

SPORTS COUNCIL 12/9/06

Date:

4th September 2006

Our Ref:

Your Ref:



Professor George Bain
c/o Mrs Elaine Armstrong
Room 302
Department of Education
Rathgael House,
Balloo Road
Bangor
Co Down
BT19 7PR

Dear Professor Bain

RE: Independent Strategic Review of Education

Further to your letter of 17 August 2006, I have detailed below a number of recommendations, justification for which is contained within our more detailed document submitted on 11 August 2006. My officers would be available to meet with you or your staff to provide further information at an appropriate time if that would be helpful.

Research carried out by Sports Council for Northern Ireland (SCNI) in recent years has highlighted a number of issues:

- There is a significant sports facility deficit in Northern Ireland compared to other areas of the UK and substantial under-provision in a number of specific sports sectors;
- There is a duplication in provision of sporting facilities in a number of geographic areas and across a number of sectors ie: district councils and schools;
- There are a large number of facilities that are not fit for purpose ie: facilities in a poor condition;
- There are a significant number of facilities (particularly in schools) that do not meet with the design specifications of the governing bodies of sport;
- There are a substantial number of schools that do not make their facilities available to outside bodies.

SCNI are generally provided by the following sectors: district councils, education, clubs and governing bodies of sport and private operators.

The Sports Council for Northern Ireland believes that to enable sport to be delivered in an effective manner and without placing an undue strain on the public purse, a strategic approach involving these sectors must be adopted. SCNI would therefore make the following recommendations:



Recommendation 1: Strategic Approach

Adopt a strategic approach to the provision of new sports facilities and refurbishment of existing facilities in the school estate, taking account of:

- (a) provision at other schools in close proximity;
- (b) other provision in the area (district council facilities, facilities at sports clubs, etc);
- (c) the sports to be offered by the school;
- (d) travel times, usage patterns, etc.

This may involve lobbying government to ensure that the work of all sectors involved in sports facility provision is coordinated.

Recommendation 2: Design and Specification

Ensure the provision of new sports facilities and, where practicable, the refurbishment of existing facilities within the school estate, meet the specification and design standards for the respective sports, and follow industry best practice. This will include the discontinuation of outmoded technologies such as gravel or shale pitches and the use of recently developed surfaces.

Recommendation 3: Shared Use

Ensure that school facilities are available to outside groups at reasonable cost and that schools and other providers work together to share the provision and usage of sports facilities. As stated above, community use should be stipulated in the design specifications for new build and refurbishments, particularly when using Public Private Partnerships. This could involve the formation of strategic partnerships to address such issues as usage patterns, revenue costs and sports development programming.

Recommendation 4: Further Education Students

Ensure that access to sporting facilities and physical education is available for further education students.

Recommendation 5: Transfer of Facilities

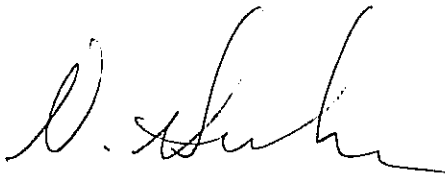
Explore opportunities to enable sporting facilities at schools which close down to be made available for community usage.

As you will already be aware, SCNI has developed a database of sports facilities in Northern Ireland and are currently undertaking needs analysis work to develop a Facilities Strategy for Sport in Northern Ireland, which will complement the overarching Strategy for Sport (to be launched in 2007).

We would be pleased to provide this information to you and also make available the expertise of our officers in the review that you are undertaking.

Should you require clarification regarding these matters, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



Nick Harkness
Acting Chief Executive