



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

National Sports Policy 2018 – 2027

Sports Action Plan 2021 – 2023



Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media

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Foreword by Ministers Catherine Martin and Jack Chambers

On the launch of the new National Sports Policy 2018-2027 in July 2018, much emphasis was placed on the importance of sport to people's lives and the positive effect that a physically active lifestyle has for physical and mental health, and quality of life. In the intervening period, the COVID-19 pandemic arrived at our shores. It has presented enormous challenges and caused suffering and hardship to so many. While it has also confirmed the validity of the National Sports Policy's central message of the importance and benefits associated with a physically active lifestyle, it is beyond dispute that significant damage has been caused to Ireland's sporting organisations, which will need to be supported and rebuilt during 2021 especially. Tailored, sport-specific solutions will be required in 2021 to get many sports back on track and contributing to people's wellbeing.

While more people are more active than ever before, we are still short of where we need to be. We want to change that situation so that at least 60% of the population are actively participating in sport by 2027. We also want to make sure that more people are socially involved in sport, whether as volunteers, club members or attendees at sporting events given the social capital that such involvement confers.


Since the launch of the new policy in July 2018, work on virtually all of its 57 Actions has started and some actions have in fact already been completed. A progress report is included in Annex 2. This three-year Action Plan covers the period up to end 2023 and sets out the key initiatives that we are going to pursue on our continuing journey to get more people involved in sport and to enhance the way that sport is managed and administered.

The bywords of this Action Plan are inclusion and diversity. The research figures from the Irish Sports Monitor, prepared by Sport Ireland, are telling us that there are many in Irish society today who are not reaping the benefits from playing some form of sport, whether recreational or competitive. The economically disadvantaged, people with disability and those from the migrant or traveller communities, for example, are all participating considerably less than the average. There have also been some disturbing incidents of racism in sport that are not only wholly unacceptable but which can also act as a deterrent for all to enjoy and reap the benefits of sport. In line with the Government's commitment to adopt a zero tolerance approach to racism in sport, we will work closely with the sporting bodies to develop information programmes and campaigns and to ensure that robust mechanisms are in place to deal swiftly and decisively with any incidents arising on or off the field of play.

Plainly, there is an overwhelming need to reach out to these communities in a more convincing and informed way than ever before if we are to meet our ambitious participation targets. That is why this Action Plan contains specific initiatives to promote across all media the sport and physical activity message. We also have commenced work on the creation of a national database of sport and recreational facilities that will make key information accessible to all. The absence of information on sport and recreation facilities will not be a reason for not participating. And perhaps most important of all, through the development of Local Sports Plans, in collaboration with the Local Authorities, we are going to shift the emphasis from the national to the local and put the interests and needs of local communities, urban and rural, to the forefront.

We are under no illusion as to the scale of the challenge ahead. Many countries in Europe and further afield are facing similar challenges of increasing physical inactivity levels. Ultimately, people will make individual choices as to whether or not they should participate in sport. Our approach is one of encouragement and facilitation. The State recognises the many benefits of sport and that is why, as a result of the increased financial provisions for sport in the last few Budgets, we are well on track to double annual investment in sport by 2027, compared to the level that prevailed before the launch of the National Sports Policy.

This is a plan that has been prepared with the valuable insights and knowledge of the Sports Leadership Group, the membership of which is shown below. We wish to express our sincere appreciation and thanks for the great efforts put in by the Group in helping to bring this Action Plan to fruition. Their work does not end here, however, as the next phase is about ensuring that words are translated and fully delivered into tangible actions to achieve our stated national policy objectives.





Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts,
Gaeltacht, Sport and Media
Catherine Martin TD



Minister of State for Sport
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Jack Chambers TD

Sports Leadership Group Members July 2021

Nina Arwitz	Volunteer Ireland
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Sarah Keane	Olympic Federation of Ireland
Paula Keatley	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
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Mary O'Connor	Federation of Irish Sport
Shane O'Connor	OFI Athletes Commission
Alan Quinlan	Broadcaster & Former Ireland Rugby international
John Treacy	Sport Ireland

Glossary

CSPPA	Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study
CCMA	County and City Management Association
DCEDIY	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
DE	Department of Education
DFHERIS	Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
DH	Department of Health
DHLGH	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
DJ	Department of Justice
DRCD	Department of Rural and Community Development
DTCAGSM	Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media
FIS	Federation of Irish Sport
IRFU	Irish Rugby Football Union
LA	Local Authority
LGBTI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex
LSP	Local Sports Partnership
MTU	Munster Technological University
NGB	National Governing Body
NSP	National Sports Policy
OFI	Olympic Federation of Ireland.
PE	Physical Education
PI	Paralympics Ireland
SCEP	Sports Capital and Equipment Programme
SDG	United Nations: Sustainable Development Goal
SIDO	Sports Inclusion Disability Officer
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
VAT	Value Added Tax

1

COVID-19 Recovery Priorities 2021

The pandemic has presented enormous challenges for Ireland throughout 2020 and has continued to do so in 2021. Sport has been severely affected, to the point where many clubs and sporting organisations have been fighting for survival. The length of the period to full recovery is still difficult and uncertain to determine precisely but will likely take several years. Many sports facilities have been significantly impacted with long periods of closure. Swimming pool operators in particular have faced significant challenges in re-opening to the public. For many people with a disability, COVID-19 has been an especially difficult time as they will not have had access to their local clubs, outdoor amenities, coaches, training facilities and equipment. In recognition of the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on people with a disability, a proportion of the COVID-19 support funding investment in 2020 was targeted directly at the disability sport sector. However, more needs to be done and we intend to set up a specific, ongoing fund for disability sport initiatives.



