



**An Roinn Turasóireachta, Cultúir,
Ealaíon, Gaeltachta, Spóirt agus Meán**
Department of Tourism, Culture,
Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media

Report of the Youth Stakeholder Forum on Sport

26th May 2022

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Foreword

I am delighted to publish this report of the Youth Stakeholder Forum on Sport held on the 26th of May last.

I attended all of the forum's deliberations that day and to say that I was impressed by the quality, depth of thought, commitment and passion for the topic of sport would in fact be an understatement. Almost 100 young people from across the island of Ireland came together and gave us their time and thoughts on sport, and their experience of it. Some had good and positive experiences, others less so.

The areas covered were certainly wide-ranging. We heard voices from the more elite end of sport, where careers and future Olympics and Paralympics participation may be within the bounds and dreams of some of the forum's participants. In that context, I want to pay a very special tribute and thanks to our very own Olympic heroine from Tokyo 2020, Kellie Harrington. Kellie was present for much of the afternoon session sharing her thoughts, feelings and experiences of sport. She also spent a considerable time after the end of proceedings chatting and having her photo taken with the young people. Kellie's story was clearly an inspiration to her rapt audience. Her willingness to engage afterwards is indeed a true measure and reflection of her greatness.

Much of this report sets out thoughts and ideas for improving our policies on sport from the more grassroots end of sport. This report has been written without commentary on the feasibility or otherwise of the various ideas and suggestions. It is intended to be a first-hand narrative of the day and I hope that the young people will feel that it does justice to their efforts and discussions.

I would like to thank the teachers, parents, guardians, coaches and others that facilitated the attendance of the young people at the forum, as well as the young people themselves, without whose enthusiastic participation this event could not have been so fruitful.

I believe that the forum was an outstanding success. It can often be the case that the pace of engagement at events such as these can take a while to get going. But happily this was not the case on the 26th of May last. There was great engagement and debate at the roundtable discussions from the outset. During the panel session, the questioning mindset of the audience was so evident and in the afternoon we had seven fantastic, confident and brilliantly delivered

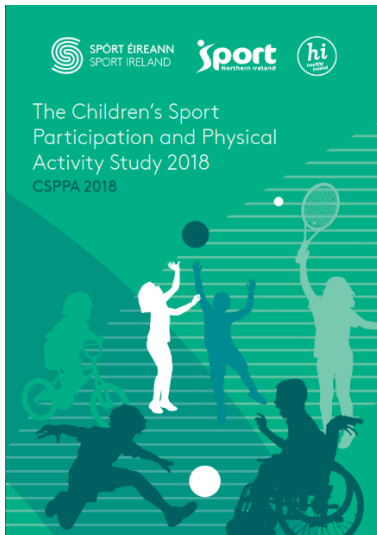


presentations. The combined result is that we have a rich list of things that policy makers and analysts across several Departments and agencies need to be thinking about. More importantly, perhaps, is that there are a series of actions we need to be taking on foot of what was said and suggested at the forum. I would like to think that come the first anniversary of the forum next May, we will be able to point to a series of concrete steps and actions that will confirm the forum's value.

Jack Chambers
Minister of State for Sport and the Gaeltacht.

Introduction

Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study 2018



The main research document motivating the convening of this forum is the Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study 2018 (CSPPA 2018)¹, published in late 2019. It had three main aims:

- To understand participation levels in sport, physical activity, physical education and active transport for Irish and Northern Irish children.
- To understand the impact of sport and physical activity on physical, mental and social health for Irish and Northern Irish children.
- Provide policy insight on physical activity initiatives aimed at children.

The study, a follow-up to one conducted in 2010, was based on a survey of 6,651 children aged 10-18 from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Survey data was collected in six areas: Physical activity, Community sport, School sport, Physical education, Active travel and Sedentary behaviour.

Whilst the findings showed some positives such as an increase in post primary students meeting the Department of Education guidelines of 120 minutes a week (10% in 2010 vs 23% in 2018)², they also highlighted some challenging issues such as only 13%³ of children being sufficiently active to meet the recommended national guideline of 60 minutes physical activity a day. Increasing the number of young people taking part in sport and physical activity is consequently considered a policy priority.

Policy Basis

The convening of this forum had a specific policy basis as well as a research basis. In 2021 a Sports Action Plan was published. This three-year Action Plan covers the period up to end 2023 and sets out the key initiatives that are to be pursued to get more people, including children, involved in sport and to enhance the way that sport is managed and administered in

¹ <https://www.sportireland.ie/research/csppa-2018>

² This figure relates to the Republic of Ireland only.

³ This figure is an all-Island figure.

Ireland. Action 5.1 of that plan commits the Department to holding an in-person consultative event:

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)



National Sports Policy 2018 - 2027



National Sports Policy 2018 - 2027 Sports Action Plan 2021 - 2023



Increasing participation, especially amongst certain targeted groups, is a core objective of the National Sports Policy 2018-2027, the overarching policy document governing sports policy in Ireland. In pursuit of that objective, a Sport for All approach is being increasingly employed, aimed at ensuring that all persons have the opportunity to partake equally in sport and physical activity, regardless of age, gender, socio-economic status, disability, or membership of, for example, the LGBTI+ community, the Traveller community or other ethnic minorities.

