



STRATEGIC PLAN 2021

Leading Student Sport in Ireland





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Glossary of Terms

Dual Career: by this we mean the right of athletes to combine sport and higher education careers.

Elite Sport: by this we mean the high performance (HP) athletes who are recognised by their national HP system and their relative NGB high performance programmes. These HP programmes facilitate the ambitions of athletes in reaching finals and achieving medals at European, World, Olympic and Paralympic level.

EUSA: European University Sports Association

FISU: International University Sports Federation

HEIs: Higher Education Institutions

IoT: Institute of Technology

Leadership: by this we mean learning and cultivating the skills it takes to be effective in society and the workplace, and developing the skills to guide others through direction and motivation.

MoUs: Memorandum of Understandings. An agreement between two or more parties which need not contain legally enforceable promises and which is often used to define the expectations and responsibilities of each of the parties.

Participation: by this we mean the involvement of a student in any physical activity, not necessarily with any competitive or team element.

Performance Sport: by this we mean those individuals or teams who are competing at the highest level in higher education and national competitions.

Professional Sport: by this we mean the high performance athletes who are contracted with professional teams.

Scholarship: by this we mean the suite of high performance supports provided by HEIs

Sport: by this we mean all physical and sporting activity, from individual physical activity such as walking or Pilates, through to competitive team sport.

Student Sport: by this we mean sport at third level and above in higher education institutions

Wellbeing: Wellbeing is present when a person realises their potential, is resilient in dealing with the normal stresses of their life, takes care of their physical wellbeing and has a sense of purpose, connection and belonging to a wider community. It is a fluid way of being and needs nurturing throughout life.

Foreword

Student sport across the island of Ireland stands in a place of great foundation and potential. Over the past decade the sector has grown significantly, both in terms of participants and breadth of opportunities, along with the professional structures, services, investment, and facilities which are now widely in place to enable activity at all universities and colleges.

Our own insights tell us that sport and physical activity provision are becoming a key measure for student experience and recruitment within the FE and HE sector, and within society that the 18-25 predominant student population age group is an important area in reversing physical activity drop off and enabling lifelong connections to sport, health, and wellbeing. The national sports policy, high performance strategy, and other interconnecting plans aligned to health, research, and education all call out student, university, and college sport in some form as a key enabler.

There is, however, more work to done. There is a common view that student sport has yet to reach its potential; and its position and impact locally, nationally, and internationally are still widely undervalued.

Student Sport Ireland is the recognised body representing and developing the sector, and yet whilst previous strategic plans and collaboration have enabled huge strides in enhancement of the organisation, overall, it has not perhaps kept pace in terms of its size and remit alongside its member institutions and the sector itself.

The strategic review and consultation identified a significant aspiration from those directly involved within university and college sport, as well as external stakeholders, for SSI to take on a stronger leadership role for the sector and place students more in the centre of our future activity planning.

This new 3-year strategic plan is focused on the establishment of sustainable growth of the organisation, enabling SSI to create more participation and competition opportunities and to support the work of member institutions. It will also create new areas of delivery, building on research and activity insights across the sector; ensure that our student leaders, athletes, and clubs are better supported and developed; and drive to establish a more equal footing for the organisation and sector across Ireland. Most importantly it will ensure a continued strength in our network, grow collaborative partnerships, and support the work of universities and colleges to provide an active, fulfilling, and successful student experience in sport at all levels.

The global health pandemic has created uncertainty and challenge. However, there is now a great opportunity to reset our thinking around student sport and engage more people on all levels from within the sector and those we work with. Collaboration and leadership are required to realise our goals, and ensure that SSI can develop itself, and in turn provide a stronger and louder platform for our students and activity to thrive from.

University sport creates connections, life changing opportunities, and a unique personal and career shaping experience unlike any other. If we can all continue to channel the level of resilience and belief towards our passion to student sport, then we can certainly achieve our goals together, and make the university and college sporting experience the best it can be.