The State has provided record levels of funding in support of many sectoral areas, including sport. The budget for Sport Ireland in 2021 is more than €100 million, which will benefit sporting communities across the country. In addition, a new round of the Sports Capital and Equipment Programme will happen in 2021 with a €40 million budget. This fully justifiable investment ensures that there will be in 2021 a sport offering for people that wouldn't otherwise be there without this funding. Encouraging developments on the vaccine front also give hope that the return to sport will gain momentum and hopefully accelerate during 2021 and beyond. The challenges faced by the Irish sport sector in 2020 are likely to continue to a varying, hopefully reducing, extent throughout this plan. Our mindset can rightly be hopeful but our planning must be driven by realism and an acceptance that the virus will continue to pose a threat to public health well into the future which will require all to continue with precautionary and diligent approaches to how sport is delivered.

Ref.	Action	Lead	Stakeholders
1.1	Continue to work closely with the sporting bodies and provide support, financial and otherwise, for the continued delivery of their sports.	DTCAGSM/ Sport Ireland	All relevant stakeholders
1.2	Engage with the sporting bodies for the purposes of informing the development of tailored proposals and approaches for future COVID-19 mitigation measures for both indoor and outdoor sports.	DTCAGSM/ Sport Ireland	All relevant stakeholders
1.3	Identify means of supporting NGBs in promoting the growth and recovery of club memberships and networks.	Sport Ireland	NGBs
1.4	Establish a Disability Sport Fund to support local disability initiatives.	Sport Ireland	SIDOs, NGBs, LSPs, CARA
1.5	Develop and implement a National Swimming Strategy to provide additional swimming opportunities indoors and outdoors.	DTCAGSM	Sport Ireland, Swim Ireland, Ireland Active, LAs, DHLGH, CARA
1.6	Continue to work with the sporting bodies to facilitate the safe return of spectators at sporting events, for the benefit of fans, clubs and sporting bodies.	DTCAGSM	Sport Ireland, NGBs
1.7	Deliver an inaugural Winter Initiative for Sport in 2021 to encourage and support enhanced membership and participation in sports clubs, which will aid the recovery of the sector	DTCAGSM/ Sport Ireland	All relevant stakeholders
1.8	Work with NGBs to promote the recovery and safe return of indoor sporting activities.	DTCAGSM/ Sport Ireland	All relevant stakeholders

2

Communications and Information

An essential requirement for any plan is its effective promotion. The message may be a positive one but unless it reaches the target audience there is no positive change. Around the country, great work is being done by many people in putting together programmes and making them available. We can build on these great resources and help them in selling the benefits of sport and physical activity through a sustained marketing campaign. We can also put key information on sports facilities at people's fingertips. Stories of the good work already underway, the physical activity opportunities available to people and the importance of physical activity will be front and centre of this nationwide campaign.

The values of sport are built on fairness and respect. These can be deployed to fight such scourges as racism, homophobia and bullying, none of which can ever be tolerated in sport or elsewhere in society. We will incorporate sport's core values into our information campaigns.



Ref.	Action	Lead	Stakeholders
2.1	Undertake a multi-annual, nationwide communications campaign to support the delivery of the National Sports Policy, fostering lifelong involvement in lifetime-friendly sport and fitness and highlighting awareness of the NSP's core values, rationales and messages about the importance of sport – recreational and competitive – to a healthy population. This campaign will focus especially on women, minority communities, people with disabilities and communities with lower levels of participation.	DTCAGSM	DH, DCEDIY, Sport Ireland, FIS, Ireland Active, NGBs, LAs, LSPs, CARA
2.2	Develop a physical literacy consensus statement and promote the adoption of physical literacy in sport and PE. Introduce a means to regularly assess and drive the adoption and implementation of this statement.	Sport Ireland	DE, DFHERIS, DCEDIY, NGBs
2.3	In line with relevant national strategies of both the Department of Justice and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth undertake an information campaign highlighting the unacceptability of prejudice, racism, homophobia and all forms of discrimination in sport, supported by the ethical practice in sport programme / values based sport.	Sport Ireland	DJ, DCEDIY, CARA, FIS, NGBs, LSPs
2.4	Develop and promote a publicly accessible National Geodatabase of Recreation Amenities, which will include the mapping of indoor and outdoor sports facilities. This Database will enable local communities to drive participation in local sporting organisations through schools, local authorities and community organisations.	Sport Ireland	DTCAGSM, DH, DE, DFHERIS, DCEDIY, DHLGH, LAs, Ireland Active, NGBs, CARA
2.5	Building on the proven success of existing fitness media campaigns, deliver a new seasonal campaign promoting active and social participation in sport during the winter months, to be launched during the European Week of Sport each September.	Sport Ireland	DTCAGSM, DH, Ireland Active, NGBs
2.6	Identify and promote ways to maximise physical activity throughout the school day.	DE/ DTCAGSM	All relevant stakeholders
2.7	Support engagement between sports clubs and schools with a view to increasing physical activity and increasing participation.	DE/ DTCAGSM	All relevant stakeholders

3

Funding

Increased funding is essential to achieving our goals. On its own, however, funding is not enough to deliver what we seek to do. We will need the commitment, energies and talents of many people in coaching, volunteering and sports administration. We will need to contemplate new ideas and different ways of doing things. Securing an improved sports system, built around ever more demanding and legitimately high governance standards, is going to involve more investment. There is the immediate challenge of assisting the sector through the COVID-19 pandemic, which has posed an existential threat to many sporting bodies. Addressing those challenges will be to the forefront of sports policy work and will be a central and ongoing funding priority throughout the three-year period of this plan, especially in 2021.



With its planned doubling of investment in sport to an annual level of more than €220 million by 2027, the State intends to take the lead in delivering more investment. But others will increasingly need to play their part also, through for instance corporate and philanthropic finance. Taxation reform can assist this drive for more funding diversity in Irish sport, not just for high performance sport but also for grassroots sport. Local businesses already provide much valued contributions to local sports clubs and wellbeing initiatives. Making sports donations easier for people is needed and we will work to achieve that. As well as the Disability Sport Fund mentioned in Action 1.4, three other distinct new Funds are going to be established – dealing with Innovation, Inclusion and Coaching – all of which will be focused around the achievement of a more diverse, inclusive, better coached and higher sports participation culture than exists today. Multi-sport offerings from local community groups and partnerships, focused around family-based participation opportunities, will be especially encouraged and welcomed.