Precursor events

Due to COVID-19 and the consequent impracticality of holding a large scale in-person consultative event, the holding of this forum had to be deferred on a number of occasions. However, two smaller events were held by means of video conference to gauge youth opinion and help inform the development of this larger scale event.

The first online meeting took place on the 4th of March 2021 and included students from the FAI Fingal Transition Year Programme based in Dublin and from two Swim Ireland clubs based in Galway, Shark Swimming Club and Galway Swimming Club.

That online consultation had two main questions to frame the conversation:

1. What helps young people to be physically active?
2. What stops young people from being physically active?

Reasons given by the assembled groups for low participation included:

- Little exposure to physical activity and sport when young / in school setting.
- Negative experiences of sport and physical activity e.g. coaches / pushy parents/ lack of choice/ bad experience of a sport itself.
- Inequality in physical education (PE) in schools - peer pressure/ judgement / limited sports offered / excessive focus on “main stream” stereotypical sports.
- Facilities: lack of facilities / sub-par facilities / not allowed access to facilities / insurance issues being cited as the reason.
- Low interest in female sport: less supports/ less spectators etc.
- Body image / social stigma / stereotyping / peer pressure.
- Transport to / from venues.
- Time constraints: too much homework etc. leaving no time to play sport.
- Lack of sport during off season: when young, summer camps can fill the void, but teenagers don't always have that option.
- Cost of sport can be prohibitive.
- Lack of scholarships moving to 3rd level.

Reasons advanced for partaking in sport and physical activity and improving participation levels included:

- Focus on early years.
- Improving sport in the school setting.
- Reducing the time constraints.
- Tackling societal stigmas.
- Emphasising inclusivity and fun in sport.
- Helping people find teams/clubs that match up with their ability level e.g. have B teams with a greater focus on fun than competition.
- Improving facilities.
- More 3rd level scholarships to encourage people to keep sport up during secondary school as parents would see that as an option to get into college instead of an almost total focus on academic studies.

On the 19th of April 2021, the Department, with support from Foroige, hosted a second online event. This was attended by young people from around the country, all of whom were members of local Foroige groups or Comhairle na nÓg. The same two questions previously used for the earlier FAI and Swim Ireland events were again used to frame the conversation, the idea being that this event would hear from people with perhaps different and lower levels of interest and involvement in sport compared to the FAI and Swim Ireland participants who were evidently already involved and committed to their respective sports at a significant level.

Reasons given for low participation included:

- Lack of opportunities/lack of variety/club locations involving long commutes.
- Mental health: unsupportive coaches/ aggressive environment.
- Peer pressure: sport characterised as “the be all and end all”.
- School: school work and studying dominating time / uncomfortable uniforms / bullying.
- Self-Management: insufficient time / lack of motivation and energy / lack of knowledge or skill.
- Social influences: feeling insecure / other people’s opinions / unsupportive coaches or teammates / bullying / don’t feel comfortable doing physical activity in public
- Sporting community: aggressive environment / pressure / lack of encouragement.
- Cost: too expensive / cost of equipment / cost of classes.
- Infrastructure and facilities: availability / accessibility / affordability.

Reasons advanced for partaking in sport and physical activity and improving participation levels included:

- Comfortability: clothing/role models/ time.
- Cost: affordability/ public facilities/ cheaper or free.
- Facilities: sports club nearby / not reliant on having parent or guardian accompaniment.
- Infrastructure: good roads/ facilities such as skate parks etc. made available
- Open space.
- Security: safe / respect / community.
- Self-management: daily routine / motivation/time.

Methodology

In order to ensure a wide representation of views at the forum from across Irish society, multiple organisations were contacted to provide students and speakers. The Department is deeply grateful to those who were able to attend and share their views. These included persons with disabilities, persons involved at a high level in their respective sports, schools from across the island of Ireland including Northern Ireland, local schools, winners of the PE Xpo and others.

The persistent pressures of the public health situation as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic were an acute concern in the planning of this forum, necessitating a much later date for its holding than preferred. These considerations inevitably pushed the timing of this event out from the spring time towards the summer months, inevitably causing a clash for many prospective attendees from Irish schools, when both in-house and state examinations are typically held. After consulting with the Department of Education the event was fixed for late May. While this meant that students in examination years could not understandably participate, it did ensure that students from other years would be available. The Department accordingly opted to focus on students in Transition Year or similar for the event.

Structure of Event

The event was held in the National Indoor Arena on the Sport Ireland Campus in Dublin. Sports Journalist Marie Crowe acted as Master of Ceremonies for the day.

The event was split into a morning and afternoon session. Prior to the official start of the event, the option of the participants going on a short tour around the high performance facilities available at the National Indoor Arena was offered.

At registration students were assigned a table number. The room was organised around a number of circular tables set up with approximately 8 chairs to a table.

The event was opened by Minister Jack Chambers, T.D., Government Chief Whip & Minister of State for Sport and the Gaeltacht. He thanked the young people for giving up their time to come and help him and his Department formulate an answer to one of the most important questions for contemporary sports policy in Ireland: how to achieve increased levels of sports participation by young people. This was followed by a brief welcome to the campus and the day's events by Dr. Una May, CEO of Sport Ireland.

