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# **A New Sport and Physical Activity Strategy for Northern Ireland**

**Department for Communities  
Consultation Document**

**February 2021**



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# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The Sport and Physical Activity Ecosystem</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Proposed Strategic Framework</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Key Theme - Recovery from the Impact of the Pandemic on Sport and Physical Activity</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Key Theme - Promoting Participation, Inclusion and Community Engagement</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Key Theme - Promoting Excellence in Sport</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Key Theme - The Importance of Partnership and Integration</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Key Theme - Providing Inclusive and Shared Spaces and Places</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Key Theme - Promoting the Benefits of Sport and Physical Activity</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Cross-cutting Principles</b>	<b>21</b>
Developing Inclusive, Shared Communities	21
Developing Capacity and Governance in Sport and Physical Activity	21
Developing National and International Linkages	22
<b>How to Respond to the Consultation Process</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>25</b>
Appendix 1: Key Messages from the Pre-consultation Research	26
Appendix 2: Sport and Physical Activity Ecosystem	33
Appendix 3: Proposed Sport and Physical Activity Framework	34
Appendix 4: Privacy notice	36

# Introduction

The Department for Communities is consulting on the development of a new Sport and Physical Activity Strategy for Northern Ireland to cover the next 10 years and beyond.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had, and continues to have, very considerable effects on the physical and mental well-being of all. The importance of people of all ages and all abilities being more active has never been so keenly felt and it is in this context that we look to maximise the benefits of sport and physical activity as we look towards recovery.

The new Strategy is being developed by the Department for Communities acting on behalf of all the departments of the Northern Ireland Executive. The aim is to provide a flexible strategic framework for a cross-departmental, ambitious, and comprehensive approach to promoting participation and excellence in sport and physical activity.

The new Strategy brings a welcome and needed emphasis on physical activity. Fundamentally there is an inextricable link between sport and physical activity, a factor recognised by stakeholders who examined with us the broad glossary of terms and definitions linked with sport and who agreed that sport in its broadest context represents ‘all forms of physical activity which, through casual or organised participation,

aimed at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels.’

The definition for physical activity was agreed as ‘any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that requires energy expenditure to improve or preserve physical or mental health or to achieve a social or other benefit’.

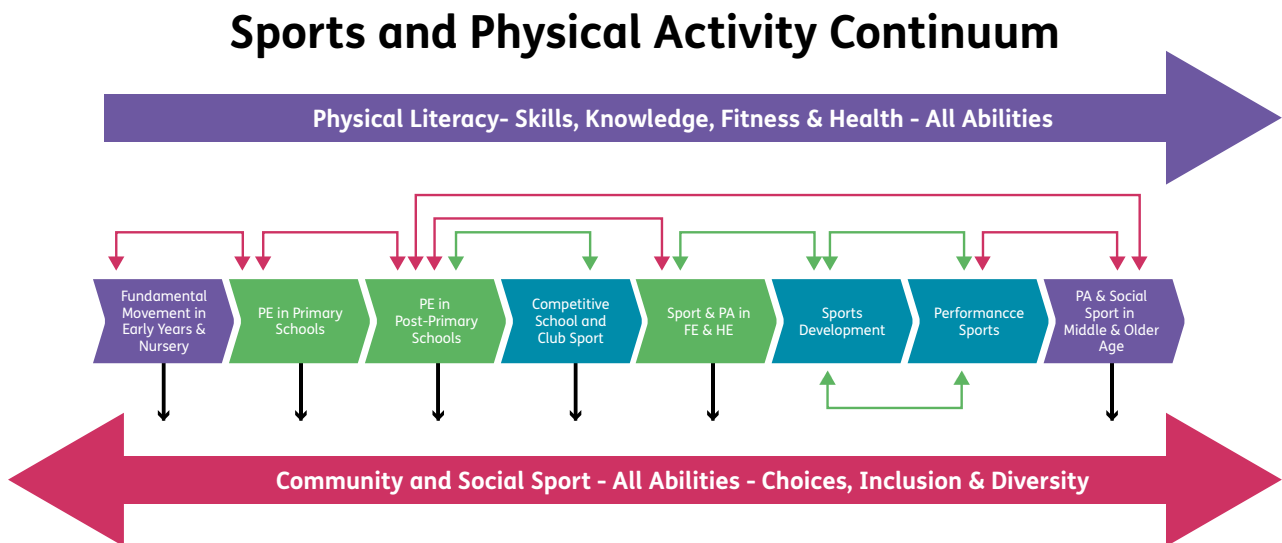
Critical factors underpin participation in sport or physical activity, such as accessibility for everybody, particularly for children and young people, alongside health, safety, fairness and tolerance and high ethical values. These factors, along with the overarching principle of physical literacy, promote the capability of fostering personal self-fulfilment at all levels in sport and physical activity.

Figure 1 provides a description of the sport and physical activity continuum as outlined through the various conversations with stakeholders during the pre-consultation phase. This describes the importance of physical activity from birth and throughout life to older age and for all abilities. It recognises the importance of choice and the building of confidence, skills and knowledge to engage. It examines the types of steps taken from learning fundamental movement skills in Early Years and Key Stage 1 at primary school through to the gradual engagement in competitive sport in Key Stage 2 at primary school and post

primary school or at club level. It recognises that not all people take part in competitive sport but ideally should remain engaged in some type of physical activity for the sake of their physical or mental health or to achieve a social or other benefit throughout their lives. The continuum also recognises the importance of volunteers, officials, coaches etc. in sports development. It recognises the importance of performance sport undertaken

by elite athletes and para athletes. After an elite athlete's engagement in competitive sport ideally they should continue to engage in sport development roles or engage in their community or in social sport acting as a role model and inspiring others to follow. Social or community sport should be available for all ages across their whole life and for all abilities with choices and inclusion and diversity at their heart.

**Figure 1: Sport and Physical Activity Continuum**



The development of the proposed strategic framework has been the subject of in-depth pre-consultation research and stakeholder engagement. This has been carried out virtually during the period of the pandemic and has involved over 70 focus groups with sports and physical activity stakeholders, involving over 300 participants, including the sports sector, councils, young people and youth organisations, public bodies including the education and health sectors and individuals from all the Section 75 groups.

This rich data source has been used to inform and develop the structure of this consultation document in the Key Themes and Cross-Cutting Principles. A summary of key messages from the pre-consultation engagement and research is provided at **Appendix 1** with a full report on the research being available from the Department.

This pre-consultation research and engagement have informed the following **proposed Vision** for the new Strategy:

‘Lifelong involvement in sport and physical activity leads to an active, healthy, resilient and inclusive society which recognises and values both participation and excellence.’

It is proposed that the final Strategy be delivered under **6 Key Themes** which reflect the key messages we have heard to date:

- Recovery from the impact of the pandemic on sport and physical activity;
- Promoting participation, inclusion, and community engagement;
- Promoting excellence in sport;
- The importance of partnership and integration;
- Providing inclusive and shared spaces and places; and
- Promoting the benefits of sport and physical activity.

These 6 Key Themes will be underpinned by **3 Cross-Cutting Principles**:

- Developing inclusive, shared communities;
- Developing capacity and governance in sport and physical activity; and
- Developing national and international linkages.

