



**S P O R T I N G  
P R I D E**

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## **LGBTQ+ Participation in Irish Sport: Submission to Joint Oireachtas Committee on Tourism, Culture, Arts, Sport and Media**

Dear Deputy Smith

Firstly, thanks to you and the other Committee members for giving Sporting Pride the opportunity to make this submission on the Participation of the LGBTQ+ Community in Irish Sport.

Formed in 2018, Sporting Pride's is a volunteer body whose mission is to inspire the LGBTQ+ community to get active. We develop inclusive programmes that increase the number of LGBTQ+ people leading active lives - and promote the positive benefits of sport, fitness and exercise to one's physical and mental health and well-being.

Sporting Pride plays a really important role in Irish sport as we are regularly the conduit between sports bodies and the LGBTQ+ community. If a National Governing Body (NGB), Local Sports Partnership (LSP) or third level institution wants to run an inclusive sports event for members of the LGBTQ+ community, they will usually approach Sporting Pride as they don't have any links themselves with the LGBTQ+ community nor the expertise within their organisation to run an event that caters for the unique needs of LGBTQ+ people.

The sports sector in Ireland cannot therefore operate at its true capacity without an organisation like Sporting Pride who is an expertise in the area of LGBTQ+ inclusion.

Yet, despite being a vital cog in the wheel of sports inclusion in Ireland, Sporting Pride is not funded by the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media nor consequently Sport Ireland.

This means that a huge amount of the responsibility to increase the numbers of LGBTQ+ community members involved in sport, fitness and exercise, whether participants, coaches or supporters, is essentially being delegated to:

1. a volunteer organisation
2. that is not in any way funded.



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Since the publication of Sport Ireland's first Diversity & Inclusion in Sport Policy in May 2022, there has been an increase in the number of NGBs and LSPs who have approached Sporting Pride to develop LGBTQ+ inclusive programmes. This understandably places huge pressure on us and our committee members who are all volunteers and, as we don't have the bandwidth to be able to collaborate with everyone, some sports inclusion programmes have not been able to go ahead because Sporting Pride doesn't have the time or financial resources to be able to facilitate it.

This is a situation that much change quickly - and urgently - if inclusion of LGBTQ+ community members in Irish sport is a real priority for this Government.

In this submission, we will present the issues that are unique to the LGBTQ+ community regarding sports inclusion and showcase a lack of investment, especially when compared to other minority groups. We will though propose solutions that can be implemented in the short, medium and long term that that will resolve the issues.

Sporting Pride has been campaigning for LGBTQ+ equality in Irish sport since its foundation in 2018 – and is therefore very happy, if invited, to participate in a public session at a committee meeting. Also, as Chairperson of this volunteer organisation, I am happy for my name and email address to be published – but would ask for my personal mobile number not to be made public.

We thank you again for the opportunity to make this submission – and look forward to hearing your recommendations for change, which are urgently needed.

