



*“THE INDEPENDENT VOICE OF SPORT IN
NORTHERN IRELAND”*

Annual Report

2024/25



ABOUT US

The Sports Forum is a voluntary association whose membership consists of 70+ Full Members, 25+ Associate Members and 14 Individual Members with an interest in sport and physical recreation.

We are the recognised umbrella organisation for the voluntary sector of sport in Northern Ireland and act as the “Independent Voice of Voluntary Sport in Northern Ireland”.

OUR PURPOSE

“To guide, support and empower our members in their role to govern and promote sport and physical activity in Northern Ireland.”

OUR STRATEGIC GOALS

1. Independence and Resilience

Increasing our independence and financial resilience

2. Leadership

Setting the Agenda

3. Effective Support and Delivery

Diversification and Development

OUR VISION

“A forward-thinking, resilient sports sector in Northern Ireland, transforming lives while building a healthy, inclusive and empowered community.”

CLUB REACH

 480,000

Potential Reach through Sport Club Members

SOCIAL REACH

 187,101

X Impressions in the last year

 159.1K

Facebook page reach in the last year

FOREWORD

Marc Scott, Chair NI Sports Forum

It has been an absolute pleasure to serve as Chair of the NI Sports Forum across 2024/25, which has seen the first year of implementation of our new strategy which targets Resilience, Leadership and Support in both the Forum and the wider sports sector.

While there has been no major multi-sport event this year to follow on from the successful Olympics and Paralympics in 2024, showcasing the work being done across Governing Bodies here, it remains evident that our member bodies are actively developing their sports at all levels, ensuring there are large numbers participating in sport every week and that NI continues to make significant progress on the international stage. To maintain this, it will be paramount that investment and funding remains across all aspects of the sector.

Funding from the NI Executive continues to be a challenge for sport and is an area the Forum will further advocate on. With the Executive back up and running we now see a draft Programme for Government, whilst recognising sport to a certain degree, should act more to drive the agenda and meet needs of the sector. Throughout the year, we've had constructive and, at times, challenging engagement with Sport NI and the Department for Communities. We would also thank Minister Gordon Lyons MLA for taking time out of his busy schedule to meet with us and listen to the challenges of the sector and to discuss potential future engagement.

The All Party Group continues to be an important platform for our members to raise issues with the political parties and local MLA's. Meetings this year have focussed on diverse areas such as social and economic impact of sport, facilities development and women is sport.

I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank David Honeyford MLA, as the new Chair of the All Party Group. David has remained a keen advocate for sport and has worked tirelessly to ensure sport and physical activity has remained prominent on the political agenda. In addition, I would also like to thank Stephen Dunne MLA for his support of the All-Party Group having been appointed as Vice Chair. Engagement on the group from political representatives of all parties has been positive and it continues to grow as an influential forum.

Our services continue to support our members and the wider sector. Aside from the day-to-day calls and engagement with members, the Board Recruitment Programme has been in high demand with several members engaged in the process resulting in a number of placements on Boards. A refresh of the recruitment panel has provided some new talent committed to making a contribution to sport. Processing AccessNI applications for our members continues to increase and our Disputes Resolution Service saw more engagement with support offered to our members. Our Finding Funding service and job advertising have been busy with more opportunities offered across the sector and full details can be found in the report.

I would like to express my thanks to the Board, staff team led by the Executive Manager, Richard Honeyford, our Members Services Officer, Rebekah Johnson and Finance Officer, Sharon Crossan for the efforts they put in daily to the benefit of the sports sector.

Our Inclusive Participation Officer, Natalie Niederman concluded her employment with NI Sports Forum earlier in 2025. I would like to recognise the impact Natalie has had on the sector and in particular for Women & Girls sport. While this post has not been re-appointed as we work with our partners to identify the best way forwards for promoting and developing woman & girls sport, Natalie has left a legacy with her input into the recently published Female Sports Forum Insights Report. To that end, I would also like to thank Tandy Haughey (Ulster University) for driving this project and also Angela Platt for her continued commitment to the Forum through Chairing the Female Sports Forum.

Finally, I would also like to thank Sport NI, The Department for the Communities and the Rank Foundation for the support of the NISF staff infrastructure, without which we could not provide the same level of support and services.



Our Executive Manager and Chair with David Honeyford, Chair APG for Sport and Physical Recreation

EXECUTIVE MANAGER'S REPORT

Richard Honeyford, Executive Manager

2024-25 saw the launch of our new Strategic Plan, after engagement with members and wider stakeholders. This was a key piece of work for us, not only to better understand the position of the Forum in the sector, but also the wider needs of our members and the broader sporting landscape. The Plan is now guiding our work, shaping our services to meet emerging priorities and strengthening our advocacy on behalf of the sector.

We have also begun to see the real impact of the Start Here funding programme this year, with two new roles now supporting both the Northern Ireland Sports Forum (NISF) and the Female Sports Forum. This investment has allowed us to expand our services, deliver more workshops, and provide enhanced support to the sector.