Matthew Dossett

President
Student Sport Ireland



Higher Education and Student Sport in 2021

 **827** Total Staff
 427 Full-time
 420 Part-time
 1,940 Volunteers

 **Investment (2015-2019)**
 Capital Investment: €106.2m
 Current Investment: €46.3m
 Student Activity Provision: €33.6m



Indoor Facilities: 4,582m²

Sports Halls: 1,745m²
 Fitness Suites and Weights Areas: 1,033m²
 Track and Field: 446m²



Outdoor Facilities: 101,449m²

Grass Pitches: 68,713m²
 Synthetic Pitches: 19,936m²
 Track and Field: 9,154m²

840 sports clubs across 54 different sport type




1 in 7 students (30,000) are members of a sports club

46 sports per University (avg)

23 sports per IoTs and Colleges (avg)

8,124* High performance scholarships and bursaries awarded

€9.6m* Total scholarships and bursaries investment



Student Participation²

70% take part in individual based sports

65% participated in sports in the previous week

64% of students are highly active

¹ All data from the SSI Self-Assessment Review Report (2020) except the student participation data
² Student Activity and Sports Student Ireland (2016)
 * Since 2015

Student Sport Ireland

237,000 students



25 affiliated HEIs

40+ active Board and committee members

2 full-time staff

3 FISU Representatives

SSI WORK
 Competitions (Participation and Performance)
 High Performance
 Leadership, Networking and Information Sharing
 Research
 Representation and Advocacy



SSI COMPETITIONS
 Sports: Badminton, Hockey, Pool, Karting, Netball, Rugby, 7s Rugby, Volleyball
130 teams per annum
2,000 registered students per annum

INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION

Irish Student Athletes at FISU World University Games (2011-2019)

264 Student Athletes
 39 Finals
 12 Sports
 6 Medals (2 Gold, 2 Silver, 2 Bronze)

Olympic and Paralympic Games (2021)

75 current HEI students and recent graduates competed at Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics

FISU (International University Sports Federation)

174 Member Federations
 30,000 HEIs
 180m students

EUSA (European University Sports Association)

47 Member Federations
 21 Sports Competitions
 5,242 student athletes
 1,032 HEIs
 43 Countries

Present and Future

Sport and physical activity continue to be important aspects of a positive and impactful student experience across our sector. Investments in facilities, staff, athlete supports, and programmes in particular highlight this growing strategic relevance, and demonstrate the wider role and potential that university and student sport plays in society. Whilst delivering and supporting some of these aspects, SSI has not reached its potential in terms of leading the sector and providing comprehensive interlinked delivery that enables our members, students, and partners to succeed.

SSI has always been integral to the network and support which exists among our member institutions, however, it is not known yet widely known outside of this immediate structure, including amongst the student population.

This new strategic plan was developed following an extensive consultative process led by the SSI Board and staff.

Following an initial detailed review of the previous strategic plan (2017 – 2020) the development of this new strategic direction was significantly informed by a survey of the wider SSI membership, internal consultations with affiliated institutions sports staff and student leaders, the SSI Board, committee members and SSI staff followed by one to one interviews with external stakeholders including senior staff and leaders within the wider sports sector in Ireland.

The review of the 2017 strategic plan identified that while the majority of actions set out in the document were successfully delivered a significant minority of key actions were also not achieved.

Key strategic advances during the period 2017 - 2020 included the continued development of the SSI network and increased information sharing opportunities for our members; the establishment of the SSI Student Commission; and the consolidation of the SSI Competitions, the World University Games, and Research programmes. Additional strategic developments included increased NGB engagements and the implementation of company governance policies and procedures which culminated in the organisation being compliant with Sport Ireland Governance Code one year ahead of schedule.

The review also identified that the lack of resources, both in terms of personnel and funding, and in some instances actions that could not be delivered by SSI without significant input from external organisations as the two key reasons the organisation did not or could not deliver a significant minority of actions set out in the 2017 plan.

The outcome of both the review of the 2017 document and the consultation process was the identification by the Board of clear long term strategic ambitions for the organisation. These ambitions, and which are set out on page 12 below, will be achieved through the delivery of specific individual actions aligned to strategic pillars on a phased basis over the coming decade.

It is envisaged that the current plan will be the first of three strategic plans published by the organisation this decade. This document, which sets out the key actions to be delivered by the end of 2024, will be reviewed and updated in advance of the publication of a revised document in 2025 with a similar exercise undertaken in 2028. The vision is that the revised plan will build on the previous document so that although the specific actions will change from plan to plan the long term strategic ambitions will remain constant throughout the decade.

The key challenges in delivering the specific actions and achieving our long term goals, and ultimately the growth of the organisation, were also identified during both the review and consultation phases set out above.

No different to any Irish sporting organisation these challenges include the capacity of current staff to deliver an ever expanding work programme and the sourcing of additional funding (in particular external funding including sponsorship) to fund the recruitment of additional staff to deliver specific strategic initiatives (i.e. Competitions, Physical Activity, and Research). Additional challenges include both the known and unknown issues that will arise as the country begins to emerge from a pandemic that resulted in significant societal restrictions during much of 2020 and 2021.

