



Department for
Communities
www.communities-ni.gov.uk

An Roinn
Pobal

Department fur
Commonities

**Level 9
Causeway Exchange
1-7 Bedford Street
Belfast
BT2 7EG**

Telephone: 028 9051 2662
e-mail: private.office@communities-ni.gov.uk
Our ref: AQW 24199/22-27

Date: March 2025

Justin McNulty MLA
Northern Ireland Assembly
Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw, Stormont
Belfast
BT4 3XX

Dear Justin

**AQW 24199/22-27 – COLLABORATION WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
ON ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION IN SPORT FROM EARLY YEARS AND
THROUGHOUT LIFE.**

You recently submitted an Assembly Written Question AQW 24199/22-27, asking that I detail the extent to which I am collaborating with the Department of Health on encouraging participation in sport from early years and throughout life.

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

Yours sincerely

Gordon Lyons MLA
Minister for Communities

Collaboration between Sport NI and the Department of Health on encouraging participation in sport from early years and throughout life

Sport NI Response

I have sought the requested information from the Chief Executive, who has advised me of the following information:

“Sport NI have engaged with both branches of the Department of Health, as well as the PHA across multiple projects to encourage participation in sport from early years and throughout life, ranging from physical literacy development and education, to support for the Special Olympics and engagement in mental health and wellbeing.

Physical Literacy Development & Education

In October 2022 Sport NI launched the All-Island Physical Literacy Consensus Statement launched with Sport Ireland. This facilitated the development of ‘Understanding physical Literacy Workshop’ also with Sport Ireland and led to Sport NI forming the Northern Ireland Physical Literacy Forum (NIPLF), which aims to promote the concept of physical literacy, advocate the integration of physical literacy into research, policy, and practice, as well as encouraging collaboration within and between groups and sectors to develop physical literacy. In 2024 both the Southern Health Trust & South Eastern Health Trust joined the NIPLF.

Subsequently in September 2024 Sport NI presented at joint meeting of PHA & HSCNI (physical activity coordinators), and delivered tutor training for the aforementioned ‘Understanding Physical Literacy Workshop’ to tutors from the Southern Health Trust & South Eastern Health Trust.

In November 2024, Sport NI also provided direct support to the Southern Health Trust in writing an Early Year Practitioners Toolkit.

In January 2025 the NIPLF meeting focused on physical literacy in early years development and in March 'Understanding Physical Literacy Workshop' will be delivered to PHA and HSCNI representatives by a tutor from the Southern Health Trust as part of 'Understanding Physical Literacy Week

Special Olympics Ireland

An Inter-Departmental Oversight Group (IDOG) including three Government Departments (Department for Communities, Department for Education and Department of Health) and Sport NI invest in Special Olympics for the purpose of delivering sporting activities to people with learning disabilities across Northern Ireland, thereby improving physical and mental health.

Engagement regarding Mental Health and Wellbeing

Sport NI officers engage with PHA every 6-8 weeks with respect to Mental Health and Wellbeing (MHWB). The Sport NI website contains resources on MHWB, including signposting to resources and campaigns offered through the PHA – see <https://www.sportni.net/mental-health-and-well-being/mental-health-support/>. By directly engaging with PHA on this, Sport NI ensures that the information offered is up to date and accurate, and that any new initiatives through PHA are afforded appropriate attention, either directly through the webpage above, or potentially through linking to Sport NI's social media channels and networks.

Sport NI also offers an online Mental Health and Wellbeing awareness course for the sports sector - Mental Health and Wellbeing is available through Sport NI's Digital Learning Hub and provides sporting clubs and organisations with an introduction to mental health and wellbeing, the signs and symptoms to look out for and how to support yourself and those around you. The introductory course connects participants to a wide range of mental health resources and services in their local Trust areas via the Public Health Agency."

For any future queries relating to operational matters, you may wish to contact Sport NI directly. Making direct contact with Sport NI will ensure that you receive the information in the shortest possible timeframe and make best use of public resources.