



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Research and Information Service Research Paper

31 January 2014

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Provision for sport for those with a disability

NIAR 876-13

This paper provides a brief overview of provision for disability sport
in Northern Ireland.

Key Points

- People with a disability in Northern Ireland exercise significantly less than those without a disability: 19% of people with disabilities participate regularly in physical activity, compared with 37% of non-disabled adults.
- Disability Sports NI has indicated that around 20% (or 360,000) of the population of Northern Ireland are considered to have a long-term limiting illness (currently used as a working definition of 'disability'). It has been stated that this figure represents the highest prevalence of disability in the UK.
- Sport NI has stated a strategic intention to deliver a six percentage points increase in participation rates in sport and physical recreation among people with a disability by 2019.
- Disability Sports NI has stated that there has not been any comprehensive research carried out to evaluate the suitability of facilities for disability sports in Northern Ireland.
- While basic physical access to sports facilities has improved in direct response to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, less has been done to meet the actual sporting requirements of people with disabilities.
- Disability Sports NI currently runs an Inclusive Sports Facility Accreditation Scheme to encourage good practice. One council has an accredited facility under this scheme, and a further six are currently under assessment. Nineteen councils do not currently have facilities which have been accredited or assessed under this scheme.
- In 2010, a *Coaching Workforce Survey* found that 65% of all coaches stated that they do not currently work with participants who are disabled.
- Under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, it is stated that State Parties shall 'encourage and promote the participation, to the fullest extent possible, of persons with disabilities in mainstream sporting activities at all levels'.

Executive Summary

People with a disability in Northern Ireland exercise significantly less than those without a disability. Just 19% of people with disabilities participate regularly in physical activity, compared with 37% of non-disabled adults. This means that people with a disability are around half as likely to participate in sport than others. Just 12% participate regularly in sporting competitions.

Disability Sports NI has indicated that around 20% (or 360,000) of the population of Northern Ireland are considered to have a long-term limiting illness (currently used as a working definition of 'disability'). It has been stated that this figure represents the highest prevalence of disability in the UK.

Sport NI has stated a strategic intention as follows:

By 2019 to deliver at least a 6 percentage points increase in participation rates in sport and physical recreation among people with a disability (from a 2011 baseline).

Sport NI, in conjunction with Disability Sports NI, has developed sports facility access guidelines, *Access To Sports Facilities For People With Disabilities: Design and Management Guidelines*. These guidelines provide detailed guidance and advice on a number of key areas of facility design and management, including guidance on developing inclusive sports development plans.

Disability Sports NI has stated that there has not been any comprehensive research carried out to evaluate the suitability of facilities for disability sports in Northern Ireland. While basic physical access to sports facilities has improved in direct response to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, less has been done to meet the actual sporting requirements of people with disabilities.

Disability Sports NI currently runs an Inclusive Sports Facility (ISF) Accreditation Scheme to encourage good practice. One council has an accredited facility under this scheme, and a further six are currently under assessment. Nineteen councils do not currently have facilities which have been accredited or assessed under this scheme.

A recent study has concluded that there are five common barriers experienced by people with a disability: lack of awareness of how to include people with a disability in sport; limited participation programmes; a lack of accessible facilities; limited accessible transportation; and limited access to information and resources. In 2010, a *Coaching Workforce Survey* found that 65% of all coaches stated that they do not currently work with participants who are disabled.

Finally, under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, it is stated that State Parties shall '*encourage and promote the participation, to the fullest extent possible, of persons with disabilities in mainstream sporting activities at all levels*'.

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1 Levels of sporting participation by those with a disability

Disability Sports NI has indicated that around 20% of the population of Northern Ireland are considered to have a long-term limiting illness (currently used as a working definition of 'disability'). At current population estimates this represents a figure of around 360,000 people¹. It has been stated that this figure represents the highest prevalence of disability in the UK².

The Chief Medical Officer has recommended that adults should take at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity at least five times a week. In 2009, Sport NI commenced the Sport and Physical Activity Survey (SAPAS) to assess uptake of these recommendations³. The SAPAS results indicate that people with disabilities fall significantly behind this target, with just 23% achieving this key threshold⁴. This compares with an average of 35% achieving the threshold for the adult population as a whole.

Indeed when surveyed, just 19% of people with disabilities had participated in any sport in the last seven days, compared with 37% of non-disabled adults. This means that people with a disability are around half as likely to participate in sport than others.