As an overview prompt to initiate and guide discussion, Shane Califf, Director of Governing Bodies at Sport Ireland, then gave a brief introduction to the findings of the CSPPA study, emphasising in particular the somewhat startling statistic that only about one in seven of Irish children aged 10-18 in Ireland today are sufficiently active to benefit their long-term health.



Roundtables

Structure

Roundtable discussions were facilitated by each table being assigned one question to consider over a 30 minute period and then to report back to the plenary. Where possible, students were assigned to tables in groups of no more than three from the same school/club/organisation whilst aiming to ensure as far as possible for no one to be at a table on their own not knowing anybody else. These aims were designed to stimulate discussion amongst friends from the outset, whilst avoiding overpowering a table's discussion with the voices from just one school/club/organisation. The questions, as they appeared on the day, are reproduced below. 14 questions were prepared in advance with Questions 1 to 10 and 12 being used on the day. Table numbers were matched to question numbers.



The questions that were presented for roundtable discussion, as drafted by Department officials in consultation with Sport Ireland, were as follows:

1. Is it important to enjoy sport, and what can be done to ensure sport is enjoyable?
2. Why did you choose your sport, or why have you tried certain sports? Have you been inspired by a famous sportsperson or sporting event to try a sport?
3. How important is competition? Does a focus on winning add to, or detract from, a young person's enjoyment of sport?
4. What makes a good coach?
5. Do you think sport is inclusive for all people (boys and girls, younger and older) and from different backgrounds (e.g. ethnic minorities, travelling community, LGBTI+ community, people with disabilities)?
6. How important is respect in sport? What is needed to ensure a respectful atmosphere for participants and officials in sport?

7. Does technology play a role in sport for you? Has technology motivated you to participate or engage in sport/physical activity?
8. What do you think are the main reasons why young people stop participating in sport, especially in early teenage years? What can be done to address this?
9. What can be done to ensure that people of all abilities can participate in sport? What keeps you or your friends from participating in sport?
10. Does your school play a big part in your sporting life?
11. *Do you play sport outside of school? If yes, are you a member of a sport club?*
12. Does sport provide a social outlet for you? Does your friends' participation in sports impact your participation?
13. *Have you had issues with your expectations of standards/fun compared to the team/coach? (mismatch between competitive sport versus sport for fun/physical activity)*
14. *Could changing the rules of a given sport encourage less competitive sport and encourage participation?*

(Questions in italics not used on the day)

There were 4 floating note takers assigned to the roundtable discussions, with 3 note takers covering 3 tables each and the other covering 2 tables. It was decided to use floating note takers to avoid the possibility of the presence of a note taker sitting at the table being a distraction for the students and potentially stymying open and free conversation. This choice was also made to avoid the note taker needing to drive the conversation forward and potentially putting across personal or pre-determined opinions and viewpoints.

Overview of Discussions

- **Table 1 - Is it important to enjoy sport, and what can be done to ensure sport is enjoyable?**
 - Essential to enjoy sports.
 - Need more facilities, more fun. Encourage more people to partake.
 - Recognise benefits of sport, improves health, start at young age, try lots of sports.
 - Good coaches vital.

- **Table 2 - Why did you choose your sport, or why have you tried certain sports? Have you been inspired by a famous sports person or sporting event to try a sport?**
 - Need to stay active.
 - School/parents/influence/active/favourite/good community.
 - Try everything, good experience.
 - Look up to a team and be inspired by Olympics.

- **Table 3 - How important is competition? Does a focus on winning add to, or detract from, a young person's enjoyment of sport?**
 - Could do with less of an off-season.
 - Boring without competition, prospect of reward from competition important.
 - No emotion if no competition, influence others, winning is good.
 - If not good at sport you are put off, not inclusive all the time.

- **Table 4 - What makes a good coach?**
 - Coach has a role in fostering a sense of community.
 - Needs to be able to spot people's strengths and weaknesses.
 - Has to be able to be positive.
 - Needs to have good listening and communication skills.
 - Good coach shows interest, patience, is motivational, positive and inspires, leader, punctual, knowledgeable about the sport.

- **Table 5 - Do you think sport is inclusive for all people (boys and girls, younger and older) and from different backgrounds (e.g. ethnic minorities, travelling community, LGBTI+ community, people with disabilities)?**
 - No, it's not always inclusive.
 - More finance and better infrastructure is needed in rural areas.
 - Safer roads, safer rules for cyclists
 - Local and rural focus for future facilities
 - More support for LGBTI+ and disability focused clubs

- **Table 6 - How important is respect in sport? What is needed to ensure a respectful atmosphere for participants and officials in sport?**
 - Attitudes of teachers.
 - Respect for good attitudes.
 - Respect important. Good atmosphere.
 - Importance of fairness.
 - Activities should include everyone to build respect and friendship among the group.