Ref.	Action	Lead	Stakeholders
3.1	Establish an Innovation Fund to promote innovative collaborative projects aimed at increasing sustainable participation in sport.	Sport Ireland	All relevant stakeholders
3.2	Applying a 'Sport for all' ethos, establish an Inclusion, Diversity and Equality Fund to promote increased and sustainable participation in sport among children, adolescents and young adults, those from lower socio-economic groups, persons with a disability, the LGBTI+ community, the Traveller community and other ethnic minorities.	Sport Ireland	All relevant stakeholders
3.3	Deliver and advance all successful projects under the Large Scale Sport Infrastructure Fund. In relation to the Sports Capital and Equipment Programme, ensure that an appropriate level of funding is ring-fenced for National Governing Bodies of Sport to include allocations for high performance equipment. Ensure that funding is also available under the SCEP for appropriate renewal/maintenance of sports facilities where this work is deemed necessary to keep the facilities in operation.	DTCAGSM	All relevant stakeholders
3.4	Modelled on the "Black Gold" programme in New Zealand, introduce a scheme for the attraction of corporate and philanthropic finance to support Ireland's high-performance programme.	OFI / PI	NGBs
3.5	In support of the national coaching plan, establish a dedicated, collaborative Coaching Fund for NGBs.	Sport Ireland	NGBs
3.6	Develop a common funding framework to guide the allocation of State funding for Gaelic Games across all codes.	Sport Ireland	All relevant stakeholders
3.7	Prepare business cases for possible taxation reform for: (a) the granting of charitable status for NGBs; (b) the lowering of the €250 eligibility threshold for capital reliefs on individual donations to sports capital projects; (c) the extension of the zero-rated VAT regime; (d) the extension of taxation reliefs on capital donations to include donations for sports participation/coaching programmes; and (e) the incentivisation of personal exercise opportunities.	FIS	Ireland Active, NGBs
3.8	Promote the provision of defibrillator machines throughout the sporting network.	DTCAGSM	All relevant stakeholders

4

Training/Resources

The benefits of being involved in sport are not enjoyed equally across Irish society today. Some sections of the population, especially those from a disadvantaged background or with a disability, participate substantially less than the population average. Successfully tackling these participation gradients, all of which are deeply embedded as reported in successive editions of the Irish Sports Monitor, is highly challenging. Recognising that there is no “one size fits all” approach to solving these issues, developing the capabilities of the overall sports system through, for example, volunteer training and best practice governance is considered vital. New toolkits, evaluation frameworks and training opportunities will be developed and made available in an easily accessible way to people at the proverbial coalface. Maximising the resources, skills and capabilities in our key networks of Sports Inclusion Disability Officers, Local Sports Partnerships and the National Governing Bodies of Sport is considered to be of critical importance. There is also a need to systematically address the threat posed to the sector at large from rising insurance costs, an aspect repeatedly emphasised during the public consultation for this plan. Sustaining and rebuilding the sports system in a post-COVID-19 world, especially at grassroots club level, is a significant challenge to be addressed for the longer-term viability of the Irish sport system.



Ref.	Action	Lead	Stakeholders
4.1	Develop tailored resources to assist the key networks of Sports Inclusion Disability Officers, Local Sports Partnerships and National Governing Bodies of Sport.	Sport Ireland	SIDOs, LSPs, NGBs, CARA
4.2	Aligned with national volunteering policy, develop resources to support volunteer management within NGBs and LSPs.	Sport Ireland	Volunteer Ireland, NGBs, LSPs, CARA
4.3	All NGBs and LSPs to adopt the Governance Code for Sport by end 2021. As part of this process Sport Ireland will identify and put in place the training and supports needed by the different organisations to assist with the adoption process.	Sport Ireland	NGBs, LSPs
4.4	Support NGBs, LSPs and other sports bodies to develop evaluation tools for their programmes and initiatives. Develop evaluation frameworks which will allow for the robust assessment of (a) the impact of publicly funded facilities, programmes and interventions and (b) the degree to which durable linkages are created with local clubs.	Sport Ireland	NGBs, LSPs and Other Sporting Organisations
4.5	Convene regular sport sector stakeholder forums to facilitate collation of insurance pricing data to inform six-monthly Ministerial presentations to the Cabinet Committee on Insurance Reform.	DTCAGSM	All relevant stakeholders

5

Programmes and Events

The public consultation undertaken for this plan has reinforced the urgency of tackling physical inactivity levels amongst our children and young people, and the important influence that parents and guardians can have in securing an improved situation. Strengthened relationships and cooperation structures are needed between the educational and sporting sectors. There is also a necessity for greater engagement with local communities and a recognition of the specific needs of rural areas in the design and implementation of programme interventions. The challenge of addressing increasing inactivity levels amongst children and young people is especially acute and urgent and has been the subject of important and valuable research. Implementing the findings of that research will require a high level of collaboration, commitment and buy-in from a multitude of stakeholders. We propose to engage these stakeholders through a special forum to be held in 2021. This forum will be organised around hearing the concerns and the challenges of the young voice in sport.