Kind regards

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Chairperson, Sporting Pride

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### 3. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **Core funding / targeted funding** is required urgently for LGBTQ+ inclusion in sport to bring it in line with other minority groups, including disability sport, women in sport and older people in sport.
- **More accountability.** NGBs and LSPs that receive funding for sports inclusion projects should be including all minority communities including the LGBTQ+ community, in those projects, and be held accountable for where that funding is spent to ensure they are reaching all minorities as best they can.
- **More Irish based research.** a reliance on international research on LGBTQ+ participation is not sufficient. Research on the experiences of LGBTQ+ people in sport in Ireland must be funded.
- **Implement Transgender inclusion policies.** NGBs and LSPs need to implement Trans inclusion policies in a proactive manner, as opposed to reacting when an incident happens.
- **Visibility.** NGBs and LSPs should be encouraged to show more public support for Pride events, including Sport Ireland / Sporting Pride *Let's Get Visible* campaign. Set up a "Sport for All" funding stream to incentivise sports clubs to take part in local Pride parades and show their support for the LGBTQ+ community at a local level.
- **Education.** Provide training to those working / volunteering / participating in sport on LGBTQ+ inclusion around understanding minority stress and how sport can be used as a positive tool to address this
- Promote the importance of **LGBTQ+ Sports Clubs** in helping LGBTQ+ people expand their network and find friends from similar backgrounds with similar interests
- **Support at all levels** for players, supports, coaches, officials and volunteers
- **Focus on Intersectionality** - acknowledge that asylum seekers and the LGBTQ+ community are not getting core / direct funding and people in this 'intersection' are at increased risk of not participating in sport.
- **Establish a working group to support LGBTQ+ males in sport**, the purpose of which is to support LGBTQ+ males in feeling included and being visible in sport.
- **Host an international LGBTQ+ Multi-Sport Tournament**, such as the [Eurogames](#) or [Gay Games](#).
- Questions for **Sport Ireland**:
  - How does Sport Ireland plan to make D&I a central part of the organisation?
  - With Sport Ireland funding already in place for people with disabilities (via Cara) and older people (via Age & Opportunity), how will Sport Ireland engage with other important minority groups, such as the LGBTQ+ community, to make sure there is funding available for projects aimed at getting more these groups involved in sport?
- Questions for the **CEOs of Ireland's three main sports**:
  - Larry McCarthy – GAA / Kevin Potts - IRFU / Jonathan Hill – FAI
  - What is each NGB doing to implement Sport Ireland's recently launched D&I Policy - and what are their timelines?
  - What measures are they taking to make D&I a central part of their organisation?
  - How are they engaging with minority groups, such as the LGBTQ+ community, to develop programmes specifically aimed at getting members of these communities involved in that sport?



## **LGBTQ+ Participation in Irish Sport: A Submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Tourism, Culture, Arts, Sport and Media**

### **1. BACKGROUND**

#### **1.1 Who is Sporting Pride?**

[Sporting Pride](#) is a volunteer-led organisation that was established in 2018 to develop and implement initiatives to assist sport organisations across Ireland become more inclusive.

Our mission is to increase the number of LGBTQ+ people leading active lives and to promote the positive benefits of fitness and exercise to one's physical and mental health and well-being, such as increasing self confidence and self reliance, while our mission is to make Ireland's sporting community the most inclusive in the world.

As the only organisation in the country tasked with getting the LGBTQ+ community more involved in sport, fitness and exercise, over the past five years, we have been trying to develop stronger relationships with the key stakeholders in Irish sport, including Sport Ireland, the 60+ National Governing Bodies (NGBs), the 29 Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs) and the 20+ third level institutions, lobbying for them to include the LGBTQ+ community in their sport development plan.

#### **1.2 Experts in LGBTQ+ Inclusion in Sport**

As Ireland's recognised experts in LGBTQ+ Inclusion in Sport, members of the Sporting Pride committee are regularly invited to be a guest lecturer or speak on discussion panels about the challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community in Irish sport. Some of these events include:

- Sport Ireland's Launch of Diversity & Inclusion Policy - May 2022
- Gaelic Players Association's (GPA) Pride Breakfast - June 2022
- Chartered Accountants Ireland "Driving D&I through Sport" - Nov 2022
- Lecture to DCU's BSc. in Sports Science and Health Students (PE Teachers) on "Diversity & Inclusion in Sport" - Dec 2022
- Leargas, "Keeping in the Game" Conference - Apr 2023

Sporting Pride committee members also sit on two Sport Ireland working groups:

- Diversity and Inclusion in Sport Advisory Group; and
- a focus group on Transgender and Non-Binary Inclusion in Sport and Physical Activity.

### 1.3 Why Work with Sporting Pride

We provide key stakeholders with access to the LGBTQ+ community and, by engaging with us and being more inclusive, Irish sporting bodies can:

- broaden their participation base;
- increase their number of volunteers and coaches;
- make themselves more attractive to potential sponsors and grow donor revenue; and
- comply with:
  - Action #6 of [National Sports Policy 2018-2027](#);
  - Action #43 of [Sport Ireland Participation Plan 2021-2024](#); and
  - [Sport Ireland's Diversity & Inclusion in Sport Policy](#).