- **Table 7 - Does technology play a role in sport for you? Has technology motivated you to participate or engage in sport/physical activity?**
 - Yes, social media helps, can be inspiring, apps such as map my run.
 - YouTube live so parents etc. can see events happening. Niche sports like archery online can help.
 - Big focus on social media here, useful to see sports on social media.
 - Can get to see niche sports online.
 - Get to see more live events and follow along better.

- **Table 8 - What do you think are the main reasons why young people stop participating in sport, especially in early teenage years? What can be done to address this?**
 - Issues of prioritisation, often have to focus on exams.
 - Lack of options/variety in PE.
 - Would like to see more student feedback in sport.
 - More bonding/teambuilding focused activities through sports.
 - Can often be hard to meet competitive standards.
 - Prioritise exercise in balance with study.
 - Coaching issues – discourage relationships between coaches and athletes due to the bias such relationships introduce.
 - Look at sports options in schools. More variety in PE. Ask students which sports they want to do.
 - Lack of friendships in team sports. Studies are prioritised. Include exercise in school day.
 - Coaches have effect on drop out, avoid favouritism, and picking on players.

- **Table 9 - What can be done to ensure that people of all abilities can participate in sport? What keeps you or your friends from participating in sport?**
 - Issues of education levels, want to see more emphasis on the scientific side of the benefits of sport.
 - Lack of time, lack of motivation, lack of interest.
 - Cost/difficulty of transport to sports venues.
 - Need more promotion of a variety of sports through media, only sports being seen are GAA sports.
 - A way for girls to socialise.
 - More accessible facilities, increase exposure to role models.
 - Can't make living out of sport – need real job. Choice between sport and career.

- **Table 10 - Do you play sport outside of school? If yes, are you a member of a sport club?**
 - Mostly yes
 - Big influence on playing outside of school is being a member of a club and being with friends.
 - Pressure from exams often has a negative impact on participation.
 - Tends to be more opportunities for boys than girls.
 - Boys' teams often get focused on while girls' teams get ignored/less focus.
 - Some schools do facilitate sport but others don't. Pressure from exams. Boys have more opportunities.
 - Sport outside of school also important.
 - Sexism prevails – boys get more effort put in to their sporting preferences.
 - Teachers only get excited about the boys' teams going places in competitions. We (girls) could actually make a final and they'd still not be really interested.
 - Boys' teams get all the support – more training, more teachers happy to work with boys.
 - Cost is a concern for the schools – if they only have so much money for kit and training etc. they'll usually give it to the boys' teams.
- **Table 12 - Does sport provide a social outlet for you? Does your friends' participation in sports impact your participation?**
 - All play GAA – football. Friends play – more enjoyable when it is with people you are comfortable with.
 - Sport is more enjoyable when around other people e.g. team sports.
 - More focus on sports for play and more friendly sports.
 - 6 kids at this table, all play Gaelic Football.
 - Yes, football allows us to meet our friends.
 - With all your friends playing you don't want to miss the training/games because you'd feel like you were missing out.
 - It gives us somewhere to go.
 - Football has helped us make a few new friends or even get on better with some others that we didn't really like!

Panel Discussion

The panel discussion was held after the roundtables. Minister Chambers, Dr. Una May and Shane Califf were invited to sit on the panel. Young people were then invited to ask questions of the panellists.



The questions were wide-ranging, from regionally specific questions about the provision of facilities, such as a 50 metre pool in Connacht, to questions about specific aspects of Sport Ireland's work in the Irish sports system e.g. how Sport Ireland discharges its anti-doping functions.

There were a number of questions related to sport and the education system. Students questioned why so little time was allocated to physical education. The Minister noted that there were constraints on school time and resources, but that he would like to see a greater focus and time allocation for sport and physical activity. One young person suggested that schools should have more sports teams, including A and B teams to encourage all persons to participate at a level with which they felt comfortable. The panel noted that many sports activities such as organised teams depend on teachers volunteering their time which can make organising a team difficult.

Dr. May noted that uniforms can present issues for active travel and sports in schools, and that this is an area that the young people themselves can help to address, as uniform policies are set by school boards of management, generally based on the wishes of parents. Traditional uniforms, such as skirts or shirts and ties, can prevent or inhibit the playing of sports. They can also make it difficult or even impossible, for girls especially, to comfortably cycle or walk to school.

Dr. May went on to say that Sport Ireland will be issuing a physical literacy statement in the near future. This will help people to understand why we do sport, how our bodies work, how to support a young person's changing body. It will stress the importance of sport throughout the life cycle – to have fun when young, to get fit when older. It will also promote the diversity of sports on offer, that it's not just football, hurling and other popular team sports; there is a sport available to match everyone's preference.

The adequacy and accessibility of facilities was raised frequently throughout the day and questions were asked of the panel around their provision and standards. The Minister explained that funding for grassroots clubs had been trebled in recent years, with there being a big focus now on measures to promote equal participation for boys



and girls. One attendee pointed out that Connacht did not have a 50m pool, the only province lacking one. The Minister noted that funding had been allocated under the LSSIF for a new pool near Galway. He went on to note that swimming is an important sport under the National Sports Policy, recognised for its ability to cater to a wide variety of people, ages and abilities. He noted the work of Swim Ireland in bringing forward their pop-up pools, which should help to improve the facilities situation in areas currently lacking facilities.

