

Cheryl Brownlee
Northern Ireland Assembly
Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw, Stormont
Belfast
BT4 3XX

Dear Cheryl

AQW 35893/22-27 – Financial support available to support the development and growth of women’s football; and plans to increase investment and opportunities for female players, coaches and clubs.

You recently submitted an Assembly Written Question AQW 35893/22-27, asking that I detail (i) any financial support available from (a) my Department; and (b) its arm’s-length bodies, to support the development and growth of women’s football; and (ii) any plans in place to increase investment and opportunities for female (a) players; (b) coaches; and (c) clubs.

I have arranged for information concerning Sport NI’s programmes which have supported and continue to support women’s football to be placed in the Assembly Library.

Yours sincerely



Gordon Lyons MLA
Minister for Communities

Annex A

Financial support available from Sport NI to support the development and growth of women's football and plans to increase investment and opportunities for female players, coaches and clubs

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

(i) **"Financial Support"**

*"IFA received £300,000 via SSI-GB **Medals and More** with £150,000 towards Women & Girls Pathway as per table 1 below.*

"Table 1: IFA Contribution to Women & Girls Pathway"

<i>Budget Sub-Heading</i>	<i>Amount</i>
<i>Sport Science alignment across girls & women's pathway (IDPs & tracking development)</i>	<i>£20,000</i>
<i>WU17 & WU19 'best v best' competition & training for UEFA qualification</i>	<i>£55,000</i>
<i>Girls' Elite Academy (U15 & U16) 'best v best' competition & training for international prep</i>	<i>£45,000</i>
<i>People Development programme for coaches, scouts & key personnel</i>	<i>£5,000</i>
<i>Girls' NPP Programme & scouting network across NI</i>	<i>£25,000</i>
<i>Total</i>	<i>£150,000</i>

*"IFA received £255,000 via SSI-GB **Retention & Growth***

- Funds support both boys and girls, total is aggregated. Specific allocation for women and girls is not available.*
- One measure identified: targeting female coaches/officials.*

"Sported Engage Her Programme"

*"Sport NI recognise the need for more investment and resource to encourage women and girls to participate in sport and physical activity. As part of the **Be Seen, Be Heard, Belong** campaign, Sport NI is committed to levelling the playing field for women and girls throughout Northern Ireland. Sport has the power to be a positive influence on all of society, through providing supporting structures and a sporting environment that places equity of opportunity first.*

“Sport NI has listened to the sector’s requests for more resource to be invested into women and girl’s sport to ensure females have a level playing field when it comes to participation.

“This iteration of the Engage Her programme for 2025/26 includes an incentive of a £2,000 award for up to 30 clubs:

- *who engage with Sported Volunteers in the programme; and*
- *who develop an implementation plan focused on improving the sport and physical experience of women and girls.*

“See table 2 below for the objectives of the Engage Her programme.

Table 2: Engage Her Programme Objectives

Aim to be achieved	Outcome/Output	Baseline (if known)	Target	Metric to be used
Improve the confidence and change the attitudes of grassroots groups in engaging women and girls.	Groups have increased confidence in engaging women & girls. Group leaders reflect more positive attitudes towards engaging women & girls.	Will be assessed at start of project	30 groups	Pre- and post-survey comparisons showing distance travelled.
Build groups’ capacity to engage more women and girls in their activities.	Groups develop women & girls engagement plans.	-	30 groups	Number of engagement plans completed.
Increase leadership’s knowledge and insight, empowering them to generate change within their organisation.	Leaders within clubs/groups report increased knowledge and insight re. women & girls’ engagement.	Assessed at start of project	30 groups	Pre- and post-survey comparisons showing distance travelled
Increase capacity for local groups to provide opportunities for women & girls activities.	Increase in number of women & girls engaging in activities delivered by local groups.	Assessed at start of project	100 W&Gs across all groups	Attendance records pre- and post-intervention and 6 months after grant awarded

(ii) **“Opportunities for female sport development**

“(Players & Coaches)

“Female Leadership

“In 2025-26 Sport NI have initiated plans to support National Governing Bodies (NGBs) to embed leadership programmes within their own organisations or collaboratively together. A female leadership framework will guide grassroots delivery, offering tailored, context-specific support. This approach will enable a broader reach through engaging governing bodies to deliver multiple programmes, guided by an ethos and framework. Sport NI will also support NGBs in addressing their environmental barriers to women in sport leadership. To date we have engaged 19 governing bodies through a survey and furthered this engagement through a facilitated shared learning session with 14 of the organisations including the Irish FA. Sport NI will work closely with these partners through the delivery of a support programme in Quarter 4 into 2025-26 that will help to collectively deliver leadership programmes that impact a greater number of females. The support programme will include:

- ***Pre- Session – 10th December 2025:*** Introduction to themes and overview of how you might prepare to maximise the impact of the course. (e.g understanding what your context looks like in terms of female leadership).
- ***Session 1- 15th January 2026:*** Understanding the Landscape: Females in Sport Leadership
- ***Session 2 – 5th February 2026:*** Developing a progressive and effective programme and influencing the environment
- ***Session 3 – 26th February 2026:*** Mentoring and Male advocacy
- ***Session 4 – 19th March 2026:*** Communities of practice and further support

“(Clubs)

“Crowdfunder – Creating Opportunities

- ***Project Name:*** Support for Woodvale Youth Academy
- ***Location:*** Belfast
- ***Funding Raised:*** £3,382
- ***Project Objective:***
 - *Implement new girls-only sessions*
 - *Develop new girls’ teams within the academy*