### 1.4 Events Organised

From the inauguration of Sporting Pride in 2018, throughout the Covid pandemic and up to present times, Sporting Pride has dramatically increased the number of LGBTQ+ sports events in Ireland and contributed significantly to the numbers of LGBTQ+ people participating in sport around the country.

Since 2018, Sporting Pride, who receive **no funding** from Irish sport, has organised over 100 events across Ireland, specifically targeting the LGBTQ+ community, and trying to get them involved in new sports and activities. There are now over 35+ active LGBTQ+ Sport Clubs in Ireland and, in 2023, there will be more than 25 LGBTQ+ inclusive sports events with hundreds of participants.

### 1.5 Popular Sporting Pride Events

Some of our most popular events include:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Women's Sports Days</li> <li>● <b>Learn to Swim Programme*</b></li> <li>● Archery Courses</li> <li>● Kayaking &amp; SUP Boarding Start Up</li> <li>● Introduction to Softball</li> <li>● Learn to Sail</li> <li>● Try a Triathlon Course</li> <li>● Basketball Training</li> <li>● Hiking Treks</li> <li>● Hockey Gettogethers</li> <li>● Student Sport Ireland</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Badminton</li> <li>● Volleyball Classes</li> <li>● Introduction to Lawn Bowls</li> <li>● Yoga Classes</li> <li>● Annual Eurovision Fundraiser for LGBTQ+ Sports Clubs</li> <li>● Cycling Sessions</li> <li>● Running Club</li> <li>● Irish Dancing Classes</li> </ul> |
|---|--|

*\* Nominated at 2022 Federation of Irish Sport Awards in "Inclusivity in Sport & Physical Activity" category*

## 1.6 Online Webinars

We also use our platform to amplify the voices of out and proud LGBTQ+ athletes and allies and, during the Covid pandemic, produced a series of 10+ groundbreaking online webinars under the title “Standing Proud in Irish Sport: My Life as an Elite LGBTQ+ Athlete”, which included high profile interviews with some of Irish sports top stars with many speaking for the first time publicly about their personal experiences as either an LGBTQ+ athlete or being an ally to the LGTBQ community.

The visibility of high profile LGBTQ+ athletes and allies is hugely important to change stereotypes and, especially for young people looking for role models - and we feel this online series plays a very important role in showcasing how who you love shouldn't define your sporting achievements, whether at an amateur or professional level.

- [Katie McCabe](#), Arsenal footballer and captain of the Ireland women's football team;
- [Graeme Souness](#), ex-professional footballer, renowned soccer pundit and LGBTQ+ ally;
- [Aoife Cooke](#), national marathon champion & Tokyo Olympian; and
- [Hannah Tyrell](#), Dublin footballer and former Irish rugby international.
- For all Sporting Pride webinars, [click here](#).

## 1.7 Let's Get Visible Campaign

Sporting Pride has worked with Sport Ireland since 2021 on an annual social media campaign during the Pride Month of June around LGBTQ+ visibility in sport. NGBs, LSPs and sport clubs are encouraged to show their support to members of the LGBTQ+ community by posting LGBTQ+ friendly images on their social media accounts. [Click here](#) for information on the 2022 campaign.

## 2. LGBTQ+ INCLUSION IN IRISH SPORT - CURRENT SITUATION

### 2.1 State of the Nation

Over recent years, Irish society has made huge strides in LGBTQ+ inclusion with the introduction of the Marriage Equality Act in 2015 and Leo Varadkar elected Taoiseach in 2017 and taking over again late last year. Ireland ranks as one of the most progressive and LGBTQ+ inclusive countries in the world - but regarding the inclusion of LGBTQ+ people in sport, Ireland is unfortunately lagging far behind our European counterparts.

Despite many having Diversity & Inclusion staff or an active “Sport for All” programme, the vast majority of Irish sporting bodies do not include the LGBTQ+ community within their D&I campaigns nor have ever organised or run a campaign or event to get more LGBTQ+ people into their sport.

Sporting Pride has been reasonably successful over the past five years in trying to engage with these sporting bodies, as approximately 30-40% of NGBs and LSPs have expressed an interest in learning more about LGBTQ+ inclusion in sport, which leaves 60-70% who have not engaged in this important area.