The position of facilities within schools was a further issue that was queried by the students, especially their accessibility outside school hours. The Minister explained that the Department is seeking to have more schools and clubs share facilities, and work together to develop new facilities that can be assets for communities.

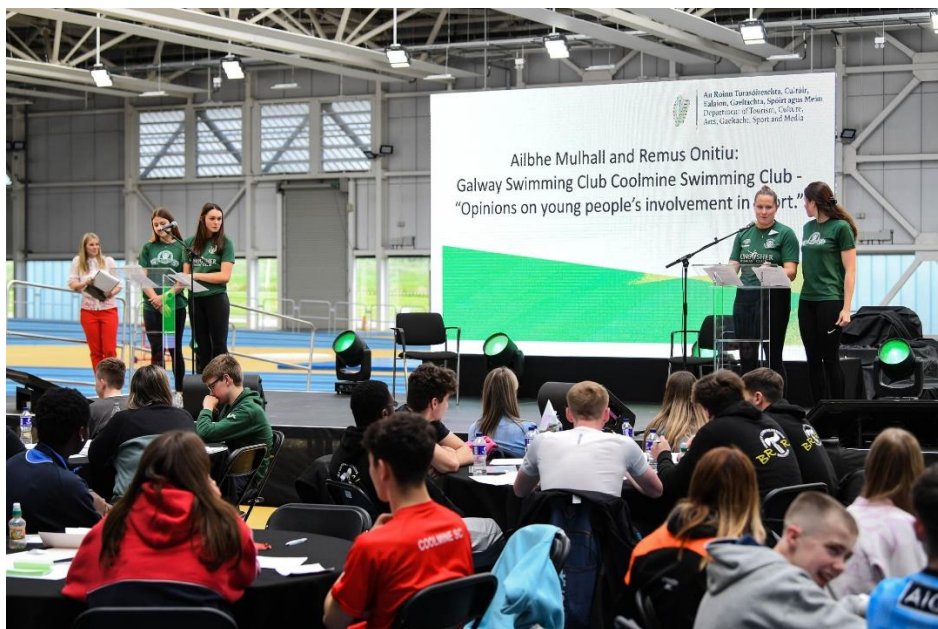
It was also queried why there weren't more sports scholarships available for students going on to third level. The Minister said that better integration of third level and high performance sport is something that is being looked at under the new Sport Ireland High Performance Strategy, and that there are a number of sports scholarships already available with tertiary institutions around the country. Shane Califf stated that the Irish sporting sector wants to see Irish athletes being able to make a career and life for themselves in Ireland, that they shouldn't feel compelled to move abroad to pursue their sports' careers. Una May spoke of the Accreditation for Student Athlete Support (ASAS) programme, operated by Sport Ireland, which recognises good practice in 'dual career' support for student athletes by Higher Education Institutions.

Presentations

Seven presentations were delivered on the day. Presenters had been invited from a variety of backgrounds to present with the suggestion that it should focus on the involvement or non-involvement of young people in sport. Presentation content was otherwise left entirely at the discretion of the presenting group.

1. Galway Swimming Club - “Opinions on young people’s involvement in sport.”

Presenters: Ailbhe Mulhall, Niamh Kennedy, Katie Waters, Adrianna Kazimiercz



Four members of the Galway Swimming Club presented on the challenges facing them as young people participating in sport at a competitive level in Connaught. They had participated in one of the online events earlier in the year. Their presentation today indicated the following:

- Swim Ireland does not support Connaught. No 50m pool.
- Lack of spectators in girls’ sport, also a lack of exposure with low levels of interest being shown in female sport.
- Lack of role models, some moving to US etc.
- Body image, periods - girls uneducated. Should be talks about it.
- Sports should be a safe space even if on a period. Understanding of their needs is important.
- Lack of facilities in Connaught is forcing athletes to travel to other counties at considerable cost.
- It should not be a disadvantage where you live and women should get as much respect as men in sport.

Their ideas on how to improve participation included the following specific suggestions:

- More investment in early years.
- Deliver overall increase in sport investment.
- Address stigma and society's negative view of women's sport.
- Enhance young people's experiences in sport.
- Improvement and investment in facilities.

2. Comhairle na nÓg - "Opinions on young people's involvement in sport."

Presenters: Marguerita Baturova and Kaitlyn Kennedy

Marguerita and Kaitlyn from Comhairle na nÓg attended a virtual forum held by the Minister on the 19th of April 2021 on the topic of youth participation in sport and physical activity. Their presentation to this forum was modelled on their earlier observations and findings on young people's involvement with sport based on two thematic questions: What helps young people to be physically active; and what stops young people being physically active? Their presentation reflected the following insights of 12 young people who had participated in a youth based consultation in advance of the April 2021 virtual forum:

- Many categories encourage and discourage physical activity:
 - Ones that encourage physical activity include:
 - Low cost, good facilities and infrastructure, the ability to self-manage, security, comfortability and open spaces.
 - Ones that discourage physical activity include:
 - Lack of opportunities, mental health, poor sporting community, school, peer pressure, social influence, lack of self-management.

