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EU sports policy and the Sport Matters strategy

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This paper describes current European Union policy with regard to sport, and in particular the actions set out in the European Commission Communication *Developing the European Dimension of Sport*. Some context for these proposed actions is provided through a brief analysis of *Sport Matters: the Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2009–2019*.

Key Points

- This paper describes current European Union policy with regard to sport, and in particular the actions set out in the European Commission Communication *Developing the European Dimension of Sport*.
- The EU has taken a greater interest in sport promotion and development in recent years.
- A major step took place in 2011 with the agreement and publication of a European Commission Communication – *Developing the European Dimension in Sport* – containing a series of action points for both the Commission and member states to be undertaken throughout 2012 and 2013.
- This is the first sport policy document since the Lisbon Treaty entered into force on 1 December 2009, and it sets out three specific work areas: the integrity of sport, capitalising on the social values of sport, and the economic aspects of sport.
- Last year, the House of Lords Select Committee on the European Union conducted an inquiry on grassroots sport and the European Union, noting that the potential of sport is under-exploited at both EU and national level.
- When examining the recommended actions within *Developing the European Dimension of Sport*, four are perhaps of particular note within a Northern Ireland context:
 - the implementation of national physical activity guidelines;
 - widening the accessibility of sport for those with a disability;
 - making greater use of evidence-based policy-making in the field of sport;
 - ensuring that grassroots sport is placed on a more sustainable financial footing.

Executive Summary

This paper describes current European Union policy with regard to sport, and in particular the actions set out in the European Commission Communication *Developing the European Dimension of Sport*. Some context for these proposed actions is provided through a brief analysis of *Sport Matters: the Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2009–2019*.

The EU has taken a greater interest in sport promotion and development in recent years. In 2007, a *White Paper on Sport* was published, accompanied by the ‘Pierre de Coubertin Action Plan’, containing 53 measures ‘to guide the Commission in its sport-related activities during the coming years’.

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This Communication is the first sport policy document since the Lisbon Treaty entered into force on 1 December 2009, and it sets out three specific work areas: the integrity of sport, capitalising on the social values of sport, and the economic aspects of sport.

Last year, the House of Lords Select Committee on the European Union conducted an inquiry on grassroots sport and the European Union. This inquiry noted that the potential of sport is under-exploited at both EU and national level despite its ability to deliver on core policy objectives in the health, education, employment and social spheres.

When examining the recommended actions within *Developing the European Dimension of Sport*, four are perhaps of particular note within a Northern Ireland context: the implementation of national physical activity guidelines, widening the accessibility of sport for those with a disability, making greater use of evidence-based policy-making in the field of sport, and ensuring that grassroots sport is placed on a more sustainable financial footing.

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Annex 1: Full list of actions proposed in *Developing the European Dimension of Sport*

1 Sport Matters: the Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2009–2019

*Sport Matters*¹ (the Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2009 – 2019) was developed by DCAL in partnership with Sport NI. The strategy was approved by the Northern Ireland Executive in December 2009.

The department states that through Sport Matters, it aspires to achieve²:

- a world class start and lifelong involvement in sport and physical recreation for all people;
- world class performances by teams and individuals;
- a sustainable sporting and physical recreation culture that contributes to broader Government objectives.

A set of 26 targets are included in the strategy, structured around the themes of participation, performance and places.

As part of the implementation of *Sport Matters*, a Sport Matters Monitoring Group was established which is responsible for monitoring and overseeing the delivery of *Sport Matters*.

2 Sport and the European Union

The EU has taken a greater interest in sport promotion and development in recent years. The Lisbon Treaty provides the European Union with a ‘soft competence’ on sport, stating that the Union ‘shall contribute to the promotion of European sporting issues’. More particularly, Article 165 of the Treaty of Lisbon states that EU action will be targeted towards:

*...developing the European dimension in sport, by promoting fairness and openness in sporting competitions and cooperation between bodies responsible for sports, and by protecting the physical and moral integrity of sportsmen and sportswomen, especially the youngest sportsmen and sportswomen.*³

Developments in this area so far have included:

- A European Commission **White Paper on Sport** was published in 2007, focusing on potential EU measures to enhance the social role of sport, its economic value, and the organisation and governance of sport across Europe⁴. The White Paper was

¹ DCAL & Sport NI. 2009. *Sport Matters: The Northern Ireland strategy for sport and physical recreation 2009–2019*.

