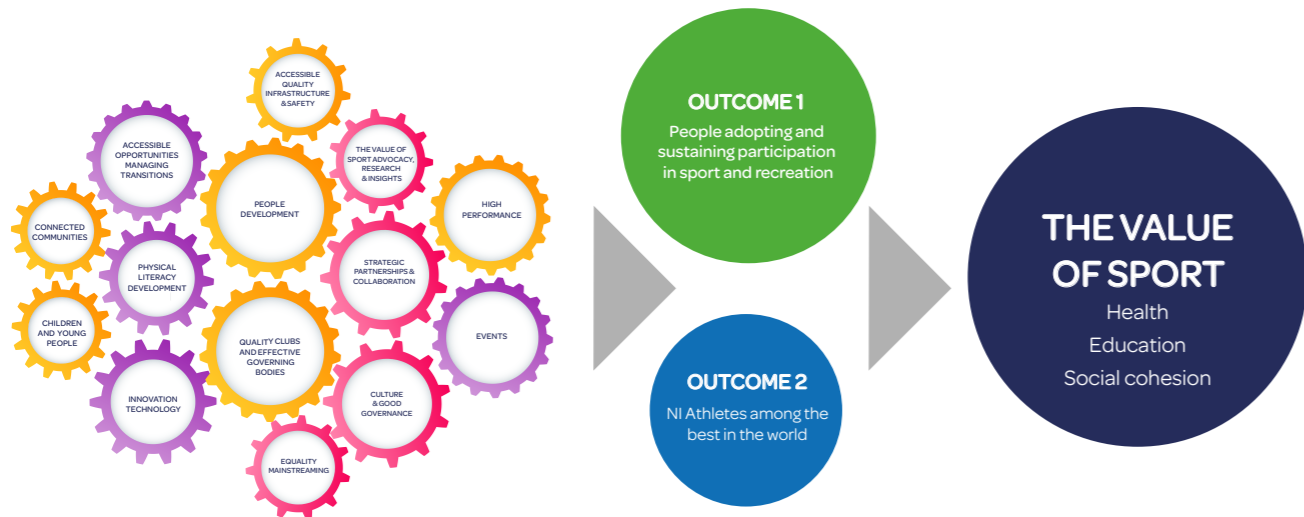
Each value has a set of behaviours which we expect of ourselves and that which you should expect to see when you engage with us. These values form part of our DNA.



# Our Strategic Outcomes

Sport NI has proposed two high level outcomes to measure our work during the life of the Corporate Plan 2020 - 2025.

We will commit to leading and contributing to positive, 'population based' change, through lifelong participation in and enjoyment of sport and physical recreation (Outcome One) and by celebrating sporting success at the highest level (Outcome Two).



Sport NI recognises the inter-dependence of both the above outcomes. Sustained participation in a diverse range of sports and physical recreation, from an early age, enables us all to live healthy lives. As we progress and become more competent in our chosen sport(s), we can be supported on a sports pathway development where potential is identified and excellence is nurtured.

In turn, our best performing athletes can inspire our young people to strive to the best they can and instil a civic pride in our community and people.

We also strive to retain our athletes in the sporting system so that their talent and involvement in coaching, officiating and volunteering positions motivate the next generation; providing the positive role models in our communities and regionally, bringing wider societal benefits to all. This cycle of sustained participation is a vital element of sporting communities and nations.



## Outcome 1

### People adopting and sustaining participation in sport and recreation.

Sport NI's core focus continues to be on growing and sustaining participation in sport and physical recreation; we recognise that this has the greatest impact on our people, our communities and our society and particularly as we merge from the COVID 19 pandemic. During this next Corporate Plan period (2020 - 2025) we aim to work with partners to get more people active and to support their transition into sustained participation in sport and physical recreation

In particular, we are acutely aware of the barriers to sport for many people and groups in society, including people with a disability, women and girls, older people, carers, black and minority ethnic communities and our LGBTQ+ communities. Closing the participation gap has, and continues to be, a priority for our partner department, the Department for Communities and Sport NI.

#### How will we Measure Success?

Indicators of success for Outcome One will come from a range of existing and new data sources, at both a population and programme level, including the Continuous Household Survey (CHS), the Young Person's Behaviours & Attitudes Survey (YPBAS), Young Life & Time/Kids Life and Time (YLT/KLT) and the All-Ireland Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity (CSPPA).