Ref.	Action	Lead	Stakeholders
5.1	Convene a youth-centred stakeholder forum to guide the adoption of the strategic framework recommended in the Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study 2018 (CSPPA 2018).	DTCAGSM/DH/DE/ DFHERIS/DCEDIY	All relevant stakeholders
5.2	Recognising the pivotal role and influence of parents and guardians on children and young people, LSPs and NGBs will promote the greater availability of local community events, accessible to all, family-friendly recreational sports opportunities, particularly in rural communities. An increased number of community sport hubs will be established countrywide.	Sport Ireland	LSPs, NGBs, CARA
5.3	Reflecting the life course perspective inherent in the NSP prioritised participation sports, expand the coverage of the Get Ireland Walking, Cycling, Swimming and Running programmes for all ages, with a particular emphasis on the needs of the elderly.	Sport Ireland	All relevant stakeholders
5.4	Implement and invest in an Outdoor Recreation Policy to increase participation in sport and physical activity in the outdoors for all ages.	Sport Ireland	All relevant stakeholders



6

Plans and Strategies

The practical achievement of the high-level, visionary objectives of the National Sports Policy 2018-2027 requires that certain transformational, operationally focused plans and strategies are first put in place to steer the development of sport in Ireland up to 2027 and beyond. The requirement for sustainability will be central to the formation of all strategies, involving the promotion of care and stewardship of our planetary resources. We will embrace the opportunity to showcase in particular world leading standards of sustainability on the Sport Ireland National Sports Campus, including a commitment to carbon emission reduction targets, to recycling and to the circular economy. We will commit to consulting with children and young people in the development of all plans and strategies arising from the National Sports Policy.



Arising from the publication of the High Performance Strategy 2021-2032, there will be a more targeted approach to our high performance programme and we will press ahead with the development of the Sport Ireland National Sports Campus. Collaboration between Sport Ireland, Sport Ireland Institute, Sport Northern Ireland, Sport Northern Ireland Sports Institute, the Olympic Federation of Ireland and Paralympics Ireland has improved considerably in recent years, and will be further enhanced. We will also prepare for a changing sporting landscape in Ireland over the next decade, where there will be ever greater expectations. Securing governance reforms, more gender diversity and equality, embedding the local dimension and improving our supports to volunteers are four specific priorities.

Ref.	Action	Lead	Stakeholders
6.1	In addition to the development of equality action plans, NGBs will be asked to achieve, by end 2023, the Government's target for State Boards of a minimum of 40% representation of each gender in the membership of their Boards. Support will be provided for dedicated leadership training programmes for women including governance-related and technical training (coaching, refereeing and team management). Sport Ireland will monitor NGB progress against targets and report annually on whether additional measures such as gender quotas are warranted.	Sport Ireland	NGBs
6.2	Sport Ireland will work with Local Authorities nationally to develop a framework to support the development and implementation of Local Sports Plans, ensuring in particular collaboration with LSPs and NGBs.	LAs	Sport Ireland, LSPs, NGBs, DTCAGSM, DHLGH, DH, DE, DFHERIS, DCEDIY, DRCD
6.3	Implement Sport Ireland's High Performance Strategy 2021-2032 involving revised approaches on focused performance investment, coaching development and retention.	Sport Ireland	OFI, PI, NGBs
6.4	Complete a new 15-year Masterplan for the Sport Ireland National Sports Campus, to include projects already underway and in the pipeline, such as athlete accommodation and a velodrome.	Sport Ireland	NGBs
6.5	Sport Ireland will lead by example and will demonstrate sport's commitment to sustainability in the development of infrastructure projects at the Campus through the development and implementation of a new sustainability strategy for the Campus. The new Strategy will seek to embed sustainability in the planning, design, construction and operation of all new infrastructure projects at the Campus.	Sport Ireland	All relevant stakeholders
6.6	Develop a policy on the hosting of international sports events that will align the efforts of state bodies, national governing bodies, local authorities and all other relevant stakeholders, to ensure Ireland can compete with the best in the world when bidding for major events.	DTCAGSM	All relevant stakeholders
6.7	Continue to engage positively on a North-South basis, to facilitate the delivery of sport and physical activity to all on the island, and to enable the sharing of best practice and access to facilities. Sport Ireland to explore potential areas of greater strategic alignment on the further development of sport on an all-island basis, including the potential for new all-island competitions at elite and recreational levels, and opportunities to make joint North/South bids in the future for international tournaments.	DTCAGSM/ Sport Ireland	All relevant stakeholders

7

Research and Evaluation

Research and evaluation contributes to a better understanding of both the participation challenges that we face and the relative effectiveness of measures taken. Supporting optimum performance from our athletes and successfully encouraging people of all ages and backgrounds to lead more active and healthy lifestyles requires an enhanced research and evaluation programme to inform and guide future actions and initiatives. Harnessing and coordinating our research and evaluation efforts will be critically important to ensure that those efforts contribute successfully to the achievement of our overall goals around participation and high performance.

Ref.	Action	Lead	Stakeholders
7.1	Develop a research strategy for sport, including an online sports research and data repository.	Sport Ireland	All relevant stakeholders
7.2	In line with the National LGBTI+ Youth Strategy and in order to better understand the barriers for LGBTI+ people in sport, expand the reach of national research tools such as the Irish Sports Monitor and other sources to refine our understanding of the issues around participation / non-participation in sport among marginalised groups such as persons with a disability, ethnic minorities, members of the LGBTI+ community, etc.	Sport Ireland	All relevant stakeholders
7.3	Undertake a Value for Money Review of the Sports Capital and Equipment Programme and ensure that any recommendations arising are incorporated into future annual rounds of the programme.	DTCAGSM	All relevant stakeholders
7.4	Reflecting the importance of international work in measuring the contribution of sport, physical education and physical activity to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and keeping the human rights dimension of sport to the forefront, map the NSP with the SDGs.	DTCAGSM	UNESCO Office, MTU

Annex 1

Key Performance Indicators and Targets

Key Performance Indicators and Targets - Active Participation			
Key Performance Indicators	Baseline 2017	Targets 2023	Targets 2027
Increased number of adults regularly playing sport	43%	47%	60%
Elimination of active sport participation gradient between men and women	4.50%	2.50%	0%
Reduced levels of adult sedentarism	22%	18%	15%
Increased number of children regularly playing sport in the community ¹			
Primary	TBD%	TBD%	TBD%
Post-Primary	TBD%	TBD%	TBD%
Increased number of adults from the three lowest income groups regularly participating in sport	30%	34%	40%
Increased participation in sport among those with a long term illness or disability	29%	34%	40%