To expand on the points above, the following are some of the key insights outlined by the presenters:

- Economic status affects participation, those with lower incomes have less opportunities.
- Need to increase awareness of facilities available.
- Sport helps shape us, make friends, be part of the community, new skills acquired from sport can transfer to work environments, like team work.
- Needs to be more variety of sports available to young people – over and above Gaelic Games, which can often be the only realistic option available to those in rural areas especially.
- Dealing with an aggressive sporting environment can be difficult and can cause participants to be scared of messing up, which was the unfortunate first experience of a 10 year old.
- There can be hierarchies in clubs; if you are not good they don't like you.



Their recommendations included:

- Address the gaps in facilities and infrastructure in more rural areas.
- More variety in sports/physical activity options to offer to young people.
- Address the imbalance in options for females.
- Improve infrastructure to access the facilities.
- Train coaches better.
- Provide subsidies for young people to take part. Better to have membership schemes than paying for individual classes.
- Increase funding.

3. Coolmine Swimming Club - “Opinions on young people’s involvement in sport.”

Presenter: Remus Onitiu

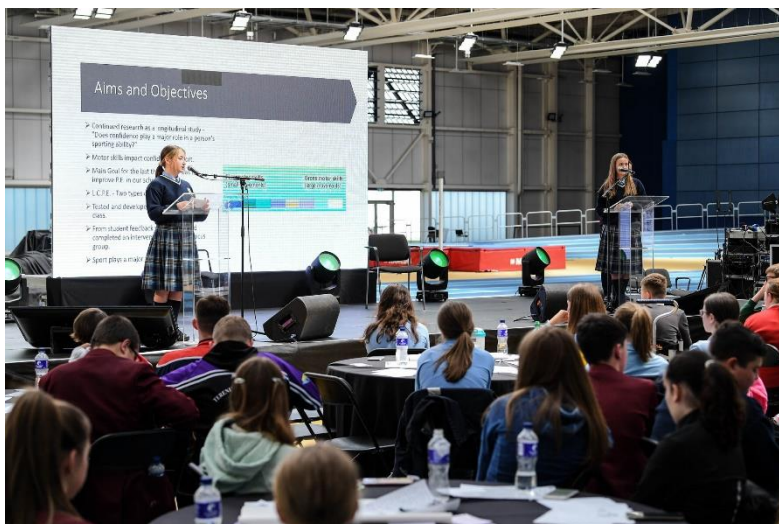
- Good things for him about sport – inclusion, fun, being in an elite group, made great memories and friendships.
- Great coaches, underrated for what they bring to sport especially around morale-building.
- Bad things for him about sport – two side of same coin e.g. injuries, pressure to meet qualifying times, hitting the wall. Important to have good relationship with oneself, confidence in oneself and with other people.
- A wall is when you do not improve for a long time and nobody else can get you over that wall, only you can.
- You can carry across mental and physical techniques to life, work, school and sport.

- Likes the escapism it offers – head in the water.
- In football and other sports, you relate to team – encouragement.
- Challenges are lack of resources e.g. physio, nutritionists, trainers.
- More expensive equipment and club fees.
- Improve media portrayal – swimming doesn't get as much attention as GAA.
- Statistics of swimming would be encouraging and new awards would lead to more inclusion and motivate others.
- Qualifying times limited to age and gender – expand to height and weight as well.
- Suggestions of improved media coverage, funding and changes to criteria are potential ways to improve sports participation.



4. PE Xpo 2022 Overall Senior Winner – “Can improving a person’s motor skills improve confidence?”

Presenters: Caoimhe Molloy and Phoebe Lemon



Caoimhe and Phoebe are the overall senior winners of the PE Xpo 2022 and their presentation was based on their winning entry. The presentation from Caoimhe and Phoebe took an approach based on their research into “Can improving a person’s motor skills improve confidence”. Their presentation outlined their reasoning for picking

the topic, how they researched their project, the methods used, the intervention plan they put in place etc. Below is a brief overview of their aims / objectives and conclusions.

Aims and objectives:

- Continued research as a longitudinal study - "Does confidence play a major role in a person's sporting ability?"
- Want to see if motor skills impact confidence in sport.
- Improve P.E. in their school.
- Test and develop motor skills within our class.
- Design and complete an intervention plan with a focus group.

Conclusions

- Analysed our quantitative and qualitative research.
- Students that developed their motor skills at an early age = higher confidence levels.
- Students that developed their motor skills at a later age = lower confidence levels.
- Calculated average confidence levels of boys and girls.
- In week one 29% had low confidence.
- But by week three just 19% had low confidence.

They have plans to further their research by implementing their motor skill improvement circuit, the programme they used to improve motor skills, across their school and also into a primary school setting.

5. Disability Sport

Presenter: James Casserly



James outlined his involvement in sport and physical activity as a person with disability.