But, as detailed below, because there is no one specifically responsible within Sport Ireland to get more members of the LGBTQ+ community active nor any accountability regarding inclusion funding, the important data we have about NGBs and LSPs who are being progressive and are working in the LGBTQ+ space has never been requested by Sport Ireland.

## 2.2 Statistics re: LGBTQ+ Participation in Irish Sport

With a dearth of research projects in Ireland concerning LGBTQ+ participation in sport, we supplement below with statistics from the UK:

- 20% of LGBTQ+ people avoid participating in sport because they are LGBTQ+
- Over 80% of LGBTQ+ people are closeted in youth sports
- 75% of Irish people have witnessed or experienced homophobia in sport
- 49% of homophobic/transphobic incidents are perpetrated by teammates
- Only 25% of the population feel comfortable calling out homophobia/transphobia in sport

\* Sources: [Stonewall](#), [Out on the Fields](#), [Out Sport Europe](#), [Shoutout](#)

The vast majority of research on LGBTQ+ participation comes from international studies. It has to be acknowledged that Ireland has its own culture and heritage, including the unique sports of Gaelic Football & Hurling / Camogie. While applying foreign research to Ireland is often relevant, more work needs to be done to identify the barriers that are unique to our culture and find ways to overcome them.

## 2.3 Relationship with Sport Ireland

Sporting Pride works closely with Sport Ireland, the NGBs and LSPs, doing what we can to assist them with the implementation of the recently launched Diversity & Inclusion Policy - but progress is very slow moving.

After lobbying for changes to D&I Inclusion funding, Sport Ireland have had some recent internal discussions with regard to the various funding streams available and hope “to be in a position to arrange a meeting with Sporting Pride in the coming weeks to discuss this in further detail. Our intention at that meeting is to provide a summary of the mechanisms in place and Sport Ireland’s criteria regarding terms and conditions of funding etc.” (update 30th March 2023)

## 2.4 Launch of Sport Ireland’s first Diversity & Inclusion Policy

[Sport Ireland launched their first Diversity & Inclusion Policy](#) in May 2022. A lot of the policy was informed by contributions from 2,275 individuals, of which 1,056 came from the relevant target groups.

Interestingly 56% of these respondents came from the LGBTI+ community, (the remaining 29% were made up from people with a disability and 15% from people from minority ethnic communities), showing a significant interest from our community in sports activities, a sector of Irish society that many LGBTQ+ people have felt excluded from for years, with many going back to unpleasant experiences of homophobic taunts and jeers during PE in their school going days.

The LGBTI+ community is mentioned several times within the policy document and it is clear that the LGBTI+ community has been listed as a priority group. For example, the policy states (p.22) that *'Sport Ireland recognises that the success of this policy depends on the level of investment and support provided. Sport Ireland is committed to investing in the areas required to support the delivery of this policy'*.

Sporting Pride believes that more direct investment is required in order for the LGBTQ+ community to fully thrive and be on an equal par with other minority groups across Ireland.

#### **2.4 Voluntary D&I Policy**

Although Sport Ireland launched their first ever Diversity & Inclusion Policy document in May 2022, it is a voluntary document that NGBs and LSPs are recommended to implement, but it is not enforced.

Sporting Pride calls on Catherine Martin, Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media and the new Minister of State for Sport and Physical Education Thomas Byrne to:

- enforce a deadline for NGBs to implement this D&I Policy; and
- asks for financial penalties to be imposed on those who are non-compliant.

#### **2.5 No One Person / Department Responsible**

There is currently no department or individual within Sport Ireland specifically responsible for increasing the amount of LGBTQ+ people involved in sport. While there is a Diversity & Inclusion Manager, their brief is all minority groups across all sports so there is no one championing LGBTQ+ inclusion from within the organisation, unlike other minority groups, including a Women in Sport Lead, Cara for the disability community and Age & Opportunity for older people.

