

6

Response to Consultation

“The NI Strategy for Sport & Physical Recreation 2007 – 2017” October 2007

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From Don Patterson

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Response to “Questions for Consultees” on p3

- ✓1. Yes.
- ✓2. On p5, “lifelong involvement in sport and physical recreation and for all people” should include older people. They can really benefit from participation through “improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships,..”. Competition is also beneficial in setting targets and improving confidence and esteem, and we look forward to setting up inter-club tournaments for older people in the future.
- ✓3. Yes.
The commitments to older people are only given token attention in the document, and even then, without any sense of real conviction. This is most evident in their replacement on the list given on p11 of “older people”, by “those on low incomes” on p2, but more seriously by their complete omission from the specific targets listed in Ch3, p8.
- ✓4. To omit “older people” from the target list is tantamount to omitting them from any real commitment and hence any real involvement in the strategy covering the next 10 years. This not only appears unfair and discriminatory to a sector comprising almost 30% (50+) of the population, but it also seems to indicate a lingering misconception, despite recent government directives, that sport is only for the young and those who have potential to hit performance headlines.
While we recognise that many of the generic targets could incorporate older people, there is no specific commitment made to this large sector of the population. Without a target, there can be no real success.
We therefore suggest the following minimum addition to the target list on p8 under “Participation”: “By 2017 to deliver an increase of 6% in the no. of older people who regularly participate in sport and physical recreation.”
- ✓5. No.
Without being specifically targeted, success in providing increased opportunities for older people in sport and physical recreation will not result. “More opportunities to maintain active lifestyles among an ageing population”(p17) will simply not happen to any significant degree. If this strategy is truly to deliver “regardless of age” (p17) we would like to see the appointment of 18 Sports Development Officers for older people across the Province as well as access to some of the 300 sports coaches.

6. Yes.

We have already established a "Senior Sports Development Team" in our community and voluntary organisation. We would welcome specific representation for older people on the SIGs.

The health-costs quotation on p27 is even more pertinent to the case of older people, where costs are even higher for people entering premature dependency due to lack of physical activity.

7. The reference to Finland on p72 is also pertinent to the age sector in that older people in that country have demonstrated their capability of embracing sport to the benefit of their society as a whole. If it can be done there, it can be done here, and the depressing statistic on p34 re older people can be significantly addressed through real commitment to their involvement in this strategy.