

# A New Sport and Physical Activity Strategy for Northern Ireland Consultation – summary of results

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## Executive Summary:

This consultation document was developed following an extensive pre-consultation exercise involving Sports Governing Bodies, Government Departments, District Councils and community and voluntary groups. Through this consultation groups and individuals were given the opportunity to comment on key themes and a range of priorities which will inform the development of an action plan for Sport and Physical Activity in Northern Ireland.

The respondents were first asked to rate the proposed vision for the strategy. Ninety-two percent of respondents gave the vision a favourable response and 57% gave it a very favourable response. Only 6% of respondents provided an unfavourable Response to the vision statement.

A high degree of endorsement of each of the key themes with favourable responses all being in the high 80s or the 90 percent range and very favourable responses ranging from 61% to 80%. Very similar results were obtained when respondents were asked to rate both the goals proposed under each key theme and the cross cutting principles in the consultation paper.

In the light of this overwhelmingly favourable feedback from the consultation process, the Department has concluded that the draft strategy does not need to be significantly modified before being finalised as the Northern Ireland Sport and Physical Activity Strategy.

## Introduction:

The proposed strategy for Sport and Physical Activity will build on the foundations established by '*Sport Matters - The Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2009 – 2019*'.

The consultation aimed to provide a framework for a cross-departmental, ambitious and comprehensive approach to promoting participation in sport and physical activity across all sectors of our society. The consultation document was developed following an extensive pre-consultation exercise involving Sports Governing Bodies, Government Departments, District Councils and community and voluntary groups. The co-design approach helped to inform and direct the Project Team in developing the proposed vision, themes and goals as detailed in the document.

The outputs from focus groups, interviews and an on-line survey provided a particularly comprehensive, rich and up to date evidence base to support the development of the new strategic approach. It was supported by extensive review and research work undertaken by a team of independent experts.

The consultation sought views to assist with finalising the new strategy, as well as reporting back to our stakeholders asking the question:

**“This is what you’ve told us, have we heard you correctly?”**

Each of the sections of the consultation questionnaire focused on a key theme and a range of priorities which will inform the development of an action plan. (See Appendix 2). A list of those organisations that took part is available on request.

When published the new strategy will help inform and guide the Executive’s policies and priorities in relation to sport and physical activity over the next 10 years. It will enable sport and physical activity to contribute more effectively to the outcomes within the new Programme for Government and the delivery of New Decade, New Approach.

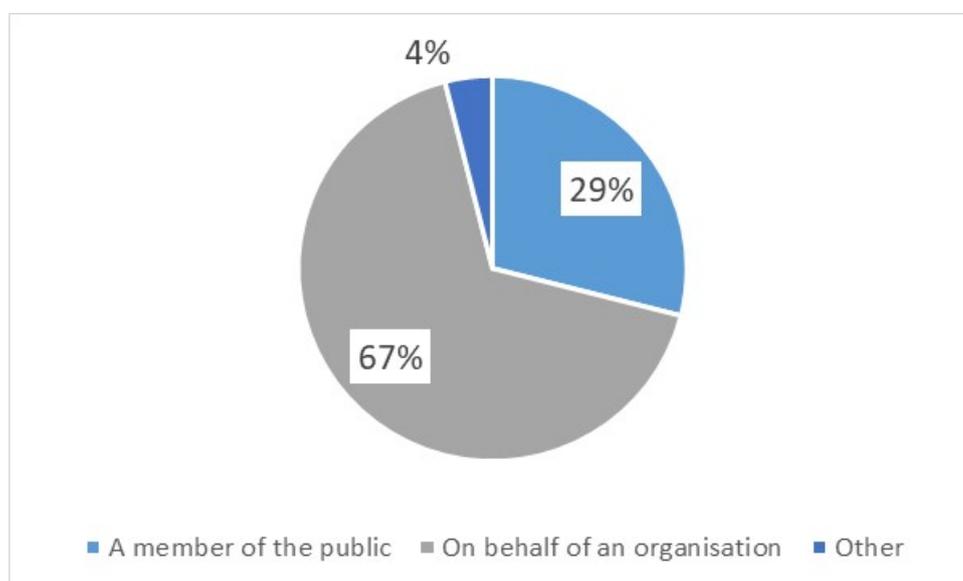
The online consultation ran from 26 February 2021 to 14 May 2021.

Previously EA Youth Service facilitated engagement events with a range of children and young people using MYVoice focus groups to gain the views of children and young people at the early stage of the strategy development. The second engagements took place during April 2021 with the purpose of hearing the views of children and young people about the draft strategy, Appendix 1 summaries the outcomes from a sample of groups across both primary and post primary age-groups. This includes children and young people from urban and rural areas across NI and from different socio-economic backgrounds. In addition, the engagement was qualitative, through the medium of focus groups. Discussion themes and questions, and detailed feedback from each group is available on request.

## Respondents:

There were 83 responses to the consultation.

**Figure 1: Type of respondents**



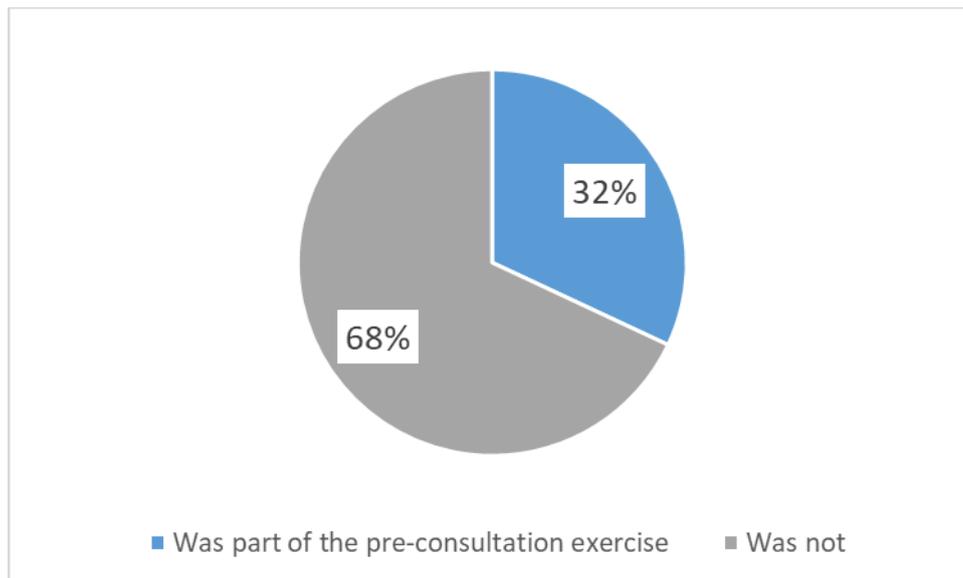
About two-thirds (67%) of responses were on behalf of an organisations, 29% were from members of the public with the remaining 4% 'other'. The other respondents were mainly academic researchers.

