

From: The Minister

Patsy McGlone MLA
Northern Ireland Assembly
Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw, Stomont
Belfast
BT4 3XX

Dear Patsy

AQW 44295/22-27 – STEPS BEING TAKEN TO HELP INCREASE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN SPORT

You recently submitted an Assembly Written Question AQW 44295/22-27, asking that I detail any steps my Department is taking to help increase participation of women and girls in sport.

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

Yours sincerely



**Gordon Lyons MLA
Minister for Communities**

Annex A

Steps being taken to help increase participation of women and girls in sport as per AQW 44295/22-27

Sport NI Response

In 2025/26 Sport NI invested circa £1.8m into female focused programmes, projects and initiatives. Please see table below for breakdown:

| Programme | Fund | Amount |
|--|-----------|-------------------|
| SSIGB female focused investment | Lottery | £1,519,393 |
| SSI-NGB female focused investment | Lottery | £56,862 |
| Creating Opportunities | Lottery | £98,632 |
| Sported Engage Her Programme* ¹ | Lottery | £99,700 |
| Sported International Women's Day Small Grant Award* ² | Exchequer | £24,000 |
| The Outdoor Partnership for a Hills and Skills training for women | Exchequer | £12,000 |
| Impact Players Conference tickets for 50 governing bodies and local councils | Exchequer | £5,000 |
| Female Leadership Programme* ³ | Exchequer | £3,577 |
| Women's Aid Federation NI Domestic abuse Awareness in Sport training for Sport NI and governing bodies* ⁴ | Exchequer | £2,500 |
| Total | | £1,821,664 |

1. The objectives of the Engage Her Programme are to:

- Improve the confidence and change the attitudes of grassroots clubs and organisations in engaging women and girls.
- Build groups' capacity to engage more women and girls in their activities.
- Increase leadership's knowledge and insight, empowering them to generate change within their organisation
- Increase capacity for local groups to provide opportunities for women & girls activities.

2. Sport NI delivered a small grants award (up to £500 per award) to 41 small sports organisations to deliver activities to women and girls (for example taster sessions and workshops) throughout March 2026, coinciding with International Women's Day, linked to Sport NI's Be Seen, Be Heard, Belong campaign.
3. Sport NI's support to NGBs the people development team through the **Female Leadership Programme**, offered 4 sessions focused on developing and supporting women in sport leadership. 21 individuals from 15 sports attended the four sessions where they developed their understanding, knowledge and skills to provide more effective support to women coaches, officials and other women in sport leadership. Topics included understanding the current landscape for women in sport leadership, designing an effective programme for women, mentoring, male allyship and the value of communities of practice
4. Sport NI offered governing bodies Domestic Abuse in Sport Awareness Sessions (including Safe Leave Act) which was facilitated by Women's Aid Federation NI. 2 sessions were delivered to 35 NGB's.

Her Outdoors Week

'Her Outdoors Week' took place in August 2025 with 19 Partner organisations, across Ireland encompassing 27 events with 274 participants.

Adult Safeguarding

Sport NI have launched an adult safeguarding service for the sports sector with Volunteer Now, which will operate until March 2027. This will provide guidance, advice and support to the sports sector, including sports clubs, regarding adult safeguarding queries including violence against women and girls. Contact details can be found on our website at <https://www.sportni.net/performance/safe-sport/adult-safeguarding/>

Be Seen, Be Heard, Belong

Be Seen, Be Heard, Belong is a three-year women in sport initiative underlining our commitment to levelling the playing field and ensuring women and girls have the same opportunities as men and boys in sport, both on and off the pitch. It is both a

communications campaign and an engagement and delivery plan to ensure the sports sector has the right tools and resources to champion women in sport and make lasting change.

'Be Seen, Be Heard, Belong' launched in March 2025 with an event attended by high profile sportspeople including Lady Mary Peters, Ciara Mageean and Tanya Oxtoby and supported by the Communities Minister and Junior Ministers. Widespread media coverage across BBC, UTV, Cool FM and Q Radio of the event complemented the advertising campaign which saw high impact video and imagery appearing across NI on billboards, adshells, digital screens and social media to inspire women and girls to be seen, be heard and belong in sport. The hero video had 3.6m views across Facebook, Instagram and YouTube and 56k link clicks. It is estimated the 15+ female population would have seen our Out of Home (OOH) ads on average 6 times and have overall contacts of 1,887,813.

Throughout the year 14 ambassadors signed up to support the campaign and share their stories in sport. Ambassadors include elite athletes like Olympic champion Hannah Scott and former NI women's football captain Marissa Callaghan as well as male allies and inspirational women including Myrtle Hanna who is still hillwalking every week at the age of 82.

Our Proudest Sporting Moment social media campaign showcased women and girls across all levels of sport, from elite athletes including Kate O'Connor and Katie Morrow to 7-year-old footballers and women getting back into competitive running in their forties. 28 moments were shared across 19 different sports with over 200,000 views on social media.