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Potential issues regarding women and sport

This paper provides a brief summary of a variety of potential issues for further scrutiny regarding women and sport, following a recent Assembly research paper on the subject¹.

1 Informal sports

Recent research has indicated that informal, non-competitive physical activity may be a successful option in encouraging teenage girls to participate in sport². Indeed, non-competitive activities have been the focus of initiatives by a range of sporting bodies in other jurisdictions, including the Active Women programme, which contributes £10 million of National Lottery funding to relevant projects.

- To what extent is current provision for informal sports opportunities sufficient?
- Is it the case that Northern Ireland is largely dependent on the private sector for *informal* sports provision for adults?

¹ Hull, DJ & Ward, M. 2014. 'Women and sport: A summary of potential issues', *Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Information Service Paper* NIAR 212-13.

² Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation. 2011. *Women and Informal Sport*. <http://www.wsff.org.uk/resources/how-women-experience-sport-and-fitness/women-and-informal-sport>

- Are sports governing bodies providing sufficient opportunities, or is the focus entirely on competitive forms of their sport?

Our current understanding of the numbers of people participating in various sports derives largely from the Continuous Household Survey.

- Could it be that further survey work is required to capture adequately the range of sporting activities currently taking place?
- Is further, more intensive research required to understand what sporting opportunities are currently successful in encouraging greater participation among women and girls? Could such initiatives be rolled out further?

2 Body image

Research has indicated that the relationship between female participation in sport and body image is a complex one, but that teenage girls in particular can be put off participating in sport because of a degree of self-consciousness about the way they look³. The Active Women project in England found that women may under-participate in sport due to a self-consciousness about fitness, weight or sporting ability⁴.

By contrast, research has also indicated that for some, body image can act as a motivator so that they are encouraged to take part in more sport in order to appear thinner⁵. However, this form of motivation can also be linked to eating disorders, particularly among elite athletes⁶.

A Council of Europe report produced in 2011 recommended that local research is important in ascertaining the particular barriers arising from girls' and women's relationship with physical and sporting activities⁷.

- Could it be that more Northern Ireland-specific research is required to investigate the relationship between sport and body image, particularly among teenage girls?
- Is there an awareness of this issue within schools and how do they seek to tackle this issue?

³ Allender, S, Cowburn, G & Foster, C. 2006. 'Understanding participation in sport and physical activity among children and adults: a review of qualitative studies', *Health Education Research*, 21(6): 826-835.

⁴ Sport England. 'Sport and women': <http://www.sportengland.org/research/encouraging-take-up/key-influences/sport-and-women/> Page accessed 14.4.14.

⁵ Sport NI. 2005. *The Social Benefits of Sport*: <http://nia1.me/1vr> p4.

⁶ Martinsen, M & Sundgot-Borgen, J. 2013. 'Higher Prevalence of Eating Disorders among adolescent elite athletes than controls', *Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise* 45(6):1188-97.

⁷ Council of Europe. 2011. *Gender Equality in Sports: Handbook on Good Practices*: http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/epas/publications/Handbook_2%20Gender_equality_in_sport.pdf

3 Role models

The Commission on the Future of Women's Sport in the UK publishes an audit each year for the Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation of the number of women involved in sports governance. Their 2013 report, *Trophy Women*, found that only one in five members of the boards of NGBs for sport in the UK is a woman, and just nine of the 57 organisations have a female chief executive⁸. UK Sport has developed the Women and Leadership Development Programme in order to increase the representation of women in leadership roles in sport through intensive training and mentoring⁹.

- What is board representation specifically within Northern Ireland?
- Have initiatives such as the Women and Sport Leadership Development Programme been attempted in Northern Ireland, and, if so, what has their impact been?

Assembly research found that coverage of female sports can be as little as two and a half minutes per hour on dedicated sports programmes¹⁰.

- How could a disparity in the representation of male and female sports within the media be addressed?
- What changes of practice have been adopted elsewhere, and how effective have these been?

The Coaching Workforce Survey found that 78% of coaches in Northern Ireland are male, though there is a high degree of variation across sports¹¹. Some sports, such as cricket and rugby, have a particularly low number of female coaches.