**Table 1: Types of Organisations**

Type of Organisation	Percentage
Sports and Physical Activity Sector	48%
Local Authority key staff	27%
Universities/ FE Colleges	11%
Government Departments	5%
Public Bodies or ALBs	5%
Community Planning Partnerships	2%
Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership	2%

The majority of organisations who responded were from the Sports and Physical Activity Sector (48%), followed by Local Authority key staff (27%) and Universities/Further Education Colleges (11%).

**Figure 2: Part of the pre-consultation exercise**



Almost a third of those who completed the online consultation (32%) had previously responded as part of the pre-consultation exercise on the strategy (e.g. completed an online survey, took part in a focus group), while the majority had not (68%).

Issues, Benefits, Barriers and Priorities:

Figure 3: "Q4 What are the current issues and opportunities facing sport and physical activity in Northern Ireland?"



Key themes for issues and opportunities included "health", "people", "play" and "facilities".

Figure 4: "Q5 What are the main benefits from more people engaging in sport and physical activity over their whole lives?"



Key themes benefits included "health", "people", "mental (health)" and "exercise".

Figure 5: "Q6 What are the main barriers (e.g., physical, practical, cultural, personal) to increased participation in sport and physical activity for people over their whole lives?"



Key barriers included "facilities", "health", "access", "time", "children" and "cost".

Figure 6: "Q7 What are the priorities for Government, given the impact of the Covid Pandemic, if more people are to be involved in sport and physical activity over the course of their life time?"

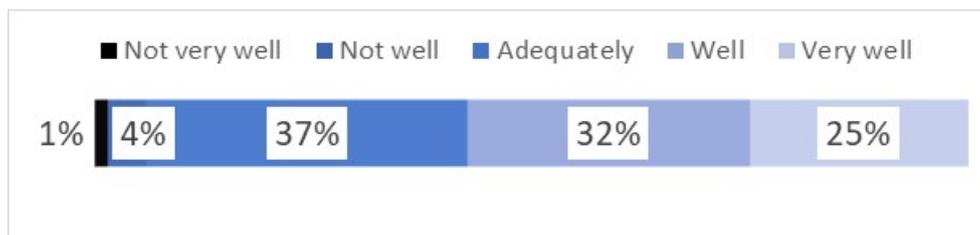


Key priorities for Government included "people", "schools", "health" and "support".

## Vision:

**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'

**Figure 7: "Q8 How well do you think that the draft vision reflects a strategy for delivering lifelong involvement in sport and physical activity?"**



More than half of respondents (57%) felt that the proposed vision reflected a strategy for delivering lifelong involvement in sport and physical activity well or very well. More than a third (37%) felt that it adequately reflected the strategy while 5% felt that it did not reflect the strategy.

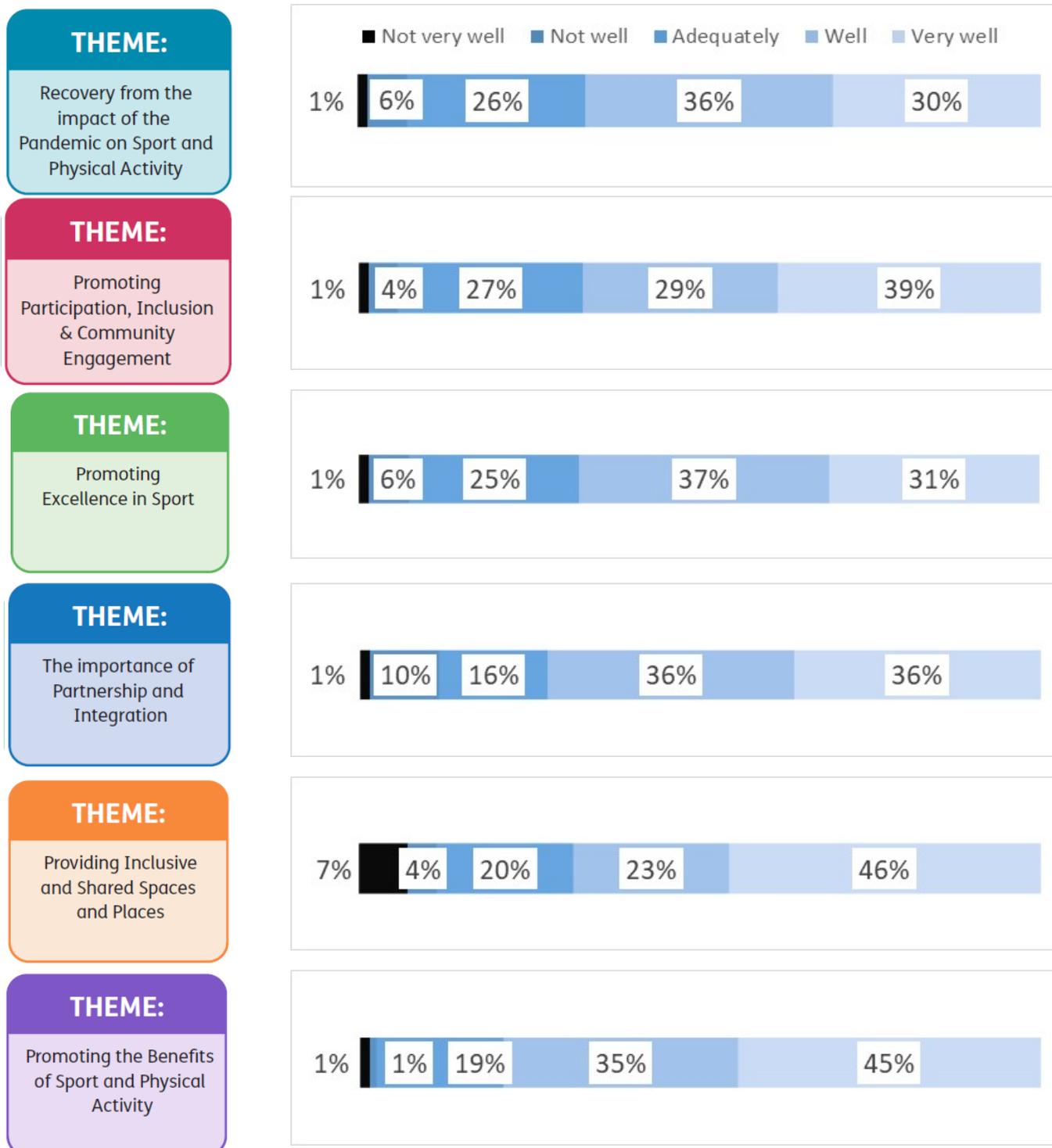
Figure 8: “Q8 How well do you think that the draft vision reflects a strategy for delivering lifelong involvement in sport and physical activity? - Why do you say that?”



Key themes for the draft vision included “people”, “active”, “involvement” and “inclusive”.

## Themes:

**Figure 9: "Q9 How well do you think that the following themes inform a strategy for delivering lifelong involvement in sport and physical activity?"**



Eight out of ten (80%) respondents felt that the “Promoting the Benefits of Sport and Physical Activity” theme informed the strategy for delivering lifelong involvement in sport and physical activity well or very well. Only 1% felt that it informed the strategy not well or not very well. Just over seven out of ten (72%) respondents felt that the “The importance of Partnership and Integration” theme informed the strategy well or very well.