² DCAL website. ‘Sport matters’: http://www.dcalni.gov.uk/index/sport/sport_matters.htm Accessed 2.6.11.

³ European Union. 2010. *Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*. (Also referred to as the Treaty of Lisbon): p121.

⁴ European Commission: Sport. 2007. *White Paper on Sport*.

accompanied by the ‘Pierre de Coubertin Action Plan’, which contains 53 measures ‘to guide the Commission in its sport-related activities during the coming years while fully taking into account and respecting the principle of subsidiarity and the autonomy of sport organisations’⁵. Among other measures, the Action Plan contains a specification to set up a European Sport Forum, measures to enhance public health through sport, preventing racism and violence, developing a method to measure the economic value of sport, and exploiting opportunities for social cohesion through sport⁶.

- In November 2010, a set of papers were issued by the Council of Ministers, containing a resolution and two sets of conclusions in the field of sport. These included a number of measures including an **EU structured dialogue on sport**, with a regular informal meeting of leading representatives of the EU and sporting bodies; the role of the EU in tackling **doping in sport**; and three priorities designed to promote **social inclusion through sport**⁷.

3 The EU work plan: *Developing the European Dimension of Sport*

A major step took place in January 2011 with the agreement and publication of an **EU work plan for sport – Developing the European Dimension in Sport** – to be undertaken throughout 2012 and 2013⁸. This is the first sport policy document since the Lisbon Treaty entered into force on 1 December 2009, and it sets out three specific work areas:

- **Integrity of sport:** in particular the fight against doping, match-fixing and the promotion of good governance.
- **Social values of sport:** in particular health, social inclusion, education and volunteering.
- **Economic aspects of sport:** in particular sustainable financing of grassroots sports and evidence-based policy making.

A European Commission communication proposes a number of specific actions under each of these three headings, with actions assigned either to the Commission or to Member States. A full list of the proposed actions is included in Annex 1, and a summary of those actions which are to be acted on by member states (in collaboration with the European Commission) is provided below:

⁵ European Commission: Sport. 2007. *White Paper on Sport*:p2.

⁶ European Commission: Sport. 11.7.10. *Action Plan ‘Pierre de Coubertin’*: http://ec.europa.eu/sport/white-paper/doc/sec934_en.pdf Accessed 21.12.10.

⁷ European Commission: Sport. 18.11.10. ‘First Council documents on sport adopted on 18 November 2010’: http://ec.europa.eu/sport/news/news971_en.htm

⁸ European Commission Communication. 18.1.11. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: *Developing the European Dimension in Sport*: <http://nia1.me/rl>

THE SOCIETAL ROLE OF SPORT:
<i>Education, training and qualifications in sport</i>
Develop European guidelines on combined sports training and general education ('dual careers').
Support the inclusion of sport-related qualifications when implementing the European Qualifications Framework. In this context, promote the validation of non-formal and informal learning gained through activities such as voluntary activity in sport.
<i>Prevention of and fights against violence and intolerance</i>
Develop and implement security arrangements and safety requirements for international sport events, including pan-European training and peer review projects for police officers regarding spectator violence.
<i>Enhancing health through sport</i>
Based on the EU Physical Activity Guidelines, continue progress toward the establishment of national guidelines, including a review and coordination process, and consider proposing a Council Recommendation in this field.
<i>Social inclusion in and through sport</i>
Develop and disseminate standards for accessibility of sport, leisure and recreation organisations, activities, events and venues through the European Disability Strategy.
Promote the participation of people with disabilities in European sporting events as well as the organisation of disability-specific events, in particular through supporting transnational projects and networks. In this context, support research related to specialised sport devices for persons with disabilities.
ECONOMIC DIMENSION OF SPORT:
<i>Evidence-based policy-making in the field of sport</i>
Produce Satellite Accounts for Sport ⁹ compatible with the agreed European definition.
<i>Sustainable financing of sport</i>
In cooperation with the sport movement, explore ways to strengthen financial solidarity mechanisms within sports while fully respecting EU competition rules.
Based on the results of the EU study on the funding of grassroots sport, consider best practice among existing funding mechanisms for transparent and sustainable financing of sport.
<i>Regional development and employability</i>
Fully exploit the possibilities of the European Regional Development Fund to support sport infrastructure and sustainable activities in sport and outdoors as a tool for regional and rural development, and of the European Social Fund to strengthen the skills and employability of workers in the sport sector.
ORGANISATION OF SPORT:
<i>Promotion of good governance in sport</i>
Promote standards of sport governance through exchange of good practice and targeted support to specific initiatives.

