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Communities
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Pobal

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Our ref: AQW 23451/22-27

Date: 2 April 2025

Daniel McCrossan MLA
Northern Ireland Assembly
Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw, Stormont
Belfast
BT4 3XX

Dear Daniel

AQW 23451/22-27 – SUPPORT FOR FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN SPORT.

You recently submitted an Assembly Written Question AQW 24351/22-27, asking that I detail how my Department is supporting female participation in sport.

I have arranged for this information to be placed in the Assembly Library.

Yours sincerely

**Gordon Lyons MLA
Minister for Communities**

“To ask the Minister for Communities how his Department is supporting female participation in sport” as per AQW 23451/22-27.

Sport NI Response

I have sought the requested information from the Chief Executive, who has advised me of the following information:

Response

“Funding

Increasing and sustaining women and girls participation in Sport is fundamental to Sport NI’s work. Through a variety of funding streams Sport NI has invested in developing and supporting female participation in sport, from national governing body level to local community organisations and clubs.

For example, Sport NI took the decision that major investment programmes such as the Sports System Investment – Governing Bodies (SSI-GB) and the Sports System Investment – New Governing Bodies (SSI-NGB) funded by the National Lottery for 2024/25, would highlight EDI (including Women & Girls) as a ‘golden thread’ of investment - ensuring governing bodies were promoting the important role of EDI in their work going forward.

*Therefore, these programmes were designed to specifically target Women & Girls amongst other under-represented groups, asking for EDI-specific interventions/programmes for investment as part of the submission to increase diversity and inclusion in sport. SSI-GB sought applicants to identify how investment from Sport NI **will positively impact** Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in under-represented groups.*

Funding has been specifically identified and allocated to address the under-representation of women in sport through the following programmes:

Table 1: SSI-GB Female Programmes

Delivery Partner	Programme	Aim of Programme	Investment (If known)
IFA	<i>Female Leaders in Football</i>	<i>Designed to help address the low levels of women in key decision-making roles within football.</i>	
IFA	<i>Women's U23 talent transition programme</i>	<i>New elite performance programme designed to bridge the gap between U19 girls international and senior women's programmes, comprising training and competition opportunities for players.</i>	<i>Funding through SSIGB Medals & More investment</i>
IFA	<i>Girls' Elite Youth Academy (15-16yrs)</i>	<i>New girls' elite youth talent programme delivered regionally in the athlete's school/club setting, and residential training camps. Alignment with the boys' programmes to ensure equality of opportunity, particularly in more rural settings.</i>	<i>Funding through SSIGB Medals & More investment</i>
IFA	<i>National Player Performance (NPP) (age 12-14) talent Identification programme</i>	<i>New girls programme for talent ID (12-14 years) to widen access regionally for girls. Alignment with the boys' programmes to ensure equality of opportunity, particularly in more rural settings.</i>	<i>Funding through SSIGB Medals & More investment</i>
<i>Ulster Hockey</i>	<i>Women in Leadership Programme</i>	<i>Increase number of female leaders, coaches etc in the sport.</i>	<i>£10,000</i>
<i>Cycling Ireland</i>	<i>Women on Wheels 2024</i>	<i>Designed to engage with new and current female cyclists in clubs in NI - plan for 50/50 split between</i>	<i>£5,000</i>