Around seven out of ten respondents felt that four of the themes informed the strategy well or very well, namely, “Providing Inclusive and Shared Spaces and Places”, “Promoting Participation, Inclusion & Community Engagement”, (both 70%) “Promoting Excellence in Sport” (68%), and “Recovery from the impact of the Pandemic on Sport and Physical Activity” (66%).

Just over one in ten respondents (12%) felt that “The importance of Partnership and Integration” theme informed the strategy not well or not very well, while a similar proportion felt the same about the “Providing Inclusive and Shared Spaces and Places” theme (11%).

**Figure 10: “Q9 How well do you think that the following themes inform a strategy for delivering lifelong involvement in sport and physical activity? Why do you say that?”**

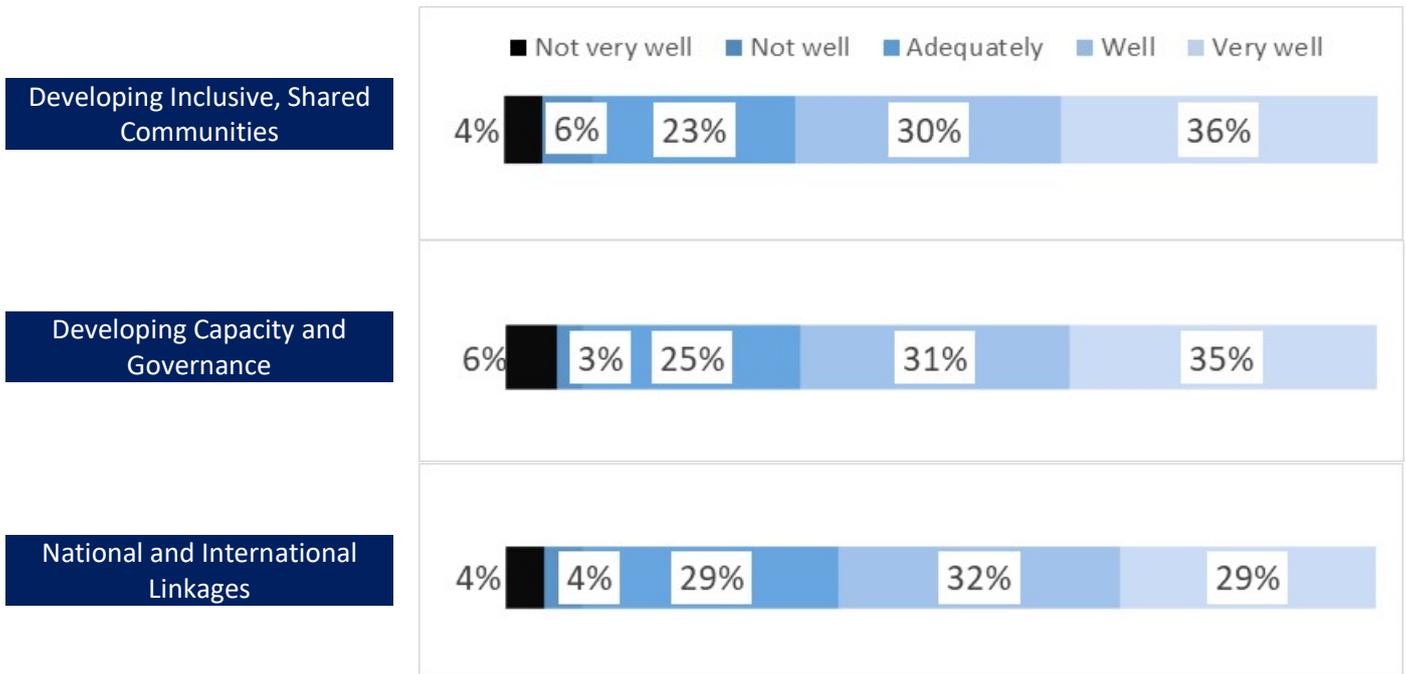


How well the themes informed the strategy included “people”, “promoting”, “benefits” and “excellence”.

## Principles:



**Figure 11: “Q10 How well do you think that the draft cross cutting principles relate to a strategy for delivering lifelong involvement in sport and physical activity?”**



Around two-thirds of respondents felt that the principles of “Developing Inclusive, Shared Communities” (67%) and “Developing Capacity and Governance” (66%) related well or very well to the strategy for delivering lifelong involvement in sport and physical activity, while 62% felt that the “National and International Linkages” principle related well or very well to the strategy.

One in ten respondents felt that the three draft principles related not well or not very well to the strategy (10% for “Developing Inclusive, Shared Communities”, 9% for both “Developing Capacity and Governance” and “National and International Linkages”).

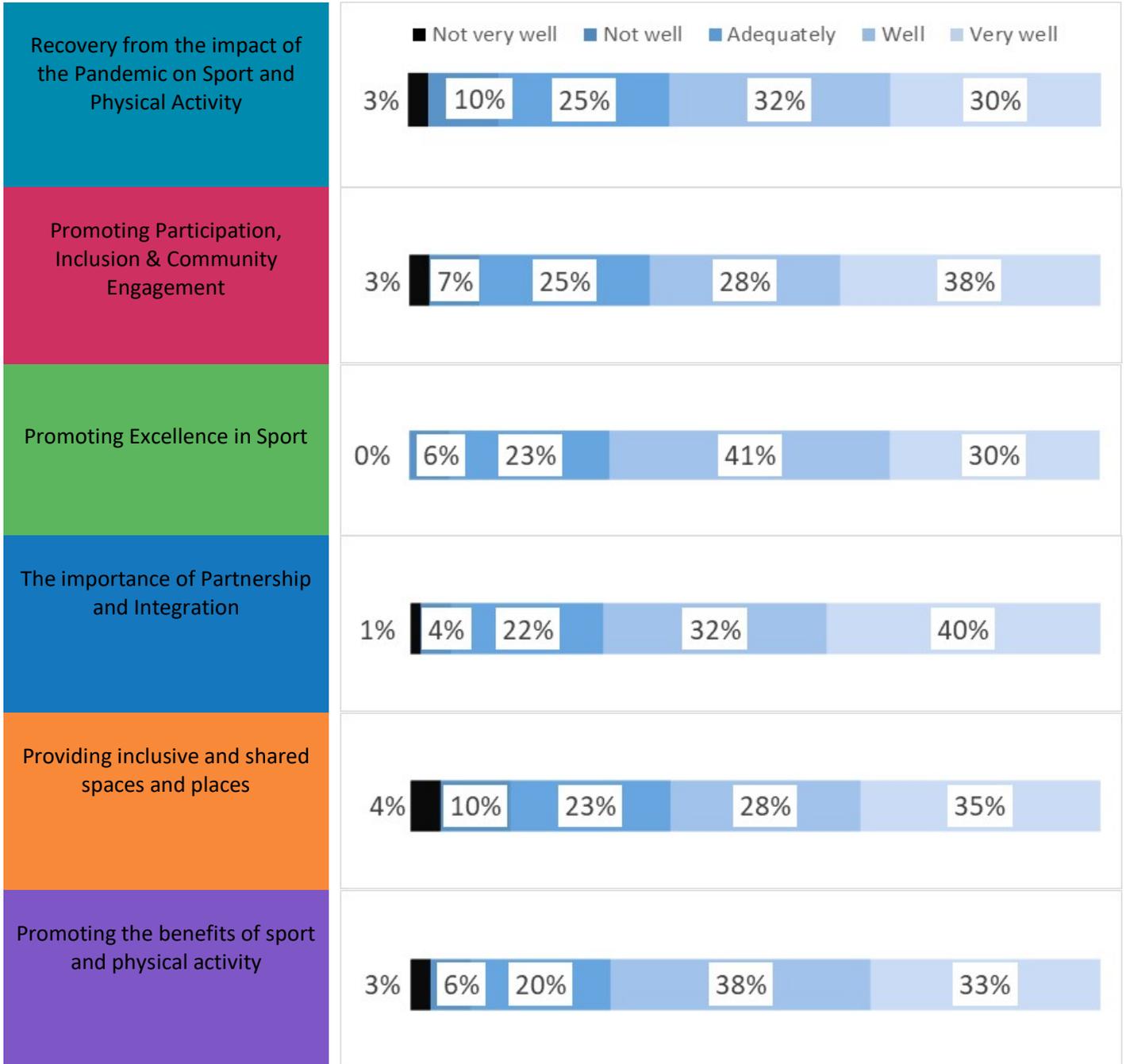
Figure 12: “Q10 How well do you think that the draft cross cutting principles relate to a strategy for delivering lifelong involvement in sport and physical activity? Why do you say that?”