The new Strategy provides a framework within which the Key Themes and Cross-Cutting Principles can be developed and effected over time. A detailed Sport and Physical Activity Cross-departmental Action Plan will be developed to support delivery, setting out the steps which will be taken to implement the strategic priorities for the initial 3 year period.

Through this consultation process we are seeking your views of the proposed vision, themes, and cross-cutting principles, and that we have heard correctly what those who have already engaged with us have told us.

We want you to tell us if the proposed Framework for the Strategy is representative of what you feel are the key issues facing sport and physical activity here. Does this approach capture the need for recovery, the potential for growth and for developing opportunities that deliver the real benefits

derived from getting more people, more active, more of the time? Does the framework demonstrate an ambitious future? Can you see where your club, organisation or chosen sport or physical activity fits in?

Your feedback is essential to the development of a new Sport and Physical Activity Strategy that meets the needs of us all for the next 10 years and beyond.

# The Sport and Physical Activity Ecosystem

We are acutely aware that the structure of sport and physical activity is varied and complex, that the sector has and continues to face significant challenges as a result of the pandemic and that it requires clear direction and support as it recovers.

In terms of the future development and delivery of sport and physical activity it is recognised that it is a sector that contributes to benefits beyond those of simply taking part in sport. Likewise, the benefits of sport and physical activity are multi-faceted and make a significant contribution to achieving many outcomes within the Programme for Government Draft Outcomes Framework and the Department for Communities own cross cutting themes.

The proposed strategic framework for sport and physical activity is derived from an understanding of sport and physical activity as being part of a complex wider ecosystem (as illustrated in **Appendix 2**) centred on the people, the organisations, the places, and the communities involved including: -

- Participants and non-participants;
- The places and spaces where sport and physical activity take place - Indoors and outdoors; and

- which takes account of a wide range of influencing factors which link to the wider priorities of the Executive and its Departments, the Arms-Length Bodies, and other public organisations.

All of this results in helping to make more people, more active, more of the time.

The messages from across the sporting sector and the wider community are clear. We know that we have a history of producing sporting talent and that this has been recognised by success at national and international level in sports such as gymnastics, boxing, swimming and golf. That success has come in various levels of competition including Olympic Paralympic and Special Olympic disciplines. But not all sport and physical activity is competitive in nature and for many participants it is the pleasure of taking part, the social interaction and the health benefits both mental and physical, that drives their participation.

As we aim to set the direction for delivery over the next 10 years and beyond, and to identify what success will look like over that period, it is important to establish what this complex landscape looks like and to give a sense of the interdependencies that are vital to successful delivery.



# Proposed Strategic Framework

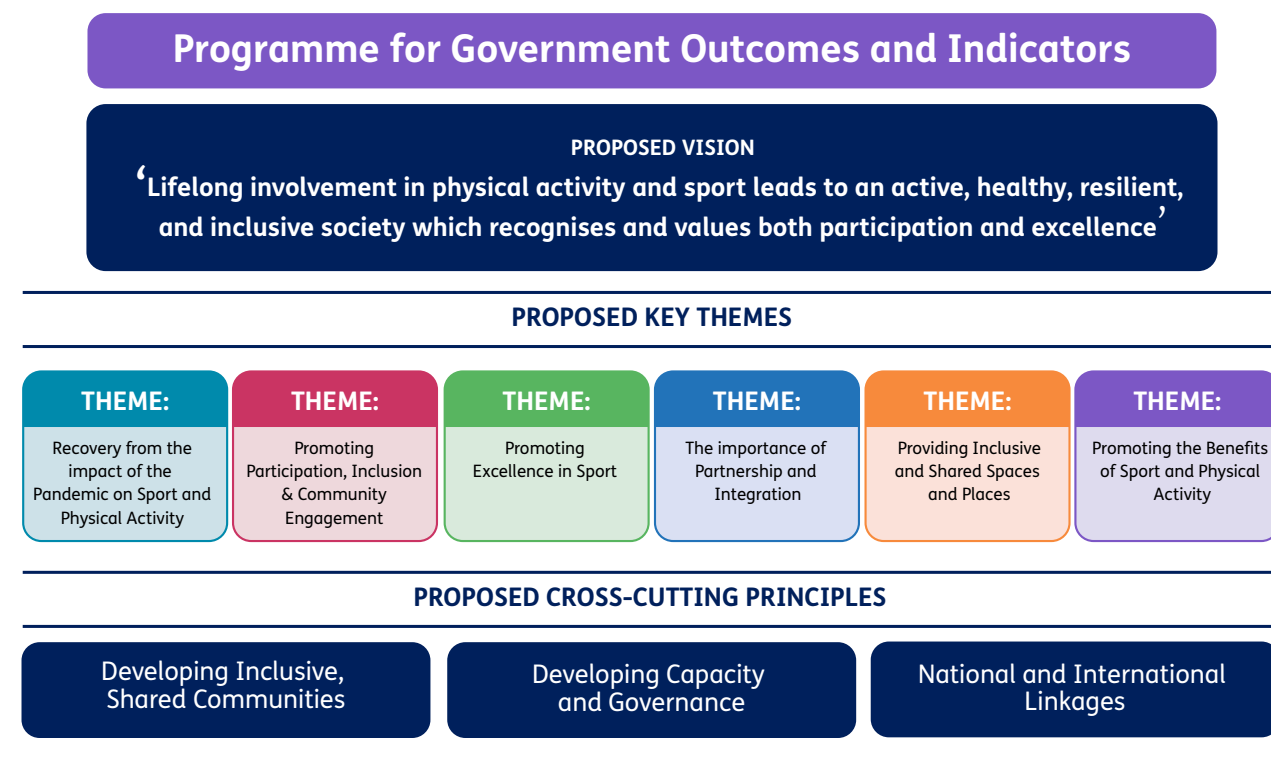
We propose the following as the strategic framework that will oversee the development and delivery of sport and physical activity for the future. This framework has emerged out of the consistency of comments provided by the wide range of respondents to a pre-consultative engagement phase held over four months from July 2020. See **Appendix 3** for the details of the full Strategic Framework.

This pre-consultative engagement and research process was carried out virtually during the period of the pandemic. As previously outlined it included over 70 focus groups with sports and physical activity stakeholders, involving over 300 participants, including the sports sector, councils, young people and youth organisations, public bodies

including the education and health sectors and individuals from all the Section 75 groups.

The following sections of this consultation document follow a clear and explanatory pattern dealing in turn with the proposed ‘Vision’ for the Strategy and identified proposed ‘Key Themes’, under which are several proposed ‘Cross-cutting Principles’ which will encourage collaborative delivery and provide clear channels and direction for the goals that will drive delivery going forward. They will be driven by the Programme for Government Outcomes and Indicators. Figure 2 below describes the proposed Vision, Themes and Cross Cutting Principles.

**Figure 2: Proposed Vision, Themes and Cross Cutting Principles**



The pre-consultative engagement and research process provided an insight into the needs of the sector and these have been developed into a number of proposed 'Goals' that reflect what delivery should look like

across both the Key Themes and the Cross Cutting Principles. Figure 3 illustrates the proposed Goals and how they link to each of the six Key Themes.

**Figure 3: Proposed Goals Under Each Theme**



# Key Theme - Recovery from the Impact of the Pandemic on Sport and Physical Activity

The Covid-19 pandemic has had major impacts on almost all sectors of the global economy and on almost all aspects of local communities and wider society. It has disrupted sport and physical activity here in ways which no one could have anticipated.