The most important reasons for taking part in sport are enjoyment and keeping fit. The following bar chart provides a breakdown of the kinds of physical activity carried out by people with a disability (overleaf):

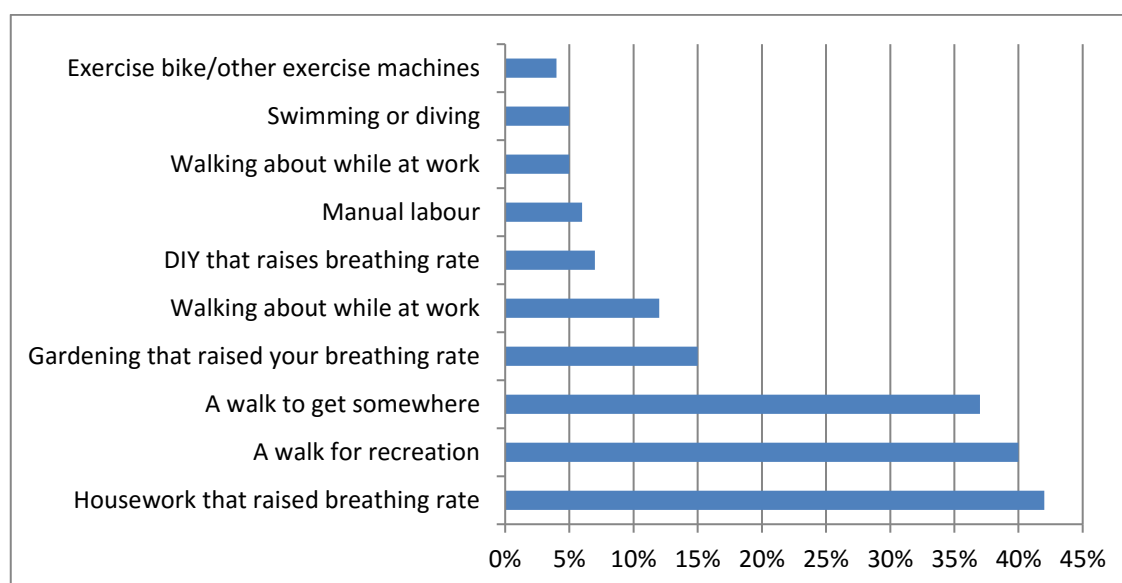


Figure 1: Forms of physical activity undertaken by those with disabilities

¹ Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. 'The population of Northern Ireland': <http://nia1.me/es> Visited 29.9.11.

² Sport NI. 2010. *Access To Sports Facilities For People With Disabilities: Design and Management Guidelines*: p10 <http://nia1.me/1v6>

³ Sport NI. October 2011. *Survey of Sport and Physical Activity: Factsheet disabled people*. SAPAS data (23 July 2009 – 10 August 2010), total sample size: 4,653. Sample size disabled people: 1,325.

⁴ SAPAS survey: as above.

As can be seen from this, the degree of sport undertaken is low, with walking at 5%, swimming at 5%, and using exercise machines 4%.

Sport participation peaks in middle age groups (30-49 years: 37%; compared with 16-29 years: 33%; and 50+ years: 11%). In line with the overall population, participation is significantly greater among those in higher socio-economic groups, among those who work and with people who have a university degree.

The difference between men and women with a disability is only minor. The main barriers to participation are injury or illness (60%), followed by 'being too old' (20%). Club membership and participation in competitions are significantly lower than average, with 13% of those with disabilities being members of a club which offers opportunities to participate in any sport or physical activities, and just 12% having participated in an organised sporting competition in the last 12 months. Overall, 53% are satisfied with sport provision in their local area, while 24% are dissatisfied.

2 Current policies and strategies

2.1 Sport Matters strategy

The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) and Sport NI published a Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Activity, *Sport Matters*⁵, which contains a specific target for raising levels of sports participation among those with disabilities:

PA10. By 2019 to deliver at least a 6 percentage points increase in participation rates in sport and physical recreation among people with a disability (from a 2011 baseline).

The strategy also provides a number of 'key steps for success', among which is stated the importance of providing 'opportunities for under-represented groups and specifically women/girls, people with a disability and older people', and of broadening the 'talent pool through affirmative action for under-represented groups and specifically women/girls and people with a disability'.