Key themes for the cross cutting principles included “inclusive”, “people”, “support” and “shared”.

Goals:

Figure 13: "Q11 How well do you think that the draft goals relate to a strategy for delivering lifelong involvement in sport and physical activity?"



For how well the draft goals relate to a strategy for delivering lifelong involvement in sport and physical activity, 71% felt that three of the goals related well or very well, namely “The importance of Partnership and Integration”, “Promoting Excellence in Sport” and “Promoting the benefits of sport and physical activity”. Just under two out of three (65%) felt that the “Promoting Participation, Inclusion & Community Engagement” goal related well or very well to the strategy, with 62% feeling the same towards both the “Recovery from the impact of the Pandemic on Sport and Physical Activity” and “Providing inclusive and shared spaces and places” goals.

Fourteen per cent of respondents felt that the “Providing inclusive and shared spaces and places” goal related not well or not very well to the strategy and 13% felt the same for “Recovery from the impact of the Pandemic on Sport and Physical Activity”. Around one in ten felt that the “Promoting Participation, Inclusion & Community Engagement” (10%) and the “Promoting the benefits of sport and physical activity” (9%) goals related not well or not very well to the overall strategy.

**Figure 14: “Q11 How well do you think that the draft goals relate to a strategy for delivering lifelong involvement in sport and physical activity? Why do you say that?”**



Key themes for the draft goals included “people”, “spaces”, “facilities”, “community”, “participation” and “health”.

Final Thoughts:

Figure 15: "Q12 Is there anything else you would like to add?"



Key themes for any other comments included "people", "participation", "support" and "health".

## Summary of Open-ended Responses:

Once again, comments were generally very favourable, and a number were concerned simply that the proposed strategy should be effectively implemented and resourced. Other comments made in the free-form sections included:

- A welcome for the inclusion of physical activity in the strategy, but a concern that informal physical activity should not be seen as less important than organised sporting activities
- A welcome for the emphasis on inclusion and partnership and the proposed cross-Departmental approach, coupled in some cases by a recognition that it will take time for new arrangements to be developed and become effective
- A concern that community or grassroots sport should not be seen in some way as of less importance than competitive and elite sport
- A welcome for the proposed emphasis on promoting the public health and other benefits of sport and physical activity and an emphasis on ensuring that sporting role models include those from disadvantaged communities and groups who have traditionally not participated fully in sport and physical activity
- An emphasis on the importance of early years provision and on young people gaining physical literacy early in their lives as the key to lifelong participation and involvement in active lifestyles.

A number of charitable, community and voluntary sector respondents reflected favourably on how effective implementation of the proposed strategy could benefit the individuals and communities they represent, for example very young children with limited access to informal play opportunities, the elderly who traditionally have tended not to participate in sport and physical activity and those with long term neurological and other conditions who could benefit from increased access to sport and physical activity both to prevent illness and to relieve and treat the symptoms.

Other points made by respondents included:

- Several respondents expressed disappointment that the consultation paper lacked tangible details of specific initiatives or projects which would be undertaken under the proposed strategy, (however, the Department's view is that specific initiatives or projects should be identified in any Action Plans, rather than in the overall strategy which has a duration of 10+ years)
- It is impossible to take all the risk out of sport and physical activity. In the context of this strategy the word 'safe' does not mean an activity or location without risk, but a context in which the risks involved in an activity or location are understood by all and managed and mitigated in an appropriate way
- In some parts of the consultation document the language used was seen by some as bureaucratic and jargonistic. It is important to use plain language to ensure full understanding of what is proposed

- Much sport and physical activity is driven by volunteers. While it is important to develop the governance arrangements and capabilities of clubs and governing bodies, it is also important to do so in ways which do not deter the culture of volunteering in sport and physical activity
- Covid 19 has caused a major disruption to sport and physical activity which has had advantages and disadvantages. In recovering from the pandemic, it is important that we retain the pluses from the Covid 19 experience – such as the much greater use of outdoor recreation – as well as building back the structures and arrangements which previously existed, and
- Effective implementation of the proposed strategy will require the development of strong partnerships at local, regional, national and international levels to achieve the common goals.

## Conclusion:

In the light of this overwhelmingly favourable feedback from the consultation process, the Department has concluded that the draft strategy does not need to be significantly modified before being finalised as the Northern Ireland Sport and Physical Activity Strategy, other than by minor adjustments and clarifications to some of the language and terminology used to clarify its intent to all readers.

## Appendix 1: Youth responses

### Methodology

The process has involved the Participation Team within the EA Youth Service planning and facilitating focus groups discussions in both local youth projects and wider YouthVoice groups.

The engagement was based on the child friendly version of the proposed strategy and the information that was presented, along with relevant questions, were agreed together with the Department for the Communities.

The engagement process utilised face to face conversations and activities as well as online Zoom meetings to generate feedback. Each focus group involved 2 group meetings. The first was a preparation session to allow the children and young people to be informed of the strategy consultation by watching the consultation video, to actively explore their experiences of some of the themes through activities and to provide them with the questions in advance of the engagement sessions. The second session then used focus group discussions and activities to hear the feedback from the children and young people.