Key Performance Indicators and Targets - Social Participation			
Key Performance Indicators	Baseline 2017	Targets 2023	Targets 2027
Increased number of adults regularly involved socially in sport through volunteering, club membership and/or attendance	45%	50%	55%
Increased club membership	34%	36%	40%
Increased attendance at sporting events	19%	22%	25%
Increased number of people regularly volunteering in sport	11%	13%	15%

Key Performance Indicators and Targets - Governance			
Key Performance Indicators	Baseline 2017	Targets 2023	Targets 2027
Increase in number of NGBs and LSPs adopting the Governance Code for Sport	12%	100%	100%
Gender Balance in Board membership of NGBs	24%	40%	50%

Key Performance Indicators and Targets - High Performance			
Key Performance Indicators	Baseline 2017	Targets 2024	Targets 2028
Increase in number of medals at successive Olympics and Paralympics	13	17 - 23	20 - 26
Number of Olympics and Paralympics events with Irish athletes in Top 10 positions/Finals	49	45 - 55	49 - 60
Country ranking in Olympics Medal Table	62	55	Top 50
Country ranking in Paralympics Medal Table	28	25	Top 20
Increase in number of medals at junior & senior European and World level	255	270	290

Annex 2

Progress Report

Implementation of National Sports Policy 2018-2027 (NSP)

1. Introduction

In the period since NSP launch in late July 2018, there has been a principal focus on establishing and supporting the structures necessary to drive NSP implementation, in particular the formation of the Sports Leadership Group, as well as the securing of additional resources, financial and otherwise, to help progress the ambitious 10-year policy objectives and aims.

As the statutory agency for the development of sport, Sport Ireland plays a lead role in the advancement and/or delivery of many of the 57 actions set out in the NSP. Implementation work has been undertaken across a broad spectrum of areas since NSP publication. The following overview, while not an exhaustive list, gives a summary flavour of this work.

2. Financial

The necessity for additional resources underpins much of the NSP. Considerable progress has been made in that regard and the achievements listed herein have been greatly facilitated by the substantial budget allocation increases that have been delivered to Sport Ireland in recent years. Grants to Sport Ireland have increased from €52.7m in 2017 to €104.5m in 2021. These enhanced allocations have enabled Sport Ireland to further strengthen the capacity and capabilities of the sports sector to deliver on key policy objectives, which is one of the three key pillars of the NSP (alongside participation and high performance).

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented enormous, unprecedented challenges to the sports sector since early 2020 and there has been a necessity since then to focus on the preservation of the sector and its long-term development. The provision of €88.5 million via the COVID-19 resilience fund package in 2020 has provided the stability necessary to facilitate continued delivery on policy actions aimed at driving increased participation, improvements in high performance sport and stronger governance and capability across the sports sector. Further details on these key NSP pillars are outlined in section 4 hereunder.

3. Sports Facilities

The NSP places a special emphasis on the importance of sports facilities. The Department supports the provision of new sports facilities through two capital support schemes, namely the Sports Capital and Equipment Programme (SCEP) and the Large Scale Sport Infrastructure Fund (LSSIF).

The SCEP is the primary vehicle for Government support for the development of sports and recreation facilities and the purchase of non-personal sports equipment throughout the country. Over 13,000 projects have now benefited from sports capital funding since 1998, bringing the total allocations in that time to over €1 billion.

The programme has transformed the sporting landscape of Ireland with improvements in the quality and quantity of sporting facilities in virtually every village, town and city in the country.

The Programme for Government commits to continuing the SCEP and to prioritise the investment in disadvantaged areas.

The latest round of the SCEP closed for applications on Monday 1st March, 2021. By the closing date, 3,106 applications were submitted seeking over €200m in funding. This is the highest number of applications ever received. The scoring system and assessment manual for the 2020 round has now been finalised and is available at www.sportscapitalprogramme.ie. Given the record number of applications and the detailed information contained in each application, the assessment process will take a number of months to complete. It is envisaged that allocations for applications for sports equipment specifically will be made during summer 2021 with allocations to other capital projects to be announced before the end of the year. At least €40 million is being made available for allocation. As soon as this process is complete all applicants will be informed of the outcome of the assessment of their application.

The LSSIF was launched in 2018 to provide Exchequer support for larger sports facility projects including swimming pools with at least €100m being made available over the period to 2027. Applications were invited from National Governing Bodies of Sport and Local Authorities via two channels, namely Stream 1 which related to design proposals and Stream 2 which catered for applications for actual construction works. Approximately €86.4m of the €100m allocation has been awarded to 33 projects to date.

As this Fund was a new programme, aimed at supporting projects of significant scale, the Terms and Conditions were designed to ensure the high level aims of the LSSIF were fully met, and encourage an even distribution of grant funding for projects across the country and across a range of sports. The evaluation procedures and guidelines for the LSSIF provide that once provisional allocations are announced, the successful projects will undergo a further process of due diligence. This process includes a further review of projects including economic appraisals and feasibility studies as appropriate to comply with the Public Spending Code. Of the 33 projects awarded funding to date, 11 are nearing, or are in receipt of, formal approval.

While it is not proposed to open the LSSIF for new applications at present, the Department is undertaking a review of the LSSIF Programme which is expected to be complete in the coming months. This review will consider, inter alia, progress on all existing grants and whether any additional grants should be awarded. The timing of any new call for proposals will also be considered. Any new allocations or a new call for proposals will be dependent on receiving additional funding for the LSSIF following the completion of the review of the National Development Plan.

The ready availability of comprehensive, up-to-date information on sport and recreational facilities is an important consideration for future planning as well as enabling people to participate in the variety of sporting and recreational facilities available in their localities. Work has commenced on the development of a National Database of Sport & Recreation Amenities. This GIS-based database encompasses considerably more datasets than was originally envisaged in an audit of sports facilities and is expected to be substantially completed within two years. Data coverage of the following areas is planned.