If successful, the sourcing of this additional funding will allow the organisation deliver the specific actions set out below and achieve its strategic ambitions and emerge as the decade develops as a thriving influential organisation embedded at the heart of Irish sport.

Vision

To lead and influence the potential of student sport in Ireland.

Mission

Our mission is to:

- Grow quality student sport competition
- Enhance wellbeing
- Lead the sector

Values

We work together in **Partnership** with member institutions and others in sport and education to create a better student sport experience

We are an **Inclusive** organisation providing equal access to opportunities and resources to all students in our network

We **Engage** with as many students as possible in student sport, to enhance their wellbeing and develop leadership skills

We **Respect** all our students, member institutions and sporting bodies and their right for parity of esteem

We are a **Transparent** organisation, open and clear in our intent and actions

We are at all times **Equal, Fair and Just** in how we treat our staff, members and partners.

We will honour our values by providing opportunities for our students, members and stakeholders to input and inform our work, by reviewing our policies and procedures and as appropriate establishing new policies, by supporting existing and new expert working groups and through our commitment to research to establish baseline data and key performance indicators that will inform our work, new initiatives and programmes and strategic plans.

Our Strategic Ambitions

In the coming decade Student Sport Ireland will:

- 1 Become a key stakeholder in sporting life in Ireland contributing to the delivery of national objectives, particularly those aligned to participation, wellbeing, and performance
- 2 Become an equal partner with national sporting organisations and be named in the National Sports Policy
- 3 Have a stronger evidence-based relationship and value-driven engagement with students in higher education institutions
- 4 Have further professionalised the organisation and established a sustainable multi source funding model
- 5 Have partnership agreements in place with key stakeholders to support the resourcing of our organisation and the funding of dedicated staff positions
- 6 Be a recognised name amongst the student and sporting communities
- 7 Be leading the delivery of modernised, sustainable and student-focused opportunities which offer a positive sporting and development experience for students and our members.



Key Enablers

The following key enablers will support us in achieving our strategic ambitions:



OUR STUDENTS

Students are at the heart of Student Sport Ireland, all our work is delivered with the central remit to enhance the student experience, for all students.



OUR STAFF

SSI staff are central to our organisation and we will continue to support them in their work, along with ensuring we have adequate roles in place to achieve our goals.



OUR MEMBERS

Our membership is our organisation. The commitment of the leadership and staff in our member institutions through their work within their institutions and on behalf of SSI is critical. Ní neart go cur le chéile.



OUR PARTNERS

Good relationships with our sporting partners and specifically the NGBs, Sport Ireland, Sport Northern Ireland, the Sport Ireland Institute (SII), and relevant government departments and state agencies are key to us achieving our vision.



RESOURCES

The successful implementation of this plan is dependent on both additional funding being raised and additional staff being recruited.



SSI RESEARCH

We will use data monitoring, benchmarking, and research as tools to underpin our activities, evidence impact, and to enable and support us to achieve our strategic goals.

Organisational Growth

In parallel with the implementation of the strategic actions set out below we will continue to grow and develop our organisation during the lifetime of this strategic plan. Specifically, we will increase our income, expand our staff number from 2 to 5 in order to support delivery, streamline and strengthen our governance structures, and enhance our profile, particularly amongst our student population and within our affiliated institutions.

By the end of 2025 we will have added three member staff members to our team. We will achieve this by successfully increasing our funding income through new member contributions, adding commercial and sponsorship income streams, shared positions with stakeholder organisations, funded research posts, and European project funding.

We will source this new funding by developing and implementing detailed annual business plans informed by internal and external expertise and our business objectives, a commercial strategy, and realistic multi annual income and expenditure projections.

Significant corporate governance restructuring was initiated during the lifetime of the previous strategic plan. This work will continue during this strategic phase. Specifically, we will:

- 1 | Align our administrative structure to reflect the aims of this strategic plan
- 2 | Streamline our committee structure to mirror our strategic pillars, establishing working and expert groups where required
- 3 | Refine existing roles and adding new supportive positions to increase capacity to support the Board, our committees and staff to deliver the actions set out in this strategic plan
- 4 | Appoint two independent non-executive Board directors
- 5 | Appoint new committee independent members and stakeholders' representatives.