		<i>existing and new female cyclists. Rolls out into Big Day Out for Female Cyclists as a group – Newcastle September 24</i>	
<i>Tennis Ulster Branch</i>	<i>Court Bosses</i>	<i>Targeting young girls to take on roles within their sport of tennis</i>	
<i>Cricket Ireland</i>	<i>On the Front foot</i>	<i>Programme aims to advance the innovation, creativity and leadership capabilities of future female cricket leaders.</i>	
<i>Table Tennis Ulster</i>	<i>Young Female Leadership Schools Programme</i>	<i>Introduction to the sport of Table Tennis and developing leadership skills & competencies. Opportunities to progress into leadership roles in the sport - officiating, coaching, role models, squads etc.</i>	<i>Part of Regional Development Officer Salary £16,500 - delivery time.</i>
<i>Ulster GAA</i>	<i>Female Leadership Programme</i>	<i>Females aged 18+ interested in personal development and potentially leading teams.</i>	<i>Fund Ladies Gaelic Football Development Mgr & Officer</i>
<i>Ulster GAA</i>	<i>Gaelic 4 Girls</i>	<i>G4G is a 12-week programme incorporating coaching sessions with fun non-competitive blitzes aimed at increasing participation in Ladies Gaelic Football. The programme targets girls aged between 8-12 years who are not currently registered with a Ladies Gaelic Football club.</i>	<i>Fund Ladies Gaelic Football Development Mgr & Officer</i>

<i>Ulster GAA</i>	<i>Gaelic 4 Mothers and Others</i>	<i>Initiative sees women playing Ladies Gaelic Football in a fun, non-competitive and social environment. Gaelic4Mothers & Others provides an opportunity for women to get their recommended weekly exercise in a fun way while meeting other mothers in the area.</i>	<i>Fund Ladies Gaelic Football Development Mgr & Officer</i>
<i>RYA NI</i>	<i>Women on Water Programme</i>	<i>Opportunity for women and girls to get onto the water and to discover the different opportunities whether it is dinghy sailing, keelboat, paddle board or powerboat.</i>	<i>Fund Active Clubs Coordinator post plus programme investment</i>
<i>IABA</i>	<i>Pilot programme for females in areas of high social need.</i>	<i>IABA to introduce 'taster sessions' to engage interest and then roll out a programme. They plan to run this in three areas targeting 15-20 females per group. IABA to roll out programme in conjunction with WISPA.</i>	<i>Funding through SSIGB retention & growth investment</i>
<i>IABA</i>	<i>Ulster Schools programme</i>	<i>One event will support females only. Had successful impact in 23/24 funding year</i>	<i>Funding through SSIGB retention & growth investment</i>
<i>IABA</i>	<i>Female Training sessions</i>	<i>IABA to support female training sessions within Ulster, providing female coaching opportunities and working in partnership with Ulster High Performance – hosting 4-6 sessions across Ulster.</i>	<i>Funding through SSIGB retention & growth investment</i>

IABA	<i>'Development of Women in the Community Programme' forum/network</i>	<i>Target 2-3 women's only groups and organise taster sessions from the network. Presented to the Department of Communities Women's Programme, currently in planning/development.</i>	<i>Funding through SSIGB retention & growth investment</i>
IABA	<i>Women's International Day</i>	<i>To host and celebrate Women's International Day involving schools, charities, and utilise 5 service providers to host workshops in March 25.</i>	<i>Funding through SSIGB retention & growth investment</i>
<i>Ulster Badminton</i>	<i>Women and Girls Programme</i>	<i>Practical Badminton and Workshop hybrid programme targeting women in affiliated clubs. Women in Sport Programme currently being delivered in Belfast. Female Sports Forum agreed to assist in delivering WIS Workshops at Blitz Day</i>	<i>Funding through SSIGB retention & growth investment</i>
<i>Ulster Rugby</i>	<i>Give it a Try programme</i>	<i>introductory programme to encourage women and girls to start playing rugby</i>	<i>Funding through SSIGB retention & growth investment</i>
<i>Ulster Rugby</i>	<i>Multiple Female coaching course</i>	<i>Courses facilitated to increase the number of female coaches in Rugby</i>	<i>Funding through SSIGB retention & growth investment</i>
<i>Ulster Rugby</i>	<i>Multiple School competitions for girls</i>	<i>Increase the number of schools taking part within Girls Schools Rugby by holding regular competitions</i>	<i>Funding through SSIGB retention & growth investment</i>