4. Key NSP Pillars

4.4. Participation - Lifelong and Inclusive Sport

The NSP aims to increase sports participation in Ireland from 43% to 50% by 2027, with the subsequent Programme for Government increasing this aim to 60%¹. To achieve this aim, there is a need to tackle participation gradients by targeting specific groups (e.g. people with disabilities, people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, women and girls and ethnic minority groups) in our society that participate significantly less than the overall average.

Fundamental to delivering this participation target is increasing the capacity of the sports sector to deliver its programmes, especially the Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs) and the National Governing Bodies (NGBs). Significant progress has been made in advancing the expansion of the Sport Inclusion Disability Programme, the Community Sports Development Programme and the launch of Sport Ireland's Women in Sport policy, which have all played a part in tackling this participation target across the sector since the launch of the NSP. The introduction of the "Keep Well" campaign in October 2020 to support people and communities in looking after their physical and mental health is also a key activity area that Sport Ireland has promoted, leading on a number of initiatives aligned to the various levels of COVID-19 restrictions.

In that regard, the Irish Sports Monitor (ISM) report published in 2020 highlighted that 46% of the Irish population (approximately 1.78 million people) participated in sport at least once a week in 2019² compared to 43% for the equivalent period in 2017, a welcome development. It is also encouraging to see the gender gap in sports participation continuing to narrow, currently standing at 3%, compared with 4.5% in 2017 and 16% when the ISM was first introduced in 2007. Additionally, active participation among persons with a disability has also increased from 29% in 2017 to 33% in 2019².

There has also been a strong focus on research into physical activity and participation (e.g. Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study, Behavioural Change, Physical Literacy etc.). Work is underway on developing a new research strategy that will be key to not only the provision of baseline participation metrics but also those metrics required to measure achievement of key performance indicators associated with the NSP.

¹ Programme for Government 2020 available at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7e05d-programme-for-government-our-shared-future/>

² Irish Sports Monitor Annual Report 2019 available at <https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/media/document/2020-09/irish-sports-monitor-2019-report-lower-res.pdf>

4.5. High Performance – Reaching Ireland’s potential at the highest levels of international competition

The Sport Ireland Institute and High Performance (HP) units provide supports to athletes and programmes seeking to deliver performances at European, World, Olympic and Paralympic level. In 2019, within this standard of competition, Irish athletes delivered 80 medals in competitions at senior and junior/youth/under 23 levels. This achievement was followed-up with another 13 medals in 2020, within an even more challenging environment.

Work was also successfully undertaken on the development of partnership agreements between Sport Ireland and the National Olympic & Paralympic Federations, which highlight the importance of an athlete centred approach. These partnerships throughout 2020 have been critically important in helping to navigate and manage the uncertainty and challenges arising within HP sport due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In line with the objective for a multi-annual support to funding, the International Carding Scheme was awarded as a two-year Scheme for 2019 and 2020 to allow athletes to fully focus on Olympic and Paralympic qualification.

There has also been a key focus on the completion of a new High Performance Strategy 2021-2032. This strategy was published in June 2021 and includes specific targets, and it will be a key component for the strategic and operational delivery objectives of the Sport Ireland Institute across its performance, leadership, coaching and specialist services.

There has also been an ongoing development of the Sport Ireland National Sports Campus, which provides international standard facilities for high-performance training. Its further development is a key action in the NSP and is also included in the National Development Plan 2018-2027. In addition to the development of a new masterplan for the Campus that is nearing completion, other significant developments there include the addition of Phase 2 of the world class Sport Ireland National Indoor Arena, which the IRFU has made its home for HP operations, and the opening of a new state of the art hockey pitch. Such facilities have greatly helped our elite teams and are critical additions to the Irish sporting infrastructure that will inspire our elite athletes and help to prepare for years to come and hopefully achieve success on the international stage.

4.6. Performance – Playing and competing at a level appropriate to ability underpinned by a community based club network.

As sport is an activity that provides benefits for many more people than the relatively few that can perform at elite level, there is a strong focus in the NSP on the community aspect associated with sport. The NGBs linked with the priority sports of athletics, swimming and cycling received additional core funding in 2020 as well as extra funding through Dormant Accounts and Healthy Ireland. This has facilitated the delivery of physical activity opportunities to an additional 50,000 non-member participants per annum. These participants come from areas of social, economic and educational disadvantage along with people with a disability. In 2020, under the COVID-19 Resilience Fund (e.g. the Innovation Element of this fund), Sport Ireland has invested across all sports but in particular in key programmes of the priority sports to provide virtual and alternative offerings to existing and future members to ensure they continue to advance participation levels during the pandemic.

The vital role played by volunteers features prominently in the NSP and has accordingly been supported. Volunteer numbers are considered an especially key component of the club network system and it is therefore positive to see the Irish Sports Monitor report a 2% increase (from 45% in 2017)² in the numbers involved in social form in sport (i.e. attending events, club membership or volunteering).

Coaching has also been a priority implementation focus. In November 2019, Sport Ireland was officially approved as a provider of Higher Education by Quality and Qualification Ireland (QQI), the State agency responsible for promoting quality and accountability in education and training services in Ireland, ensuring that all coach education course material and delivery are of the highest standards. Sport Ireland Coaching has also developed a new Coaching Plan in line with the NSP policy aims and objectives.

Sport Ireland, in alignment with the NSP, has fully committed to expanding its Research and Evaluation Programmes as a vital resource in the progressive development of sport and physical activity. The team has developed a systemic evaluation framework using national level monitoring and a single item measure system. It has also developed needs analysis resources and delivered training to the LSPs since 2019 to ensure that Sport Ireland investments are going to the communities and individuals that need it most and will benefit most.

4.7. Governance & Capability – Drive the development of a highly effective sports sector that will have an impact throughout the country.

