



The **POWER** of **SPORT**



**CORPORATE
PLAN 2021-26**

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Foreword

We are pleased to introduce our corporate plan covering the period 2021-26. This plan has been informed by extensive engagement with our current and potential future partners and stakeholders from the world of sport, 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. It aligns with Active Living - The Sport and Physical Activity Strategy for Northern Ireland and Sport NI looks forward to working closely with the Department for Communities, other government departments and strategic partners in delivering this strategy.

Today, people's perception, understanding and experience of sport and physical activity is very different to that of the past and indeed it has been further shaped by the COVID pandemic. Many people were already embracing a more individualistic approach to sport and physical activity, with a trend emerging towards more informal participation happening in local communities and outside of traditional formal sports club structures. COVID restrictions required even more of us to engage in sport and physical activity at an individual level as sport closed its doors, courts, arenas, pitches and playing fields.

COVID reminded us just how much sport and physical activity shapes our lives here. During periods of lockdown, we witnessed the profound impact of no sport; from frustrated athletes who geared training regimes to peak for Tokyo 2020, to silent playing fields where there would normally have been a cacophony of excitement and noise.



COVID also reminded us that sport is an integral part of our communities with governing bodies and their sporting clubs proving to be invaluable; supporting our communities in a range of innovative ways, from the provision of food banks and food/prescription delivery to online sport sessions and communicating critical health messages.

As we emerge from the pandemic, Sport NI is more committed than ever to removing barriers to sport and physical activity. For some, the routes into local sports clubs are not always easy or clear, yet our research and engagement insights tell us that the most likely indicator for sustained participation in sport and physical activity is through membership of a sports club. We also know that while participation in sport and physical activity has increased in recent years, there still remains a significant gap from overall participation rates to those of women, people with a disability or those living in the most deprived areas.

Sport NI wants to address the barriers and create opportunities for those under-represented groups to be more active and to close that gap by making equality and inclusion an integral part of this corporate plan. In particular, we want to ensure opportunities for females to take part at all levels of their chosen sport.



Sport also gives expression to our culture and identity. Sport NI is acutely aware of, and is witness to, the positive role that sport plays in healing divisions, not in a superficial or orchestrated manner, but in an organic and intrinsically motivated way which brings communities, athletes and teams together as “us”. We want to ensure that this work flourishes.

Sport NI has a key responsibility to support sports so that they can achieve at their highest level. For some, they will look to the Birmingham Commonwealth Games 2022, the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Paris 2024, as well as World and European Championships, as key opportunities to showcase the best of our talent internationally. Others will strive for success at national, regional, school or local competition levels.

The sports sector here 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 sector here, co-designing with stakeholders and partners, a Sporting System that harvests the best practice, partnerships and relationships across the UK and Ireland in delivering our ambitions for 2026. This will further strengthen a sporting sector which puts people - participants, athletes, teams, coaches, volunteers and leaders - at the heart of what we do.

Sport changes lives and we know of its enduring ability to support health and wellbeing, educational attainment, cohesive communities, and instill pride in our region.

We will ensure that sports infrastructure draws on the latest and most sustainable innovations in design, build and management and that they help our athletes prepare and excel.

Real and meaningful partnerships are required to maximise the power of sport. Sport NI is conscious of the responsibility we share with others to make the best use of public money. Public sector bodies can no longer afford to work in isolation, therefore, we are focused on sharing our resources with others to achieve common outcomes, so that all of society benefits. Together, we can ensure our communities thrive through The Power of Sport.



GEORGE LUCAS

CHAIR, SPORT NI



**ANTOINETTE
MCKEOWN**

CHIEF EXECUTIVE, SPORT NI

Executive Summary

Our Mission Statement

We are passionate about maximising the power of sport to change lives. By 2026, we want the power of sport to be recognised and valued by all.

The Value of Sport

Sport and physical activity makes an invaluable contribution to individual emotional, mental and physical wellbeing. Sport and physical activity provides essential capabilities such as a growth mindset, 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 wellbeing, educational attainment, community cohesion, as well as the economic impact realised from associated jobs and events.

Our Strategic Context

This plan seeks to build on the success of previous Sport NI corporate plans and on the success of Sport Matters, the Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2009-19. It is firmly aligned to Active Living - The Sport and Physical Activity Strategy for Northern Ireland (which has replaced Sports Matters) and will pursue the aims and objectives of future NI Executive Programmes for Government.

Community Planning Partnerships provide a strategic opportunity to enable a more accessible and connected approach to delivery of the Sporting System locally; to improve sustained participation in sport and activity generally and specifically from under-represented groups, contributing to improving physical activity in communities.

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

Consequently, the participation rates for these groups remain significantly below the general population rates for participation in sport and physical activity. We know there are critical points in people's lives when, for a range of reasons, they are at risk of stopping participation. We will continue to work to mitigate these risk points.