During the consultation process profile and brand awareness was identified as an area that required further development. Name recognition amongst our student population was specifically highlighted. In response to this feedback we will increase our profile by building a communications plan that focuses on:

- 1 | Engaging directly with students through greater use of social media
- 2 | Further strengthening our engagement with SSI affiliated institutions
- 3 | Communicating the importance of student sport to the HEI Presidents and senior management, thereby ensuring the value of sport at higher education level is fully understood by the leaders with our affiliated institutions
- 4 | Increasing our relationships with the state bodies for sport in Ireland, along with those in Europe and Internationally
- 5 | Developing key messaging for SSI and be consistent in the delivery of that message to all stakeholders





STUDENT SPORT IRELAND
**STRATEGIC
PLAN**
(2021-2024)

The organisation's strategic development over the coming period will be built on the following three key strategic pillars:



Strategic Framework (2021 – 2024)

Vision	To lead and influence the potential of student sport in Ireland		
Mission	To grow quality student sport competition, enhance wellbeing and lead the sector		
Pillars	Competition	Physical Activity and Wellbeing	Leadership
Objectives	Enable more regular activity for students and support greater engagement and interaction with the NGBs.	Promote, enable and highlight the benefits of physical activity and wellbeing to the student experience and inspire more students to be more active more often.	To develop skills of students involved in sport, to provide learning, development, networking, information and knowledge sharing opportunity for our members and their staff, and to present and promote SSI and the sector to our stakeholders through promotion, lobbying and advocacy.
Actions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review Competition Structures 2. Build a Competition Framework 3. Build a Competitions Unit 4. Continue to grow NGBs Partnerships 5. Review World University Games Model 6.. With stakeholders develop and support the delivery of high performance sport within the TL sector 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop a Physical Activity and Wellbeing policy and framework 2. Coordinate student focused and inclusive physical activity campaigns 3. With partner agencies support, appoint a Physical Activity and Wellbeing Officer 4. Undertake research to evidence the benefits of physical activity and wellbeing initiatives 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Deliver a Student Leaders Development Programme 2. Build a centralised Student Sports Club Portal 3. New NGB and stakeholder MoUs 4. Build an international representation strategy
Key Enablers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Additional resources to establish a new Competitions Unit 2. NGB Partnership Agreements 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Additional resources to recruit both a Physical Activity and Wellbeing Officer, and a Research Officer 2. Key stakeholder partnership agreements e.g. Healthy Ireland, Ireland Active, HSE 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Student Leaders' engagement and input 2. Funding to deliver new initiatives 3. NGB and stakeholder Engagement 4. Representation budget

1

COMPETITION

Strategic Objective:

Enable more regular activity for students and support greater engagement and interaction with the NGBs.



ACTIONS:

- 1 Undertake a review of current competition structures to ensure they are fit for purpose
- 2 Build a strong competition framework
- 3 Resource and build a competitions unit
4. Continue to grow existing NGBs partnerships and develop new relationships with those sports looking to build their competition structures
- 5 With NGBs develop MoUs and partnership agreements (participation and performance) to achieve common goals and facilitate collaborative partnerships with those organisations who enable or deliver student sport competitions or championships across the island and internationally
- 6 Work with key stakeholders in the high performance sector to support the development of a coordinated and strategic approach to the provision of high performance sport across the higher education sector in the context of the Sport Ireland strategy
- 7 With NGBs develop MoUs and partnership agreements (participation and performance) to achieve common goals and facilitate collaborative partnerships with those organisations who enable or deliver student sport competitions or championships across the island and internationally.

Key Enablers

- 1 New funding to facilitate the appointment of a Competitions Officer in advance of the establishment of a Competitions Unit
- 2 NGB engagement and as appropriate new MoUs with NGBs and key stakeholders

2 PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND WELLBEING

Strategic Objective:

Promote, enable and highlight the benefits of physical activity and wellbeing to the student experience and inspire more students to be more active more often.



ACTIONS:

1. Develop a student physical activity and wellbeing policy and framework that aligns with the National Sports Policy, the Sport Ireland Participation Plan, and government policies relevant to student sport at a national level
2. Coordinate student focused and inclusive physical activity campaigns through active partnerships with member institutions, Sport Ireland, Sport Northern Ireland, NGB's, Healthy Ireland and FISU
3. Explore collaborative funding opportunities to resource the appointment of a National SSI Physical Activity and Wellbeing Officer in partnerships with stakeholders and external agencies
4. Provide evidence to support the delivery of physical activity and wellbeing initiatives throughout the SSI membership by means of collaborative and funded projects, and research
5. Coordinate research to establish baseline data on levels of student physical activity to inform the development of programmes and initiatives to increase student activity.