**Table 1: Actions set out for the European Commission and member states in
Developing the European Dimension of Sport**

A series of expert groups have been established to help carry each work area forward, and a timetable has been set for implementation. The work plan will be reviewed at the end of 2013, with a view to establishing a full programme from 2014 onwards. It is

⁹ A 'satellite account' can be defined as a statistical framework to measure the economic importance of the sport sector to an overall economy.

expected that a draft decision will be announced soon regarding the establishment of a new Sports Programme funding stream.

4 House of Lords Select Committee report

The House of Lords Select Committee on the European Union conducted an inquiry on grassroots sport and the European Union in 2011¹⁰. The report notes that the potential of sport is under-exploited at both EU and national level despite its ability to deliver on core policy objectives in the health, education, employment and social spheres. It considers how the EU can maximise the potential of sport in its own policy making and delivery, and help member states to do likewise.

A number of key recommendations emerge from the report, such as the integration of sport into wider EU policy making and funding streams.

The Committee concluded, for example, that,

We believe that the EU could gain most from the new competence, particularly at a time of financial constraint, by regarding sport not as a peripheral policy area but as a powerful and effective tool in the delivery of objectives across the policy spectrum, notably in the health, social and educational spheres.

In particular, the Committee found that sport could make a 'strong contribution' to three of the five headline targets in the Europe 2020 Strategy, namely employment; education and poverty; and social exclusion, and that 'increasing levels of participation in grassroots sports should therefore be a priority'. A recommendation is also made that initiatives to promote participation in sport, particularly in groups which traditionally are under-represented, should be shared between member states, and that joint-working should take place to measure not just economic outcomes but 'social returns' also.

With regard to the regular meeting of the Sport Forum, it is suggested that the role of the forum could be strengthened by using it as a medium through which the conclusions of the various working groups could be disseminated and discussed. The Committee was supportive of the Commission intention to introduce a specific Sports Programme. However, it was also noted that Sport NI (and equivalent bodies in Scotland and Wales) were not represented at a Department for Culture, Media and Sport EU Sport Stakeholder Group.

¹⁰ House of Lords, European Union Committee. 2011. 'Grassroots sport and the European Union': <http://nia1.me/fu>

5 Further EU developments

The European Commission has yet to decide how much funding to allocate to a Sport Programme, with a decision expected soon. An independent evaluation of EU sports policy concluded in September 2011 that annual funding must increase if it is to be fully effective¹¹. Total EU funding for the bloc's nascent sports policy amounts to €25.5 million for the period 2009-2011, ahead of the expected launch of a fully-fledged programme in 2014.

The evaluation has concluded that funding should be increased to at least €20 million a year if the EU is to take full advantage of its actions in the field of sport. It was also concluded that transnational projects (involving multiple member states comparing best practice between sports organisations so that discrepancies can be addressed) are likely to be the most effective, and that around 75% of funding should be allocated for such projects.

In February 2012, the European Commission published a study on the funding of grassroots sport in the EU¹². The main purpose of the study was to identify and evaluate the different systems of funding of grassroots sport across the EU. The study examines the importance for grassroots sport of different funding sources including gambling and media revenue. The impact of certain regulations on the funding of grassroots sport is analysed also. The paper outlines five key objectives:

1. Secure, increase and diversify the revenue sources allocated to sport in general, and to grassroots sport in particular;
2. Promote and enhance financial solidarity between the professional and/or elite (high-level) sport, and the grassroots level;
3. Promote and support voluntary work;
4. Recognise the public interest of grassroots sport in other policy areas;
5. Improve the evidence-base relating to grassroots sport participation and funding.