Additionally, we know that there is a growing trend to participate more informally and autonomously in sport and physical activity outside the club structure. We will retain an inclusive offering so that people here can remain physically active in the way that best suits them.

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 activity 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.

Sport NI recognises that the network of sports governing bodies, clubs and organisations can, through various programmes, provide countless opportunities for the population to engage in more physical activity. Sport NI will work with partner organisations who lead in the area of physical activity to provide assistance and support where appropriate and where it adds value.



We have listened

As we developed this corporate plan you told us that:

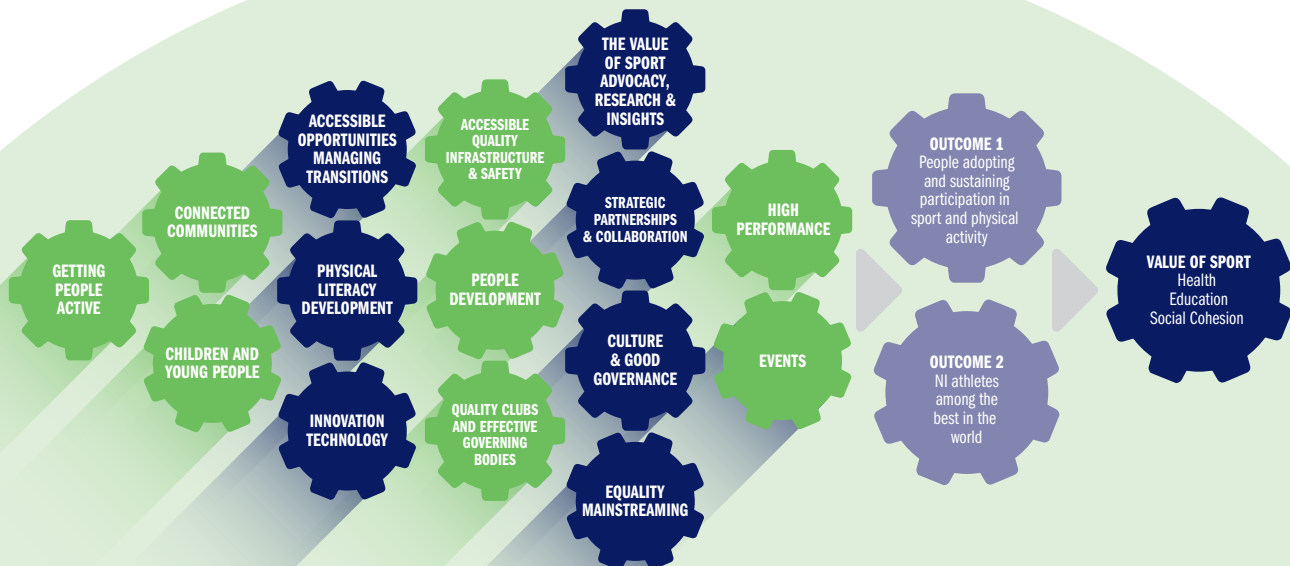
- ✓ The provision of accessible sport and physical recreation opportunities needs to transition effectively into connected pathways within the Sporting System, in order to sustain participation generally and for underrepresented groups;
- ✓ A warm, welcoming, inclusive environment and quality coaching 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;
- ✓ A holistic view is needed to achieve the best outcomes for all who participate in sport and physical activity, so that we can celebrate all our sporting achievements; and
- ✓ Recognition should be given to the range of competitive sport here, and that for some, achieving at the highest level in their sport cannot be at Olympic, Paralympic, European or International levels.

The Sporting System and Culture

The Sporting System here 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. The Sporting System will be underpinned by a Sporting Infrastructure Strategy, to improve facilities across the region in a joined-up way.

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 driving change in how sports, the media, the general public and young people view female sport; ensuring cultural and structural barriers are removed as we change mindsets in this critical area for sport and physical activity.



Our Approach

The delivery of this corporate plan requires leadership from Sport NI and our partners, as we work with the finite resources available.

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, communities and clubs

to get people active, keep them active and support them into sustained participation in sport and physical activity.

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 pursues two outcomes for Sport NI over the next five years:

Outcome One:

People adopting and sustaining participation in sport and physical activity.

Outcome Two:

Our athletes among the best in the world.

About us

Sport NI is the lead development public body for sport and physical recreation. 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 here is distributed. 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 statutory obligations.

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 and working with and supporting a range of partners including governing bodies of sport, private sector providers and various sectoral training bodies. 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 activity. TNOC's reach extends far beyond those who visit the centre each year. Since its inception TNOC has built capacity and expertise through those who complete skills and leadership training at the centre and we continue to provide these cascade benefits to thousands more individuals every year.



The Sport NI Sports Institute (SNISI)

The Sports Institute 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 and this reflects the organisation's unique position at the intersection of both UK and Irish pathways.