2.2 CAL Committee inquiry into sport and physical activity

The previous CAL Committee conducted an inquiry into sport and physical activity in 2010, and made two recommendations specific to people with disabilities⁶:

⁵ DCAL & Sport NI. 2009. *Sport Matters: The Northern Ireland strategy for sport and physical recreation 2009–2019*: <http://nia1.me/eq>

⁶ Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure. 2010. Report on the Committee's Inquiry into Participation in Sport and Physical Participation in Northern Ireland: NIA 73/09/10R: <http://nia1.me/er>

21. We recommend the expansion of specific programmes aimed at increasing participation among women, people with disabilities, older people, people from low income groups, and people from ethnic minorities.

24. We recommend that local authorities enhance training for staff at leisure centres on how to best provide services for women, people with disabilities, older people, people from low income groups, and people from ethnic minorities.

2.3 Sport NI Disability Action Plan

The Sport NI *Disability Action Plan 2012–2015*⁷ states Sport NI's commitment to, and proposals for, fulfilling the statutory obligations in compliance with Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 (as amended by the Disability Discrimination (NI) Order 2006). This Act places duties on public authorities, when carrying out their functions, to have regard to the need,

- (a) to promote positive attitudes towards people with disabilities; and
- (b) to encourage participation by people with disabilities in public life.

The plan describes a wide range of measures designed to fulfil Sport NI's statutory commitments, including the development of a *Disability Mainstreaming Policy*⁸, and contracting the services of Disability Sports Northern Ireland for the delivery of various aspects of the plan.

2.4 Design and management guidelines

Sport Northern Ireland in conjunction with DSNI have developed sports facility access guidelines, *Access To Sports Facilities For People With Disabilities: Design and Management Guidelines*⁹.

The guidelines provide detailed guidance and advice on four key areas of facility design and management:

- (a) Design and technical issues, including standards for car parking, signage and changing areas;
- (b) Sports specific technical guidelines for 14 Paralympic sports;
- (c) Guidance on putting in place relevant policies and procedures; and
- (d) Guidance on developing inclusive sports development plans.

⁷ Sport NI. 2013. *Disability Action Plan 2012–2015*. Belfast:

⁸ See Sport NI. 2011. *An Impact Review of Sport Northern Ireland's Disability Mainstreaming Policy*: <http://www.sportni.net/NR/rdonlyres/0EFF464A-0F12-4938-B4F6-8191359DE932/0/DMP.pdf>

⁹ Sport NI. 2010. *Access To Sports Facilities For People With Disabilities: Design and Management Guidelines*: <http://nia1.me/1v6>

3 Facilities for disability sport

Disability Sports NI (DSNI) has previously stated that there are around 20 dedicated disability sports clubs in Northern Ireland, and that there are a further 100 clubs or institutions with specialist facilities. A list of these facilities is provided by Disability Sports NI in the 'sports opportunities' section of their website¹⁰.

However, the organisation also states that, to date, there has not been any comprehensive research carried out to evaluate the suitability of facilities for disability sports in Northern Ireland¹¹.

While DSNI states that, in broad terms, basic physical access to sports facilities in Northern Ireland has improved significantly in recent years as a direct response to the introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995, where improvements have been made these tend to meet the minimum requirements of the DDA and Building Regulations, rather than meeting the actual sporting requirements of people with disabilities¹². This is particularly the case in relation to the requirements of team sports, wheelchair sports and access to fitness equipment.

DSNI currently runs an Inclusive Sports Facility (ISF) Accreditation Scheme to encourage good practice¹³. The ISF scheme is viewed by DSNI as a mechanism for the organisation to validate and recognise the achievement of sport and leisure facilities which are fully inclusive of people with disabilities participating in sport¹⁴. The following is a list of the councils which have signed up for the ISF scheme to date¹⁵.

- **Accredited**
 - Fermanagh District Council – Lakeland Forum ISF (accredited 3.3.11)
- **Under assessment**
 - North Down Borough Council – Bangor Aurora Aquatic and Leisure Complex
 - Belfast City Council – Dunville Park Pavilion
 - Omagh District Council – Omagh Leisure Centre
 - Newry and Mourne District Council – Newry Leisure Centre
 - Magherafelt District Council – Greenvale Leisure Centre
 - Derry City Council – North West Regional Sports Centre

¹⁰ Sport Northern Ireland. 'Sports opportunities': <http://nia1.me/ep> Visited 20.9.11.

¹¹ Correspondence from Disability Sports NI, following an information request from NI Assembly Research and Information Service: 27.1.14.

¹² Correspondence with DSNI, as above.

¹³ Sport NI. 'Inclusive Sports Facility (ISF) Accreditation Scheme': <http://www.sportni.net/Facilities/Quality+Schemes> Page accessed 28.1.14.