Our engagement with Government Departments and key stakeholders has continued throughout the year, as we work to ensure that the voice of sport is heard where it matters most. The All-Party Group (APG) on Sport continues to be an important platform for raising awareness of both the successes and challenges within the sector.

I would like to extend our sincere thanks to Mike Nesbitt MLA, who stepped down as Chair of the APG after nearly a decade of dedicated service. We are also grateful to David Honeyford MLA, who has taken on the role of Chair and continues to champion the sporting agenda and highlight the needs of the sector.

As you read through this report, you'll see examples of the Forum's activity and impact over the past year. We hope this format helps demonstrate how we continue to evolve and deliver meaningful support for our members and the wider sporting community.

I want to take this opportunity to thank Sharon, Natalie, and Rebekah for their outstanding work and commitment in supporting our members. My thanks also go to our Board and Committee members, whose expertise and guidance are invaluable in shaping our direction and supporting delivery. We are especially grateful to our corporate partners and stakeholders for their ongoing collaboration and expertise, which strengthen everything we do.

Finally, thank you to our members. Your engagement, feedback, and ideas are at the heart of how we adapt and respond to the ever-changing challenges and opportunities within our sector.

OUR BOARD

Marc Scott (Chairperson)
Kelly McVeigh (Vice Chairperson)
Karen Rollo-Stewart (Secretary)
Stuart Hollinger (Treasurer)
Catherine Quinn
Chris Morrow
Dr. Paul Donnelly
Amina Martin-Ross
David Johnston
Allison Mercer

OUR STAFF

Richard Honeyford	Executive Manager
Sharon Crossan	Finance Officer
Rebekah Johnson	Member Services Officer
Natalie Niederman	Inclusive Participation Officer



2024-25 OVERVIEW

28

Representative Matters
Engaged in

4

All Party Group meetings

10

Consultations
returns

63

Funding Opportunities
advertised

315

Enhanced AccessNI
Checks

13

Board Recruitment
Support

4

Female Sports Forum
Events

9

Workshops Delivered

8

Dispute Support

99

Members

ADVOCACY AND POLICY

Improve awareness of the challenges faced by the sports sector; highlight positive impacts and advocate for continued support from decision makers.

28
Matters
Engaged In



Stakeholder Groups we represent on:

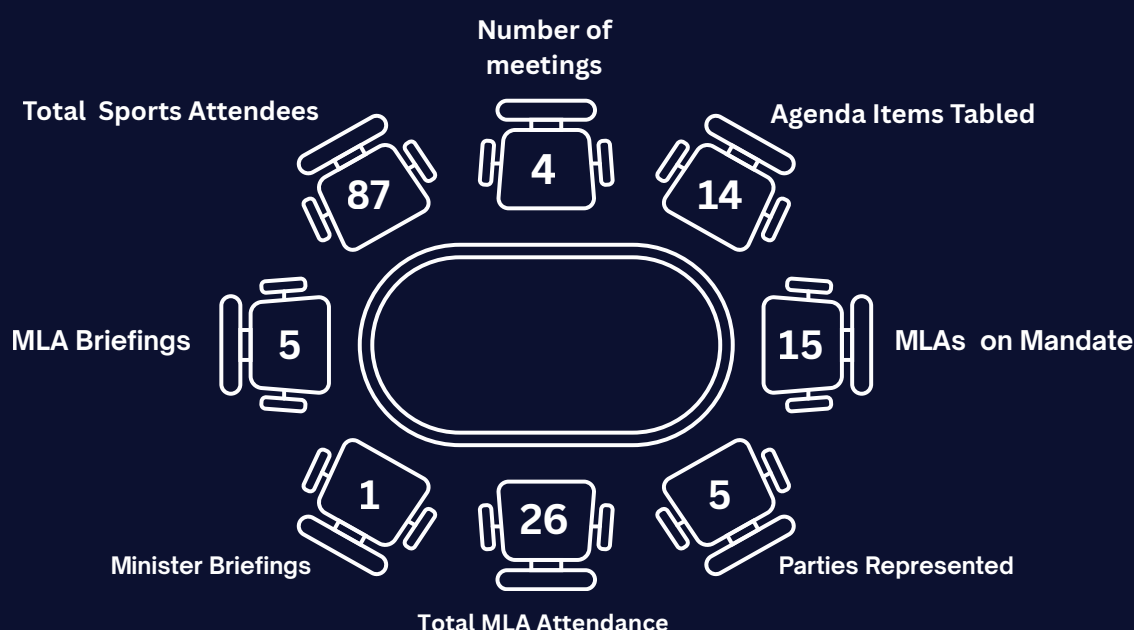
- > Belfast Hills Partnership
- > Stranmillis Stakeholder Forum
- > Safeguarding in Sport Strategic Group
- > AccessNI Stakeholder Group
- > UK Sport Masterplan Group
- > Home Countries Sports Associations
- > Active Living No Limits Forum
- > Sports Resolutions UK
- > All Party Group on Sport and Physical Recreation
- > UU Coersive Control Co Design Group
- > EVAWG Co Design Group
- > Female Sports Forum
- > Developing Good Governance Group
- > Active Living Strategic Implimentation Group
- > NI Sports for Human Rights Forum
- > UU Employer's Advisory Board