The information and discussion questions were developed jointly by the Participation Team and the Department of Communities utilising the child and young person easy read version of the draft strategy. A copy of the discussion PowerPoint is available in Appendix 1

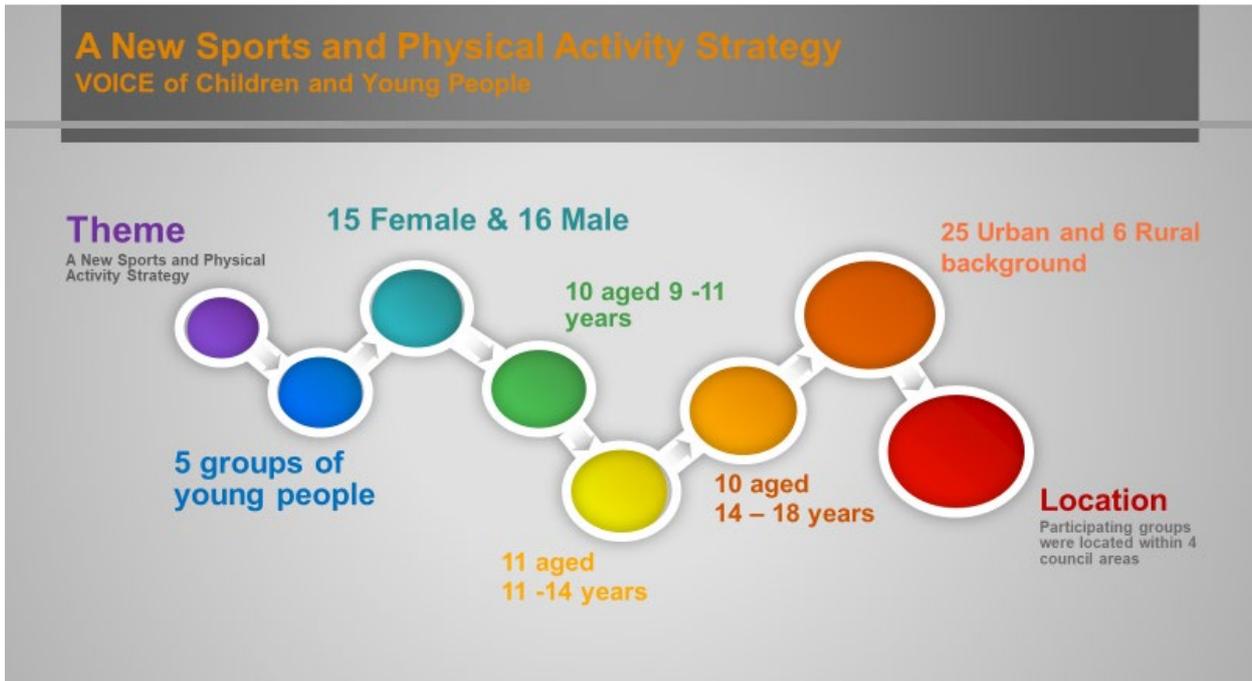
### Focus Groups Engagement with Children and Young people

A total of 31 children and young people from a range of age, urban, rural, and socio-economic settings, took part. Participating groups are detailed below:

Reference	Youth Setting	Location	Count of participating of Children and Young People
Group A	Ballymote Youth Project Group	Downpatrick, Newry, Mourne & Down	5
Group B	Archway Primary Youth Club	East Belfast, Belfast	10
Group C	Doyle Youth Club	Short Strand, Belfast	6
Group D	YouthVoice	Lisburn and Castlereagh	4
Group E	YouthVoice	Causeway Coast & Glens	6

## Profile of focus group participants

The infographic below shows the background characteristics of the focus groups



## Outline of Focus Group Discussions:

### Vision: How important is this vision?

All the children and young people thought that this vision is important as people need to get active and stay healthy, with their mind and body.

- Some found the proposed vision statement too long and felt it could be more concise and to the point.
- One group said that sport is very fun for them and they think others should take part as they will enjoy it.
- It was suggested the vision could promote inclusivity better, including those with disabilities and from lower socio-economic backgrounds.
- It was discussed that solo activities should be encouraged as well as an emphasis on team sports.

### Key Theme 1: Getting over the effects of Covid-19:

Many children and young people welcomed the benefits of sports and physical activity in the wake of an extended period of Covid restrictions which resulted in people of all ages feeling demotivated and slightly concerned about re-engaging safely and with confidence in activities. Some cited various health, mental health and social benefits of doing so. In the current context, many children and young people spoke of how they felt that exercise and physical activity had been put *on the back burner* or *forgotten about for too long*.

In helping to reduce weight gain and obesity after the lockdown period, from the perspective of these children and young people, sports and physical activity were seen to have not only these health benefits but would also bring about lifestyle changes that stressed more outdoor activities which were more profitable than being confined to home, or as one young person put it, *better than gaming indoors*.

The mental health benefits of physical activity were reinforced, as many children and young people recognised the importance of encouraging people to *, get outside in the fresh air as this can cause people to feel better about themselves*, which in doing so would make them aware of the importance and benefits of physical activity and exercise. A sport and physical activity strategy for these children and young people should encourage people to keep active, to follow a routine to include eating healthily for physical and mental health benefits, or as one young person summarised *for not only your health but also your mind*. It is worth noting that some of these children and young people mentioned that mental health support still needs to be more accessible within their local area.

Many of the respondents acknowledged the social benefits of sports and physical activity which ranged from meeting friends and socialising to going on family walks. They noted that during the period of maximum restrictions many children and young people missed their sports training and weekly routines that activity like this allows them to have. One respondent noted, *they miss people coming and watching their football matches for example*.

It is also important to note that these children and young people were aware that more thought and planning needs to go into the long-term solutions of how physical activity and exercise are going to be implemented and facilitated post-Covid. For instance, some pointed to a need for more encouragement and initiatives in place to urge people to get involved. Some children and young people pointed out that the price of participating in sporting activities was more prohibitive than the effects of the Covid restrictions.

Fundamentally, these children and young people want the strategy to allow them to play sports and partake in physical activity again with their friends. Further benefits that were universally quoted among these children and young people were to make new friends, create a sense of belonging, increase confidence and social skills and initiate a healthy lifestyle in the wake of the Covid-19 lockdowns and restrictions.

## **Key Theme 2: Encouraging people to get involved:**

This theme was also identified by the children and young people as being very important, with much comment focusing on the need to provide a broad range and variation in the activities available, with an emphasis on encouraging more marginalised children and young people to participate.

Many of them echoed the benefits of sports and physical exercise as a basis for the strategy to encourage people to become involved in sport for its exercise and fitness benefits, and for social interaction purposes which involve meeting new people and making new friends and overall for the fun and enjoyment of it. The respondents also noted that encouraging people to get involved in sport will also support the development of their life and social skills and teach them how to cope, learn and grow. The importance of being involved in competitive sport was viewed as healthy and character building.

It was also recommended by respondents that any future strategy should encourage children and young people to try a range of sports, possibly in a format of a 6 week programme and involve sporting activities such as golf, tennis, Gaelic games and boxing.