The significant impact of the Covid pandemic on sport and physical activity has been a recurring theme with almost everyone who has engaged with the Project Team over the last six months. It is recognised that any strategy for sport and physical activity will have to reflect the changing landscape and the need for a period of recovery, reset and possibly restructuring across the sector. It will also need to embrace the needs generated by an upsurge in interest around the importance of taking part in sport and physical activity, including investment in outdoor infrastructure and the importance and necessity of embracing new technologies.

## **Why is this important?**

If the sport and physical activity sector is to make a full contribution to an active, healthy, resilient, and inclusive society, it first has to recover from the damage done by the pandemic. The impact of this crisis is unprecedented in modern times and so the response, in terms of sport and physical

activity recovery, needs to involve all the stakeholders and will require a significant degree of collective, creative and innovative thinking.

## **Who has to be involved?**

This process of recovery will involve investment of time and resources by the sector's Governing Bodies, by clubs and by the public sector organisations that support sport and physical activity. It will be necessary not only to deal with the financial challenges facing sport and physical activity organisations, but it will also be important to refresh and restore leadership and volunteering structures and to rebuild membership, participation and spectator numbers.

## **Where does this Key Theme impact?**

This Key Theme is the fundamental platform for the successful implementation of the overall Strategy. A weakened, demoralised and under-resourced sector will not be able to play the strong partnership role for the development of sport and physical activity foreseen in this Strategy. As well as efforts by the sector itself, public sector organisations, such as local authorities, Government Departments and their Arms-Length Bodies as well as the private sector have a major

contribution to make. There is an opportunity to make the process itself one which leads to a healthier, more active, more resilient and more inclusive society by creating a solid foundation for recovery and growth in sport and physical activity.

### **What are the Goals?**

Following extensive engagement with stakeholders, those involved have indicated the key goals which the new Strategy should address are:

- Ensuring that the return to sport and physical activity is both safe and sustainable for all members, participants and spectators;
- Re-establishing the habit of participation in sport and physical activity across all abilities; and

- Making the sport and physical activity sectors more resilient to potential future shocks by rebuilding and developing the role of volunteers, publicising the benefits of sport and physical activity and the achievements of local people and by diversifying the sources of revenue of sports and physical activity organisations.

### **Conclusion**

The sport and physical activity sector needs to reset and the rebuilding and recovery process will be essential to putting in place a strong foundation for the delivery of the Strategy in the short, medium and long term.

# Key Theme - Promoting Participation, Inclusion and Community Engagement

While the participation rates for those engaging in sport and physical activity have risen over the last decade, including for females and those with a disability, barriers still exist and there remains a gap between the rates of participation for the population as a whole compared to those for a number of Section 75 groups. There is still much to do in increasing participation, inclusion, in closing existing gaps and in improving general levels of physical literacy.

## **Why is this important?**

A strong theme in the pre-consultation stakeholder engagement was that being involved in sport and physical activity has multiple benefits. However, you told us that many people in our communities lead sedentary lifestyles and many don't understand or realise these benefits, with physical literacy among our young and older population in particular being a concern. You told us about a range of barriers to taking part and of the importance of access to opportunities to engage, of feeling included, comfortable, supported and safe. You reflected a range of complex issues, including social, economic, educational, health, psychological, physical and cultural that influence non-participation in sport and physical activity. To increase participation,

you suggested that barriers need to be tackled in an integrated way. Providing accessible, practical, inclusive opportunities for all people of all ages and abilities across our communities, and other appropriately accessible settings, is fundamental to encouraging more people to be more active, more often.

## **Who has to be involved?**

Many structured inequalities remain which mean that those who are older, less well, with a disability, or who live in a disadvantaged area, rural communities or who are unemployed or economically inactive are significantly less likely to participate in sport and physical activity than their peers. If this Strategy is to be a success, then proactive and innovative engagement mechanisms need to be developed. Creating new or strengthening existing partnerships involving sports Governing Bodies, clubs and community organisations must be used to take forward and develop initiatives that cut across target groups. The role of our very active volunteering sector is essential to realising greater success for sport and physical activity for the future.

Improving physical literacy from a young age is the cornerstone for lifelong engagement

in sport and physical activity. Essential to this will be a commitment to exploring how to improve the way in which fundamental movement, physical literacy and physical education is managed from a young age through the school years and into adulthood.

### **Where does this Key Theme impact?**

Increasing the number of people participating in sport and physical activity by creating an inclusive sector will help reduce sedentary behaviours, help create more inclusive sports clubs and organisations, reduce obesity and non-communicable diseases, and improve mental and physical health and well-being.

The delivery of this Strategy will support the World Health Organisation (WHO) recommendations for physical activity across all age groups and diverse abilities. This is in recognition of the fact that being physically active is a critical factor in improving good mental and physical health and well-being and improved life expectancy. It is notable that up-to-date evidence shows that active lifestyles and participation in activities of even moderate intensity can prevent life threatening conditions and improve quality of life with sporting, economic, social and cultural benefits regardless of age.

### **What are the Goals?**

Following extensive engagement with stakeholders, those involved have indicated the key goals which the new strategy should address are:

- Improving physical literacy and increasing lifelong participation in sport and physical activity for all;
- Addressing the barriers to participation in sport and physical activity through co-designing programmes and initiatives in partnership with key stakeholders;
- Improving the physical and mental health and well-being of those who participate;
- Ensuring that sport and physical activity is inclusive, safe, diverse, shared and offers equality of opportunity to participate for all;
- Through a wider choice of sport and physical activity opportunities and more suitable offerings, children and young people are given the best start in life.

### **Conclusion**

Enabling lifelong enjoyment of physical activity and sport from early years to older age, and supporting and encouraging more people, immaterial of their ability, personal circumstances, or background to participate in wide ranging, inclusive sport and physical activities throughout their lives is a fundamental building block for this Strategy.

# Key Theme - Promoting Excellence in Sport

The ongoing development of a sporting sector that embraces participation by all but provides pathways for individuals to reach their full potential is recognised as a key aspect of the Strategy. We have some of the best athletes and sports teams at national and international levels in both able-bodied and para-sports who have achieved excellence and produce exceptional levels of performance, many on the world stage.

## **Why is this important?**

It is important that this Strategy provides the framework and momentum for both sustaining and further developing top-level sport. Many of you told us that there was a tension or trade-off between supporting participation and inclusion in sport and physical activity and supporting and delivering excellence. Some considered that a strategy of ‘chasing medals’ in a few sports meant that adequate resources would not be available to support participation and inclusion in sport and physical activity.

Most advocated that a well-designed support system for sport can and must support elite athletes to achieve excellence in their chosen sports. Talented athletes must be identified and supported through clearly defined development pathways. Many emphasised that those fulfilling their full potential in sports are role models who can inspire young people at the start of a sporting career, or for some, just to get more active. Athletes at the

end of their sporting careers need support as they take the next steps in their working life with mental health and wellbeing and community re-engagement highlighted as important factors.

## **Who has to be involved?**

The new Strategy needs to recognise the importance of well governed, inclusive, and diverse clubs and Governing Bodies. Inclusive and effective sports and physical activity programmes and initiatives require the recruitment, development, training and retention of staff, volunteers, coaches, administrators, finance experts, referees, sports scientists, researchers, data analysts, medics, media experts and support staff working side by side in a holistic system.