ALL PARTY GROUP SPORT AND PHYSICAL RECREATION



Purpose

- To ensure that sport and physical recreation has a high profile in the NI Assembly
- To influence Assembly policy
- To liaise with Sport NI, the governing bodies and other organisations in Northern Ireland so that such organisation will be able to keep MLA's informed on matter affecting sport and physical recreation.
- To promote sport and physical recreation which results in improved physical and mental health.
- To recognise the value of sport and physical recreation as a tool, that can affect change, across are most marginalised communities.
- To develop cross sectorial working with business, governing bodies, community/ voluntary funders, universities and government that promotes, celebrates and collaborates through sport



Matters Engaged

- Olympics 2024
- Commonwealth Games 2026
- Sports Access to School Facilities
- Legal vetting requirements in NI
- Challenges for Disability Sport
- The Economic & Social Value of Gaelic Games
- Lotteries Legislation in NI
- Need for Outdoor Recreation Bill
- Water Quality impacts on Sport
- Mountain Bike trails and facilities Development
- Prevention of Terrorism (Premises) Bill
- NBA Schools Programme
- ENAS Conference
- Grassroots Sporting Facilities

As Secretariat to the APG on Sport and Physical Recreation, the NI Sports Forum continues to offer the mechanism for members to engage with political representatives across all parties. In May 2024, David Honeyford MLA took over the Chair from Mike Nesbitt MLA, who had served as Chair since the group's inception in 2015. Our sincere thanks goes to Mike, whose leadership and engagement helped address a number of areas and highlight the positive impacts to Government.

The meetings and ongoing engagement with MLAs and Ministers on a wide variety of matters has enabled sport to ensure ongoing representation across a wide variety of matters. With thanks to all the sporting and stakeholder representatives who continue to engage with this group and, in particular, the MLAs who support us, raise issues and advocate on behalf of the sector.

Why choose Attis Sports & Leisure?



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- Contract Bonus
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LEISURE

CASE STUDY: CLEAN WATER SPORTS ALLIANCE NI

WHAT WAS THE CHALLENGE?

In 2024 a number of sports had reported challenges on the delivery of activity due to Water Quality. It soon became apparent this was affecting over 6 sports, each working independently of one another.

HOW DID NISF HELP?

The NI Sports Forum facilitated initial meetings across seven sports to share experiences and outline how it was impacting training, clubs, events and participants.

The Forum enabled presentations to the All Party Group for Sport, supported the development of ASKS of Government and planned a Launch Event on 2nd April 2025 in Stormont. This involved collaboration, coordination and shared resources to initiate.

Over 9 months, six meetings were held with further subgroup meetings facilitated on evidence, communications and launch event planning.

WHAT DIFFERENCE WAS MADE?

IN YEAR ONE:

- Evidence went before the APG for Sport and Physical Recreation ‘ December 2024
- One MLA has taken the campaign as a key ask to Government, helping engage Infrastructure, AERA and Communities Committees.
- Written Evidence was requested to to the Infrastructure and AERA Committees
- Launch event attendees included the AERA Minister and Communities Committee Chair among other MLAs.
- A Campaign page was developed on the NISF website to encourage local participants to engage with MLAs on the matter.
- Organic Campaign Video Views: 7,179 (within 1 month)

TESTIMONIALS

"NISF were excellent throughout the process. Engaging, supporting, unifying, empowering and co-ordinating groups to deliver a positive outcome. "

"It exceeded our expectations. There was a rapid acceleration from ideas to actions"

UAF

"Getting the right people round the table an NISF's ability to take a non-biased angle, meant they were able to pull together the right people and contacts from across the sporting sector"

RYA Northern Ireland

"The collaborative approach adopted by NISF has supported Paddle NI in advocating for clean water and strengthened our voice to effect policy change on these issues. "

PaddleNI



OUR PARTNERS

Our continued engagement with funders and strategic partners enables us to deliver vital support and services to the sector, strengthening our impact and sustainability. Our sincere thanks for their ongoing support as a key partner to the NI Sports Forum and our members.

SPORTS LAW NI

Sports Law NI is Northern Ireland's first specialist Sports Law Company led by Keith McGarry with specialist training and experiences right across the spectrum of sport legal disciplines, from contracts and image rights to governance and eligibility. www.sportslawni.com

KINGSBRIDGE HEALTHCARE GROUP

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ATTIS INSURANCE

A trading division of Attis Insurance Brokers Limited, independent insurance broker. The team have over 60 years combined experience in the Sport & Leisure insurance sector and have forged trusted relationships with specialist insurers. We represent our clients in the insurance market in a positive and forthright way to obtain quotes from quality Insurers who want to work with and support clients in the long term.

S3 SOLUTIONS

Founded in 2013, S3 Solutions is a leading independent consultancy dedicated to supporting Third Sector and Public Sector organisations to deliver impactful social change. Our diverse range of clients includes local authorities, government departments, not for profit organisations, social enterprises, sports clubs, and charities. www.s3solutions.co.uk

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Ensure the voice of the sports sector is highlighted through relevant consultation engagement. Prevent adverse impacts, advocate potential opportunities where possible.

Consultation	How did we respond?
Martyn's Law	<p>Following our Consultation return to the Standard tier Consultation on 18/3/2025, we received confirmation of changes to the Bill and welcomed steps to take a more practical and reasonable approach whilst still supporting the principle of keeping the public safe. We developed a Policy update circulated to sports in September 2024 summarising key elements including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The bill exempts parks, sports grounds, recreation grounds, and other open-air premises used for sport and recreation. • Premises expecting 200-799 people fall under the Standard Tier, increased from 100 in the initial bill to exclude more grassroots community clubs. • Premises expecting to host 800+ people fall under the Enhanced Tier. Events not at enhanced tier premises but expecting 800+ attendees qualify. • The term "reasonably expect" replaces capacity calculations for a more flexible approach. <p>Ongoing engagement remains and through our colleagues at Sport and Recreation Alliance.</p>
National Insurance Contributions	<p>The NI Sports Forum undertook a survey of the sector in January 2025, to assess the impact of future NIC Employers Contributions to the sector. The survey found that changes to National Insurance Contributions and pensions in 2025 will significantly impact sports organisations in Northern Ireland, with increased staffing costs and reduced funding for development. Organisations recommend increased funding from bodies like the Department for Communities and SportNI to mitigate these impacts. They also stress the need for greater recognition of the economic and social roles of sports organisations. The Forum worked with NICVA, inputting to an overall response for the voluntary sector and shared with survey results and recommendations with SportNI, DfC and relevant Stakeholders to continue to highlight the challenges faced.</p>
NI Budget Consultation Equality Impact Assessment	<p>NI Sports Forum provided a response to this consultation, including:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Data and Evidence: Emphasize the need for historical data from SportNI and NISRA Household Survey to inform the EQIA. 2. Adverse Impacts: Identify potential adverse impacts on S 75 groups due to budget constraints, including reduced participation and inc. health service pressures. 3. Mitigation Actions: Suggest prioritizing service delivery, re-evaluating capital funding, and securing equivalent legacy funding from the UK Government. 4. Budget Constraints: Highlight the increased costs faced by ALBs, necessitating prioritisation of service delivery.
Programme for Government	<p>NISF publicised and circulated an assessment summary to sports on the PfG. We ran a Sports Briefing Session to gather opinions of the sector with 17 representatives from 13 sports. Our return was made welcoming that sport, physical recreation and the environment had been included in specific areas of the document, however the immediate priorities did not include aspects that we could pinpoint would directly support the sector. We called for more detail, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater recognition and substantial investment in the Sport & Physical Recreation sector, including grassroots facilities and support for event bids. • Active Living Strategy should be a key action in the PfG, and a Sports Infrastructure Strategy to be published and reviewed. • PE and Extra Curricular Sport should be prioritized in education. • A new Outdoor Recreation Bill should be produced. Multi-year funding with greater transparency between funders and clubs/sports is needed. • Use of Sugar Tax Levy to support anti-obesity and health strategies
Draft Governance arrangements for EVAWG Strategy	<p>The NI Sports Forum remained engaged with the Executive Office on the Draft Governance, Partnership and Engagement arrangements to support delivery of the Strategic Framework for Ending Violence Against Women & Girls, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governance, Partnership, and Engagement Arrangements: These arrangements appear appropriate across all levels, from Ministerial and Departmental to grassroots groups. • Co-design Group Evolution: We support the evolution into the Insight and Reference Network. It's crucial that all affected groups are engaged, and specific Task Groups should involve wider groups to address challenges and opportunities.

Consultation	How did we respond?
Belfast Sport and Recreation Strategy	The NI Sports Forum engaged with Belfast City Council on their draft Strategy for Physical Activity, including engaging in a focus session with Strategic Leisure Ltd. The plan remains in draft and under review.
DfC Charity Threshold £20k	<p>NISF ran a Sports Briefing Session in collaboration with NICVA on the Threshold with 13 sports represented. We recommended that a further scoping exercise should be undertaken to provide recommendations of that level. This should include rationale from England, Wales and Scotland, where the asset threshold is £ multi-million Further input was given on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deregistration • Evidence requirements • False Statements on status of a charity • Powers of and services provided by the Commission • Determination of jurisdiction
Anti Money Laundering Regulations	<p>NISF advocated for Government to consider a straightforward exemption for qualifying grassroots sports clubs and organisations. If this is not possible, an alternative approached could be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To simplify the criteria for exemption by raising the monetary thresholds to extend the exemption to a greater number of grassroots sports clubs. • To exempt CASCs • To exempt sports clubs registered with the Charity Commission NI.
Healthy Futures Consultation	<p>The NI Sports forum welcomed the strategy and included the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A call for clearer responsibilities and engagement between the Department of Health and other departments. • The need to reference recent studies on children's physical activity (PA) and stressed the importance of statutory PE requirements in schools. • We agreed with the strategy's themes but suggested the "whole system approach" should be a cross-cutting principle. • We supported the theme of healthy policies but recommended clearer alignment with other strategies and emphasized the importance of safe places for PA • We highlighted the need for professional development in schools, better engagement in colleges and workplaces, and support for inactive individuals to get active.
Draft Gambling Act Code of Conduct	The NI Sports Forum welcomed the consultation and emphasized the impact on grassroots clubs, particularly regarding society lotteries and fundraising machines. They supported the gambling Code of Practice for providing safeguards and appreciated the exclusion of small and private lotteries. They highlighted the need for clarification on card payments, the scope of Section 1.1, and the definition of 'premises.' They also suggested distinguishing societies lotteries from collections and providing background on Customer Self-Exclusion. The Forum stressed the importance of clear, understandable guidance for grassroots clubs.
NI Draft Budget 2025-25	The Forum made a return to the consultation on the draft Budget 2025- 26, highlighting the need it is that the Executive prioritises support for the whole of sport and recreation, as indicated in the Programme for Government. With the increase in budget towards the Department of Communities, there must be consideration of a relative % increase to the sports sector, specifically in support of developing the Active Living Strategy and to create a capital budget for improving sports infrastructure.



Registered members will be able to benefit from preferential rates on private healthcare services and avail of a range of additional benefits from across the Kingsbridge Healthcare Group.

This benefit can also be extended to family and friends.



THE KINGSBRIDGE SPORTS FUND

Access Funding For Your Club

Working in partnership so we can provide funding to sports clubs across the country.

The added benefit of being a part of our Sports Membership means that you can apply for funding for your club.

Every year the Kingsbridge Sports Fund will grant awards from between **£250 and £1,000**.

The grant awards will help provide financial support for equipment, training, and other necessary resources.

Criteria

The criteria for applicants is any sports club or associations that:

- are part of the Kingsbridge Sports Membership
- has an official bank account registered in the club's name
- have a minimum of 30 members registered to the online membership portal

NI SPORTS FORUM SERVICES

The NI Sports Forum currently provides members with 13 services in support of their organisations. Our Member Services Officer role has been in place for over 2 years, helping progress our delivery in support of members. Towards the end of 2024-25, this saw development of our funding support with members (and clubs) able to request latest opportunities for athletes or projects through our Funding Funding Service Portal. We have also managed to increase or Education offer for sports, with a number of workshops and briefings delivered throughout the year. We are constantly reviewing these services to best meet the needs of members and within the capacity of the Forum to deliver.

AccessNI

Ensure NGBs meet minimum safeguarding needs for Regulated Activity and support sports in meeting their statutory requirements

315

Checks Received

24

NGBs Supported

72

Workshop Attendees

5

1:1 Support

Service Feedback:



Importance: 4.9/ 5.0



Effectiveness and Support



Satisfaction: 5.0/ 5.0

The NI Sports forum maintained its Umbrella Status, following a full audit on 3rd May 2025, ensuring compliance with AccessNI requirements.

We delivered 2 workshops on Safe Recruitment and Vetting on with 51 organisations attending. Our thanks go to Paul Stephenson at the CPSU for his continued support on safeguarding requirements.

Our ongoing support for sports includes 1:1 advice and guidance to help members through the process.

The NI Sports Forum maintained its representation on Access NI Stakeholder Group, allowing feedback and engagement on behalf of the sector, raising challenges and keeping informed of developments.

“A very good service for us, we do not process enough applications to be a registered body so this services ensures that our safeguarding policies and adhered to and we have disclosures for people working with children” HSI

Board Recruitment

Ensure NGBs maintain and develop Board committee structures, expanding skill sets where possible, increasing female representation and meeting governance best practice

13

Position requests

7

NGB engagement with candidates

87

Candidates Shared

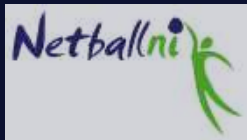
3

Appointments made

The NI Sports Forum Board Recruitment Programme was first established in 2019 with annual engagement from members to explore potential candidates for Boards and committees. This year, we had 13 position requests across 11 organisations, with three candidates placed on Boards by the end of the year and a number of ongoing engagements into the new year.

To improve the programme, we are looking to plans for engaging additional candidates from a wider skills base to meet the needs and experience required for organisations. We have reviewed and updated the Expressions of Interest to help better outline skills and experience of candidates and our dedicated webpage also helps advertise roles across sports with wider circulation to broaden organisations' reach and pool of candidates.

CASE STUDY



Skills:
Governance
Strategy,
Comms

Request:
September
2024

Candidates
Shared:
13

Appointed:
2
Candidates

“ We are delighted to welcome Michael to the Netball NI Board. We believe his experience in strategic roles, as well as background in governance, change management and communication will be a real asset to Netball NI.

Helen Stirling, Chair NNI



FINDING FUNDING

Supported by



Our Finding Funding Service looks to support NGBs to diversify income through grants. In 2024-25 the Forum expanded this to support fir NGBs, clubs and sports organisations to better advise them of relevant opportunities for funding and investment.

63

**Grants
Advertised**

30K

**Social Media
Reach**

29K

**Funding Page
Visits**

A New Funding Enquiry Service received over 12 enquiries in its first 2 months. We further developed a Database to share with sports and met with two Organisations on grant development (Capital), supporting and advising on funds and how to help build their case. This remains a strategic area of support and a top area of requested support from members.

We were also delighted to agree a strategic partnership with S3 Solutions to further develop and support the sector, with a number of offers for both funding and account support available at discounted rates. These strategic partnerships are key to the work we do in looking to best support the sector and deliver capacity.

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DISPUTES RESOLUTIONS



8

Dispute Enquiries

7

Sports supported

5

Referrals made

A disproportionate amount of time is spent by governing bodies dealing with disputes, often over many years. The Northern Ireland Sports Forum is committed to working with member organisation to prevent disputes from occurring by ensuring appropriate processes and policies are in place to mitigate against future disputes taking place.



Keith McGarry (SLNI), Co Chair of the Sports law Conference pictured with NISF Executive Manager, Richard Honeyford

Through our connection with Sports Law NI and Sport Resolutions UK, we look to support members when disputes may arise. Through the year, support included:

- Legal Qualified placement on appeals panel;
- Mediation process started with two organisations;
- Advice and guidance given in areas of HR and policies.

We continue to review this service with view to gaining resources to develop this support. Our relationships with experts such as Disputes Resolutions UK and Sports Law NI are key in order to provide service to our Members. We would particularly like to thank Keith McGarry and Ken Nixon for their ongoing guidance and help in this area and supporting our members directly when required.

SPORTS LAW NORTHERN IRELAND

SportsLawNI, led by Keith McGarry, have specialist training right across the spectrum of sport legal disciplines, from contracts and image rights to governance and eligibility.

SERVICES:

ANTI DOPING

SPORT GOVERNANCE

GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES

DISPUTE RESOLUTION

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SPORTS LAW CONFERENCE 2024

The Sports Law Conference NI 2024 took place on Friday, 15 November at Law Society House, bringing together 91 delegates from across the sports and legal sectors to explore key issues surrounding women in sport, diversity, and governance. With a diverse line up of speakers and panel discussions, the conference provided valuable insights and practical ideas to drive meaningful change.

The event opened with an address by The Honourable Madam Justice Denise McBride, who emphasised the urgent need for legal frameworks to address gender inequalities in sport. She highlighted the importance of representation and role models in creating a more equitable sporting landscape. Keith McGarry, of Sports Law NI, expanded on this theme, offering reflections on the persistent disparities in the sector and proposing actionable steps to promote equality. Professor Jack Anderson, an expert in global sports law, followed with insights into current research and the challenges affecting sport globally, focusing on governance, commercial pressures, and regulatory changes that continue to shape the industry.

Attendees were introduced to compelling data and research from Nora Stapleton of Sport Ireland, who outlined how innovative policies and programmes are reshaping opportunities for women in sport. Lisa O’Keefe MBE, representing the International Working Group on Women and Sport, explored what makes policies effective, drawing on case studies from international initiatives to illustrate the value of collaboration and insight-sharing.

A particularly inspiring session focused on Olympic and Paralympic reflections. Sinead Chambers, GB Paralympic physiotherapist, shared her experiences working with elite athletes and the challenges of supporting high performance on the global stage. Rachel McCann, who competed at the Paris 2024 Olympics, spoke about her dual journey of excelling in sport while pursuing a PhD, highlighting the resilience required to balance these demanding paths. Lady Mary Peters, Olympic Gold Medallist from the 1972 Munich Games, reflected on her distinguished career and discussed the impact of the Mary Peters Trust, which has supported over 4,000 Northern Irish athletes during its four decades of operation.

The day concluded with a thought-provoking expert panel discussion, featuring Feargal Logan (Logan & Corry Solicitors), Andrew Nixon (Sheridans London), Angela Platt (Irish Football Association), Bernie Fox (GAA), and David Humphreys MBE (Performance Director, IRFU). The panel explored a range of topics, including governance, diversity, and high performance, offering practical insights to address the challenges faced by the sports sector.

The conference underscored the importance of collaboration and the exchange of ideas in driving progress across sport and law. With the Sports Law Conference NI 2024 now successfully concluded, planning is already underway for next year’s event, which will build on this year’s success and continue fostering positive change.

A special thank you goes to Ken Nixon and Keith McGarry (pictured below), our co-chairs, for their tireless efforts in organising the event. We would also like to express our ongoing gratitude to the Law Society of Northern Ireland for their continued support in making this conference a success year after year.





WORKSHOPS



Workshops Delivered



4.7 out of 5
average rate delivery

256

Total Attendees

63

Organisations



To meet the diverse needs of the sector, we delivered a range of learning and engagement opportunities throughout the year, grouped into different key formats:

Sport Briefings

These are short, informative sessions designed to keep the sector up to date with current developments, consultations, and key safeguarding issues.



Topics this year covered:

- Charity Threshold £20K
- Safe Recruitment and Vetting
- PFG Consultation.

Sprint Series

Our Sprint Series are focused, practical workshops offering bite-sized learning on core topics relevant to sport and community organisations.



Topics this year covered:

- Grant and Sponsorship Funding
- Principle of Good Governance
- Safeguarding Children

Conference Events

Our larger-scale events bring together experts, practitioners, and stakeholders for deeper exploration of key themes.



Highlight:

- Sports Law Conference 2024 – This event brought together leaders from law, sport, and governance to discuss key topics around diversity, equality, and the challenges women face in sport.



FEMALE SPORTS FORUM

3

Leadership
Workshops Delivered

35

Total
Attendees

11

Mentors Identified

1

Women in Sport
Series

41

Total
Attendees

30

Organisations

FEMALE SPORTS FORUM

In 2024–25, the Female Sports Forum continued to lead efforts to promote and support the participation of women and girls in sport and physical activity across Northern Ireland. Thanks to investment from SportNI and DfC, further work was delivered to help develop leadership in NI and undertake a substantial survey to inform the Insight Report 2025.

Through a range of impactful initiatives, the Forum delivered a Women's Social Sport Try Day, which provided inclusive and welcoming opportunities for new participants to engage in sport. The Forum also hosted its annual Women's Sport series, focussing on Research and Insights and bringing together expertise from across the sector and academia.

The ActiveFitSporty Strategy continued to raise visibility and the Inclusive participation Officer, continued to ensure visibility through social media and publication of local role models in sport. The Forum also launched its Resource Hub, available through the website with a summary of over 100 research articles, toolkits and relevant information relating to women and girls sport.

Looking ahead, the Forum is committed to expanding leadership development opportunities for women in sport, advocating and amplifying the voices of women and girls to shape a more inclusive sporting future. The Female Sports Forum Insights report 2025 will actively inform the next Strategic Plan from 2026, looking to make meaningful impact and change for women and girls sport across the sector.

Strategic partnerships remained central to the Forum's success, with ongoing collaboration including Ulster Hockey, Ulster Camogie, Ulster Ladies Gaelic, Ulster Rugby, and the Irish Football Association, alongside key relationships with Sport NI, the Northern Ireland Sports Forum, and Ulster University.

SURVEY

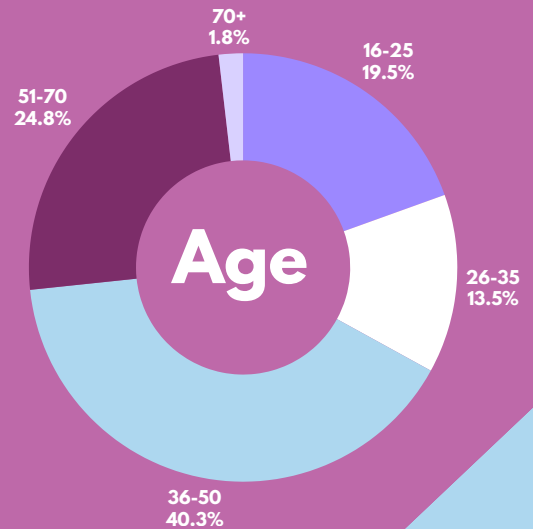
Insights into how and why women are getting and staying active

In February 2024, the Female Sports Forum launched a consultation survey, with support from SportNI and Ulster University, to better understand how to support and encourage more women to engage and thrive in sport and physical activity. The survey invited responses from individuals aged 16 and over who are involved in women's sport, across five key areas: participation, volunteering, coaching or leadership, high performance, and employment in the sector. Insights gathered will help shape future initiatives and inform strategies to promote inclusive and sustained involvement of women in sport. The final report was published in August 2025.

598 REPOSSESSES

11 COUNCIL AREAS

50+ ACTIVITIES



WOMEN'S SPORT SERIES

Theme: Insights to Impact

Date: 27th March 2025



4.43/5 was the rating for session delivery



87% Reported Significant Increased Learning



4.71/5 was the rating on the content on the session

“it is evident that there is a gap between Ireland and NI. Many of the resources discussed are readily available and shows lack of communication between the two.”

A highly insightful session with engaging speakers, covering really important topics around women & girls in sport. Discussion around the room were equally interesting. I would have liked more time to explore

“Excellent event, well organised and the guest speakers where fantastic.”

“Fantastic insight into sports participation and menstrual pain in women in non-elite sports. It is great to see that there is a vested interest in this, but we still have a long way to go in order to understand and ultimately improve the health and well-being of girls and women in sport. Quote of the day- "Women are not small men".”

FINANCE REPORT

INCOME & EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT FOR YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2025

	2025 £	2024 £
<u>Income</u>		
Sport Northern Ireland	40,000	40,000
Membership Income	17,441	16,171
Other Income	67,143	70,649
Bank Interest	238	163
Total Income	124,822	126,983
<u>Expenditure</u>		
Wages & Administration	105,610	99,168
Printing and Stationery	3,079	2,150
Accountancy Fees and Sundries	6,196	12,493
Programme Costs	9,094	5,349
Access NI Fees	1,836	1,366
Course Fees	35	66
Website Expenses	1,540	1,200
Total Expenditure	127,390	121,792
Surplus / (Deficit) for the Year	(2,568)	5,191

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31ST MARCH 2025

	2025 £	2024 £
<u>Current Assets</u>		
Debtors	46,432	15,959
Cash at Bank	57,272	89,065
	103,704	105,024
<u>Current Liabilities</u>		
Sundry Creditors and Accruals	20,305	19,057
Net Assets	83,399	85,967
<u>Capital Fund</u>		
Opening Balance	85,967	80,776
Surplus / (Deficit) for the Year	(2,568)	5,191
<u>Total Charity Funds</u>	83,399	85,967

TREASURER'S REPORT

Stuart Hollinger, Treasurer

During 2024/25, the Finance Subcommittee continued to meet virtually to review quarterly management accounts, budgets, and future projections. The committee provided financial oversight and recommended approval of the Financial Statements to the Board. Regular reviews of the membership list and overdue accounts were carried out at the meetings, with new member applications approved at Board level. The committee also monitored funding, salary scales and membership rates in the year.

The year finished with a better financial position than anticipated with a much smaller deficit for the Sports Forum, driven by a focus on consolidation with a further investment in the Strategic Plan which was launched at the beginning of the financial year. With support from the Rank Foundation, the Forum was able to continue resourcing two funded posts supporting both the membership body and the Female Sports Forum. The Forum's strong financial position in previous years enabled it to budget for a deficit to complete the strategic report and ensured it remained well placed to serve its members.

Looking ahead, the financial outlook for 2025/26 is positive, with the Forum expected to benefit from the consolidation and strategic development undertaken during the year.

I would like to thank the members of the Finance Subcommittee for their support and effective operation throughout the year - Sharon Crossan for ensuring efficient accounting and accurate financial reporting throughout the year, and Richard Honeyford for his oversight and input as Executive Manager.

As this is my first full year as Treasurer, I wish to thank all those who have contributed to the Forum and supported me in this role.



OUR MEMBERS

73

FULL
MEMBERSHIP

American Football Ireland
Archery NI
Association of NI Car Clubs
Association of Irish Indoor Bowls
Athletics NI
Basketball NI
Baseball Ireland
British Horse Society
British Gymnastics
British Taekwondo
Cricket Ireland
Cycling Ulster
Golf Ireland
Gymnastics Ireland
Horse Sport Ireland
IABA Ulster Branch
Inline Hockey Ireland
Irish Indoor Bowling Association
Irish Football Association
Irish Underwater Council
Irish Bowling Association
Irish Coastal Rowing Federation
Irish Women's Indoor Bowls Association
Irish Women's Outdoor Bowls Association
Motor Cycle Union of Ireland Ulster Centre
Motorcycle Racing Association
Mountaineering Ireland
Mounted Games Association
Netball NI
NI Association of Aeromodellers
Northern Ireland Cross Community Angling
NI Horse Board
NI Ju Jitsu Association
NI Judo Federation
NI Orienteering
Northern Ireland Pool Association

NI Smallbore Shooting Association
NI Volleyball
NI Women's Football Association
NI Weightlifting
Northern Ireland Fencing Ltd
North West Cricket Union
Northern Cricket Union
PaddleNI
Parkour UK
Pitch and Putt Union Ireland
Racquetball Association of Ireland (Ulster Council)
Rowing Ireland Ulster Branch
Royal Yachting Association NI
Showjumping Ireland Ulster Region
Softball Ireland
Swim Ulster
Triathlon Ireland
Ulster Federation of Rambling Clubs
Ulster Provincial Council of Sea Anglers
Ulster Angling Federation
Ulster Badminton
Ulster Camogie Council
Ulster Coarse Fishing Federation
Ulster GAA
Ulster Hockey Union
Ulster Rifle Association
Ulster Rugby
Ulster Squash
Ulster Tennis
Ulster Clay Pigeon Shooting Association
Ulster Gliding Club
Ulster Council Ladies Gaelic Football
Yoga Fellowship NI

26

ASSOCIATE
MEMBERS

2 & 4 Wheels
Active Communities Network
Active Youth NI
Ards and North Down Sports Forum
Belfast City Marathon
Commonwealth Games NI
Community Games
CIYMS
Disability Sports NI
Ethnic Minority Sports Organisation NI
Fermanagh & Omagh Sports Forum
Inclusive Skating
Leave No Trace Ireland
Mary Peters Trust

Multi Ethnic Sports and Cultures
Northern Ireland Boys' Football Association
NI Civil Service Sports Association
NI Deaf Sports
NI Football League
NI Schools Football Association
Outscape
Royal Lifesaving Society
Sport Lisburn & Castlereagh
Sport for Life
Special Olympics Ulster
Sported Foundation
Train To Be Smart Soccer
Ulster University Sports Union



THE VOICE OF SPORT AND RECREATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND



Charity commission NI Number: 100895

Company Number: NI 10440

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