It was also noted that the strategy needed to facilitate a broader participation in sport and exercise programmes to engage more children and young people. It was suggested that transport should be provided for children and young people from rural areas and there ought to be the development of services for those children and young people who are restricted in ability or disabled.

The children and young people also attributed location as a limiting factor to participation and identified this as contributing to isolation. This lack of access meant a lack of social interaction and therefore an inability to make friends and integrate with those who do attend their clubs or participate in sporting activities regularly. This opportunity is not afforded to rural children and young people, or indeed as a one group of young people pointed out, marginalised young people living in these rural communities. Some children and young people noted time constraints limited their opportunities to take part, whereas others stressed a lack of confidence, vulnerability or anxiety could stop some taking the first step on their own. One young person in a mental health group remarked:

*Having anxiety or having a wee bit of fear can make it hard to go to the gym or try physical activity. Some people are reluctant to join an activity group on their own, it takes a lot of motivation and courage.*

There was however widespread support among most focus groups of the need to promote sporting activities and exercise not only by advertising activities through social media, the provision of taster sessions in schools, youth clubs and even local parks, the provision of a broad range of sports to appeal to more children and young people and changing its perception to something that involves fun and not as one group of young people put it:

*P.E in schools can put people off with how its delivered. This needs to be changed.*

## **Key Theme 3: Helping people to make the most of their ability**

One particular viewpoint in one of the focus groups was that a safe environment would enable and motivate young people to push themselves in their exercise and try new sporting activities by deriving encouragement from themselves and others, celebrating achievements at all levels. This group of young people also suggested allowing young people having the opportunity to meet and train with professional athletes and develop goals which, aside from the physical and mental health benefits, will develop transferable like skills to support their future development. Whilst one group of young people advocated for opportunities to move to professional levels of a given sport, another group stressed the focus should really just be on providing fun and recreation.

More discussion however took place on the nature of the barriers to children and young people developing their ability in sport and exercise and how a strategy ought to provide a basis for overcoming them. Many participants recognised that background and privilege is a huge factor when it comes to this and the ability for those of modest means to make other sacrifices when making decisions to give up time and money.

One group of children and young people identified home life, particularly for talented children and young people, as one of the biggest barriers to not being able to participate in clubs and sports, as their parents lacked the financial means or interest to invest in sport and exercise for their child. Others noted that caring responsibilities precluded some from participating. One young person stated that when she was younger and the only child, she was lucky to be able to go to dance classes, gymnastics and other activities, however, when her two younger sisters came to the same age, her parents could not afford for them to do the same. She noted that: *This is why we need more backing and support from strategies like this to allow those young people to continue on with things they love and are good at.*

Some children and young people, although highlighting the importance of incentives to get more involved with sports, went on to recommend an accredited course as being beneficial and rewarding in a number of ways for many children and young people. This would allow people to build on their existing skills, learn new ones while also benefitting from exercise and physical fitness while at the same time enjoying it. Other children and young people suggested that a strategy should allow for bursary scholarship programmes for children and young people who are disadvantaged ensuring that hidden talent is identified and developed and to allowing equal opportunities for all children and young people.

#### **Key Theme 4: Working better together**

The children and young people in their various focus groups explored different aspects of working together and collaboration, from the sharing of resources and expertise, establishing local hubs, bringing together children and young people from different communities and cost sharing.

Many of the children and young people noted that groups, schools, youth clubs and sporting organisations should collaborate and share their resources to enable all children and young people to play sports and take part in physical activity. They emphasised how this would be a good opportunity for smaller clubs who did not have access to funding opportunities. It would also be beneficial to have different clubs working together in the local area, even extending to hubs in the community where those playing different sports could train together.

Other groups of children and young people suggested that the proposed strategy ought to encourage grant-aiding small clubs to access sports and leisure facilities and bring youth clubs together to play sport or exercise. Given local rivalries however, the idea that sports equipment could be shared among youth clubs or sporting organisations did not receive universal support, especially given the multiple competing demands for it.

A common theme emerging from the focus group discussions was that a strategy should consider sport and exercise in the context of working with people from different communities and backgrounds and that religion for instance should not be a barrier to children and young people accessing facilities and services.

Many of the respondents believed that sport could be used as a means to successfully bring people and communities together with one suggestion taking the form of sports teams made up of children and young people from different backgrounds on the same team, allowing them to form friendships and encouraging the breakdown of stigma and promoting successful relationships based on teamwork and team-building. For some children and young people, the strategy should not be solely about promoting sport and physical activity but should encourage wider team-building and problem-solving skills development.

## **Key Theme 5: High quality shared spaces**

The focus groups noted that high quality shared spaces are extremely important within this strategy; children and young people discussed issues such as choice, travel, resource allocation and accessibility in relation to this.

Currently, many of these children and young people do not feel that shared spaces of sufficient quality are available to them, referring to the expense of hiring or purchasing centres, pitches and equipment and how this limits the so-called shared spaces to only those who can afford them. Consequently, these children and young people recognised the implications of organising and paying for transport and other costs which is something a strategy would need to take account of especially as many children and young people and their families would be unable to meet these fees.

The issue of accessibility was also important to them as high quality facilities were invariably seen as only available in cities or large towns and therefore not all children and young people were able to access them, although, conversely, another group preferred a small number of well-appointed modern facilities rather than a wide distribution of local facilities of lesser quality. One young person noted:

*It would be better to have one big modern place to go rather than having 10 that are falling down in different areas.*

There was clear enthusiasm however for new premises and facilities in local communities for a range of sports that could be accessed locally and in this light some children and young people were of the opinion that a strategy would need to review how resources are currently distributed and that any focus on any one sport in an area would be removed and children and young people be supported to try something else,

*Like the way there are loads of McDonalds there should be loads of different sports clubs.*

Other children and young people suggested that a strategy should review how resources are currently distributed. One group of young people suggested that funding should be made for community organisations who are sensitive to local needs, re-evaluating the current organisations in receipt of funding and the provision they are delivering so that the variation of sporting activities are appropriate to the local areas being provided for.

*Are the right groups receiving the money? Are the same type of groups getting all the money and those who are different sports not getting as much?*

Rather than focussing on resource intensive buildings and facilities, one group of young people discussed how outdoor spaces such as forests, hills, beaches, could be utilised. Activities such as rock climbing, hiking and water activities should be promoted within the strategy, particularly as a way of celebrating and promoting outdoor spaces and facilities. This in turn may create volunteer opportunities or perhaps even jobs in these areas.

The children and young people acknowledged how religion plays a part in what spaces people can and cannot access due to safety fears and other sensitivities. Some children and young people, using T: BUC as an example, believed that the provision of good quality shared spaces should be included in the strategy to help breakdown divisions and end sectarianism. One group suggested schools take the lead by promoting a range of sports to allow for cross-community activities in youth programmes, whereas another group of young people felt that stereotypes in sport, particularly around gender and religion, should be challenged by the strategy.

Finally, in a reference to cleaning protocols, there was mention that in the post-Covid period, these spaces need to be clean and sanitised to ensure they are safe for children and young people to gather in numbers.