In line with the NSP, Sport Ireland is responsible for overseeing the sector's adoption of the Governance Code for Sport by December 2021. All funded bodies are being guided and supported in putting in place and maintaining robust corporate governance structures. Significant work has been carried out in this area to ensure this timeline remains on track, since Sport Ireland's take-over of the Code for Community, Voluntary and Charitable Organisations (CVC) in 2019 and its rebranding as a Governance Code for Sport. Momentum on this has been maintained with the introduction of the Gov-Enhance Programme in 2020 with a keen focus being put on the updating of guidance documents, resources and templates to underpin the principles of the Code. Progress on improving gender balance on the Boards of funded sport organisations continues, with Sport Ireland looking to see improvements on the current 5% increase (from 24% in 2019 to 29% in 2020). A new Gender Diversity on Boards Toolkit was launched in December 2020.

Annex 3

Actions

Ref.	Action	Lead	Stakeholders
1	COVID-19 Recovery Priorities 2021		
1.1	Continue to work closely with the sporting bodies and provide support, financial and otherwise, for the continued delivery of their sports.	DTCAGSM/ Sport Ireland	All relevant stakeholders
1.2	Engage with the sporting bodies for the purposes of informing the development of tailored proposals and approaches for future COVID-19 mitigation measures for both indoor and outdoor sports.	DTCAGSM/ Sport Ireland	All relevant stakeholders
1.3	Identify means of supporting NGBs in promoting the growth and recovery of club memberships and networks.	Sport Ireland	NGBs
1.4	Establish a Disability Sport Fund to support local disability initiatives.	Sport Ireland	SIDOs, NGBs, LSPs, CARA
1.5	Develop and implement a National Swimming Strategy to provide additional swimming opportunities indoors and outdoors.	DTCAGSM, LAs	Sport Ireland, Swim Ireland, Ireland Active, LAs, DHLGH, CARA
1.6	Continue to work with the sporting bodies to facilitate the safe return of spectators at sporting events, for the benefit of fans, clubs and sporting bodies.	DTCAGSM	Sport Ireland, NGBs
1.7	Deliver an inaugural Winter Initiative for Sport in 2021 to encourage and support enhanced membership and participation in sports clubs, which will aid the recovery of the sector	DTCAGSM/ Sport Ireland	All relevant stakeholders
1.8	Work with NGBs to promote the recovery and safe return of indoor sporting activities.	DTCAGSM/ Sport Ireland	All relevant stakeholders

Ref.	Action	Lead	Stakeholders
2	Communications and Information		
2.1	Undertake a multi-annual, nationwide communications campaign to support the delivery of the National Sports Policy, fostering lifelong involvement in lifetime-friendly sport and fitness and highlighting awareness of the NSP's core values, rationales and messages about the importance of sport – recreational and competitive – to a healthy population. This campaign will focus especially on women, minority communities, people with disabilities and communities with lower levels of participation.	DTCAGSM	DH, DCEDIY, Sport Ireland, FIS, Ireland Active, NGBs, LAs, LSPs, CARA
2.2	Develop a physical literacy consensus statement and promote the adoption of physical literacy in sport and PE. Introduce a means to regularly assess and drive the adoption and implementation of this statement.	Sport Ireland	DE, DFHERIS, DCEDIY, NGBs
2.3	In line with relevant national strategies of both the Department of Justice and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth undertake an information campaign highlighting the unacceptability of prejudice, racism, homophobia and all forms of discrimination in sport, supported by the ethical practice in sport programme / values based sport.	Sport Ireland	DJ, DCEDIY, CARA, FIS, NGBs, LSPs
2.4	Develop and promote a publicly accessible National Geodatabase of Recreation Amenities, which will include the mapping of indoor and outdoor sports facilities. This Database will enable local communities to drive participation in local sporting organisations through schools, local authorities and community organisations.	Sport Ireland	DTCAGSM, DH, DE, DFHERIS, DCEDIY, DHLGH, LAs, Ireland Active, NGBs, CARA, LAs
2.5	Building on the proven success of existing fitness media campaigns, deliver a new seasonal campaign promoting active and social participation in sport during the winter months, to be launched during the European Week of Sport each September.	Sport Ireland	DTCAGSM, DH, Ireland Active, NGBs
2.6	Identify and promote ways to maximise physical activity throughout the school day.	DE/ DTCAGSM	All relevant stakeholders
2.7	Support engagement between sports clubs and schools with a view to increasing physical activity and increasing participation.	DE/ DTCAGSM	All relevant stakeholders