If an NGB or LSP wants to run an LGBTQ+ inclusive event, they will obviously need access to the LGBTQ+ community for marketing and promotion. But there is no one within the Sport Ireland organisation who is responsible for LGBTQ+ participation to help them - therefore the NGB/LSP has to come to Sporting Pride for help and assistance, which we are very happy to provide.

But this essentially means that Sport Ireland is delegating a huge proportion of the responsibility to get more members of the LGBTQ+ community involved in sport to a voluntary organisation that it doesn't fund - and this needs to change urgently.



## 2.6 No Core Funding for LGBTQ+ Community

Despite the launch of Sport Ireland’s first Diversity & Inclusion Policy in May 2022, there is still no core funding provided by Sport Ireland for LGBTQ+ inclusion in sport.

[€26 million of core funding](#) was announced by Sport Ireland on 14th February 2023 - but, although other minority groups will be in receipt of core funding, there is nothing allocated to the LGBTQ+ community. The question has to be asked: why is this the case?

The breakdown by Minority Groups of [Sport Ireland’s Core Funding](#) is as follows:

<b>Disability in Sport</b>	<b>€2,113,000</b>
- Special Olympics Ireland	€1,500,000
- Irish Wheelchair Association Sport	€330,000
- Cara	€140,000
- Vision Sports Ireland	€75,000
- Deaf Sports Ireland	€68,000
<b>Older People in Sport (via Age &amp; Opportunity)</b>	<b>€620,000</b>
<b>Women in Sport (via Local Sports Partnerships)</b>	<b>€265,000</b>
<b>Minority Ethnic Communities, including Travelers in Sport *</b>	<b>€0</b>
<b>LGBTQ+ in Sport</b>	<b>€0</b>

\* €939,000 allocated for the employment of 29 x Community Sport Development Officers (CSDOs)

## 2.7 Lack of Accountability

[Sport Ireland announced in December 2022](#) that €5.5 million of dormant account funding will be available through “the NGBs and their affiliated Clubs, as well as the extensive network of funded bodies and Local Sports Partnerships” for “a Diversity, Inclusion & Equality Fund, a Disability Sports Club Fund and the introduction of NGB focused ‘Hubs’”

There is no specific mention of the LGBTQ+ community in the 26 page accompanying document, although it does say that NGB Diversity & Inclusion Fund “*seeks to build capacity and skills across sport in the area of inclusion to ensure sport is welcoming and inclusive, offering appropriate opportunities for participation and improvement to all, regardless of socio economic background, gender, disability, sexual orientation or ethnicity.*”

So there may be a portion of this new fund available for NGBs to use towards LGBTQ+ participation in sport - but where is the requirement to do so? How much of the €5.5 million will end up being spent on LGBTQ+ inclusion projects?



Without any key performance indicators set, it is completely up to the NGB how they spend their allocated money - they can choose any number of very worthy D&I programmes targeting minority groups, including disability, non-national and Traveler communities.

There is no obligation on NGBs to spend this money on LGBTQ+ inclusion so there is no accountability or repercussions if an NGB decides not to use their allocated Diversity & Inclusion budget for work with the LGBTQ+ community.

Leaving the distribution of this funding in the hands of the NGBs and LSPs without any specific requirement on how they allocate the money to different minority groups is a major flaw of this process - and one Sporting Pride would call for greater scrutiny on.

And again, as mentioned above, even if an NGB or LSP wants to run an LGBTQ+ programme using this Dormant Account Funding, they will need the assistance of an organisation like Sporting Pride to get access to and act as a conduit to the relevant community...but Sporting Pride is a voluntary body that is not funded - so how is this be best practice for running sport in Ireland?

### **2.8 €2,000,000 “Sport for All” Fund**

In July 2022, [Sport Ireland launched](#) a €2,000,000 ‘Sport for All’ Disability Supports Club Fund as part of the NGB Dormant Accounts Fund.

Sporting Pride would like Sport Ireland to confirm if they have any plans for similar “Sport for All” funds targeting other minority groups, including the LGBTQ+ community.

### **2.9 Lack of Ancillary Support**

In addition to the lack of funding, if an organisation sits outside the Sport Ireland network, there is also no access to other ancillary support services, for example Leadership & Development Programmes, that are available to minority groups within the current Sport Ireland framework, eg Cara for disability sport, Age & Opportunity for older people and Women in Sport for female participation.