Our Vision and Mission Statements

Vision Statement

Active Living - The Sport and Physical Activity Strategy for Northern Ireland, sets out a vision of:

“ Lifelong involvement in sport and physical activity will deliver an active, healthy, resilient and inclusive society which recognises and values both participation and excellence.”



Sport NI's Mission Statement

“ We are passionate about maximising the power of sport to change lives. By 2026, we want the power of sport to be recognised and valued by all.”

The Value of Sport and Physical Activity

Sport and physical activity makes an invaluable contribution to individual emotional, mental and physical wellbeing. Sport and physical activity provides essential capabilities such as a growth mindset, higher levels of physical literacy, improved academic achievement in school children, improved emotional states, and a sense of belonging and connection. This is even more critical as we emerge from the COVID pandemic.

Indeed, by changing many individual lives, the power of sport can be realised societally, in its contribution to health and wellbeing, educational attainment, community cohesion, as well as the economic impact realised through employment, commercial activities and by hosting major national and international events.

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.



The Value of Sport

Being regularly active has not only proven benefits for physical health, but also has real positive impacts on mental health and wellbeing. Being physically active is not just a health issue, it brings people together to enjoy shared activities and contributes to building strong communities whilst supporting the economy to grow.

Professor Sir Michael McBride, Chief Medical Officer for Northern Ireland; Active Living 2021.

The estimated direct cost of physical inactivity to the NHS across the UK is **£1.2 billion** 

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

An estimated over **97,000 cases** of disease were prevented in Ireland in 2019 from sport and physical activity participation with a net gain in health worth of

€0.4 billion 


Sport Ireland, and Sheffield Hallam, Researching the Value of Sport in Ireland 2021.

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 **12-16% rise** in other transferrable 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.

CASE: The Culture and Sport Evidence Programme (Online Database).

The benefits of Outdoor Recreation in NI:

-  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 that the public sector invests there is a **return of £1.77**.

Sport NI 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, a number of strategic and policy matters will impact on our work and the way in which we work. They include:

Programmes for Government

Sport NI's Corporate Plan 2021-26 reflects priorities identified in previous programmes for government and we will remain agile to continue that alignment in future iterations. These set out broad outcomes that touch on every aspect of society, including the attainment of good health and education, economic success and confident and peaceful communities.

New Decade New Approach

New Decade, New Approach enabled the restoration of the NI Assembly in January 2020. This promises significant changes and investment in almost every sector, including sport and it has informed the development of this corporate plan.

Sport and Physical Activity

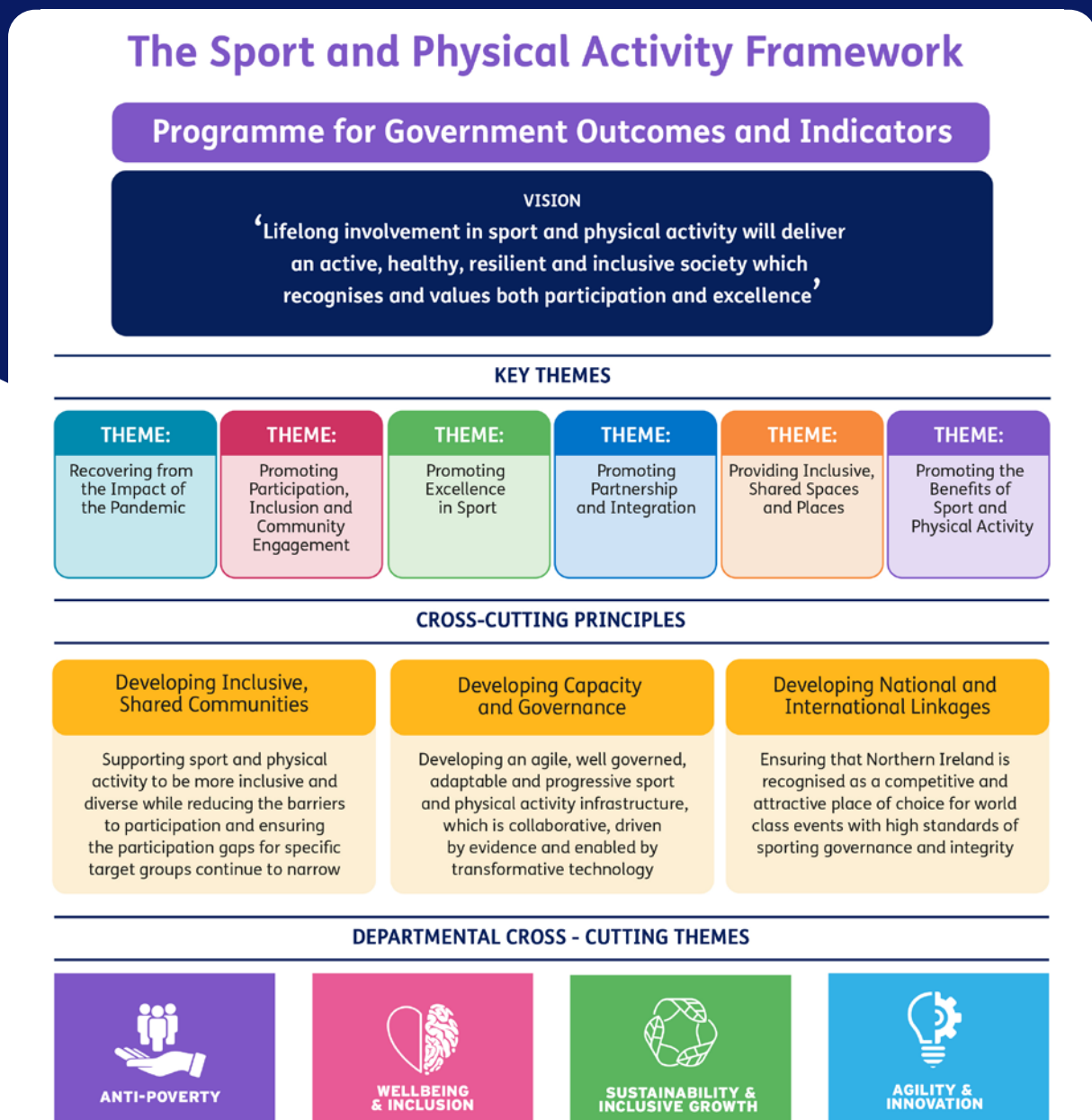
Sport NI recognises that sport takes place within the context of physical activity. Physical activity is broader than sport, so Sport NI's focus will concentrate on those elements of physical activity more closely aligned to sport. For example, we aim to get involved in projects that are gateways to sport, rather than other activities, e.g. gardening or active travel.



Active Living - The Sport and Physical Activity Strategy for Northern Ireland

Sport NI's partner department, the Department for Communities, has led the development of Active Living - the Strategy for Sport and Physical Activity which replaces Sport Matters. Sport NI will play a key role in the delivery of that strategy and work closely with departmental colleagues to realise the ambitions set out in this plan.

The framework below sets out 'Active Living' strategic context in pursuing programme for government outcomes; as well as its vision, key themes, cross-cutting principles, and departmental themes.



Community Planning Partnerships

Community planning aims to improve the connection between the different bodies including local and central 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 wellbeing of an area; improving community cohesion and the quality of life for all citizens.

The Community Planning Partnerships continue to perform a key role in providing more opportunities for more people to get involved in sport and become physically active. As a statutory community planning partner Sport NI is aware of how these opportunities align with our strategic objectives and in supporting more people to access and sustain participation in sport and physical activity. We will continue to seek out agreed joint action with our partners to deliver on our shared outcomes and drive maximum benefits within each council area.



Sport and the Environment

Sport NI is committed to leading the sports sector to make significant progress on reducing its environmental footprint, contributing to reducing carbon emissions and becoming self-sustaining. We will contribute to the delivery of recommendations made in the Environmental Strategy for NI, particularly Outcome 2 - Healthy & Accessible Environment & Landscapes everyone can connect with and enjoy.

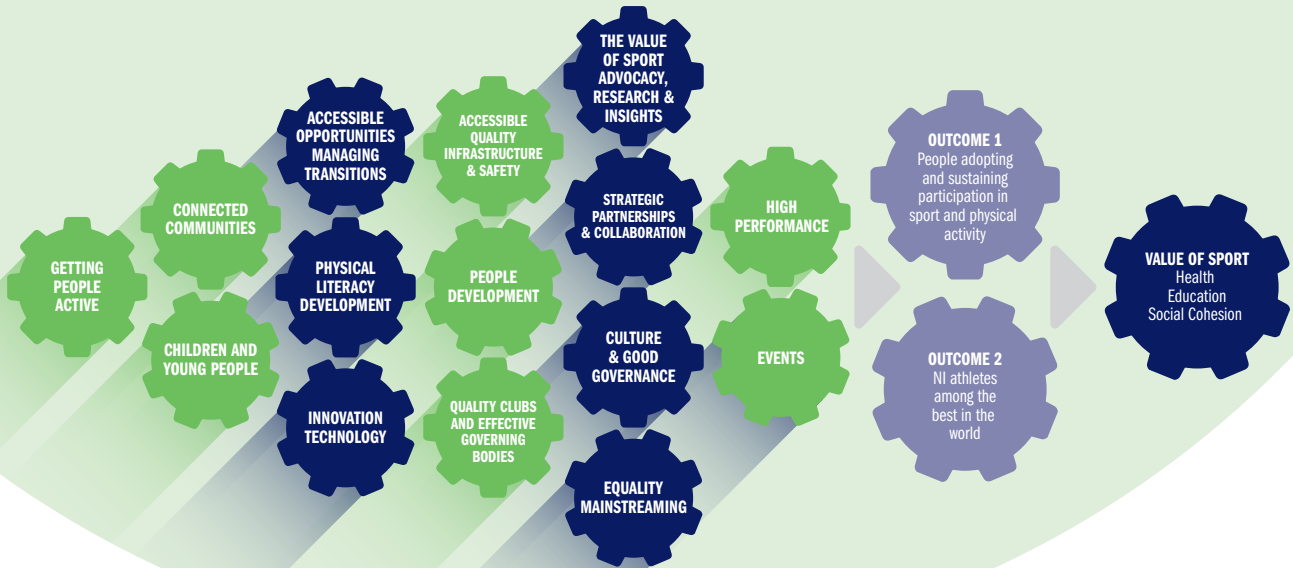
We also recognise the commitment in New Decade New Approach to legislation setting out the route-map to tackling climate change and will drive a sustainability agenda towards the greening of sport.