<i>Ulster Rugby</i>	<i>Girls Let Play Events (U10 – U18)</i>	<i>Events to provide opportunities for female participation</i>	<i>Funding through SSIGB retention & growth investment</i>
<i>Ulster Rugby</i>	<i>XV Summer Programme</i>	<i>Programme designed to increase the number of female Ulster players selected for and contributing significantly to Ireland squads.</i>	<i>Funding through SSIGB retention & growth investment</i>
<i>Ulster Rugby</i>	<i>Facilitate and run Girls' youth competition structures</i>	<i>League and Cup competitions</i>	<i>Funding through SSIGB retention & growth investment</i>
<i>Paddle NI</i>	<i>Female development programme</i>	<i>Support 10 female paddlers in their Paddlesport development.</i>	<i>Funding through SSIGB retention & growth investment</i>
<i>National Coarse Fishing Federation of Ireland</i>	<i>Coach Training</i>	<i>2 new Female Coaches to be trained</i>	<i>Funding through SSIGB retention & growth investment</i>
<i>Ulster Angling Federation</i>	<i>External Angling Consultation and Club Consultation</i>	<i>This Consultation is designed to ascertain how clubs and UAF can work to increase Female Membership. Once Consultation is complete a report will be produced.</i>	<i>Funding through SSIGB retention & growth investment</i>
<i>Ulster Angling Federation</i>	<i>Female Representative/ Committee Member</i>	<i>Encourage at least 3 clubs to recruit a female representative or to any committee role or management level.</i>	<i>Funding through SSIGB retention & growth investment</i>
<i>Ulster Angling Federation</i>	<i>Level 2 Coaching Course</i>	<i>Have at least 1 female participant at this course.</i>	<i>Funding through SSIGB retention</i>

			& growth investment
<i>British Orienteering</i>	<i>Females to the Fore</i>	<i>Project will give more female members more volunteering opportunities, support specific training opportunities for female members and ensure advertising and NIOA/Club images are reflective of women/girls in sport.</i>	<i>Funding through SSIGB retention & growth investment</i>
<i>Mountaineering Ireland</i>	<i>Mountaineering and Climbing Instructor Pathway Mentoring Day</i>	<i>Female Instructor will spend a day mentoring 4 women on the Pathway.</i>	<i>Funding through SSIGB retention & growth investment</i>

- *Sports System Investment New Governing Bodies - £6,750*

These are awards made through National Lottery funding to governing bodies of sports to invest in the sports system. Typically, these are smaller governing bodies and ‘smaller’ sports, where Sport NI has had limited or no engagement with previously.

Note: these are specifically identifiable programme elements targeting the inclusion of women in sport. Funding targeting inclusion more generally will also include women but is not separately identifiable and so has not been included.

- *NI Sports Forum - £10,000*

This is a business case investment in NI Sports Forum to operate programmes promoting women in sport and providing resources to governing bodies and clubs.

Sport NI recently launched the Creating Opportunities Crowdfunder small grants programme, which is available to local clubs. Clubs can apply for funding for any new and/or additional participation projects they wish to run within their club. The programme offers up to 50% match-funding support to a maximum of £5,000 from Sport NI through the Crowdfunder platform. Eligible costs include (but are not exclusive to) coaching costs, venue hire, workshops costs, equipment and capital costs required to deliver their participation project.

Details of organisations which have sought funding to support women in under-represented roles within sports or positions within sport are detailed in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Creating Opportunities