- Has this situation changed since 2010?
- Have specific initiatives been pursued to bring about a change?

SportScotland has created a Young Ambassador programme which involves the recruitment of young people between the ages of 14 and 17 to motivate and inspire other young people from primary and secondary schools across Scotland to get involved in sport.

- Have DCAL or Sport NI considered a scheme similar to the Young Ambassador programme in Scotland?

⁸ Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation. 2013. *Trophy Women: NGB Leadership Audit 2013*: <http://nia1.me/1l2>

⁹ UK Sport 'Women in Leadership Development Programme': <http://www.uk sport.gov.uk/pages/women-and-leadership-development-programme/>

¹⁰ Hull, DJ & Ward, M. 2014. 'Women and sport: A summary of potential issues', *Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Information Service Paper* NIAR 212-13.

¹¹ Sport NI. 2010. Coaching Workforce Survey: <http://www.sportni.net/NR/rdoonlyres/A8EF3483-299B-4B12-B2AA-51F3A6BC523C/0/CoachingWorforceSurvey.pdf>: p24.

4 Sport and young people

Recent evidence would suggest that the period from 12 years onwards is crucial in setting the pattern of physical activity for girls and young women into adulthood¹². A survey by Sport NI in 2010 found that of the recommended 120 minutes of curricular PE time, just 89 minutes is the average at post-primary¹³. As their school career progresses, they exercise less and less, with 103 minutes at Key Stage 3, 81 minutes at Key Stage 4 and 63 minutes at Key Stage 5. Furthermore, in 2013, a UK-wide study found that just 43% of children in Northern Ireland achieve the recommended level of one hour of exercise per day – eight percentage points less than the UK average, and lower than anywhere else in the UK¹⁴.

- Are the right range of sports being offered within schools in Northern Ireland?
- What is the current balance between formal and informal sports?
- What specific studies have been carried out in Northern Ireland to discover what barriers there may be to participation?
- What about extra-school sports – are there sufficient opportunities for older girls and young teenagers, such as the 12–14 age group, which address participation in post-primary years before it starts to decline significantly?

5 Funding models

While Sport NI has various participation investment programmes with targets for female participation, it would seem that there are currently no funding programmes which focus specifically on female sport and physical activity. Sport England has an Active Women project designed to investigate and pilot initiatives aimed at boosting participation among women¹⁵.

- Would Northern Ireland benefit from such a project, along with a bespoke fund?
- What is the role of local government in this – to what extent do councils in Northern Ireland regard female participation as a key strategic issue?
- What forms of sports programmes and projects exist, both at grassroots and elite level, for women from disadvantaged backgrounds, young mothers, and those with disabilities?

¹² Lunn, P, Kelly, E & Fitzpatrick, N. 2013. *Keeping Them in the Game: Taking Up and Dropping Out of Sport and Exercise in Ireland*. Dublin: The Irish Sports Council/An Chomhairle Spóirt & Economic and Social Research Institute: Research Series No 33.

¹³ Sport NI. 2011. *A Baseline Survey Of Timetabled PE in Post Primary Schools in Northern Ireland - 2010: Summary Report*. <http://nia1.me/1y0>

¹⁴ Griffiths, LJ, Cortina-Borja, M, Sera, F, Poulidou, T, Geraci, M, Rich, C, Cole, TJ, Law, C, Joshi, H, Ness, AR, Jebb, SA & Dezaux, C. 2013. 'How active are our children? Findings from the Millennium Cohort Study', *BMJ Open* 3(8): <http://www.bmjopen.bmj.com/content/3/8/e002893>

¹⁵ Sport England. 'Sport and women': <http://www.sportengland.org/research/encouraging-take-up/key-influences/sport-and-women/> Page accessed 14.4.14.

- Is there specific awareness of the European Sport Sub-Programme, either of the 'Collaborative Partnerships' strand or the 'Not-for-Profit European Sport Event' programme?
- What models have been followed elsewhere in Europe which Northern Ireland could try – particularly in countries such as Denmark and France where female participation is high?