We have listened

As we developed this corporate plan you told us 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;
- ✓ A holistic view is needed achieve the best outcomes for all who participate in sport and physical recreation, so that we can celebrate all our sporting achievements;
- ✓ A recognition that sport takes place within the context of physical activity. Physical activity is broader than sport, so Sport NI's focus will concentrate on those elements of physical activity more closely aligned to sport. For example, we are more likely to get involved in projects that could be gateways to sport, rather than other activities e.g. gardening or active travel; and
- ✓ Recognition should be given to the range of competitive sport here, and that for some, achieving at the highest level in their sport will not be at Olympic, Paralympic, European or International levels.

A Strong Sporting System



A strong Sporting System is a widely used and recognised concept in sport development across the world, enabling nations and regions to develop an effective set of standards that define what is 'good'. It also enables benchmarking with other sporting bodies. Our local Sporting System 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.

Sport NI recognises that the foundation of the Sporting System is to get people active, through physical activity. Improving accessibility and connectivity will also create more opportunities for those not already participating in sport to become engaged.

We will work with our partners to create a more inclusive and supportive sporting culture that ensures that key elements of the Sporting System include improved accessibility for all and specifically for people with a disability, women and girls, older people, carers, ethnically diverse communities and our LGBTQ+ community.

We will move away from a sporting culture that has at times complied with investment requirements and targets simply because they were part of the terms and conditions of financial aid. We will move towards a sporting culture where everyone is truly welcome, where sports embrace diversity rather than see it as an extra unnecessary task. We will grow skills in the sports workforce to create positive experiences for all, so that for example, everyone can see that our female teams have an equal right to access the main team pitch, that everyone embraces our disabled members as an asset and our Black, Asian and minority community members are recognised for their skills rather than their skin.

We have established a Sports Culture and Integrity team to support the development of a culture of inclusion and integrity for everyone involved in sport and physical activity.

We will work tirelessly to support this culture being embedded in effective leadership and governance on and off the field of play, with hearts and minds open to seeing the person first, providing respect, compassion and a duty of care.

We will focus on the various entry points to the Sporting System including how to transition people from non-structured to structured sport in that inclusive environment. We will continue to improve sustained participation in sport and physical activity in the general population and specifically for underrepresented groups. We will strive to quickly regain sports club membership and participation rates in sports and physical activity which were so adversely impacted by the COVID pandemic.



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 cornerstones for our work. We remain focused on our need to promote, embed and reinforce inclusivity and wellbeing.

We will:

- ✓ Build a welcoming and inclusive sports culture, recognising the rights of everyone to access and participate in sport and physical activity;
- ✓ Promote wellness and wellbeing;
- ✓ Retain a duty of care to all those engaged in the Sporting System; and
- ✓ Target sport in rural communities, in disadvantaged areas and amongst under-represented groups.

We remain committed to equality, inclusion and anti-poverty measures in all that we do and this is reflected in the Cornerstones. This energises Sport NI's implementation of anti-discrimination legislation and our obligations to promote equality and good relations in all that we do.

We support the UN Convention on Human Rights and are committed to working with the NI Human Rights Commission to ensure that human rights are embedded in all aspects of our work.

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;
- ✓ Add value 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, loud and clear, the need for Sport NI to advocate and evidence the value of sport and we will increase our research programme and insights to track and demonstrate the impact of sport on society.

We will influence strategically and build partnerships

Active Living - The Sport and Physical Activity Strategy for Northern Ireland emphasises the importance of strategic partnerships and the need for improved collaboration to ensure delivery of the key themes and goals. We are committed to engaging and working with all stakeholders 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 Sporting System, in order to address barriers, and issues. We will work in more effective ways in our partnerships with district councils, health and education partners, governing bodies of sport, clubs and communities, to build understanding around the roles of each partner, and address perceived or actual barriers and improve pathways into sustained participation in sport and physical activity.

We will use a coherent, systems-based approach to achieve the best outcomes for more people to participate in sport and physical activity and to fulfil their potential.