These indicators will include:

- % of adults & children participating in sport & physical recreation, including those from under-represented groups (women/girls, people with a disability and those living in areas of highest social need);
- % of adults & children who belong to a sports club;
- % of adults who have volunteered in sport in the last 12 months; and
- % of adults who have coached in the last 12 months.

Within each of these indicators, Sport NI will look for the 'story behind the headline', with a particular emphasis on what the data tells us about the experience of those groups of people who have traditionally been excluded from, or under-represented in, sport and physical recreation.



## The Challenges and Opportunities

### The Challenge:

The COVID19 pandemic resulted in the temporary closure of all organised sports activity, and a subsequent regulated phased return to sport; resulting in a challenge to the financial sustainability of sports organisations, membership retention and sports participation programmes.

### The Opportunity:

More people recognise the importance of mental and physical wellbeing, the value of sport in this regard, the invaluable role of the sports clubs at the heart of the community response efforts, and the need to innovate and adapt to survive, using digital technologies and collaborative approaches. Finally there is an opportunity not only to re-engage and retain volunteers and club members but to inclusively welcome more into the sporting family.

In some cases, sports clubs may not have responded to changing perceptions, motivations and expectations of people within their local communities. For many people, the pathways into local sports clubs are not always easy or clear. The COVID19 pandemic has changed this landscape somewhat, with the invaluable role of sports clubs at the heart of our communities reinforced by their tremendous community response efforts; to protect our most vulnerable and connect and support our communities. The regulated social isolation measures has focused our attentions on the importance of collaboration, interdependence and connection within our communities to ensure health and wellbeing. The sports club has a significant opportunity to reassert its role and relevance to our communities, through the re-engaging of volunteers, including coaches, and the reactivation of inclusive sports development programmes, along with sustainable business planning and modernisation through digital technologies.

Opportunities to create early, seamless linkages between an introductory 'sports' programme in a leisure centre or community setting may not have a natural signpost to sustain participation within an appropriate local sports club – to the detriment of the participant, the club and the original provider.

### The Challenge:

Societal and lifestyle changes have led to a growing trend in individual participation or in other cases, to social isolation and inactivity.

### The Opportunity:

To build a sporting system that positively influences and captures autonomous participation and creates accessible pathways into clubs for socially isolated and underrepresented groups.

People's perception, understanding, experience and consumption of sport and physical recreation today is very different to that of the past. Societal and lifestyle changes, have resulted in many embracing a more 'individualistic approach' to sport and physical recreation, with much more participation happening outside the traditional, formal sports club structures. There are many reasons for this which may include community or social isolation, work/family pressures, time, cost, and the growth of new 'lifestyle sports'.

### The Challenge:

Isolated and time bound sporting interventions have a limited impact in sustaining participation in sport and physical recreation without effective transition management.

### The Opportunity:

Build an accessible inclusive sporting system with connectivity and transition management.

Participation in sport and physical recreation is widely acknowledged as presenting benefits for people individually, and as a society, to improve health (specifically obesity), mental health and well-being and to obtain educational achievement. Over the last ten years, Sport Matters and the Programme for Government has concentrated on targeting socially isolated and underrepresented groups through the medium of sport. However, in practice, public bodies and other providers may have targeted resources and activities into certain areas or communities for a time bound intervention that does not transition participants into a sporting pathway and system effectively. Community

planning affords an opportunity to work in increased connection and collaboration over the period of our next Corporate Plan 2020-2025; to enable people to transition effectively into a lifelong quality, meaningful sporting experience.

### The Challenge:

The decline in children's experience of and participation in sport and physical recreation, including physical literacy.

### The Opportunity:

To improve physical literacy and reverse the reduction in childhood participation in sport and physical recreation, reduce drop-out rates among school aged children and address the inequalities associated with the drop-off between boys/girls and those with/without a disability.

Participation in sport and physical recreation is at its highest when we are children. However, there is a considerable body of research over the last ten years - most recently the 'Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity study (CSPPA 2018)' undertaken across the island of Ireland - that highlights a persistent and worrying decline in children's experience of, and participation in, sport, physical recreation and physical education.