Delivery Partner	Programme	Aim of Project	Investment (If known)
Carrickmore Handball	<i>Empower Girls Through Handball</i>	<i>Empowering girls & women in rural Carrickmore to get active through handball. Please support us in creating a new inclusive handball program</i>	<i>£5,000.00</i>
University of Ulster Volleyball Club	<i>University of Ulster Volleyball Club</i>	<i>We are a volleyball club that is passionate about introducing people to the sport of volleyball</i>	<i>£1,096.00</i>
St Macartans Ladies GFC	<i>Future Sporting Stars @ St Macartans Ladies GFC</i>	<i>We are launching a new "future sporting stars" programme to inspire, empower, and engage more girls in sport across Clogher Valley</i>	<i>£5,000.00</i>
St Patricks GAA Dromintee	<i>St Patricks Dromintee New Girls in Sport Programme</i>	<i>Creating new opportunities for girls and young people in sport at St Patrick's Dromintee, for future success on and off the field.</i>	<i>£5,000.00</i>
Dorsey Emmets GFC	<i>Dorsey Emmets GFC Girls' Game-Changers Initiative</i>	<i>Help us kickstart Dorsey Emmets GFC's new girls' programme- creating more opportunities for girls n our community. Let's level the field!</i>	<i>£5,000.00</i>
CI Sixers	<i>CI Sixers - Here Come the Girls</i>	<i>To deliver the best girls and ladies cricket coaching and facilities in east Belfast</i>	<i>£5,000.00</i>
North Down Cricket Club	<i>Women and Girls Into Cricket</i>	<i>North Down Cricket want to get your support to facilitate a women and girls "into" cricket programme.</i>	<i>£5,000.00</i>

Belfast Ravens	Give Football A Go	<i>Give Football A Go encourages adult women, with little or no experience, to take introductory steps towards taking up football.</i>	£787.50
Erne Boxing Club	<i>Erne Boxing Club The Power of the Punch</i>	<i>We want to encourage more girls and females into boxing and active participation in our club</i>	£5,000.00
Dungannon Boxing Club	<i>Dungannon Boxers Queens of the ring</i>	<i>Develop a female-only boxing programme</i>	£5,000.00
Wellington Recreation Football Club	<i>Wellington Rec Womens football ..Dream Bigger</i>	<i>To generate funding to secure long term female participation in football at our club. Making memories ,boosting confidence, friendships</i>	£2,500.00
St. Michael's GAC, Magheralin	<i>Girls Can Play to With St Michaels Magheralin</i>	<i>A completely new project Feb and March 2025 for a new cohort of girls in our community to play football and build life skills through sport</i>	£5,000.00
Queen's University Golf Club	<i>Queen's Golf Female Participation Programme</i>	<i>We aim to enhance the student experience by increasing participation in golf, particularly among female golfers.</i>	£5,000.00
Armagh Amateur Boxing Club	<i>Armagh Amateur Boxing Club Female Programme</i>	<i>A new 8-week girls' boxing programme aimed at creating a supportive and empowering environment for girls to box for the first time</i>	£1,500.00
Lisburn CC	<i>Lisburn CC - Women and Girl's Winter Program</i>	<i>Lisburn CC want to use this funding to help support our women and girl's winter coaching programmes.</i>	£5,000.00
Cookstown Fr Rocks	<i>"This is Us!": Cookstown Fr</i>	<i>"This is US!" is a new girls programme at Cookstown Fr Rocks GFC: Getting more girls to take up</i>	£5,000.00

	<i>Rocks Girls Programme</i>	<i>football through new opportunities created.</i>	
Tummary Athletic FC	<i>Levelling the Playing Field at Tummary Athletic FC</i>	<i>We are crowdfunding to "level the playing field", through a new girls' football programme at Tummary Athletic FC over the winter</i>	<i>£5,000.00</i>
Ormeau Road Boxing Club	<i>Ormeau Boxing Club Girls Box Clever</i>	<i>Encourage more girls into the sport of boxing</i>	<i>£5,000.00</i>
St. Michael's GAC, Magheralin	<i>Girls Can Play to With St Michaels Magheralin</i>	<i>A completely new project Feb and March 2025 for a new cohort of girls in our community to play football and build life skills through sport</i>	<i>£5,000.00</i>
Erne Boxing Club	<i>Erne Boxing Club The Power of the Punch</i>	<i>We want to encourage more girls and females into boxing and active participation in our club</i>	<i>£5,000.00</i>
Total			<i>£85,883.50</i>

Sport NI also works in partnership with District Council through Community Planning to fund programmes/projects aimed at promoting participation in sport for women and girls among local community groups.