We will deliver expertise

Sport NI has also signalled its intention to bring much needed expertise to sports in a range of areas including technology and innovation, infrastructure design, data insights and environmental sustainability. We are committed to acquiring the skills that sports have told us is needed to ensure the sector continues to grow and thrive. We believe that expert skills and financial investments will be equally important in providing solutions and achieving the right outcomes. We will address gaps in knowledge and in the sports system by focusing on developing sports to reach the highest levels in their game.

We will make outcome focused investments

As we move through the next five years, we will pursue more partnership and joint investments in facilities and programmes to achieve shared outcomes; demonstrating the value of sport and physical activity and making more effective use of the finite resources that we all have available to us.

Our values

Sport NI's Board, Executive Leadership Team, management and staff have invested time, energy and commitment into defining a culture that reflects our passion for sport. That culture reflects our desire 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 establish a values-driven approach to our leadership and work and we are committed to embedding a strong sporting culture of inclusion and integrity within the Sporting System so that organisations can thrive.

Our four values and corresponding behaviours are:

EXCELLENCE

RELENTLESS ABOUT BEING BETTER

- Drive high standards in all we do, rejecting mediocrity & challenging underperformance.
- Demonstrate confident leadership to make positive impact.
- Be innovative, take intelligent risks, driving positive change.
- Deliver with pride, passion & expertise, going above & beyond.

COLLABORATION

STRONG TEAMWORK & PARTNERSHIPS

- Support teammates & partners to be their best & achieve their potential.
- Communicate effectively with the team & partners.
- Recognise & value the contribution of others.
- Act as one cohesive Sport NI team.

INTEGRITY

DO THE RIGHT THING, EVEN IF NOBODY IS LOOKING

- Build trust by acting with honesty, authenticity, transparency & consistency.
- Be respectful of others.
- Be mindful of everyone's wellbeing.
- Be accountable for decisions & actions.

LEARNING

GROW YOURSELF, THE ORGANISATION & THE SECTOR

- Be self-reflective & drive personal learning.
- Embrace challenge, learn from all experiences.
- Recognise & celebrate success.
- Stay agile, adaptable & current.

sport Northern Ireland DNA

sport Northern Ireland

The behaviours set out in the illustration above are what we expect of ourselves and what you should expect to see when you engage with us. These values and behaviours make up Sport NI's organisational culture DNA.

Our Strategic Outcomes

Sport NI has proposed two high level outcomes to measure our work during the life of this corporate plan 2021-26.

We are committed to leading and contributing to positive, 'population based' change, through lifelong participation in and enjoyment of sport and physical activity (Outcome One) and by achieving and 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 activity, 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 clearly defined sports pathway where potential is identified, developed and excellence is nurtured. This enables sports and athletes to be highly competitive and to perform at the highest levels in their sport.

In turn, our highest level performing athletes can inspire our young people to strive to be the best they can and instil a sense of pride across communities and wider society.

We will also strive to retain our athletes in the Sporting System so that we retain their talent, knowledge and experience and that they have pathways into becoming involved in coaching, officiating and volunteering. This approach will motivate the next generation by providing positive role models in our local clubs, communities and at a regional level, bringing wider societal benefits to all. This cycle of life-long involvement and participation is a vital element of sustaining and growing involvement in sport, increasing club membership and retaining expertise.



Outcome 1:

People adopting and sustaining participation in sport and physical activity.



Sport NI's core focus continues to be on growing and sustaining participation in sport and physical activity; we recognise that this has the greatest impact on our people, our communities and our society. Over the lifespan of this corporate plan, 2021-2026, we will work with strategic partners to get more people active and to support their transition into sustained participation in sport and physical activity, where appropriate. This includes ensuring a pathway into sports clubs and development programmes to enable some to reach the highest levels in their sport.

We are acutely aware of the barriers to sport and physical activity for many people and groups in society, including people with a disability, women and girls, older people, carers, ethnically diverse communities and our LGBTQ+ community. Closing the participation gap has, and continues to be, a priority for the Department for Communities, our partner department, and Sport NI.

We recognise the many, and different, ways and levels at which people participate in sport - from their introduction to sport, to grassroots engagement, school and club sport, right through to prestigious, regional, national and international competitions. We will encourage the provision of opportunities for people to participate and excel in sport, both on a recreational and competitive basis. In addition, Sport NI will support sports to ensure they can lead their clubs and regions to perform at their highest level; creating a rising tide of competitiveness within a cohesive and vibrant Sporting System.

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 and children participating in sport and physical activity, including those from under-represented groups (women/girls, people with a disability and those living in areas of highest social need);
- ✓ % of adults and 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 activity.



Challenges and Opportunities

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

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 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 activity, 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'.

For many people, the pathways into local sports clubs are not always easy or clear.

The sport network, made up of clubs, organisations, people and facilities, provides a foundation from which to engage the wider population in ongoing sporting opportunities, either for the first time or after a period away from sport. Often these engagements will overlap with physical activity and these interactions can serve to increase the number of people in the Sporting System.