This downward trajectory in children's participation is especially worrying as it provides a lower starting point from which adult participation rates continue to decline. As we live longer, this results in increased levels of inactivity in later life with the associated public health implications. Participation in sport and physical recreation is acknowledged to reduce those negative physical and mental health impacts. A starting point must be to reverse the reduction in childhood participation in sport and physical recreation, reduce drop-out rates among school aged children and address the inequalities associated with that drop-off between boys/girls and those with/without a disability.

'The Children and Young People's Strategy (Department of Education, 2019)' identifies a number of outcomes to which sport can, and does, make a positive contribution towards making lives better; benefitting local communities and society overall.

## What is Physical Literacy?

Physical Literacy can be described as the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding that provides children with the movement foundation for lifelong participation in physical activity. Enabling children to be physically literate supports their development as competent, confident and healthy individuals.

Physical literacy provides a foundation for positive lifelong experiences of sport, physical recreation and physical education. Sport NI will work to build a shared understanding of roles and responsibilities around physical literacy.

### The Challenge:

Risk of drop out at key life points.

### The Opportunity:

To build a sporting system that manages transition points effectively.

We also know that there are key points in each of our lives when people may drop out of participation and involvement in sport and physical recreation. These occur for myriad reasons reflective of individual circumstances and identity, however there is one constant truth; once we drop out, it can be harder to return. We have identified some of these 'transitions' and are committed to working with our partners to support interventions that reduce drop-out and/or facilitate an early return to sport and physical recreation.



## Outcome 2

### NI Athletes Among the Best in World

Sport NI recognises that high performance sport is a focus for a small number of people who excel in their field. These athletes operate in high performance programmes, led by National Performance Directors and Head Coaches.

'NI Athletes among the Best in World' is defined as athletes / teams succeeding at senior international level at World, Olympic, Paralympic, European and Commonwealth competition.

#### How will we Measure Success?

Indicators of success include medals won, numbers of athletes winning medals and placings (Top 8, Top 16) in these major championships and where appropriate, world rankings will be used. The ultimate indicator of success for NI athletes/teams is to hold the Number One ranking in the world.

Given that we operate across two sporting jurisdictions, Sport NI will work closely with key strategic partners (Sport Ireland and UK Sport), who also invest in high performance programmes containing athletes from Northern Ireland. Whilst a few sports do compete internationally as 'Northern Ireland', every Commonwealth Games offers athletes who normally represent either Team Ireland or Team GB in Olympic or Paralympic sport the opportunity to compete for Team NI.

Sport NI uses the term 'performance pathway' to describe the sport based journey that allows high-potential athletes to grow and be effectively prepared for high performance sport at senior international level. Sport NI support to performance pathway development will help sports understand how their pathway may need to adapt to international and/or best practice trends, where helps athletes to learn and thrive and also where it does not. Investment of expertise to enhance practice within performance pathways and to develop the coaches and performance people who steer them, will be key to sustaining current levels of success and building for future improvement.

#### The Challenge:

Two sporting jurisdictions.

#### The Opportunity:

Strategic partnership to optimise the performance pathway.



# Supporting Our Outcomes

To support our sporting outcomes and to respond to what our stakeholders asked of us, during our extensive engagement, we have identified some broad enablers below.

## Strategic Partnerships and Collaboration: A Strong Sporting System

Deliver a strong, inclusive sporting system, through co-design with our sports' governing bodies and other stakeholders that produces improved outcomes and enables us to grow and learn from one another.

## The Value of Sport: Advocacy, Research and Insights

Establish a common framework for measuring the value of sport; providing compelling evidence as to its fundamental importance in our society, in partnership with UK and Ireland sports bodies.

Provide meaningful insights into participants and non-participants experiences and the consumption of sport and physical recreation across the life course through the development and implementation of a research strategy.

## Culture, Good Governance and Equality Mainstreaming: Our Cornerstones

Improve culture and well-being within the whole sporting system, including the enabling of equality mainstreaming that will impact on the quality and performance of the system to deliver. We will move our sporting system from one that is focused on compliance and targets, to one that facilitates the co-designed delivery of 'people focused' sporting outcomes.



# Proposed Actions

As we emerge from the COVID19 pandemic, Sport NI has responded with a range of immediate actions, to support the sporting family to build back better.