### **2.10 Mental Health Promotion & Social Inclusion**

There are three recent Government policy documents which emphasize the importance of sport, exercise and fitness to the physical and mental wellbeing of the LGBTQ+ community, two of which are still current:

1. Action #6 of National Sports Policy 2018-2027 <https://tinyurl.com/4veumyv>
2. Action #43 of Sport Ireland Participation Plan 2021-2024 <https://tinyurl.com/3ccpsu93>
3. National LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy 2019-2021 (extended to 2022, due to Covid-19) <https://tinyurl.com/yuzekha6>

The big question is: what is being done to follow up on these documents?



It is well documented that the LGBTQ+ community is at a much higher risk for mental health challenges and being discriminated against ([HSE Supporting LGBT Lives](#)), with many still encountering high levels of minority stress due to their sexual, race, ethnicity and gender identity.

Research has proven that minority stress is greatly reduced if the LGBTQ+ individual feels supported by the club / community organisation that they are a member of or work for. Sport has been proved to be a great asset in supporting mental wellbeing and it is for this reason we want to highlight why sport should be used as a health promotion tool more widely in our community, and how such work could lead to greater social inclusion.

Covid lockdowns exacerbated a number of issues experienced by LGBTQ+ people in Ireland. Although primarily focused on community members aged up to 23, [BelongTo's Life in Lockdown](#) research found that 60% of respondents are experiencing loneliness, 48% regarded their mental health as bad or very bad and 23% regarded their physical health as bad or very bad.

This highlights a need for connection - to find safe and healthy activities that bring people together and promote their overall wellbeing. By encouraging sports organisations to support their LGBTQ+ members, there is potential to greatly reduce the minority stress endured by the Irish LGBTQ+ community.

This could be done through an uptake in training directed at coaches, volunteers and staff around the issues that face the community, how to address issues that arise, creating policies around tackling homophobia on the field and in the stands, and who to contact if someone they are working with needs support related to their sexuality and/or gender identity.

Furthermore, increased LGBTI+ visibility is very much needed in many areas of society. Pride month (June) is regularly a huge success in terms of increased visibility. However, [UEFA's Euro 2020/21 tournament](#) highlighted the need for sports to become a more tolerable and supportive environment. There is a lack of willingness to show consistent support and the locker room and playing fields are still not a safe space. Simple steps like joining local Pride celebrations and campaigns, inviting out and proud sports people to speak to athletes of all ages at events, and finding Champions in clubs and organisations would be a move in the right direction. The issue remains around who is going to lead this if the resources are not allocated to the LGBTQ+ community.

Furthermore, with an increasing number of LGBTQ+ asylum seekers arriving in Ireland, we cannot ignore the power of sport in ensuring these communities find ways to reach their peers in health promoting spaces. As noted above, no core funding is provided to organisations tackling racism in sports and promoting increased physical activity in this community either.

The intersection of race, nationality and sexuality is a difficult one as if a person finds themselves in the position of being an LGBTQ+ asylum seeker in Ireland, most often having traveled from a deeply homophobic space, the likelihood of engaging positively with sport, as it stands today, is extremely low.

### **2.11 Human Rights - Progress but not in all Arenas**

Basic human rights have recently been reversed in a number of countries, such as Hungary and Uganda, while violent acts have been committed against LGBTQ+ people in some Irish cities and towns over the past 12 months.

Although Ireland is seen as a progressive country, we cannot take for granted the need to continue our push for equal rights. We recently only ranked as 17th on a recent [Gay Travel Index](#), which assesses the laws and living conditions for LGBTQ+ people in each country based on 17 components, ranging from marriage equality to laws that criminalize homosexuality. Points are awarded for positive categories like anti-discrimination legislation, transgender rights and intersex gender recognition and deducted for negative factors like religious influence, HIV travel restrictions and Pride bans.

Although 17th is a high ranking, there is no reason why a progressive country like Ireland should not be ranking higher. The question remains - what's holding us back?