## **Key Theme 6: Telling everyone about the benefits**

These groups of children and young people were universal in agreement that the promotion of the benefits of sport and exercise was of prime importance, and that much of this promotional activity could be carried out in schools through physical activity and lessons. As this theme is central to communicating the benefits of exercise, diet and healthy lifestyles, a strategy should detail a significant investment in a campaign that is targeted and addresses anxieties that some may have about becoming involved in exercise or sporting activities. One young person concluded, *the benefits are amazing and well worth telling others about.*

One group of young people discussed how they are not currently taught enough about the benefits and importance of exercise and physical activity in school. These respondents were of the opinion that Physical Education classes should teach more about the benefits and include more education on physical activity instead of, as one group put it *just the rules of different sports.*

The same group of young people also stressed that this messaging should be more broadly based within their curriculum. They felt they should learn about it regularly, recommending it be embedded into lessons all the time rather than just one-off classes. Some were critical of their school for discontinuing Physical Education before children and young people could be persuaded of its benefits, one focus group noted:

*.....schools drop physical activity way too early, young people should do PE throughout school and learn more about it, rather than just in science, or learning for life and work.*

In order that interest in sports is continued as children and young people get older, one group advocated transition programmes from one age group of the sport to another so that they don't become intimidated or daunted by the higher level and pull back from the sport. This was illustrated by the following quote:

*Most clubs are for under 18s, under 16s, and categorised in age groups like this, meaning once you are over 18, you are usually in with the under 21s or under 25s, and this can be extremely daunting and just cause people to stop playing sport altogether*

Outside of school settings, some children and young people made the case for councils co-ordinating the promotion of all sporting activities available in the area and also that sports clubs should be incentivised to offer sessions and support within youth clubs and schools.

## **Making the plan work**

The children and young people were aware of the pivotal importance of effective planning. As an essential element within this was a joined-up approach to the strategy so that ideas were shared and various types of children and young people from different settings, whether by school, location or age could be included. This, as one group of young people suggested, should include schools, councils and communities sharing facilities and working more with youth centres and sports clubs.

One group of young people suggested that various initiatives are needed that go beyond the settings of sport and leisure facilities themselves in order to ensure that the various barriers to participation, whether disability, living in a rural area with its accessibility issues or low income are addressed in a systematic and comprehensive way that facilitate all children and young people to become involved in sport and exercise. A joined-up approach therefore, for some children and young people, would allow opportunities to be more effectively advertised through the medium of social media.

### **Suggested Names or Titles of Strategy:**

The children and young people discussed some ideas and suggested the following:

- “**30 a Day**”: as people are encouraged to do 30 minutes of physical activity a day
- “Exercise and Improve”
- The children and young people discussed that it should not just be sport matters as there is more to it than sport: it could include the words **movement and activity!**

### **Other comments:**

- Children and Young people spoke of how they would like to be informed of what happens next.
- Is it possible to receive information on how much money will be invested over all in delivering it?

### **Recommendations**

- Promotion of the different activities happening, and people should be encouraged to get active through social media. This promotion could highlight the benefits of sport and physical activity. Outreach coaches and delivery of taster sessions would also be required to support re-engagement
- Gift bags and free sports equipment could be given at different sporting events to encourage people to get involved.
- People who have become more active to come out and talk in schools/clubs to share how it has benefited them.
- Children and young people could be supported financially as an incentive to take part.
- A culture of fun should be created rather than just sport as a challenge or exercise as a chore.
- Marginalised children and young people in communities should be targeted especially those in most need.
- Identify champions and role models of all abilities and talents to promote sport and exercise.
- Interaction and collaboration with schools and youth clubs should be promoted.
- Achievements should be celebrated at all levels and given the opportunity to progress.
- Opportunities for children and young people to talk to and train with professionals so they have an idea of what their options are.
- Opportunities to learn and share new experiences with other clubs.
- Provide new premises in the local community for a range of different sports.

## Conclusion

It was evident throughout the engagement with the various focus groups that these children and young people were very positive about the strategy and that the themes put forward for engagement were a true reflection of the core elements that a strategy on sport and physical activities should address. Such a strategy will be valuable for both children and young people's physical and mental health as they emerge from the Covid 19 pandemic and to re-establish healthy routines along with the associated physical and mental health and social benefits.

Throughout the engagement process the children and young people demonstrated their enthusiasm and recognition of the benefits of participating in sport and physical activity, stressing the fun and enjoyment aspect and even the development of transferable life skills that enhance confidence, self-esteem and will have future benefits. There was however a widespread feeling among these children and young people that there were significant groupings of children and young people for whom access would be restricted and consequently it would be highly important for a strategy to address such barriers. In particular, those who lived in rural areas, those living in low income families, and those who lived within their communities but had vulnerabilities and anxieties about taking part in physical activity, were excluded from the benefits of physical activity in a group setting with other young people.

It was clear from the focus group discussions that to realise these benefits for the greatest number of children and young people and to provide the maximum choice available, more thought and planning needed to be applied. Such an approach ought to embrace collaboration between schools, the sharing of resources at a community level and youth clubs enjoying the benefits of relationships with sports clubs and sporting professionals. Furthermore, there was an indication among these children and young people that the various elements of a strategy should be joined up and should be advocating for better communication of opportunities, reduction of barriers, providing more chances for disadvantaged children and young people and more access to shared facilities. It was also important to them that the benefits of physical activity should be further embedded and promoted within formal education and focus more on the excellent outdoor spaces available and physical activities associated with these.

A further dominant theme emerging from these focus group discussions was how the strategy should enable people from different communities to play sport together, reduce stigmas and barriers and should help to breakdown divisions and end sectarianism. In this regard many thought that good quality shared facilities were important, but not necessarily at the exclusion of local facilities that were able to provide choice and accessibility.

Having recognised the issues faced in putting together a strategy to encourage and promote sport and physical activity among children and young people, the core themes and principles this should be constructed around are therefore the need for partnerships and resource sharing, targeted investment, the provision of choice, tackling division, accessibility and a cohesive approach to the strategy in order to ensure everyone is included.

## Appendix 2: Questionnaire

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

### Overview

This questionnaire, in conjunction with the consultation document represents a key step in developing a new, cross departmental Strategy for Sport and Physical Activity for Northern Ireland to cover the next ten years and beyond.

### Why we are consulting

The proposed strategy for Sport and Physical Activity will build on the foundations established by '*Sport Matters - The Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2009 – 2019*'.

The new strategic approach detailed in the consultation document has been prepared by the Department for Communities and seeks to provide a framework for a cross-departmental, ambitious and comprehensive approach to promoting participation in sport and physical activity across all sectors of our society.

**Link to consultation document** <<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/consultations/consultation-new-strategy-sportand-physical-activity>>

The consultation document has been developed following an extensive pre-consultation exercise involving sports Governing Bodies, Government Departments, District Councils and community and voluntary groups. The co-design approach has helped to inform and direct the Project Team in developing the proposed vision, themes and goals as detailed in the document.