¹¹ Economisti Associati srl et al. 2011. *Evaluation of Preparatory Actions and Special Events in the Field of Sport*. <http://nia1.me/fv>

¹² European Commission. 2012: <http://nia1.me/rj>

6 Conclusion: Potential areas of interest

Having outlined the key aspects of the European Commission Communication *Developing the European Dimension of Sport*, a number of areas may be of interest in an analysis of sport planning within Northern Ireland.

6.1 Physical activity guidelines

The European Commission Communication sets out an intention to progress towards the establishment of national physical activity guidelines. It states that,

Based on the EU Physical Activity Guidelines, continue progress toward the establishment of national guidelines, including a review and coordination process, and consider proposing a Council Recommendation in this field.

The EU Physical Activity Guidelines¹³ were approved in 2008, and set out a wide range of measures for member states to follow in order to encourage higher levels of physical activity. The first guideline sets out the recommendation that children engage in at least 60 minutes of physical activity per day, and adults at least 30 minutes per day. This differs slightly from the current recommendations of the Chief Medical Officers of the UK, which recommend 150 minutes of activity per week for adults.

Sport Matters would appear to place much emphasis on these guidelines, stating within target PA1 'to have agreed and commenced implementation of a revised research framework for participation rates that is cognisant of the recommendations of the Chief Medical officers in the UK by 2009'.

Sport NI conducted research in 2010 and published the *Northern Ireland Adult Sport and Physical Activity Survey*¹⁴. One of the findings of this research was that 35% of Northern Ireland's adult population achieved the levels of physical activity recommended by the Chief Medical Officer.

6.2 Disability sport

The European Commission Communication sets out two specific actions regarding widening the accessibility of sport, particularly for those with disabilities:

Develop and disseminate standards for accessibility of sport, leisure and recreation organisations, activities, events and venues through the European Disability Strategy.

Promote the participation of people with disabilities in European sporting events as well as the organisation of disability-specific events, in particular

¹³ *EU Physical Activity Guidelines: Recommended Policy Actions in Support of Health-Enhancing Physical Activity:*
<http://nia1.me/rm>

¹⁴ Donnelly, P. 2011. *The Northern Ireland Adult Sport and Physical Activity Survey 2010*. Belfast: Sport Northern Ireland:
<http://nia1.me/rn>

through supporting transnational projects and networks. In this context, support research related to specialised sport devices for persons with disabilities.

The House of Lords inquiry found that,

Participation in sports can bring particular benefits to groups whose participation rates are lowest. These include women and girls, those with a disability, the unemployed, older people, migrant communities and those from disadvantaged communities.

At an inquiry into participation in sport and physical activity conducted by the previous CAL Committee, evidence was gathered which suggested that a number of groups are under-represented in sport, particularly older people, people with disabilities, women, people from disadvantaged areas, and people from black and ethnic minority communities. The Committee recommended 'the expansion of specific programmes aimed at increasing participation' among those groups¹⁵.

Indeed, Sport NI has reported through the Northern Ireland Sport and Physical Activity Survey that people with disabilities fall significantly behind the recommended threshold for physical activity, with just 23% achieving 150 minutes of exercise per week¹⁶. This compares with an average of 35% achieving the threshold for the adult population as a whole.

The Sport Matters strategy includes specific targets for increasing participation rates among a number of under-participating groups by 2019.

6.3 Evidence-based policy-making in the field of sport

The European Commission Communication recommends that there should be 'evidence-based policy-making in the field of sport'. Indeed, the House of Lords report made a number of recommendations regarding evidence-based planning, including that the social returns of sport be included within future research initiatives.

The EU Physical Activity Guidelines recommend that 'physical activity data should be included in health monitoring systems at national level'¹⁷.

The Sport Matters strategy has a target (PA1) to have 'agreed and commenced implementation of a revised framework for participation rates that is cognisant of the recommendations of the Chief medical officers in the UK'.

¹⁵ 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>

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ Recommendation 14: *EU Physical Activity Guidelines*.

6.4 Sustainable financing for grassroots sport

The European Commission Communication makes a number of points about the importance of finding sustainable financing models for grassroots sport. In particular, the plan states an action point for the Commission and member states to carry out as follows:

Based on the results of the EU study on the funding of grassroots sport, consider best practice among existing funding mechanisms for transparent and sustainable financing of sport.

The EU study to which this action refers recommended in February 2012 that policy makers and sporting bodies focus on securing, increasing and diversifying the revenue sources allocated to sport in general, and to grassroots sport in particular. It was also recommended that financial solidarity between elite sport and the grassroots level be enhanced.