Sport NI recognises the pathway to sport requires people to first get physically active, and we are committed to working with strategic partners in health, education and local councils to make this happen.



Challenge: Isolated and time bound sporting interventions have a limited impact in sustaining participation in sport.

Opportunity: Build an inclusive and connected Sporting System with effective transitions.

Participation in sport and physical activity is widely acknowledged as delivering significant benefits for people individually, for communities and wider society. Benefits include improvements to physical health (including instances of obesity and diabetes), mental health and wellbeing and educational achievements.

Over the last ten years, programmes for government have recognised the need for policy interventions to redress poverty and exclusion in society in pursuit of equality, diversity, economic growth, giving our children the best start in life and ensuring we all live active, healthy lives. The Sport Matters strategy included targets aimed at increasing participation rates in sport and physical recreation for under-represented groups and socio-economically disadvantaged groups. Achieving meaningful positive societal change over a decade requires sustained collaborative work. In practice, public bodies and other providers may have targeted resources into certain areas or communities for a limited time bound intervention and quite often, public sector bodies singularly invest resources to address the same challenges with little sharing

or effect. In our experience many short-term sport and physical activity programmes do not change behaviours. Such programmes do not transition participants into sustained participation; therefore, the investment is not effective and outcomes are not achieved.

The community planning approach aims to improve connections between all the tiers of government and wider society. As a statutory partner this affords an opportunity for Sport NI to work more collaboratively over the period of this Corporate Plan 2021-26; to enable people to transition effectively to pursuing a lifelong, meaningful, sporting experience. As a statutory partner in the community planning process, Sport NI is committed to making an effective contribution to getting people in our communities physically active and to providing effective leadership in the development of a Sporting System that focuses on delivering sustained participation in sport and physical activity.

We recognise some key challenges that have persisted despite significant investment from a range of providers and we will focus on meaningful change through effective partnership working.

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

Opportunity: To improve physical literacy and reverse the reduction in childhood participation in sport and physical activity, 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 activity 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 activity 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 activity is acknowledged to reduce those negative physical and mental health impacts as well as helping address social isolation amongst an aging population. A starting point must be to reverse the reduction in childhood participation in sport and physical activity, 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. Sport NI will work in partnership with key education stakeholders to improve physical literacy for young people, including via school sport and physical education.



What is physical literacy?

Physical literacy can be described as the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding that provides children with the 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 activity and physical education. Sport NI will engage and build a shared understanding of roles and responsibilities around physical literacy, including the development and promotion of an 'all-island' Physical Literacy Consensus Statement in partnership with Sport Ireland.

Challenge: Risk of drop off at key life points.

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 withdraw from participation and involvement in sport and physical activity. These occur for myriad reasons, reflective of individual circumstances and identity, however, there is one constant truth; once we withdraw or stop, 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-off rates and facilitate an early and sustained return to sport and physical activity.



Outcome 2:

Our athletes among the best in the world.

Sport NI recognises that a small number of people have the opportunity to excel internationally in their field. We also recognise that many local sports people excel in their field at regional, provincial and national levels.

In keeping with other national sports councils, 'Our athletes among the best in world' is defined as athletes / teams succeeding at senior international level at World, Olympic, Paralympic, European and Commonwealth competitions.

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. Sport NI also recognises that in the pursuit of these measures of success, there will be other indicators of progress which provide evidence to support investment, therefore collaboration between Sport NI and sports' governing bodies will be encouraged to maximise those opportunities derived from investment in this outcome.

Challenges and Opportunities

Challenge: Two sporting jurisdictions.

Opportunity: Strategic partnership to optimise the performance pathway.

Sport NI holds a unique position globally as a sports council that supports, develops and facilitates athletes across three sporting jurisdictions: Northern Ireland, Team Ireland and Team GB.

That creates a challenge for us in terms of alignment across the two sporting systems and investment to ensure complementarity and best value for money with the high-performance programmes in both the UK and Ireland.

Given that we operate across three sporting jurisdictions, Sport NI will work closely with key strategic partners (Sport Ireland and UK Sport), who also invest in high performance programmes containing home-grown athletes. We also recognise that a few sports do compete internationally as 'Northern Ireland' and support is provided to ensure our NI teams have every chance of success. In addition, Sport NI will continue to support the NI Commonwealth Games Council as 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.

We will continue to share a sport recognition policy with UK sports councils to recognise sports' governing bodies (informed by sports' international federations). Sport NI will continue to recognise and support island of Ireland sports' governing bodies in existence prior to Irish partition. We are proud of the role we play in enabling athletes to compete for the country they choose to.

In terms of high performance, Sport NI uses the term 'performance pathway' to describe the sport-based journey that allows high-potential athletes to be effectively prepared for high performance sport at senior international level. Sport NI's support to performance pathway development

will help sports understand how their pathway may need to adapt to international and/or best practice trends where it helps athletes to learn and thrive. Investment of expertise within performance pathways and development of coaches, will be key to sustaining current levels of success and building for future improvement. Within programmes, Sport NI will promote a focus on athlete wellbeing and address known or hidden barriers to diversity and inclusion. We will also support athletes to access the performance programmes in, and compete for, the country of their choice.

Sport NI will seek to leverage learning in the high-performance arena including the expertise within our teams, including the Sport NI Sports Institute, that can be used to support and improve all aspects of the Sporting System. For example, opportunities will be sought for learning in coach education, skill development or sports science provision to be cascaded to other parts of the Sporting System to improve best practice and add value.

In addition, Sport NI will invest in sports along the performance pathway where there is clear evidence of the benefit to sport here, to supporting the foundation and long-term legacy of our sports and to ensure the benefits are as far reaching as possible.

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, Inclusive and Connected Sporting System

Deliver a strong, inclusive and connected Sporting System, through co-design with our sports' governing bodies and their affiliated clubs and with strategic partners in health, education, tourism, infrastructure, local government and other stakeholders to ensure the sector thrives in a post COVID era.

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 participant and non-participant experiences and the consumption of sport and physical activity across the life stages through a strong evidence base of research, data capture, insights and best practice.

Culture, Wellbeing and Equality Mainstreaming: Our Cornerstones

Improve culture and wellbeing within the whole Sporting System, including the enabling of equality mainstreaming and accessibility of funding that will impact on the quality and performance of the system. Delivering the right skills development in coaching and sports leadership will enable positive experiences for all participants and the development of a culture of inclusion and integrity embedded in effective leadership and governance, with hearts and minds approach to wellbeing and duty of care.



Proposed Actions

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:

Children
and Young
People

Connected
Communities

People
Development

PROPOSED ACTIONS

Quality Clubs
and Effective
Governing
Bodies

Infrastructure
- Accessible
Quality
and Safe

International
Sport

Children and Young People

- 1 Enrich the early experiences of sport and physical activity 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 building partnerships with education stakeholders and governing bodies of sport.
- 5 Strengthen pathways and partnerships between afterschool sport, local sports clubs and local communities, by working with education stakeholders and governing bodies of sport.

Connected Communities

- 6 Create a 'level playing field' so that accessibility and inclusion is felt and experienced by those who have traditionally been excluded from sport. This will be driven by aligned action plans Equality, Diversity & Inclusion, Women in Sport and Tackling, Tackling Racism and Sectarianism in Sport, based on principles of consultation and co-design with expert and 'lived-experience' panels.
- 7 Embed a life-long model for participation in sport and physical activity 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 enabling, supporting and leveraging regional partnerships, through community planning.
- 9 Support our health and local government partners to get people active and deliver strategic partnerships with education, tourism, economy and infrastructure to demonstrate the benefits and tell the compelling story of the value of sport in the context of a healthy, prosperous society.



**People
Development**

- 10** Develop, promote, support and celebrate volunteering across the sports sector via a Volunteer Development Plan including a focus on diversity and inclusion.
- 11** Develop, promote, support and celebrate people development opportunities for the sports sector. This includes supporting athletes and enabling governing bodies and clubs to nurture talent and access a range of resources to strengthen pathways.

**Quality Clubs
and Effective
Governing
Bodies**

- 12** Advocate agreed definitions of what a modern, fit for purpose sports club looks like; supporting governing bodies of sport to embed a positive and inclusive culture in their clubs.
- 13** Support governing bodies to identify and close development gaps in their sport, so they can lead their clubs and regions to reach the highest levels at provincial and national competition.
- 14** Empower governing bodies of sport to make improved use of data management and insight to meet the needs of sports clubs and their members.

**Infrastructure
- Accessible
Quality
and Safe**

- 15** 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 activity.
- 16** Provide thought leadership on outdoor sport and activity and its many benefits, maximising our expertise from Tollymore National Outdoor Centre, aligned to NI Executive's Green Growth Strategy and NI Executive Environment Strategy.
- 17** Work in partnership with education, DAERA and district council partners to continue leveraging a range of investment opportunities for sports facilities and spaces for all.
- 18** Work with our partners in tourism, infrastructure, local councils, governing bodies and others to maximise the power of our sports infrastructure and build consensus on the best use of spaces for sport and physical activity.
- 19** Explore feasibility and need for regional high performance training centre that enhances competitiveness domestically, nationally and internationally.





**International
Sport**

- 20** 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.
- 21** Encourage national governing bodies to develop business models that underpin the performance programme and operate to a sustainable position of public versus self-generated funding.
- 22** Support performance directors, coaches and athletes to improve performance by finding solutions to their identified performance limiting problems.
- 23** Provide focused athletes services that maximise the training gains needed to enhance performance and minimise days lost from training and competition.
- 24** 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.

Appendix One

Activity 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' (the 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'.





**THE NATIONAL
LOTTERY**



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