Ref.	Action	Lead	Stakeholders
3	Funding		
3.1	Establish an Innovation Fund to promote innovative collaborative projects aimed at increasing sustainable participation in sport.	Sport Ireland	All relevant stakeholders
3.2	Applying a 'Sport for all' ethos, establish an Inclusion, Diversity and Equality Fund to promote increased and sustainable participation in sport among children, adolescents and young adults, those from lower socio-economic groups, persons with a disability, the LGBTI+ community, the Traveller community and other ethnic minorities.	Sport Ireland	All relevant stakeholders
3.3	Deliver and advance all successful projects under the Large Scale Sport Infrastructure Fund. In relation to the Sports Capital and Equipment Programme, ensure that an appropriate level of funding is ring-fenced for National Governing Bodies of Sport to include allocations for high performance equipment. Ensure that funding is also available under the SCEP for appropriate renewal/maintenance of sports facilities where this work is deemed necessary to keep the facilities in operation.	DTCAGSM	All relevant stakeholders
3.4	Modelled on the "Black Gold" programme in New Zealand, introduce a scheme for the attraction of corporate and philanthropic finance to support Ireland's high-performance programme.	OFI / PI	NGBs
3.5	In support of the national coaching plan, establish a dedicated, collaborative Coaching Fund for NGBs.	Sport Ireland	NGBs
3.6	Develop a common funding framework to guide the allocation of State funding for Gaelic Games across all codes.	Sport Ireland	All relevant stakeholders
3.7	Prepare business cases for possible taxation reform for: (a) the granting of charitable status for NGBs; (b) the lowering of the €250 eligibility threshold for capital reliefs on individual donations to sports capital projects; (c) the extension of the zero-rated VAT regime; (d) the extension of taxation reliefs on capital donations to include donations for sports participation/coaching programmes; and (e) the incentivisation of personal exercise opportunities.	FIS	Ireland Active, NGBs
3.8	Promote the provision of defibrillator machines throughout the sporting network	DTCAGSM	All relevant stakeholders
4	Training/Resources		
4.1	Develop tailored resources to assist the key networks of Sports Inclusion Disability Officers, Local Sports Partnerships and National Governing Bodies of Sport.	Sport Ireland	SIDOs, LSPs, NGBs, CARA
4.2	Aligned with national volunteering policy, develop resources to support volunteer management within NGBs and LSPs.	Sport Ireland	Volunteer Ireland, NGBs, LSPs, CARA
4.3	All NGBs and LSPs to adopt the Governance Code for Sport by end 2021. As part of this process Sport Ireland will identify and put in place the training and supports needed by the different organisations to assist with the adoption process.	Sport Ireland	NGBs, LSPs
4.4	Support NGBs, LSPs and other sports bodies to develop evaluation tools for their programmes and initiatives. Develop evaluation frameworks which will allow for the robust assessment of (a) the impact of publicly funded facilities, programmes and interventions and (b) the degree to which durable linkages are created with local clubs.	Sport Ireland	NGBs, LSPs and Other Sporting Organisations
4.5	Convene regular sport sector stakeholder forums to facilitate collation of insurance pricing data to inform six-monthly Ministerial presentations to the Cabinet Committee on Insurance Reform.	DTCAGSM	All relevant stakeholders

Ref.	Action	Lead	Stakeholders
5	Programmes and Events		
5.1	Convene a youth-centred stakeholder forum to guide the adoption of the strategic framework recommended in the Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study 2018 (CSPPA 2018).	DTCAGSM/DH/DE/DFHERIS/DCEDIY	All relevant stakeholders
5.2	Recognising the pivotal role and influence of parents and guardians on children and young people, LSPs and NGBs will promote the greater availability of local community events, accessible to all, family-friendly recreational sports opportunities, particularly in rural communities. An increased number of community sport hubs will be established countrywide.	Sport Ireland	LSPs, NGBs, CARA
5.3	Reflecting the life course perspective inherent in the NSP prioritised participation sports, expand the coverage of the Get Ireland Walking, Cycling, Swimming and Running programmes for all ages, with a particular emphasis on the needs of the elderly.	Sport Ireland	All relevant stakeholders
5.4	Implement and invest in an Outdoor Recreation Policy to increase participation in sport and physical activity in the outdoors for all ages.	Sport Ireland	All relevant stakeholders
6	Plans and Strategies		
6.1	In addition to the development of equality action plans, NGBs will be asked to achieve, by end 2023, the Government's target for State Boards of a minimum of 40% representation of each gender in the membership of their Boards. Support will be provided for dedicated leadership training programmes for women including governance-related and technical training (coaching, refereeing and team management). Sport Ireland will monitor NGB progress against targets and report annually on whether additional measures such as gender quotas are warranted.	Sport Ireland	NGBs
6.2	Sport Ireland will work with Local Authorities nationally to develop a framework to support the development and implementation of Local Sports Plans, ensuring in particular collaboration with LSPs and NGBs.	LAs	Sport Ireland, LSPs, NGBs, DTCAGSM, DHLGH, DH, DE, DFHERIS, DCEDIY, DRCD
6.3	Implement Sport Ireland's High Performance Strategy 2021-2032 involving revised approaches on focused performance investment, coaching development and retention.	Sport Ireland	OFI, PI, NGBs
6.4	Complete a new 15-year Masterplan for the Sport Ireland National Sports Campus, to include projects already underway and in the pipeline, such as athlete accommodation and a velodrome.	Sport Ireland	NGBs
6.5	Sport Ireland will lead by example and will demonstrate sport's commitment to sustainability in the development of infrastructure projects at the Campus through the development and implementation of a new sustainability strategy for the Campus. The new Strategy will seek to embed sustainability in the planning, design, construction and operation of all new infrastructure projects at the Campus.	Sport Ireland	All relevant stakeholders
6.6	Develop a policy on the hosting of international sports events that will align the efforts of state bodies, national governing bodies, local authorities and all other relevant stakeholders, to ensure Ireland can compete with the best in the world when bidding for major events.	DTCAGSM	All relevant stakeholders
6.7	Continue to engage positively on a North-South basis, to facilitate the delivery of sport and physical activity to all on the island, and to enable the sharing of best practice and access to facilities. Sport Ireland to explore potential areas of greater strategic alignment on the further development of sport on an all-island basis, including the potential for new all-island competitions at elite and recreational levels, and opportunities to make joint North/South bids in the future for international tournaments.	DTCAGSM/Sport Ireland	All relevant stakeholders

Ref.	Action	Lead	Stakeholders
7	Research and Evaluation		
7.1	Develop a research strategy for sport, including an online sports research and data repository.	Sport Ireland	All relevant stakeholders
7.2	In line with the National LGBTI+ Youth Strategy and in order to better understand the barriers for LGBTI+ people in sport, expand the reach of national research tools such as the Irish Sports Monitor and other sources to refine our understanding of the issues around participation / non-participation in sport among marginalised groups such as persons with a disability, ethnic minorities, members of the LGBTI+ community, etc.	Sport Ireland	All relevant stakeholders
7.3	Undertake a Value for Money Review of the Sports Capital and Equipment Programme and ensure that any recommendations arising are incorporated into future annual rounds of the programme.	DTCAGSM	All relevant stakeholders
7.4	Reflecting the importance of international work in measuring the contribution of sport, physical education and physical activity to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and keeping the human rights dimension of sport to the forefront, map the NSP with the SDGs.	DTCAGSM	UNESCO Office, MTU



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