- Has partaken in lots of different sports over the years.
- Clubs should be open and willing to be equal for all and you should try-out different sports and find something that you love to do.
- Playing isn't the only option, you can for example take up coaching to be involved in sport.
- Inclusive training in clubs and schools. PE teachers should be trained to include disability in the curriculum.
- Important to understand that a person with a disability can love sport and can love competition.
- Not enough competition available for people with disability; needs to change. Only so long you can train for a sport without competition before it becomes boring.
- An example of the difference encountered is training only once every two weeks for people with a disability, compared to able-bodied sports people getting to train twice a week usually.
- Important to understand that the health benefits of exercise apply to everyone.
- Every gym should have adapted equipment, should be a case of being able to join a gym like everyone else.
- Key message is get out there, try something out and enjoy it.

6. Volleyball Ireland – “Inclusion in Sport”

Presenter: Viktoriia Bykova

Interpreter: Nataliya Khvashchevska



Viktoriia is a volleyball player and a recent arrival from Ukraine. Her presentation involved her sharing her experience of sport in both Ukraine and Ireland through a question and answer session with the young audience.

- Volleyball allows her to do something she enjoys doing since arriving in Ireland.
- Sports brings people together.
- Main difference here is that you train 2 days a week while in Ukraine she trained twice a day.
- Basketball would be her second choice of sport but she likes all sports.
- She feels free to choose any sport and considers it important that young people have a good choice and menu of sporting options available to them.
- There is a sport for everyone and it’s her hope that everyone finds their place in sport.
- Having chosen a sport, important to put their souls into it.
- Important not to establish boundaries or limits. Be ambitious on what can be achieved.

7. Armagh Boxing Club – “Thoughts on and experience in sport”



Presenter: Aoife Dougan

Aoife Dougan is from the Armagh Boxing Club. She is the current Junior Light-Flyweight (48kg) Irish national champion.

- Boxing different to football – shock as to how committed you must be, trains every day, strict diet of chicken and rice, low carb, no fizzy drinks, chocolates or sweets.
- Winning has driven her.
- Only girl in the club at the time and had to spar with boys. Hard to get fights.
- She has won Ulster championships.
- COVID was very difficult, everything closed – just her and her mother, who is a boxing coach in her club.
- After COVID she won All Ireland this year after 5 years' training.
- For her, sports are all about winning, positive mental and physical health, strength and fitness, always wants to work harder, has a never give up attitude.
- Sport provides a great distraction from other life pressures, training with others improves social skills.

Q&A with Kellie Harrington

The special guest speaker was boxer Kellie Harrington, multiple medallist at national, European and World Championships and also Olympic Gold Medallist in Boxing at the Tokyo Games. Kellie fielded numerous questions from both the MC Marie Crowe and the young people in attendance. Questions covered her boxing career, her motivations and reasons for starting to box, the influences of her coaches, dealing with negativity / social media, the challenges of being a woman in sport, her hopes and plans after her boxing career is over.

Kellie noted how she joined boxing aged 15. Boxing brought discipline and commitment into her life at that time. It was a hard journey at the start at that young age but she's not sure if it's because she was female. Irrespective of whether inequality had then prevailed she now feels that since 2016 male and female boxers are treated very equally. The reason why she took up boxing was because there were so many boxing clubs in the central Dublin 1 area, where she lived. She trains Monday to Friday, two sessions a day, break at work to go for a run. Sunday is always an off day and if another off day is needed she will take it. While sport offers the dream of medals, the real benefit of any sport is getting great endorphins for one's mental health. Boxing allows her to clear her head and gives her a reason to get out of bed in the morning.



Kellie emphasised the importance of good coaches, the importance of respect between athletes and their coaches. A good coach can give you structure and discipline. She added that it is very important that coaches realise that not everyone is going to be a champion and that there has to be an accommodation for those who won't reach elite levels. Coaches thus need to be adaptable to the individuals that they are coaching. Sport needs to be able to cater for all, including for those participants where simply being able to take part is their legitimate

and valid goal. She added that sometimes it can be difficult for female athletes to talk with male coaches about any personal issues they are facing. Sometimes male coaches do not want to hear about an athlete's menstrual cycle, for example, but it is essential for both athletes and coaches to become comfortable with discussing such topics as they are natural and can impact on performance. They need to be addressed in a mature way to allow for the athlete to compete to the very best of their ability.

When asked about setbacks such as not being selected or suffering injuries for example, Kellie outlined her belief that these things aren't setbacks but rather stepping stones. It is important to surround yourself with like-minded people who can remind you of why you are doing your sport when such occasions occur. At times like this she remembers that what drives her is purpose, having structure, discipline, and wanting to feel good and alive. However, you also need to understand that sometimes you need a day off, some days she will stay in bed, and that's ok as long as it's only an infrequent one day off. We are only human and need to be kind to ourselves.

Kellie talked about social media and that you need to be able to take a break from it for your own mental health. She went off social media for a month before the Olympics as she didn't want to see people's expectations of her on it. She feels that social media is in many respects a fake world as some people will only show all the good stuff and none of the bad. People filter themselves on social media, so it's vital to be aware of what is real and unreal. Life is for living, not for scrolling all the time. When it comes to dealing with criticism, whether it's from social media platforms or in the media in general, always remember that today's newspaper is tomorrow's chips paper. She acknowledged that taking that approach can be hard to do, it's not easy to let a lot go over your head but everyone will have their opinion, you just don't need to listen to it. When asked about dealing with success, Kellie explained that her life hasn't changed but everyone else's attitude to you does change. You can't do everything and you need to mind your mental health, you have to be real to who you are – never lose that.