Research

Sport NI has commissioned research to monitor the participation gap between boys and girls:

- (2022) The Children's Sports Participation and Physical Activity Study (CSPPA) in collaboration with Sport Ireland and Healthy Ireland. School children and young people aged 10 to 19 on the island of Ireland was asked to report on various aspects related to sport participation and physical activity.*
- (2023) A Sport module in the Young Person's Life and Times Survey. The questions asked within this are available at [Northern Ireland Young Life and Times Survey: 2023 \(ark.ac.uk\)](https://www.ark.ac.uk/northern-ireland-young-life-and-times-survey-2023) and a summary report is available from ARK, at [summary23.pdf \(ark.ac.uk\)](https://www.ark.ac.uk/summary23.pdf).*

- (2023) A Sport module in the Kids Life and Times Survey. The questions asked within this are available at [Northern Ireland Kids Life and Times Survey: 2023 \(ark.ac.uk\)](https://ark.ac.uk/nirks/) and a summary report is available from ARK, at [summary23.pdf \(ark.ac.uk\)](https://ark.ac.uk/summary23.pdf).

Guidance

In partnership with the Home Country Sports Councils, Sport NI launched Moving to Inclusion (<https://movingtoinclusion.co.uk/>) an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) hub.

Women in Sport Engagement and Delivery Plan

Sport NI has developed a Women in Sport 'Engagement and Delivery' Plan to identify gaps in female involvement in sport and take steps to address this. The plan has identified four pillars to set objectives against – Leadership, Participation, Visibility & Advocacy and Sporting Foundation. One of the Leadership objectives areas is "Support towards female workforce development i.e. coaches, officials and volunteers to broaden the base." Baselines have been established through an EDI survey of the NI sports sector and the imbalance in women's participation in sport and physical activity presented at an EDI Sports Development network event in October 2024.

The Delivery Plan includes a Women in Sport campaign - **Be Seen, Be Heard, Belong** – which launched on 3 March 2025 and scheduled to run for an initial 3 year period to demonstrate Sport NI's continuous commitment to this area of work.

The integrated comms campaign aims to help women and girls find their place in sport and will include PR, advertising, digital and social media and stakeholder engagement. Sport NI held a launch event on the 3 March, attended by key decision makers within sport's governing bodies, local councils, local athletes and academics with an interest in the area. As a first step Sport NI is asking everyone within the sector to sign up and join the movement. More information can be found here: www.beseenbeheardbelong.co.uk

People Development

Sport NI People Development team are implementing interventions to support 'official' development in NI, with elements within these interventions linked specifically to the concept of gender equality officiating. Interventions include:

- *NI Officials Forum (Sports Development practitioners who are responsible for official learning, management and logistics): this forum supports sports development officers from our governing bodies to better support, develop and deploy their officials (including gender balance context).*
- *Digital learning for officials: SNI have developed a digital learning course called Positive Mental Health for Officials. Many of the images and references within this course speak specifically to females officiating.*
- *Rise Female Leadership Programme: 19 women from 13 different sports have taken part in the programme. They have successfully completed the first phase of the programme, and they are currently receiving personalised mentoring to prepare them to make lasting impacts in the sports sector. Rise is empowering the next generation of female leaders in sport, providing tailored support for female coaches, officials, and administrators across the Derry, Strabane, Causeway Coast, and Mid Ulster areas. Rise aims to close the gap of underrepresentation by enhancing leadership skills, diversity and inclusion.*

Sport NI is currently developing a People Plan that will look to achieve a vision of an active, skilled and supported workforce, which is representative of the population, and has the capacity and capability to meet the demands of the sporting system in Northern Ireland. The plan will identify problems to be addressed and proposed actions which will support the development of the system. This includes the underrepresentation of people including women across the populations of officials, coaches, and sports administrators. This plan will become a live working document in 2025-26.”