### **2.12 Decision Makers in Irish Sport**

Since the formation of the Irish state, sport in Ireland has been run by committees consisting primarily of middle-aged, straight, white men. Important decisions around minority group inclusion, including LGBTQ+, have therefore been made without any consultation with the relevant minority group.

How therefore can the intricacies and uniqueness of the different minority groups be captured without an understanding of what that minority group is really looking for?

With this in mind, Sporting Pride welcomes Sport Ireland's work in [promoting gender diversity on the boards of sporting organisations](#) - and calls for further work in this area to encourage board members from different minority backgrounds, including LGBTQ+.

### **2.13 Importance of Sports Clubs in true LGBTQ+ Inclusion in Irish Sport**

One intricacy that is unique to the LGBTQ+ community is the importance of the [LGBTQ+ Sport Clubs](#).

One question that is often asked is: why is there a need at all for LGBTQ+ Sports Clubs? Surely LGBTQ+ people should be able to join their local sports club and feel as accepted and welcomed as everyone else???



And yes - every sports club in the country should be more inclusive to members of the LGBTQ+ community, welcoming them with open arms...but this overlooks a very important point that is unique to LGBTQ+ people among minority groups - LGBTQ+ people are looking to meet other LGBTQ+ people for a multitude of reasons, such as networking, friendships and, who knows, potentially long-term relationships.

The LGBTQ+ world can be a very intimidating place if you know no-one else in it. You could be an out GAA player in Donegal or an out runner in Kerry where everyone in your local sports club accepts and welcomes you...but there may come a time in your life where you want to expand your horizons and meet LGBTQ+ people who have similar interests and backgrounds to you. Where do you go to find them?

You can go online - but the beauty of sport is that it is a fantastic way to bring people with similar interests and backgrounds together. And that is where the LGBTQ+ Sports Clubs come in...

These clubs provide a bridge for LGBTQ+ to meet like-minded people via the forum of sport. Now that out GAA player from Donegal can contact [Na Gaeil Aeracha GAA club](#) and join them once a month for a kick around in Phoenix Park - or the out runner from Kerry can contact the [Cork Frontrunners](#) for a fortnightly training session in Cork - and, without realising it, you are introduced to a brand new network of people with similar experiences and from similar backgrounds to you who can help your development as an LGBTQ+ person, contributing positively to your physical and mental health and wellbeing.

Suddenly, the medium of sport has introduced you to a new group of friends who can give you the confidence to navigate the often intimidating LGBTQ+ social life - and making your first visit to The George in Dublin or Chambers in Cork with your new team mates by your side is not as big a deal as doing it on your own.

Sporting Pride committee member Karina Murray describes very eloquently the importance of LGBTQ+ Sports Club in Ireland in an interview with the ground-breaking BBC Sounds "The LGBTQ+ Sport Podcast" in February 2021 - [click here to listen to it](#).

## **2.14 LGBTQ+ Sports Clubs in Ireland Leaflet**

In 2023, Sporting Pride published the [second edition](#) of a ground-breaking document that showcases every LGBTQ+ sports club in Ireland in one leaflet.

6,000 were printed and distributed via an insert in the February edition of GCN, the nationwide LGBTQ+ community magazine.

Sport Ireland were invited to contribute to the leaflet but declined to do so. They did offer to share the document on social media, while the document was also made available to NGBs, LSPs, third level colleges, community groups and online allies to distribute to those unaware of the thriving LGBTQ+ club scene around Ireland.

## 2.15 Visibility of LGBTQ+ Men in Irish Sport

Since hurler Donal Og Cusack came out as gay in 2009, there has been an underwhelming lack of LGBTQ+ Irish athletes, especially in male team sports, who have followed his lead. Why is this the case - do men not feel safe coming out...or are LGBTQ+ men dropping out of sport earlier in life?

[Research](#) from the Gaelic Players Association (GPA) in 2022 encouragingly showed that 99% elite Gaelic players would accept a team mate coming out as LGBTQ+.