On the topic of her career and plans for when her career ends, Kellie emphasised resilience, stating that her toughest ever fight was against a Finnish opponent who had beaten her four times. Kellie felt she was getting closer to her each time but unfortunately, she's retired now. She balances her work and her sporting life and will never quit her cleaning job, she thinks everyone needs a job and for her the cleaning job is an escape from boxing which helps keep her grounded. It's not all sunshine and rainbows being a world or Olympic champion and it does not mean you're a millionaire. After she is finished with boxing she would love to be involved in some way in a coaching role.

Kellie's final message, greeted with a resounding round of applause, to the young people in attendance was to be confident and comfortable in your own skin.

Key Forum Conclusions

The problems associated with insufficient physical activity were frequently referenced during the forum. It was acknowledged by all that young people are not getting enough physical activity, and that this is a problem that needs to be urgently addressed.

Nine main conclusions, presented below in no particular order of priority, emerged from the day's discussions and debate:

1. More facilities to address current gaps.

A clear desire was expressed at the forum, in many of the roundtable groups and in the presentations, for more facilities, of all kinds, in all areas. Often, this centred around demands for better facilities for smaller, niche, less popular sports, whose availability and accessibility was much less, particularly in more rural areas. Moreover, significant infrastructure gaps were considered to exist at provincial or regional level. The absence of a 50m. swimming pool in Connacht was cited as an example of this reality.

2. Share existing facilities more, especially between schools and local communities.

Echoing the first conclusion, concerns were raised about sports facilities that, while they existed, were simply unavailable to be used by young people when they were free to do so, either immediately after school hours or later in the evening when homework had been completed. These facilities were often owned by schools or other private, member-only bodies that did not in many cases provide access to the general public. There was frustration at those facilities that prevented entry when they were visibly unused or underused on occasions, or which asked young people to leave at times when they were relatively quiet. Finding a way to open these facilities and increasing their utilisation was requested by many forum participants.

3. Prioritise the development of multi-sport facilities to improve range and variety.

The issue of choice and variety came up frequently at the forum. The young people requested greater variety in the Irish sport offering, with the idea of more facilities being shared, especially by smaller sports. This would enable sports who might not have the resources or numbers to support their own facility to still be available as a choice for young

people. Developing facilities along the more municipal model in existence in continental Europe, with a single multi-purpose, multi-equipped facility being designed for and being available for use by multiple sports, was suggested as a practical response to this need.

4. Develop coaching standards and capability.

The importance of good coaching featured strongly throughout the day. A good coach was noted to be an essential requirement for people to have a positive experience of sport. A bad coach can create, or simply fail to prevent, the wrong kind of sporting environment for children and young people leading to people deciding to drop out of sport. People need to have a good and positive experience of sport for a lifelong love of sport and physical activity to be sustained. The consequent need for suitable training and support for coaches was raised by many at the forum.

5. Have a physical activity friendly school uniforms policy.

Strict, inflexible uniforms and school dress policies were cited as being an impediment in many cases to achieving greater physical activity by young people. This was considered to be an issue for girls and young women especially, although boys and young men agreed that such school policies around apparel also made it difficult for them to lead an active life and be engaged in physical activity in school. Promoting active travel to and from school, whether by cycling or walking, was not being helped in this context.

6. Better access for young people to sports facilities during peak hours after school.

Given the time constraints placed on young people, especially by the education system, young people were often only able to partake in sports for a relatively short period in the day or in what could be considered peak times: post-school in the afternoon. The reality often facing young people was that facilities, where they existed, would more often than not be either booked out or be just too busy to use at these times.

7. More active travel to and from sports facilities and improve public transport availability, especially in rural areas.

Access to facilities was cited as a major issue by the young people. Many said that they depended on transport provided by parents and guardians in private cars to access facilities. This was most acute in rural areas, where there would be no safe option to walk, cycle or use public transport, but even in urban areas many considered it impractical or unsafe.

Enabling children and young people to access these facilities, through appropriate and better planning and transport provision, would enable them to choose to be more active themselves, rather than depending on their parents and guardians.

8. More time dedicated to a more diverse physical education (PE) curriculum.

Students were frustrated with the insufficient amount of time, and the scope of PE activities that they said were available in their schools. Students said that often only a handful of sports, especially major field sports, would be focused on. There was too much emphasis on team sports, more attention should be given to individual or less popular sports. Students also said that they wanted to see a greater focus in PE about the science and facts around physical activity.

9. Need for Gender equality.

Matters of gender inequality were brought up several times during the day, some of which have been discussed above already in relation to school dress codes. Students complained that sports for women and girls were not given equal attention or resources in many schools. The priority was being given to sports played by boys with girls' sports losing out as a result. Issues around menstruation could also be problematical, especially in relation to coaches either not knowing how to address or approach performance issues of athletes or being insensitive or unaccommodating to the constraints on the athletes concerned.



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