The outputs from focus groups, interviews and an on-line survey have provided a particularly comprehensive, rich and up to date evidence base to support the development of the new strategic approach. It is supported by extensive review and research work undertaken by a team of independent experts.

Now is the time for us to seek your views to assist with finalising the new strategy and to report back to all our stakeholders asking that all important question:-

***“this is what you’ve told us, have we heard you correctly?”***

Each of the sections of the consultation document focuses on a key theme and a range of priorities which will inform the development of an action plan.

When published the new strategy will help inform and guide the Executive’s policies and priorities in relation to sport and physical activity over the next 10 years and beyond. It will enable sport and physical activity to contribute more effectively to the outcomes within the new Programme for Government and the delivery of New Decade, New Approach.

The current Covid crisis has shown, more than ever, the importance of sport and physical activity to health and wellbeing. This questionnaire seeks your views on key structural elements of the strategy such as the draft Vision, the key strategic themes and the goals that will form the basis of the Sport and Physical Activity Strategy.

Your responses to the content of this consultation will make an important contribution to finalising the new strategy. That final draft will be presented to the Executive for their endorsement in advance of publication.

**Please note:-** If you were part of the stakeholder engagement process during 2020 you may wish to by-pass questions 4-7 or alternatively you can respond to all the questions as you desire. If you are engaging with the process for the first time we welcome your input on all eleven questions.

The information you provide in completing this survey will be controlled and processed in line with Data Protection Legislation by the DfC and its Communications Unit. To find out more about how we handle your personal information, DfC's Privacy Notice can be viewed online at [www.communities-ni.gov.uk/dfc-privacy-notice](http://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/dfc-privacy-notice) <<http://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/dfc-privacy-notice>> . In order to facilitate the survey, Citizen Space, which is not operated by DfC, is used as a data processor. Details of Citizen Space's privacy policy can be found online at [www.delib.net/legal/privacy\\_policy](http://www.delib.net/legal/privacy_policy) <[http://www.delib.net/legal/privacy\\_policy](http://www.delib.net/legal/privacy_policy)> . Individuals will not be identifiable from the results; some comment within responses to this consultation may be disclosed, although they will not be attributed to anyone.

**1** I am responding as

- A member of the public
  - On behalf of an organisation
  - Other (please specify below)
- 

**2** I responded as part of the pre-consultation exercise on this strategy (e.g. completed an esurvey, took part in a focus group).

*Please select only one item*

- Yes
- No

If yes, you may have already shared your views on Q4 to 7. If so, please feel free to add any additional comments you may have or skip to Q9.

**3** What is your name/organisation?

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*Please select only one item*

- Sports and Physical Activity Sector
  - Government Depts
  - Public Bodies or ALBs
  - Universities/ FE Colleges
  - Local Authorities CEOs
  - Local Authority key staff (e.g. sports, physical activity, HWB, Community Dev, GR)
  - Community Planning Partnerships
  - Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership
  - Other (please specify)
- 

**Issues, Opportunities, Benefits, Barriers and Priorities**

**4** What are the current issues and opportunities facing sport and physical activity in Northern Ireland?

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**5** What are the main benefits from more people engaging in sport and physical activity over their whole lives?

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**6** What are the main barriers (e.g., physical, practical, cultural, personal) to increased participation in sport and physical activity for people over their whole lives?

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**7** What are the priorities for Government, given the impact of the Covid Pandemic, if more people are to be involved in sport and physical activity over the course of their life time?

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## Vision

### 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'

8 How well do you think that the draft vision reflects a strategy for delivering lifelong involvement in sport and physical activity?

*Please select only one item*

1	2	3	4	5
Not very well	Not well	Adequately	Well	Very well

Why do you say that?

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## Themes

### THEME:

Recovery from the impact of the Pandemic on Sport and Physical Activity

### THEME:

Promoting Participation, Inclusion & Community Engagement

### THEME:

Promoting Excellence in Sport

### THEME:

The importance of Partnership and Integration

### THEME:

Providing Inclusive and Shared Spaces and Places

### THEME:

Promoting the Benefits of Sport and Physical Activity

**9** How well do you think that the following themes inform a strategy for delivering lifelong involvement in sport and physical activity?

<i>Please select only one item</i>	Not very well	Not well	Adequately	Well	Very well
Recovery from the impact of the Pandemic on Sport and Physical Activity	1	2	3	4	5
Promoting Participation, Inclusion & Community Engagement	1	2	3	4	5
Promoting Excellence in Sport	1	2	3	4	5
The importance of Partnership and Integration	1	2	3	4	5
Providing Inclusive and Shared Spaces and Places	1	2	3	4	5
Promoting the Benefits of Sport and Physical Activity	1	2	3	4	5

Why do you say that?

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## Principles

### Proposed Cross-Cutting Principles

Developing Inclusive, Shared Communities

Developing Capacity and Governance

National and International Linkages

**10** How well do you think that the draft cross cutting principles relate to a strategy for delivering lifelong involvement in sport and physical activity?

<i>Please select only one item</i>	Not very well	Not well	Adequately	Well	Very well
Developing Inclusive, Shared Communities	1	2	3	4	5
Developing Capacity and Governance	1	2	3	4	5
National and International Linkages	1	2	3	4	5

Why do you say that?

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## Goals

<b>Recovery from the impact of the Pandemic on Sport and Physical Activity</b>	<b>Promoting Participation, Inclusion and Community Engagement</b>	<b>Promoting Excellence in Sport</b>
<p>A safe and sustainable return to sport and physical activity for all involved</p>	<p>Improved physical literacy and increased lifelong participation in sport and physical activity for all</p>	<p>Improved sporting pathways that ensure that talent is recognised, and potential is realised</p>
<p>Recovered level of participation in sport and physical activity, sports clubs, and opportunities</p>	<p>Addressing the barriers to participation in sport and physical activity through co-designing programmes and initiatives</p>	<p>Confident, strong, and well supported clubs, volunteers, athletes, quality coaches, officials, and leaders</p>
<p>We have a more resilient sport and physical activity sector</p>	<p>Improved physical and mental health and well being</p>	<p>Sustained achievements in sport and physical activity at national and international levels</p>
	<p>Sport and physical activity is inclusive, safe, diverse, shared and offers equality of opportunity to participate for all</p>	<p>Increased community pride in the achievements of all our sporting participants</p>
	<p>Children and young people are given the best start in life through sport and physical activity opportunities</p>	

### **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 Inclusive 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

**11** How well do you think that the draft goals relate to a strategy for delivering lifelong involvement in sport and physical activity?

<i>Please select only one item</i>	Not very well	Not well	Adequately	Well	Very well
Recovery from the impact of the Pandemic on Sport and Physical Activity	1	2	3	4	5
Promoting Participation, Inclusion & Community Engagement	1	2	3	4	5
Promoting Excellence in Sport	1	2	3	4	5
The importance of Partnership and Integration	1	2	3	4	5
Providing inclusive and shared spaces and places	1	2	3	4	5
Promoting the benefits of sport and physical activity	1	2	3	4	5

Why do you say that?

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**Final Thoughts**

**12** Is there anything else you would like to add?

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