But, the same research provides some interesting insights for sports administrators to consider, especially female player awareness of an out teammate being 65% compared to 10% male. The difference is stark and raises important issues about inclusiveness and acceptance in female dressing rooms compared to male ones.

In what can be a very lonely and isolating situation, the results of this research will hopefully provide much needed comfort and relief to any LGBTQ+ inter-county player who is not yet out - and hopefully they can find the confidence to speak with a friend, team mate or the GPA for support.

Sporting Pride therefore calls on sporting bodies to consider the following:

- What can male team sports learn from their female counterparts about locker room culture, language and providing better support and being more empathetic towards teammates?
- Why is there less awareness of LGBTQ+ male players at an elite level?
- Are the systems in place to make young LGBTQ+ male players feel safe and welcome in the sport - or do they drop out at an early age?

It may be worthwhile to establish a working group of elite LGBTQ+ athletes who can mentor and advise a younger generation of elite LGBTQ+ athletes who may be struggling with their identity and feeling isolated, especially in male team sports. [Half of male athletes have recently used homophobic slurs](#) and it's important for us to understand why this is happening and how it can be addressed.

## 2.16 Transgender Participation in Sport

On a broader scale, healthcare for members of the trans community in Ireland is inadequate. However, when it comes to sport, it has been very difficult to progress trans participation. One of the primary reasons is a lack of policies focused on trans inclusion. Sporting Pride understands the difficulties faced by sports organisations around this topic: however, sport should be welcoming to everyone, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, age, race, national origin or and it is necessary to address this issue in a manner that is fair and inclusive.

[In a recent incident](#), a trans woman playing on a ladies gaelic football team was identified online, with images of the person shared widely on social media and negative commentary posted publicly. The Ladies Gaelic Football Association have since published a policy on trans participation in sport, which is a positive step forward.

However, we are highlighting this incident as, for the LGFA to introduce the policy, a seriously dangerous situation, in which a trans woman was targeted for abuse, had to occur.

We need less policies that are ‘reactive’ to negative events and more policies that are proactive. For this reason, we believe that more forward thinking is required from Sport Ireland and the NGBs - and trans inclusion policies should be placed high on the agenda of the relevant bodies.

Sporting Pride welcomes the recent formation of a Sport Ireland focus group on “Transgender and Non-Binary Inclusion in Sport and Physical Activity” - and hopes this group can make recommendations that make sport inclusive for everyone.

### **2.17 Learn to Swim Programme**

One of Sporting Pride’s most successful initiatives to date is Ireland’s first “Learn to Swim” programme, specifically targeting members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Swimming is an essential life skill. As well as the obvious health benefits and being a great workout, swimming is a low-impact activity you can enjoy your whole life, offering pleasure when on holidays and at the beach.

But for members of the LGBTQ+ community who have issues with their body, learning to swim has not been an option as they have felt unwelcome and uncomfortable in and around swimming pools because, when dressed in your swimming togs, you have nowhere to hide.

Sporting Pride’s “Learn to Swim” programme aims to make swimming a safe and welcoming place for all members of the LGBTQ+ community. Classes are provided by a Swim Ireland-qualified LGBTQ+ swim instructor (or ally) with individual changing areas provided where possible to ensure privacy.

77 people have been through the programme since it started as a trial in Shannon Leisure Centre in January 2022 – with additional venues added in Rathmines and Clontarf (Dublin) and Clara, Co Offaly. Initially aimed at beginners, improver programmes are also being organised due to demand.



The feedback from participants has been phenomenal as these testimonials show:

Participant #1

*I drive up (to Dublin) from Wexford every week and am enjoying the swimming so much. Offering an LGBT+ safe space for queer bodies to enjoy swimming has really been transformative for me. The first session was my first swim in my new body and I felt completely safe and welcome!*

Participant #2

*I am trans and had top surgery earlier this year. I don't think there would've been any other way that I'd have engaged with sport, and particularly swimming, without these lessons.*

Hearing first-hand how a simple "Learn to Swim" programme can have such positive life-changing effects on those taking part is something Sporting Pride is very proud of – and we look forward to developing innovative, transformative and inclusive sports programmes for the LGBTQ+ community into the future.