These have ranged from the regular dissemination of critical guidance and support around regulations, the maintaining of prompt payments to ensure continuity of funding, Sports Hardship Funding (in partnership with DFC), the provision of mental health and wellbeing resources, to the provision of funding and expertise to strengthening through improved resilience and increased capability and stimulating through the development of recovery projects and innovation.

To support our sporting outcomes and to respond to what our stakeholders asked of us, during our extensive engagement we have identified some broad actions below:

## Outcome 1

### People adopting and sustaining participation in sport and recreation.

#### Children and Young People

1. Improve the early experiences of sport and physical recreation for school-aged children.
2. Promote and support the development of an 'all-island' Physical Literacy Consensus Statement, in partnership with Sport Ireland.
3. Embed a systematic and formal approach to physical literacy.
4. Support the strengthening (quality and quantity) of physical education and school sport for school-aged children, by advocating and partnering with education and governing bodies of sport.
5. Strengthen pathways and partnerships between afterschool sport, local sports clubs and local communities, by working with education and governing bodies of sport.

#### Connected Communities

6. Create a 'level playing field' so that accessibility and inclusion is felt and experienced in a real 'lived' way by those who have traditionally been excluded from sport.
7. Embed a life course model for participation in sport and physical recreation that provides interventions at the points when they are most needed and one which is reflective of changing patterns of participation.
8. Meet local need and maximise local sports impacts by supporting and leveraging regional partnerships; through community planning.

#### People Development

9. Develop, promote, support and celebrate volunteering across the sports sector.
10. Develop, promote, support and celebrate people development opportunities for sports clubs.

#### Quality Clubs and Effective Governing Bodies

11. Advance and advocate agreed definitions of what a modern, fit for purpose sports club looks like.
12. Support governing bodies of sport to embed a positive and inclusive culture in their clubs.
13. Empower governing bodies of sport to make improved use of data management to meet the needs of sports clubs and their members.

#### Accessible, Quality Infrastructure and Safety

14. Advocate for and support the delivery of a modern, fit for purpose physical sports infrastructure to meet the local and regional needs of communities, and sports clubs in delivering increased, inclusive and safe sustained participation in sport and physical recreation. (Links to Outcome 2, Action 6)



## Outcome 2

### NI Athletes among the Best in World

#### High Performance

1. Develop and implement a high performance sports framework aligned to GB and Ireland systems that seeks to leverage benefits, through investment in key strategic partners, to impact on the performance of NI athletes.
2. Encourage National Governing Bodies to develop business models that underpin the performance programme and operate to a sustainable balance of public versus self-generated funding.
3. Support performance directors, coaches and athletes to improve performance by finding solutions to their identified performance limiting problems.
4. Provide focused athletes services that maximise the training gains needed to enhance performance and minimise days lost from training and competition.
5. Enhance the operational practices of sporting organisations operating at performance level, adding value through shared learning on culture, governance, anti-doping, sport pathways, transition management and people development.
6. Work with partners to develop a new regional training centre that supports the development of high performance sport.

### WE NEED YOUR FEEDBACK

Are these the right outcomes for our Corporate Plan?

Do the broad actions support your needs?

Is there anything missing?

Is there anything else that you feel Sport NI should be leading or delivering on to support you?

Is our approach the right one?

## Appendix One

Recreation and Youth Service Order 1986 for the furtherance of sport and physical recreation in Northern Ireland. Sport NI has a range of functions including the following:

- Advising on matters relating to sport and physical recreation, our 'government department (Department for Communities; DfC) and other government departments, education, district councils and other bodies interested in sport and physical recreation';
- Encouraging the 'provision of facilities for, and participation in, sport and physical recreation';
- Assisting 'the provision of administrative services, equipment, coaching and instruction';
- 'Assisting in the organising or supporting of, or participating in, international or other events, by bodies providing facilities for sport or physical recreation or organising such activities'; and
- 'Assisting bodies providing supportive services in connection with sport and physical recreation'.



This document is available in other accessible formats on request, and online at [www.sportni.net](http://www.sportni.net)

**Contact us:**

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

T: 028 9038 1222  
E: [info@sportni.net](mailto:info@sportni.net)  
W: [sportni.net](http://sportni.net)