Key Enablers

1. With members and stakeholders develop a long term sustainable financial model to fund both the appointments of two new positions (i.e., a Physical Activity Officer and a Research Officer) and associated initiatives
2. Seek stakeholders input to inform the drafting of the physical activity and wellbeing policy and framework.

3

LEADERSHIP

Strategic Objective:

To develop skills of students involved in sport; to provide learning, development, networking, information and knowledge sharing opportunity for our members and their staff; and to present and promote SSI and the sector to our stakeholders through promotion, lobbying and advocacy.



ACTIONS:

1. Provide opportunities for our students, athletes and leaders, involved in sport at all levels:
 - a) Build a centralised portal/platform with the goal of providing continuity in the management of student sports clubs and a resource depository
 - b) Establish an accredited training model for student leadership and volunteering
 - c) Deliver a student sport leadership themed conference
 - d) Develop an online student committee structure promoting student engagement and active involvement within our organisation
 - e) Expand and enhance support for dual career athletes nationally and work with key stakeholders to best support elite student athletes studying in higher education via the SII's Accredited Student Athlete Support Programme.

Key Enablers

1. Student engagement and input
2. New funding and external expertise to develop and deliver the training programme

2. Increase engagement opportunities with our stakeholders and advocate for and promote the sector by:

- a) Actively seeking representation on the Boards of stakeholder organisations, and build networking and agreement opportunities
- b) Building strategic relationships with relevant NGBs and stakeholders in sport in Ireland and ensure the appropriate positioning of the higher education sector as an equal partner in the sport sector in Ireland
- c) Build an international representation strategy, with focus on key international stakeholder relationships (e.g. FISU, ENAS, European Commission/Erasmus, EUSA and national university federations).

Key Enablers

1. Stakeholder/Representative Working Group to draft, lead and deliver the representation strategy
2. Multi annual budget to support advocacy, networking and representation initiatives.

Measuring Success

The successful implementation of this strategy will be measured by the following strategic goals being delivered by the end of 2024.



- 1 An expanded staff team to support the work of the organisation, enabled by a sustainable business model and new and increased income streams
- 2 A streamlined governance and administration structure to mirror the strategic pillars
- 3 A new Competitions Unit
- 4 The development and implementation of a stakeholder communications plan
- 5 The development and implementation of a physical activity and wellbeing plan aligned with the National Sports Policy and the National Physical Activity Plan
- 6 Signed MoUs with NGBs to achieve common goals around student sport
- 7 A student leadership plan which delivers initiatives annually
- 8 A refined model for the coordination of high performance student athletes at the World University Games.

Implementation, Monitoring and Review



IMPLEMENTATION:

The strategic plan will be implemented by the SSI staff supported by SSI committees and working groups, affiliated institutions and partner organisations including individual NGBs.

The implementation of the strategy is dependent on increased income and turnover and the recruitment of additional full-time staff. The SSI Board is committed to leading and advocating on the organisation's behalf to its affiliated institutions, key stakeholders including Sport Ireland, Sport Northern Ireland, relevant government and state agencies, and other partner organisations to identify and secure this additional funding.

SSI will develop a 3 year business plan incorporating multi-annual income and expenditure projections to support and aid the Board and staff in securing this additional funding.

Baseline Data

During this current strategic phase we will undertake research to establish both base line data and key performance indicators that will inform future strategic plans and which will allow us monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the programmes and initiatives that we are delivering.

MONITORING:

SSI has in recent years developed a strong governance structure with clear lines of reporting from staff and committees to the Board and the wider membership. The Board will on a quarterly basis monitor progress in the delivery of the plan, reporting its findings to the members twice a year.

REVIEW:

The monitoring process will be informed by an implementation report template linked to a detailed annual operational plan, with KPIs, and which will be subject to annual review and sign off by the Board.

SSI Affiliated Institutions (2021)

1. Belfast Metropolitan College
2. Dublin Business School
3. Dublin City University
4. Dundalk Institute of Technology
5. Galway Mayo Institute of Technology
6. Garda College
7. Griffith College Dublin
8. ICD Business School
9. Institute of Technology Carlow
10. Institute of Technology Sligo
11. Letterkenny Institute of Technology
12. Maynooth University
13. Munster Technological University
14. National College of Ireland
15. National University of Ireland, Galway
16. Queen's University Belfast
17. Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland
18. St. Mary's College Belfast
19. Technological University Dublin
20. Trinity College Dublin
21. TUS Midlands Midwest
22. Ulster University
23. University College Cork
24. University College Dublin
25. University of Limerick
26. Waterford Institute of Technology

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