These programmes and initiatives must be supported by innovative, collaborative leaders with an understanding of the wider sector, an appreciation of the transformative power of technology and with an international perspective. Support across certain sports needs to be continually improved to ensure that emerging talent is identified, nurtured and given the best opportunities to reach its full potential. Alongside this, the current successes at international level need to lead to a continuous cycle of learning and improvement supported by the Governing Bodies, public bodies, local councils which ultimately leads to the development of local expertise and specialists.

The strategic focus on excellence extends beyond the push for medals in the narrow field of major world events to include the achievements of many athletes who strive to reach the pinnacle of their chosen sport and maximising their own performances irrespective of whether these feature on the Olympic, European or Commonwealth stages or not.

### **Where does this Key Theme impact?**

Supporting our high performing athletes at a national level or those competing at European or world events, our Olympians, and our Paralympians, is critical in order for those on the 'pathway' to achieve their full potential. That means that the appropriate support and expertise needs to be available at different stages in the development cycle and at all stages of their journey. The provision of expertise in areas such as sports science and performance coaching and in the innovative use of technology in all aspects of sport alongside the organisational structures needed to deliver excellence must be seen as a priority. The development of successful sports people is a continually evolving environment and to pause means that opportunities and talent will be wasted.

### **What are the Goals?**

Following extensive engagement with stakeholders, those involved have indicated that the key goals which the new strategy should address are:

- Improving sporting pathways that ensure that talent is recognised, and potential is realised;
- Supporting the development of a confident sport and physical activity infrastructure of clubs, governing bodies, volunteers, athletes, quality coaches, officials and leaders;
- Sustaining achievements in sport and physical activity at national and international levels through appropriate elite support; and
- Increasing community pride in the achievements of all our sporting participants.

### **Conclusion**

We should continue to support the pursuit of excellence in our leading athletes and para-athletes and sports teams by enabling them to progress along effective, clearly defined pathways as far as their ability permits at regional, national, and international levels as they progress through their sporting lifecycle.



# Key Theme - The Importance of Partnership and Integration

The new Strategy for Sport and Physical Activity should feature enhanced provisions to ensure that Government Departments, public bodies, the sector, participants, spectators, and volunteers work collaboratively to deliver the best possible outcomes for all.

## **Why is this important?**

A strong recurring theme in the pre-consultation stakeholder engagement, with both the sector and wider groups including those not currently involved in sport and physical activity, was the need to strengthen collaborative partnerships and develop integrated approaches in areas of common interest including infrastructure planning, facilities development and programming of activities. You told us that delivery channels that worked effectively under Sport Matters need now to be expanded to a whole system approach which is fundamental to turning the curve and getting more people, more active, more often.

## **Who has to be involved?**

The new Strategy needs to reinforce the need for sports Governing Bodies and clubs (representing all abilities), community organisations, stakeholder and community groups, local authorities, schools, colleges, universities and Government Departments to work together to realise the benefits of sport and physical activity for society.

A critical enabler in this will be a focus on longitudinal research, creativity and innovation, technology and new products that can enhance sport and physical activity experiences for all.

## **Where does this theme impact?**

The strengthening of partnership working and delivering improved integrated approaches to sports development, outdoor activities, facility usage and infrastructure planning should make for better use of limited public funding and ensure that organisational barriers that can exclude people are removed for those participating in, or interested in participating, in sport and physical activity.

## **What are the Goals?**

Following extensive engagement with stakeholders those involved have indicated that the key goals which the new Strategy should address are:

- The creation of better outcomes for communities through a collaborative approach to the development of sport and physical activity using co-design and co-production and building on enhanced partnership structures locally, regionally, nationally and internationally;
- The future outcomes for communities in terms of sport and physical activity will be significantly improved by a more

focused approach to co-design and co-production of support, initiatives and programmes;

- The strengthening of sport and physical activity partnerships must take place at local regional, national and international levels as well as cut across traditional boundaries/structures; and
- The creation of partnerships and better integration delivering an increased number of shared facilities across sports, clubs, schools and communities.

### **Conclusion**

The principles of partnership and integration should be at the centre of all future investment decisions in new and refurbished sports and physical activity facilities and programmes.

# Key Theme - Providing Inclusive and Shared Spaces and Places

The physical space requirements for sport and physical activities range from access to the natural or built environment, for example for walking and playing, through to community sports facilities and onto highly specialised facilities for training and competing in structured sports. They also include the need for high quality facilities developed to internationally recognised specifications that provide for the needs of those performing at, or striving to perform at national, international and world level competition. Councils will have a particularly important role in shaping this on the ground given their role in planning and community planning.

## **Why is this important?**

Sport and physical activity will not fulfil its potential to contribute to an active, healthy, resilient and inclusive society if the sector does not have access to suitable venues, facilities, spaces, and places. The absence of facilities or the existence of poor quality, inaccessible facilities or outdoor recreational spaces will limit participation in sport and physical activity, which in turn will contribute to a failure of society to benefit from the positive impacts including the economic, social, educational and health benefits that greater participation can deliver. So, for example, making infrastructure inclusive, safe and attractive, and where possible

integrating it with active travel plans, can provide the momentum for many to leave the car behind and adopt a more active lifestyle. This will contribute to the Government's Net Zero Carbon targets.

## **Who has to be involved?**

Sports Governing Bodies, their clubs, councils and other sporting and community organisations that facilitate participation in sport and physical activity are central to this Key Theme. However, the full benefit of venues and facilities will not be realised unless there is a genuine shift towards creating spaces that are shared, inclusive and accessible to all. There is, therefore, a need for cooperation between and within sports and across communities, including greater access to schools, council facilities and other publicly funded facilities. This can only be delivered by building sound partnerships and having an integrated approach when planning and developing facilities, whether that be stadiums, club facilities, walking trails or community spaces.

## **Where does this Key Theme impact?**

New, modernised, or repurposed, quality, shared, inclusive, affordable and accessible facilities and venues will open up new opportunities for participation in sport and physical activity at both a local community level, across council areas and at a regional

level. This must include the provision of environmentally friendly, sustainable facilities and venues that maximise the use of technology to enhance the user experience. You said that the Strategy needs to realise the transformational power of technology in sport and physical activity for participants, spectators, officials, policy makers and funders.

### **What are the Goals?**

Following extensive engagement with stakeholders, those involved have indicated that the key goals which the new Strategy should address are:

- Everyone has access to inclusive, shared, welcoming and high-quality indoor and outdoor sports and physical activity infrastructure;
- A safe, economically and environmentally sustainable local and regional sports and physical activity infrastructure; and
- Our sports and physical activity sector and infrastructure are enabled by innovative and emerging technologies.

### **Conclusion**

Investment from a range of sources in new, modernised, or repurposed, quality indoor and outdoor sport and physical activity spaces and places should prioritise projects which are high quality, shared, inclusive, accessible, safe, eco-friendly and sustainable. This will encourage increased participation in sport and physical activity leading to an active, healthy, resilient, and inclusive society. New, existing or repurposed high quality indoor and outdoor facilities and high quality venues must embrace new technology and be environmentally friendly.

# Key Theme - Promoting the Benefits of Sport and Physical Activity

As part of the wider efforts to realise the social, mental, and physical wellbeing and economic benefits of a high level of participation in sport and physical activity it is important to promote those benefits.