¹⁴ Correspondence from Disability Sports NI, following an information request from NI Assembly Research and Information Service: 27.1.14.

¹⁵ As of 27.1.14.

The following council areas have not yet signed up to the Inclusive Sports Facility Accreditation Scheme:

- Antrim Borough Council
- Ards Borough Council
- Armagh City and District Council
- Ballymena Borough Council
- Ballymoney Borough Council
- Banbridge District Council
- Carrickfergus Borough Council
- Castlereagh Borough Council
- Coleraine Borough Council
- Cookstown District Council
- Craigavon Borough Council
- Down District Council
- Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council
- Larne Borough Council
- Limavady Borough Council
- Lisburn City Council
- Moyle District Council
- Newtownabbey Borough Council
- Strabane District Council

DSNI is supporting 11 Sport NI community funded facilities to achieve the ISF mark. In addition, the organisation has identified in the latest draft of its strategic plan ‘a need to develop an inclusive disability sports training and resource centre which will act as a ‘hub’ for the development of sport for people with disabilities in Northern Ireland’¹⁶.

¹⁶ Correspondence from Disability Sports NI, following an information request from NI Assembly Research and Information Service: 27.1.14.

4 Potential issues

4.1 Barriers to participation

A recent academic study in the journal *Sport Management Review* has concluded that,

*In a sporting context, people with a disability often face a multitude of barriers to participation in sport and achievement in sport. While other marginalised populations have received attention in the field of sport management, disability has received very little...*¹⁷

The authors conclude that there are five common barriers experienced by people with a disability to accessing sport, including:

- lack of understanding and awareness of how to include people with a disability in sport;
- limited opportunities and programmes for participation, training and competition;
- lack of accessible facilities;
- limited accessible transportation; and
- limited access to information and resources.

An independent review of Sport NI's *Disability Mainstreaming Policy* in 2011 found that investment by Sport NI in disability sport had increased by 45% between 2006 and 2012¹⁸. Increases in funding provided by Sport NI to Disability Sports NI are as follows:

Year	£
2009/10	159,800
2010/11	169,920
2011/12	179,740
TOTAL	509,640

Table 1: Funding provided by Sport NI to Disability Sports NI

However, funding and provision would appear still to have some way to go in achieving equitable provision for those with and without a disability. The participation figures above suggest that only around half as many people with a disability participate in regular exercise compared with those without.

Sport NI published a *Coaching Workforce Survey* in 2010 which found that 65% of all coaches stated that they do not currently work with participants who are disabled¹⁹.

¹⁷ Misener, L & Darcyl, S. 2014. 'Managing disability sport: From athletes with disabilities to inclusive organisational perspectives', *Sport Management Review*,

¹⁸ Sport. 2011. *An Impact Review of Sport NI's Disability Mainstreaming Policy*. Belfast: <http://www.sportni.net/NR/rdonlyres/0EFF464A-0F12-4938-B4F6-8191359DE932/0/DMP.pdf>

¹⁹ Sport NI. 2010. *Coaching Workforce Survey*. Belfast: <http://nia1.me/1va>

While some sports have a relatively high level of coaching provision, there are much lower proportions, for example, for cricket (22%), hockey (16%) and rugby union (17%).

4.2 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

In 2006, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities established among its general principles that those with a disability shall have 'full and effective participation and inclusion in society, and 'equality of opportunity'²⁰.

More specifically in the area of sport, Article 30 (5) states the following:

5. With a view to enabling persons with disabilities to participate on an equal basis with others in recreational, leisure and sporting activities, States Parties shall take appropriate measures:

- (a) *To encourage and promote the participation, to the fullest extent possible, of persons with disabilities in mainstream sporting activities at all levels;*
- (b) *To ensure that persons with disabilities have an opportunity to organize, develop and participate in disability-specific sporting and recreational activities and, to this end, encourage the provision, on an equal basis with others, of appropriate instruction, training and resources;*
- (c) *To ensure that persons with disabilities have access to sporting, recreational and tourism venues;*
- (d) *To ensure that children with disabilities have equal access with other children to participation in play, recreation and leisure and sporting activities, including those activities in the school system;*
- (e) *To ensure that persons with disabilities have access to services from those involved in the organization of recreational, tourism, leisure and sporting activities.*

These obligations would seem to go beyond the provisions of the UK Disability Discrimination Act 1995, which really provides for access to facilities alone, advocating instead provision for 'an opportunity to organize, develop and participate in disability-specific sporting and recreational activities'.

²⁰ *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities:*
<http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml>