

**Ref: GE-i-136-2022 – Recommendations of the Citizens’ Assembly on Gender  
Equality.**

**March 2022**

Sport Ireland welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to the Committee.

This submission sets out Sport Ireland’s prior engagement with the Citizens’ Assembly, an overview of Sport Ireland’s work in the area of Women in Sport, along with specific comments on the recommendations included in the report of the Citizens’ Assembly.

**Engagement with the Citizens’ Assembly**

Sport Ireland has had direct engagement with the Citizens’ Assembly (the Assembly) on this matter. Through the Chair of Sport Ireland’s Women in Sport Committee, Lynne Cantwell, Sport Ireland presented directly to the Assembly. This presentation may be of assistance to the Committee.

This presentation is publicly available on the Assembly’s YouTube Channel here:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f7yEbXa5CIw&t=2s>

**Sport Ireland and the Women in Sport Programme**

Sport Ireland is the authority tasked with the development of sport in Ireland. This includes participation in sport, high performance sport, anti-doping, coaching and the development of the Sport Ireland Campus. Sport Ireland financially support 113 sports organisations, which includes 66 National Governing Bodies (NGBs) and 29 Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs). Sport Ireland is committed to working in partnership with these organisations and building their capacity to deliver shared goals.

History of Sport Ireland’s Women in Sport Programme

- On foot of a 2004 study by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI)<sup>1</sup> which showed that less than one in five women completed 30 minutes of physical activity on at least five days per

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.esri.ie/publications/sports-participation-and-health-among-adults-in-ireland>

week as recommended by the WHO, Sport Ireland developed a Women in Sport (WIS) Programme in 2005. The aim of this programme was to “raise overall physical activity levels and support women’s roles within funded bodies”.

- In 2007, data from the Irish Sports Monitor<sup>2</sup> highlighted a participation gradient of 15.7% between males and females. This data further strengthened the need for Sport Ireland to continue to roll out its Women in Sport programme funding. The most recent full-year data released by Sport Ireland in 2020 highlights that the participant gradient reduced to 3.4%.
- From 2005 through to 2018, the Women in Sport Programme has funded a wide range of initiatives delivered by NGBs and LSPs to further the agenda of gender equality in sport.
- The programme was reviewed and relaunched in 2019 to coincide with the development of Sport Ireland’s Policy on Women in Sport.
- To date, over €22m has been invested through the Women in Sport Programme in National Governing Bodies and Local Sports Partnerships. This investment has supported the delivery of a variety of sports participation initiatives and the development of organisational and leadership capacity through the employment of women within the sport sector.

### **Developing the Policy for Women in Sport**

In 2018, as part of a review of the Women in Sport Programme, Sport Ireland established the Women in Sport Project with three main objectives, namely to:

- Develop an enhanced understanding of the current landscape for women’s involvement in all areas of sport
- Identify common barriers and opportunities for women in sport
- Make recommendations to inform the development of future policies and programmes relating to strengthening women’s involvement in sport.

Sport Ireland sought to hear as many voices through this project and it was critical that the voices of men and women, from all backgrounds, were captured; the project stimulated high levels of engagement.

Through the work of the Women in Sport Project, backed up with Sport Ireland internal and general population research, some key statistics emerged which helped shape the development of a policy for women in sport.

- Females accounted for 23% of board members of National Governing Bodies.
- The proportion of female Chairs of NGB Boards/Decision Making Authorities was 23%.
- Females accounted for 24% of paid CEO’s across the NGBs.
- The number of females coaching in Ireland was 34%. This figure accounted to a ratio of male to female coaches of 2.5: 1.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/2019-11/irish\\_sports\\_monitor\\_2007.pdf](https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/2019-11/irish_sports_monitor_2007.pdf)

- The ratio of male to female officiators was 2.3: 1.
- According to the Irish Sports Monitor results in 2017<sup>3</sup>, the gender gap in adult participation stood at 4.5%. Females also accounted for 42% of adult sports club members.
- The 2018 Children's Sports Participation and Physical Activity study (CSPPA)<sup>4</sup> reported levels of participation in community sport by age group among girls and young women
- The proportion of sports print media articles devoted to women's sport in 2015 was 3%.

### **Sport Ireland Policy on Women in Sport**

Through the Women in Sport Project, national policies, and recognised national research, the Sport Ireland Policy for Women in Sport<sup>5</sup> was developed. This policy identifies four key areas, which have emerged as current gaps & future opportunities for women in sport. From 2019 on, Sport Ireland aimed to target each of these four areas to deliver on the commitments of the policy on Women in Sport.

#### **Four Key Areas of the Policy**

1. Leadership and Governance
2. Coaching and Officiating
3. Active Participation
4. Visibility

The policy expresses Sport Ireland's commitment to women in sport. It seeks to build on the significant work which has already been undertaken in this area within the sport sector to date and, in recognising the opportunity to make a significant impact on the lives of women through their involvement in sport, it provides a blueprint for Sport Ireland's future work. The policy aligns with the Government's National Sports Policy 2018 – 2027, National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020 and Sports Action Plan, and forms a key element of Sport Ireland's corporate strategy<sup>6</sup>. As referenced throughout the policy, 'women' encompasses women and girls of all ages; all ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds; and is inclusive of all abilities.

**Sport Ireland's Vision for Women in Sport:** is one where women have an equal opportunity to achieve their full potential, while enjoying a lifelong involvement in sport.

Sport Ireland is committed to increasing women's sustained involvement in sport as coaches, volunteers, club members, athletes, advocates, leaders, and participants from grassroots to the podium.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.sportireland.ie/research/participation-adult-services/ism-2017>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/2019-11/csppa-2018-final-report.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/2019-11/wis\\_policy.pdf](https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/2019-11/wis_policy.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/2019-11/csppa-2018-final-report.pdf>

## Policy Objectives and Actions

### Active Participation

#### *WIS Policy Objectives:*

- Significantly reduce the active sport participation gradient between men and women
- Reduce the drop-out from physical activity and sport in young girls

#### *WIS Policy Actions*

- Invest in participation programmes which lead to sustained engagement in sport by women and girls
- Promote the establishment of a 'girls in sport toolkit', which better assists coaches in supporting young girls who are at risk of drop-out.

### Leadership & Governance

#### *WIS Policy Objectives*

- Progress towards greater gender balance in Board membership of funded bodies
- Provide a pathway for women aspiring to become leaders of funded bodies

#### *WIS Policy Actions*

- Recognise and reward NBs who have achieved gender diversity at Board level
- Provide gender diversity training to NGBs and LSPs
- Develop and invest in leadership and mentorship courses for women and girls

### Coaching & Officiating

#### *WIS Policy Objectives:*

- Broaden the coaching base to include more women from grassroots to high performance
- Increase the number of women officiating and refereeing

#### *WIS Policy Actions:*

- Invest in targeted coach education programmes in NGBs
- Support NGBs to deliver flexible learning to women
- Invest in education programmes which target young people

### Visibility

#### *WIS Policy Objectives:*

- Increase the visibility and profile of our female role models in sport.
- Use the heroes of today to inspire the next generation of future Olympians and Paralympians.

#### *WIS Policy Actions:*

- Develop and implement a Women in Sport Communications Plan.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Publish annual achievements by sporting bodies receiving WIS funding.</li><li>• Require female athletes in receipt of funding to ‘give back’ as ambassadors for sport.</li></ul> |
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Underpinning the work of addressing the target areas, achieving the identified objectives and actions, the following three measures were put in place:

- Appoint a Women in Sport Lead to act authoritatively and strategically to develop and promote women and girl’s involvement in sport from leadership to participation to high performance. This role will contribute to the delivery of the organisations strategic vision of ‘developing a world class sports sector operating to the highest standards of governance and accountability’. A key output for this role will be to lead, advocate for and evaluate the policy.
- Relaunch the Women in Sport Investment Programme with a move in investment towards initiatives by NGBs and LSPs addressing the four target areas on a sustainable basis.
- The Women in Sport Steering Committee will oversee the delivery of action 32 in the National Sports Policy: “NGBs will be asked to set gender diversity targets and develop equality action plans. 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 their progress in delivering on these and report annually.”

### **Women in Sport Programme Investment 2021 & 2022**

Reflecting Sport Ireland’s continued commitment, the Women in Sport budget was increased from €3 million to €4 million across 2021 & 2022. This investment aims to enhance all aspects of female involvement across the Women in Sport policy target areas namely, Coaching & Officiating, Active Participation, Leadership & Governance and Visibility. Sport Ireland recognises that effective and sustainable programmes require a long-term approach. To that end, Sport Ireland committed to a multi-annual (2 year) Women in Sport Investment Programme. The continuation of this two year award cycle enables NGBs to further progress their strategic objectives for women in sport.

As part of the competitive bid process for funding Sport Ireland received applications from 47 organisations in April 2021 totalling €2.3 million average cost per annum. Following a comprehensive review of all proposals, 45 organisations were awarded funding to the total of €3.3 million over the course of the funding cycle.

Funding of €700k was ring fenced under Women in Sport for strategically important internal and NGB related events and projects under the ‘Special Projects’ funding. This investment is also used to support

organisations who did not apply for funding support in the current round. The Sport Ireland Punditry and Analysis Media Training Programme for female pundits is an example of one such programme funded under the Special Projects funding. This programme aims to increase the number of females visible on TV and radio as pundits and analysis for sport.

The following NGB programmes are examples of work ongoing under the Leadership and Governance pillar.

- Golf Ireland Level Par Programme was created in 2019 to support the amalgamation of the female and male sporting bodies. Sport Ireland continues to help support this programme for the 2021/22 funding cycle as the main focus of the programme revolves around initiatives aimed at supporting golf clubs to be gender equal and welcoming for all.
- In 2019/2020, Tennis Ireland developed and launched its Equal Advantage Charter. Sport Ireland continue to support this initiative for the 2021/22 funding cycle as the main focus of the Charter outlines Tennis Ireland's commitment to gender equality. It provides clubs with an opportunity to discuss and decide actionable change they wish to implement within their own club to support The Equal Advantage Strategy and grow the sport for females. The NGB is also producing a club toolkit with steps clubs can implement in order to promote gender diversity within their club.
- Badminton Ireland, Irish Squash, Table Tennis Ireland and Tennis Ireland have jointly established a programme, entitled 'The Racquet Sports Leadership Programme'. This aims to give female coaches from the four sports the opportunity to gain knowledge and collaborate with each other.
- Swim Ireland continue to coordinate the Women in Sport Leadership Programme which all sports and LSPs can avail of. The programme was first launched in October 2021 and to date has seen almost 200 women educated through it. The programme is targeted at females already in leadership positions or those who wish to pursue a leadership position in sport. This includes sporting Officials, Committee and Board members, WIS Leads, Sports Development Officers and other volunteers. Early signs from the programme suggest that many of its participants have progressed to committee and Board roles within their sport as a result of attending.

### **Sport Ireland Response to Specific Actions**

It is the view of Sport Ireland that all actions in the space of Leadership and Governance are focused on sustainable change. It is important that this includes a long term cultural shift and societal change regarding people's views, perception and acceptance of women in sport. It is our ambition for female's involvement in sport to become the 'norm' and it is no longer a 'women in sport' topic.

### ***Action 21. Improve gender balance on boards by:***

- (a) Making funding to public bodies contingent on reaching a 40% gender balance quota by 2025.*

***Action 22. Public funding to cultural, sports, arts and media organisations should be contingent on:***

- (a) A quota of 30% representation of women, and of men, on their Governing bodies by 2025 and 40% by 2030.*
- (b) Published plans to advance gender equality in their organisations.*
- (c) Annual reporting on progress towards agreed quotas on gender representation and funding.*

As a public body, the composition of the Board of Sport Ireland is a matter for the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media.

Notwithstanding this, Sport Ireland places a strong emphasis on ensuring that organisations in receipt of funding are operating to the highest standards of governance. Key among these is ensuring that there is appropriate representation on the boards for these organisations.

This is explicitly outlined in the Sport Ireland Policy, and augmented by inclusion in the National Sports Policy and Sports Action Plan.

Sport Ireland's objectives:

- Progress towards greater gender balance in Board membership of funded bodies
- Provide a pathway for women aspiring to become leaders of funded bodies

Sport Ireland's actions:

- Recognise and reward NBs who have achieved gender diversity at Board level
- Provide gender diversity training to NGBs and LSPs
- Develop and invest in leadership and mentorship courses for women and girls

Action 6.1 of the Government's Sport Action Plan states:

“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 publishes a Leadership snapshot annually, which gives an overview of the breakdown of the number of females in leadership positions in sport. Sport Ireland’s Grant Application process has been adjusted to include questions on board composition and current work in NGBs to ensure gender diversity.

The snapshot is published as part of the Leadership & Governance pillar of the Sport Ireland Women in Sport Policy and outlines the current position and progress made since the publication of the Policy.

A key objective of the Leadership and Governance target area is to progress towards greater gender balance in board membership of funded bodies. The second objective is to provide a pathway for women aspiring to become leaders of funded bodies.

The first Leadership snapshot update, published in March 2020, showed that females made up an average of 29% of boards across funded National Governing Bodies. This was an increase from 24% when the Sport Ireland Policy on Women in Sport was published in 2019. This figure now stands at 32% in National Governing Bodies<sup>7</sup> (including Sport Ireland, the Federation of Irish Sport, Olympic Federation of Ireland and Paralympics Ireland). This figure has remained the same in Local Sports Partnerships over the last year with females accounting for 37% of Board members.

**Action 25. Work places should be required to develop, resource, implement and monitor gender-neutral recruitment and promotion policies and practices including:**

- (a) Specific policies to promote gender equality in leadership positions.**
- (b) A requirement to operate gender-sensitive and anti-discriminatory selection and promotions processes.**
- (c) Equal access to training, assignments and mentoring opportunities for all employees including part-time and remote workers.**

A board recruitment service<sup>8</sup> has been developed in conjunction with the Federation of Irish Sport. This is a space where females available for board positions are visible. This service includes accompanying training as applicable.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.sportireland.ie/women-in-sport/news/progress-towards-gender-balance-on-boards-leadership-composition-snapshot-3>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.irishsport.ie/board-recruitment-service/>



Sport Ireland currently supports approximately 35 NGBs to deliver Women in Sport Leadership programmes or to fund candidates to attend leadership programmes such as the Swim Ireland programme mentioned previously.

Sport Ireland has developed a Gender Diversity on Boards Resource for CEOs and Board Chairpersons with educational webinars taking place biannually on the topic of gender diversity on boards.

In consultation with Institute of Public Administration, Sport Ireland offers a Level 9 Professional Certificate in Governance course free of charge to the Sport Section. Sport Ireland works with the IPA to ensure gender diversity is featured strongly on the course.

There is strong gender diversity on Sport Ireland courses, e.g. 58% of applicants for the inaugural IPA course were female.

Modules have been added to Sport Ireland's professional development programmes: Arena and Accelerate. Including: Gender Diversity on Boards, Unconscious Bias, Understanding Boards and Anti-discrimination.

Sport Ireland has delivered a Gender Diversity in Leadership Networking Group Masterclasses.

Sport Ireland offers the 'M-Power' Mentoring Programme. Now in its third year, there is specific focus of gender diversity of participants

Sport Ireland funded LSPs deliver leadership courses with high number of women and girls in attendance.

Sport Ireland will shortly publish its Diversity & Inclusion Policy for sport in Ireland.

Sport Ireland created a Women in Coaching Toolkit with tips and guidance for organisations on enhancing the recruitment, development and retention of female coaches. This includes suggested actions on assessing the culture within the organisation and ensuring diversity amongst its workforce.

Sport Ireland also offers recruitment advice and guidance on human resource matters, including recruitment.

## **Conclusion**

The area of Women in Sport is one that is strategically important for Sport Ireland. This is given equal prominence in the Government's National Sports Policy and Sport Action Plan.

Sport Ireland continues to work with all of our funded bodies and key stakeholders to ensure that sport, at all levels, is equitable and inclusive for all.

Sport Ireland supports the work of the Citizens' Assembly and the Joint Committee and is remains available to further support both as is required.