The House of Lords European Union Committee inquiry looked at how EU legislation could be applied to sport in order to ensure the sustainability of grassroots sport, particularly its revenue streams from the broadcasting of professional sport. For example, it was noted that the UK Sport and Recreation Alliance's voluntary Code of Conduct on the reinvestment of broadcasting revenues into grassroots sport¹⁸ had recently been strengthened. Some major sports governing bodies have pledged through the code to reinvest at least 30% of their net UK television broadcasting revenues in grassroots sport¹⁹.

The inquiry also examined the relationship between gambling revenues and grassroots sport. The Committee took note of a levy model operated in France where a set percentage of money derived from betting transactions is paid into a fund and is then allocated by the French government among grassroots sports.

Finally, the European Commission Communication also contained the following action point:

Fully exploit the possibilities of the European Regional Development Fund to support sport infrastructure and sustainable activities in sport and outdoors as a tool for regional and rural development, and of the European Social Fund to strengthen the skills and employability of workers in the sport sector.

The House of Lords inquiry described it as 'desirable' that sport be mainstreamed into wider funding and policy, such as health, education and social initiatives. Indeed, the

¹⁸ Sport and Recreation Alliance. 'Broadcasting and the Voluntary Code': <http://nia1.me/rk> Accessed on 23.2.12.

¹⁹ The bodies which have made the pledge are The FA, the Lawn Tennis Association/All England Lawn Tennis Club, the England and Wales Cricket Board, UK Athletics, the FA Premier League, the Rugby Football League, the R&A and the PGA European Tour.

CAL Committee inquiry made a number of recommendations for other departments beyond DCAL, and indeed for the Executive in general, regarding increasing participation in sport.

The House of Lords inquiry also recommended that EU funding should be better publicised to grassroots sporting groups.

Annex 1: Actions proposed in *Developing the European Dimension of Sport*

THE SOCIETAL ROLE OF SPORT:
<i>Education, training and qualifications in sport</i>
Commission and member states: develop European guidelines on combined sports training and general education ('dual careers').
Commission and member states: support the inclusion of sport-related qualifications when implementing the European Qualifications Framework. In this context, promote the validation of non-formal and informal learning gained through activities such as voluntary activity in sport.
<i>Prevention of and fights against violence and intolerance</i>
Commission and member states: develop and implement security arrangements and safety requirements for international sport events, including pan-European training and peer review projects for police officers regarding spectator violence.
<i>Enhancing health through sport</i>
Commission and member states: based on the EU Physical Activity Guidelines, continue progress toward the establishment of national guidelines, including a review and coordination process, and consider proposing a Council Recommendation in this field.
<i>Social inclusion in and through sport</i>
Commission and member states: develop and disseminate standards for accessibility of sport, leisure and recreation organisations, activities, events and venues through the European Disability Strategy.
Commission and member states: promote the participation of people with disabilities in European sporting events as well as the organisation of disability-specific events, in particular through supporting transnational projects and networks. In this context, support research related to specialised sport devices for persons with disabilities.
ECONOMIC DIMENSION OF SPORT:
<i>Evidence-based policy-making in the field of sport</i>
Commission and member states: produce Satellite Accounts for Sport ²⁰ compatible with the agreed European definition.
<i>Sustainable financing of sport</i>
Commission and Member States: in cooperation with the sport movement, explore ways to strengthen financial solidarity mechanisms within sports while fully respecting EU competition rules.
Commission and member states: based on the results of the EU study on the funding of grassroots sport, consider best practice among existing funding mechanisms for transparent and sustainable financing of sport.
<i>Regional development and employability</i>
Commission and member states: fully exploit the possibilities of the European Regional Development Fund to support sport infrastructure and sustainable activities in sport and outdoors as a tool for regional and rural development, and of the European Social Fund to strengthen the skills and employability of workers in the sport sector.
ORGANISATION OF SPORT:
<i>Promotion of good governance in sport</i>
Commission and member states: promote standards of sport governance through exchange of good practice and targeted support to specific initiatives.

²⁰ A 'satellite account' can be defined as a statistical framework to measure the economic importance of the sport sector to an overall economy.