## **Why is this important?**

Increasing participation in sport and physical activity will contribute to the development of an active, healthy, resilient, and inclusive society. A significant proportion of the population does not currently engage in sport or physical activity on a regular basis and research shows that females, those with disabilities and those from socially deprived areas and many rural communities are less likely to be active through sport and physical activity.

There is evidence that an inactive lifestyle can lead to physical and mental ill health as well as having a detrimental impact on educational attainment. Encouraging a lifelong involvement in sport and physical activity brings with it cognitive strengths, improved academic attainment and achievements as well as healthy growth, physical development and sustained wellbeing for children and young people. It also supports positive social outlooks, healthier ageing, greater community involvement and improved quality of life, especially as we move through the different aging cycles to old age.

You told us that we need to make sure our communications and messaging are easy to understand for all and is available in a range of formats including appropriate social media platforms.

Where sedentary behaviours and a 'no interest' attitude to sport and physical activity are obvious risks to health and wellbeing and a limitation to the potential growth of social and competitive sport, becoming and staying active changes individual, family and group outlooks on what can be achieved and enjoyed.

## **Who has to be involved?**

Promoting the health benefits of sport and physical activity to everyone, regardless of a person's abilities, disability, community background or economic status, has to be an important element of the new Strategy and must include a focus on increasing participation amongst those who are currently physically inactive, take little exercise or those at risk of becoming physically inactive in the future.

The shift to a more active society must be through a collective effort involving multiple Government Departments, their Arms-Length Bodies, Councils, sports Governing Bodies, the voluntary and community sector, the private sector and individuals.

### **Where does this Key Theme impact?**

This theme will impact at every level of society as a better understanding of the challenges people face, alongside improved awareness and education, can have a significant impact on education, health and community wellbeing. This theme supports many of the other themes identified through engagement with stakeholders. Promoting the benefits of a more active society and removing barriers to participation will create a more vibrant and inclusive sport and physical activity sector enjoyed by more diverse groups of participants.

### **What are the Goals?**

Following extensive engagement with stakeholders, both those involved in sport and physical activity and those who have been sedentary in their lifestyle have indicated that the key goals which the new Strategy should address are:

- Increased awareness of the benefits of participation in sport and physical activity;

- Positive attitudinal behavioural change, resulting in more people becoming more active; and
- An improved evidence base supported by enhanced research about the benefits of sport and physical activity to local communities

### **Conclusion**

Promoting the benefits of participation in sport and physical activity both for the individual and for society as a whole is a key public health priority which will be given greater weight in the new Strategy for Sport and Physical Activity. Embedding physical literacy early in the education journey is crucial. A fitter population in the future is critical to help tackle significant health issues including obesity, mental health, and an aging population. It will also bring benefits to the sport and physical activity sector through increased participation rates, potentially more young people realising their full potential and sustainability with prolonged involvement by more people.

# Cross-cutting Principles

In the course of the pre-consultation research with stakeholders three important cross-cutting principles for the new Strategy for Sport and Physical Activity were identified. These cross-cutting principles will underpin the delivery of the new strategic framework.

## **Developing Inclusive, Shared Communities**

The Executive is committed to developing an inclusive society in which people of all ages and backgrounds are respected and supported, a society which has no barriers to people living long, healthy, prosperous, and fulfilling lives. A new cross cutting strategic approach to developing sport and physical activity has a role to play in the delivery of these ambitions.

The principles of partnership and integration, of inclusion and community engagement, and of co-design and co-production with central and local government, structured sports organisations and community partners are essential. Providing inclusive and shared spaces and places as well as developing a creative, forward thinking inclusive and diverse workforce that promotes inclusion, will contribute to ensuring that sport and physical activity becomes more shared, inclusive, and diverse and that the existing barriers to participation in sport and physical activity are further reduced. This in turn will lead to a more active, healthy, resilient, and inclusive society.

Structural inequalities and the impact of poverty on participation are recognised as significant barriers to being active. The need to engage innovatively across all section 75 target groups and across rural and urban disadvantaged areas is an important aspect of the future strategic direction.

## **Developing Capacity and Governance in Sport and Physical Activity**

At the centre of most sport and physical activity there are Governing Bodies and clubs which rely heavily on volunteers both for their future development and for their day-to-day operations such as coaching, administrators, officials, medics etc. Those volunteers have many other demands on their time and are an important resource which must be valued, developed, trained, rewarded and incentivised.

It will be important to continue to develop the capacity of clubs and Governing Bodies to manage their existing activities to the highest standards of corporate governance and to identify, develop and deliver new initiatives that sustain and develop their sport. New technology and innovative funding mechanisms will be important for the future sustainability of sport and physical activity.

There is a need to support the dissemination of best practice in these areas both within and across different forms of sport and physical activity. The sharing of knowledge, resources, expertise, and experience is

fundamental to the future wellbeing of the sector. A more joined up approach will contribute to the creation of a more agile, adaptable and progressive sport and physical activity sector based on shared values and collaboration to achieve shared goals.

### **Developing National and International Linkages**

Competitive sport here is unique and complex in that some sports and athletes are in the UK system, with some operating on an all-island basis and others operating within Northern Ireland. Athletes can compete for Team GB or for Team Ireland while also competing for Northern Ireland at some competitions. Governing Bodies, their clubs and athletes compete at local, national and international levels and regularly achieve notable successes which in turn creates a sense of pride locally.

Competing and being successful at various levels also provides great opportunities to build relationships nationally and internationally which benefit not just local sport but can have a much wider economic and societal impact. The potential for building networks that contribute to improving sporting performance, infrastructure, investment, and access to technology will, if realised not only benefit sport but will also impact positively on all our communities.

Strong and effective linkages have an important role to play in ensuring that we are recognised as a progressive, welcoming, competitive and attractive place capable of hosting world class sporting events.

### **What are the Goals?**

Following extensive engagement with stakeholders, those involved have indicated that the key goals which the new Strategy should address are:

- Supporting Sport and Physical Activities to be more inclusive and diverse while reducing the barriers to participation and ensuring the participation gaps for specific target groups continue to narrow;
- Developing an agile, well governed, adaptable and progressive sport and physical activity infrastructure, which is collaborative, driven by evidence and enabled by transformative technology; and
- Ensuring that Northern Ireland is recognised as a competitive and attractive place of choice for world class events with high standards of sporting governance and integrity.

### **Conclusion**

These cross-cutting principles will underpin the delivery of the wider sport and physical activity strategy. They will be reflected in the key themes where appropriate and provide a strong foundation on which those themes will be delivered through the new Strategy.



# How to Respond to the Consultation Process

The best way to respond to this consultation is online, through our survey questionnaire which can be accessed here:

**<https://tinyurl.com/SportPaDfC>**

A copy of the survey questionnaire is also available for you to download at the following link:

**<https://consultations.nidirect.gov.uk/dfc-analytical-services-unit/sport-and-physical-activity-strategy/>**

Completed hard copy survey questionnaires and general written responses can be sent to us by:

**Email:**  
**[strategy2020@communities-ni.gov.uk](mailto:strategy2020@communities-ni.gov.uk)**

Or

**Post:**  
**Sports and Physical Activity Consultation**  
Department for Communities  
Causeway Exchange  
1-7 Bedford Street  
Belfast  
County Antrim  
BT2 7EG

Easy read and children's versions of this consultation will be made available on request.

More information and details about the consultative events which are being set up can be found on the Department for Communities website - **<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/consultations/consultation-new-strategy-sport-and-physical-activity>**

Responses to this consultation are invited until 11.59pm on 23 April 2021.

We look forward to hearing from you and are keen to engage with you. If you want to speak to a member of the Team about the new Strategy or the approach being taken, or if you or a group you are involved with would like to participate in an engagement event, please do let us know.

**Note – Due to COVID-19 restrictions, all engagement activities will be conducted using a virtual platform.**

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# Appendices

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## Appendix 1:

# Key Messages from the Pre-consultation Research

The following is a summary of what you told us during the pre-consultation stakeholder engagement process for the new Sport and Physical Activity Strategy. We facilitated over 70 focus groups, spoke with over 300 participants, including the sports sector, councils, young people and youth organisations, public bodies including the education and health sectors and individuals from all the Section 75 groups. We received over 100 responses to our pre-consultation e-survey as well as receiving comments from 85 young people. Among these consultees we spoke with over 160 less active individuals which has given us a great insight into the barriers faced by many in our society to engaging in sport and physical activity. We have highlighted these findings under six key themes and three cross cutting themes.

### **Theme: Recovery from the Impact of the Pandemic on Sport and Physical Activity**

#### **You told us...**

- About the need to build more resilience into the sport and physical activity sector.
- About the need to embrace the upsurge in interest in physical activity, in particular walking and cycling, and how improvements in outdoor infrastructure such as walking and cycling routes and community trails could support this to grow.
- Some of you told us that for some their physical activity has reduced and that confidence will need to be rebuilt.
- About the debilitating effect the pandemic is having on sport and the need for support in restoring sport to its pre-pandemic condition.
- Of the need for creative and innovative thinking in how we address challenges with a focus on greater collaboration between the sector and others.
- Rebuilding confidence in the use of leisure centres and sports facilities will be important, particularly for those more vulnerable members of society.
- That there needs to be a better understanding of the sport and physical activity integrated ecosystem and how active participation impacts on areas such as health, education, justice, and the built and natural environment.
- We need to build back better by using, for example, ways of bringing new innovative forms of finance and other supports into the sport and physical activity.
- In order to recover, actions are required to make life better for society and in getting more people more of the time active.

## **Theme: Promoting Participation, Inclusion and Community Engagement**

### **You told us...**

- That embedding physical literacy at an early age is the cornerstone for healthy lifelong engagement in sport and physical activity and for sporting success.
- Ensuring competence in Fundamental Movement Skills supplemented with good advice on diet, nutrition and hydration enables young people to continue to move well throughout their lives and to develop sport specific specialised movement skills which helps them to reach their full potential in their chosen sport.
- That the PE Curriculum needs to be revised and updated, supported by a review of School Development Plan Guidance alongside enhanced human resources for PE across all school types – nursery, primary, post primary and special schools.
- Teachers identified a need for more CPD to update and supplement existing skills.
- The recent pandemic has shone a light on the need for improved and dedicated indoor PE facilities and storage. You also explained that in some areas, facilities needed significant improvements to make engagement more attractive for young people.
- There is a need for a more integrated cross departmental approach to investment in new, existing or repurposed indoor and outdoor facilities.
- That addressing sedentary behaviour was fundamental (often resulting from digital gaming, screen time culture and Covid Working From Home) but that this needed a bespoke approach.
- About the current barriers faced by many to engaging in physical activity and sport which included having the motivation, confidence, movement competence, knowledge and understanding to take part in physical activity and the need to provide accessible, barrier free opportunities for all ages and abilities that practically address these barriers.
- About the importance of inclusion and diversity in sport and physical activity. You explained that from a health and wellbeing perspective, “every contact counts” which can really make a difference to getting people more active through gentle persuasion, support, and buddying.
- That the strategy needs to focus on under-represented groups and narrow participation gaps for specific groups such as females, those with a disability, older people, those in disadvantaged areas or those who are economically inactive. Participatory co-designed approaches involving the voices of these under-represented groups is really important.
- There is a need to promote and support the development of inclusive communities where active lifestyles are promoted for everyone.
- That there is steep decline in engagement in physical activity in

schools at the age of 16 and of the need to find innovative ways of keeping young people active throughout their education right through to those in universities or on further education or apprenticeship programmes, especially females.

- You told us that young people needed to be part of the solutions so asking and including the youth voice in planning and initiative development was key to successful outcomes.
- You told us that embedding physical literacy among early years and promoting the value and importance of it to their parents was essential.
- Many young people told us that there was a lack of awareness of and opportunity to play in different types of sports and physical activities. They cited the need to widen choice to suit all needs, genders, abilities, ethnicities, and motivations from the age of 3-16 and at the 16 + transition stage. Offering all sports in all schools can contribute to cross community engagement and increase friendships. Understanding and proactively addressing barriers can increase participation rates.

### **Theme: Promoting Excellence in Sport**

#### **You told us...**

- There is a need to continue to holistically support excellence among our leading athletes and para-athletes by enabling them to progress along effective pathways as far as their ability permits in regional, national, and international events before, during and after their sporting careers.

- You told us of a need to continue to use technology as a way of enhancing progression in all aspects of sport and physical activity.
- Enhancing community/ social sport opportunities to help people get back into sport or to continue their engagement later in life after their engagement in competitive sport is really important in keeping people physically and mentally active and motivated.
- To make the sporting ecosystem work as effectively as possible you suggested that infrastructure planners, including councils, should work together and take a co-design and co-production approach to developing solutions with athletes and governing bodies, and should work across government departments to reduce bureaucracy, achieve better value for money and outcomes.
- There is a need to continue to support those who seek to participate and progress to achieve their full potential in their chosen sport at whatever level is appropriate with clear and effective pathways.
- There is a need to support wider inclusion and participation in sport in urban, rural, and disadvantaged areas where gaps currently exist and that this can be helped through the promotion of role models that demonstrate that anyone can achieve their potential.
- There was a need to care for the mental health and wellbeing of elite athletes and as such some re-calibration was needed in what is meant by success for athletes. This you suggested needed to

focus on a whole life approach to the wellbeing of athletes, helping them to plan for their careers before, during and after their sporting success and focusing on a wide range of outcomes such as their position as role models for others, their mental and physical well-being, and their role in promoting key messages through active community engagement during and after their careers.

### **Theme: The Importance of Partnership and Integration**

#### **You told us...**

- There is a need to recognise the importance and value of a collective inter-departmental, local government and community and voluntary sector cross sectoral role in addressing some of the challenging issues associated with physical inactivity and that together more can be achieved.
- A whole system, outcomes-based approach to “turning the curve” on issues such as physical inactivity was important in getting more people, more active, more often. Community Planning Partnerships and their strategic partners have an enhanced role in “joining the dots” between need and practical ways of addressing these types of issues locally.
- For an outcomes-based approach to be successful, it needs to be built on co-design and co-production with service users.
- One year funding does not enable long term planning or innovative solutions to address need. There is potential for

the development of new collaborative / partnership funding mechanisms with a focus on social value from an early stage.

- Many of you told us about the existing partnerships and initiatives upon which success could be built and the importance of leaders who drive these partnerships having a common purpose - a focus on understanding complex and interconnected problems that cross boundaries and about which collaboration could contribute.
- That in order to understand the difference that initiatives were making there needed to be ongoing connectivity with Universities and FE colleges with a focus on longitudinal research, creativity and innovation that can enhance sport and physical activity experiences for all, including new products.

### **Theme: Providing Inclusive and Shared Spaces and Places**

#### **You told us...**

- That modernising and future proofing existing facilities is a key requirement in ensuring that the sports and physical activity infrastructure is attractive to users and makes these facilities fit for purpose and more ecofriendly.
- We can no longer afford to duplicate club, school and local authority facilities and that co-location of facilities with schools, councils and other public sector bodies can reduce duplication, increase usage and the likelihood of better outcomes.

- That providing accessible and affordable facilities that contributes to more people feeling comfortable and able to use them can really help increase participation levels.
- Multi-sport venues are important in supporting the development of and participation in less prevalent sports. You told us that some sports were not available in some areas leading to less choice for people to engage.
- Active travel is important and is often one of the first steps in getting people active and in creating habits of life, but that in order to embrace it there was a need for infrastructure to be safe and attractive. This was a particular issue for rural areas and more densely populated urban areas.
- Many of our natural assets – mountains, beaches, rivers, forests etc. are underutilised by local people for the purposes of getting people more active.
- There was a need to promote more inclusive access to outdoor spaces and places and build skills in their use in particular land and water-based infrastructure (green and blue). A link with the Community Plans and the new Council Local Development Plans was cited as an important link.
- Just over 1.8 million people live here and while it would be ideal to have multiple high-performance centres that would make accessibility easier, many felt it was important to build on the existing high-performance centre at UU with its existing outreach centres and build on its success.
- However, there was a call for Multi-sports Regional Participation Centres that could be led by one sport, but which could also encompass other less prevalent sports as a way of widening access and choice to more people.
- We needed to ensure that more of our existing or new spaces are open and welcoming to all and supportive to newcomers and are age and ability proofed.
- About the importance of using technology to enhance spectator experiences at our venues and facilities.

### **Theme: Promoting the Benefits of Sport and Physical Activity**

#### **You told us...**

- That promoting greater participation in sport and physical activity is a key public health priority and has a role to play in addressing or reducing the incidence of non-communicable diseases as well as keeping people mentally and physically healthy.
- Clear, consistent public health messaging, that is social media friendly, is important.
- That promoting role models of excellence, and those on the way to it, can inspire people to aspire to and achieve greatness in sport.
- That promoting role models of those who participate in community sport and physical activity can inspire people to get more active and stay active.
- As so much of society uses mobile devices and communicates via social



media, a technology driven information and promotional approach should be used to engage people with key motivational messages that encourage movement and activity. This should be supplemented with more traditional communications channels like TV ads to ensure all parts of society can access these key messages.

- That the sector needs to demonstrate more effectively the economic, social, educational, health, environmental and cultural benefits of engagement in sport and physical activity.
- Promoting this place as a national and international sporting venue can contribute to wider economic and social benefits.

### **Cross Cutting Principle: Developing Inclusive Shared communities**

#### **You told us...**

- That greater cooperation between clubs in different sports on a cross community basis can contribute to more inclusive communities.
- Building on existing cross community multi-purpose local community hubs for sport and physical activity would enable greater entry level opportunities for those engaging or re-engaging in sport or physical activity.
- In order to really increase participation rates, addressing structural inequalities and poverty needs to be a priority.
- Many Section 75 groups with whom we engaged in the pre-consultation process (such as older women and

men, LGBTQ+ communities, black and minority ethnic communities, minority faith communities, young people, those with a disability (e.g. physical, sensory, learning), those with dependents, looked after children, travellers, carers, those in rural or urban disadvantaged areas), face multiple barriers to engagement in physical activity or sport. There is a need to develop local inclusive sports and physical activity partnerships with these groups to co-design and co-produce solutions.

- Sport and physical activity contribute to achieving wider outcomes (e.g., health education, justice). There is a need to recognise this instrumental role in developing more cohesive communities.
- Developing a creative, forward thinking, inclusive and diverse workforce that promotes inclusion is essential to the success of the sport and physical activity ecosystem.
- For inclusion to be achieved, affordable community facilities are required – incentives to encourage better use of facilities with appropriate in-house supports for all abilities is a necessity – this requires joined up thinking with other departments.

### **Cross Cutting Principle: Developing Capacity and Governance in Sport and Physical Activity**

#### **You told us...**

- Recruiting, developing, training, and retaining high quality volunteers, coaches, leaders, and specialists at all levels in the sport and physical activity

ecosystem will contribute to success. You told us that where gaps in some skills and that these should be addressed to create a robust, forward looking, and agile ecosystem.

- Ongoing support for governing bodies and clubs is still a requirement but with a focus on greater collaboration and networking and the sharing of expertise between clubs and governing bodies and across different sports.
- Recognising the growth and value of e-sports needs to be tempered with the fact that many of these are sedentary in nature.
- Volunteers are crucial to the sustainability of sport and physical activity but there is a need to avoid putting further and unnecessary bureaucratic burdens on clubs and volunteers.
- The sector needs to embrace the transformational impact of technology and to be more ambitious and visionary.
- That ensuring financial and environmental sustainability of sport and physical activity was really important and as such innovative financing should be examined more fully.
- That the sector needed to embrace its role in helping to achieve Government's Net Zero Carbon objective.
- That quality assurance of clubs and governing bodies was important from safeguarding through to coaching and from fundraising through to talent identification.

- That evidence-based planning was important and can drive change. As such a central portal that enables agile data collection, collation, analysis and reporting on outcomes is crucial.

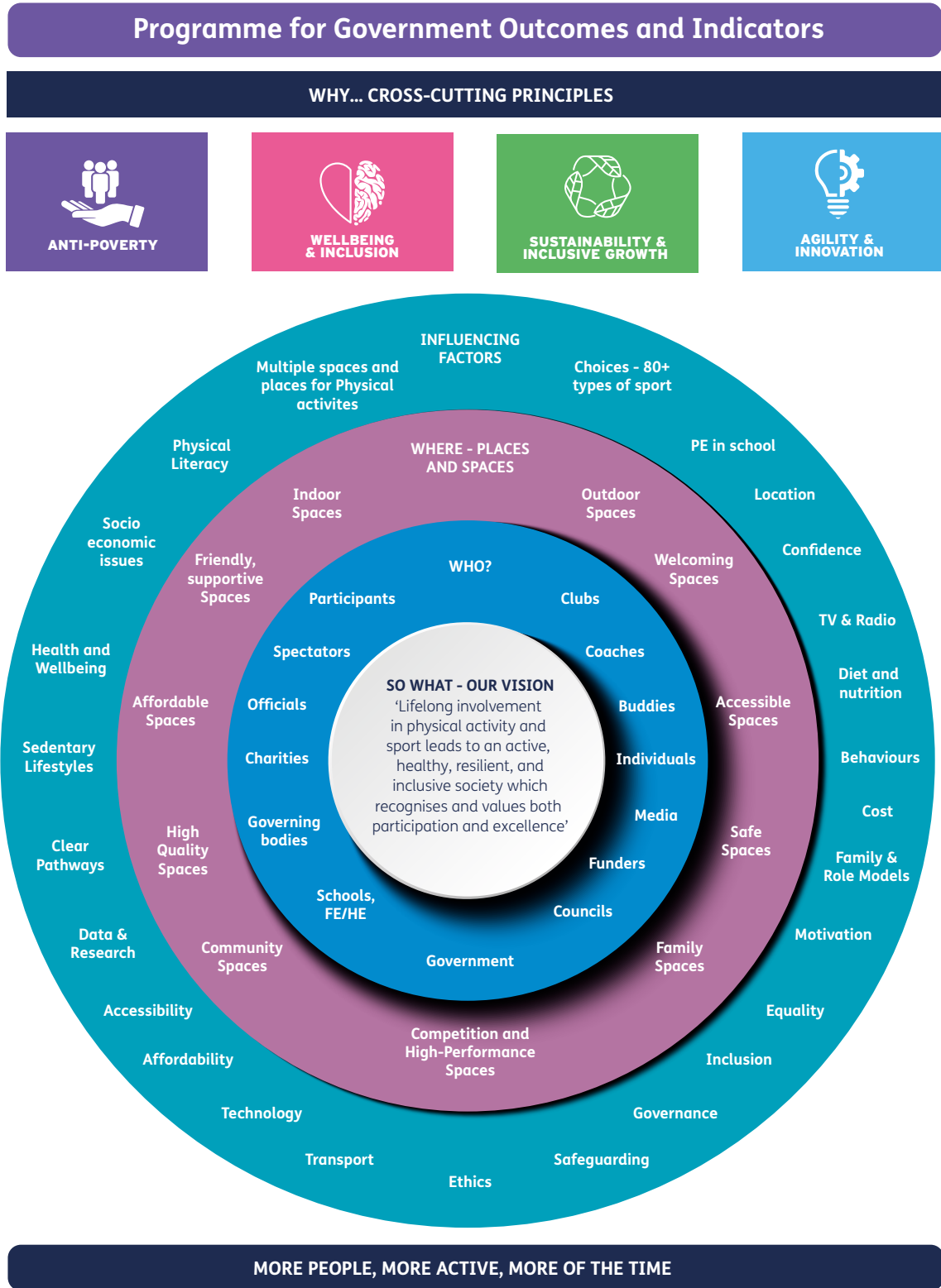
### **Cross Cutting Principle: Developing National and International linkages**

#### **You told us...**

- Due to the unique constitutional position of this place, sports men and women can compete for the Great Britain and Republic of Ireland in the Olympic or Paralympic Games and in other sporting competitions. This brings added complexity but also opportunities.
- Maximising existing national and international networking opportunities through our engagement at National, Commonwealth, and Olympic Games will help us raise our profile as a place to invest and do business. Developing these international links to compensate for the impact of Brexit is even more important than before. Strong leadership is required.
- Attracting world class sporting events to Northern Ireland can bring great economic and social benefits and we should continue to prioritise this moving forward.
- We should continue to learn from the experiences of others and help others learn from us.

## Appendix 2: Sport and Physical Activity Ecosystem

### Sports and Physical Activity Ecosystem



### Appendix 3: Proposed Sport and Physical Activity Framework

## Programme for Government Outcomes and Indicators

#### PROPOSED VISION

‘Lifelong involvement in physical activity and sport leads to an active, healthy, resilient, and inclusive society which recognises and values both participation and excellence’

#### PROPOSED KEY THEMES

THEME:	THEME:	THEME:	THEME:	THEME:	THEME:
Recovery from the impact of the Pandemic on Sport and Physical Activity	Promoting Participation, Inclusion & Community Engagement	Promoting Excellence in Sport	The importance of Partnership and Integration	Providing Inclusive and Shared Spaces and Places	Promoting the Benefits of Sport and Physical Activity

#### PROPOSED CROSS-CUTTING PRINCIPLES

Developing Inclusive, Shared Communities	Developing Capacity and Governance	National and International Linkages
Sport and Physical Activity is more inclusive and diverse while barriers have been reduced and participation gaps further narrowed	An agile, adaptable, & progressive sport and physical activity infrastructure which is collaborative and driven by evidence	NI is recognised as a competitive and attractive place of choice for world class events with high standards of sporting governance & integrity

#### DEPARTMENTAL CROSS - CUTTING THEMES

 <p><b>ANTI-POVERTY</b></p>	 <p><b>WELLBEING &amp; INCLUSION</b></p>	 <p><b>SUSTAINABILITY &amp; INCLUSIVE GROWTH</b></p>	 <p><b>AGILITY &amp; INNOVATION</b></p>
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## PROPOSED GOALS FOR EACH THEME

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### RECOVERY FROM THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

A safe and sustainable return to sport and physical activity for all involved  
Recovered level of participation in sport and physical activity, sports clubs and opportunities  
We have a more resilient sport and physical activity sector

### PROMOTING PARTICIPATION, INCLUSION & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Improved physical literacy and increased lifelong participation in sport and physical activity for all  
Addressing the barriers to participation in sport and physical activity through co-designing programmes and initiatives  
Improved physical and mental health and well being  
Sport and physical activity is inclusive, safe, diverse, shared and offers equality of opportunity to participate for all  
Children and young people are given the best start in life through sport and physical activity opportunities

### PROMOTING EXCELLENCE IN SPORT

Improved sporting pathways that ensure that talent is recognised and potential is realised  
Confident, strong, and well supported clubs, volunteers, athletes, quality coaches, officials and leaders  
Sustained achievements in sport and physical activity at national and international levels  
Increased community pride in the achievements of all our sporting participants

### THE IMPORTANCE OF PARTNERSHIP AND INTEGRATION

Better outcomes for communities through a collaborative approach to the development of sport and physical activity  
Outcomes for communities are improved by a focus on co-design and co-production  
Strengthened sports and physical activity partnerships at local, regional, national and international level  
An increasing proportion of our facilities are shared across sports, clubs, schools and communities

### PROVIDING INCLUSION AND SHARED SPACES AND PLACES

Everyone has access to inclusive, shared, welcoming and high-quality sports and physical activity infrastructure  
A safe, economically and environmentally sustainable local and regional sports and physical activity infrastructure  
Our sports and physical activity sector and infrastructure are enabled by innovative and emerging technologies

### PROMOTING THE BENEFITS OF SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Increased awareness of the benefits of participation in sport and physical activity  
Positive attitudinal and behavioural change resulting in more people becoming more active  
An improved evidence base supported by enhanced research about the benefits of sport and physical activity to local communities

## Appendix 4:

# Privacy, Confidentiality and Access to Consultation Responses

For this consultation, we may publish all responses except for those where the respondent indicates that they are an individual acting in a private capacity (e.g. a member of the public). All responses from organisations and individuals responding in a professional capacity will be published. We will remove email addresses and telephone numbers from these responses; but apart from this, we will publish them in full. For more information about what we do with personal data please see our consultation privacy notice.

Your response, and all other responses to this consultation, may also be disclosed on request in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR); however all disclosures will be in line with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA) and the UK General Data Protection Regulation.

If you want the information that you provide to be treated as confidential it would be helpful if you could explain to us why you regard the information you have provided as confidential, so that this may be considered if the Department should receive a request for the information under the FOIA or EIR.

You can also view the Departments Privacy Statement at: <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/dfc-privacy-notice>

If staff would like to discuss the content of this DPN or the template Privacy Notice please contact:

### **Departmental Data Protection Officer**

Karen McMullan  
5th Floor, Nine Lanyon  
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