



GETTING BACK TO SPORT – A FRAMEWORK GUIDE

Sport NI has today (Friday 22 May 2020) published a Framework for the sports sector, to support a return to sport and physical recreation, in line with the NI Executive’s 5 Step Plan.

The document called *“A Framework to guide progression towards a resumption of sport and physical recreation in NI”* provides high level guidance, which will help individual Governing Bodies and organisations develop their own protocols to inform a return to sporting activities including training and competitions.

The Framework is published on the Sport NI website <http://www.sportni.net/about-us/framework-return-sport>

The Framework takes account of NI's unique position within the sporting landscape, with many sports aligning to the island of Ireland, others to the UK and a minority operating as NI only organisations. It provides for all sports, including outdoor recreation, from grassroots level to high performance sport and professional athletes.

There is a huge appetite across sports; athletes, coaches, fans and spectators to return to sport and many sports are actively planning how to implement the first step on this pathway. Sport NI's Framework aims to facilitate that and acts as an important bridge between the NI Executive's document and the more detailed protocols that sports will need to develop on an individual basis. We commend the leadership which sports have already shown in responding to Covid-19 and recognise that, through responsible actions within each phase and at each of the 5 steps of the Executive's pathway to recovery, all sport participants can play their part in gradually and safely transitioning NI towards a new type of normality.

The sport sector welcomed the announcement by the Executive of its 'Approach to Decision-making' document and 5 step pathway to recovery. Before that announcement and since, Sport Northern Ireland has been engaged with Governing Bodies to understand their challenges as they consider what a resumption of sport might look like.

As they complete planning protocols and tasks, many sports are seeking guidance in this area as they struggle to come to terms with the impact of Covid-19. Sport NI recognises the need to provide leadership within the sector, in particular in preparation for return to sport when the Executive believes that it is safe to do so.

Sport NI has therefore developed a Framework to guide progression towards a resumption of sport and physical recreation in Northern Ireland. This Framework provides essential, high-level guidance at this time. It is based upon consideration of information from a wide range of sources including consultations with Sports Governing Bodies, discussions with Sport Ireland and UK Sport and consideration of other international responses from proven

sporting systems (e.g. Australia and New Zealand) and representative groups (e.g. European Network of Outdoor Sports).

Framework Aim and Contents

The Framework is designed to guide progression towards a resumption of sport and physical recreation in Northern Ireland and is deliberately aligned to the Executive's 5 step process. It will act as an important bridge between the Executive document and the more detailed protocols that sports will need to develop on an individual basis. Critically, this Framework will guide sports during development of these individual sport specific protocols and acts as guidance only.

The liability and responsibility for decision making around safe return to sport will be for each individual sport; working with their national/international Federation. Sport NI will offer guidance and a helpful challenge function to sports.

The Framework will also be a tool to continue collaboration between Sport Northern Ireland, sports organisations and facility providers as the situation evolves. It should be considered as a 'living document' that will be reviewed and improved as more information becomes available.

The Framework identifies the on-going support available right across the sports sector at all levels, from single participants at local level to clubs and through to high performance and professional athletes.

It has sections specific to the different categories of sport, from low-risk outdoor sport and recreation (e.g. hill walking; mountain biking) to high-risk contact sport (e.g. rugby; boxing), with transitions aligned to the five stage process in the Executive's Recovery Plan.

A further "high performance/professional athlete" category is included, referencing the "elite sport return to training guidance" published on 13 May by DCMS. This section also proposes how, with special dispensation from the Executive, it would be possible for Northern Ireland's high performance and professional athletes to return to training.

Sport NI has ensured that mental health and well-being of athletes, players and participants is given focus in Framework alongside phased return to physical fitness, as we continue to lead on supporting sports within the sector that have identified this as a specific need, offering additional resources to the Sport NI Sports Well-being Hub.

Sport NI will continue to collaborate with Governing Bodies of Sport, Sport Ireland and UK sports bodies to continuously update the Framework as more information and best practice emerges and as we progress through the recovery stages.

Further enquiries should be submitted to:
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