

1 **A Framework for Lifelong Involvement in Sport and Physical Activity: The Irish**  
2 **Perspective**

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21 Abstract

22 Contextualised within physical activity policy (Schoppe, Bauman & Bull, 2004) this  
23 paper presents a critical review of current sport development pathway models, (including  
24 the pyramid concept, long-term athlete development and the development model of sport  
25 participation), acknowledging a number of issues that we should be cognizant of when  
26 working with models (Lyle, 2002). Along with a review of the existing situation in  
27 Ireland with regards to the governance of sport and patterns in sport (non)participation,  
28 the paper discusses the need for a broader and more encompassing framework that  
29 encourages lifelong involvement in sport and physical activity. The paper reviews the  
30 Irish lifelong involvement in sport and physical activity (LISPA) framework as a policy  
31 ‘for’ complementing both a performance-oriented and participation-oriented model and  
32 addressing the particular physical activity and sporting requirements within the Irish  
33 context. The LISPA framework has been adopted by the Irish Sports Council as the  
34 model to underpin all its work aimed at improving participation rates in sport in Ireland,  
35 although the Council have yet to identify how best to promote the LISPA framework.  
36 Suggestions on how to maximize the implementation and success of the framework are  
37 discussed.

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39 Key words: active lifestyles, system alignment, sport development

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44 Introduction

45 An international review of national physical activity policy (Schoppe, Bauman & Bull,  
46 2004) provides an insight into countries that have developed and implemented physical  
47 activity policies at national level. Similarities regarding the methods and approaches  
48 adopted to develop and implement national physical activity policy were evident. These  
49 included developing policies after consultation with key stakeholders, developing  
50 partnerships between the public and private sector and an integration of physical activity  
51 promotion with agendas such as health and education. However, there was a lack of role  
52 delineation and accountability between partners and a difficulty in determining concrete  
53 timeframes related to the funding and implementation of strategies (Schoppe et al., 2004).  
54 In reviewing the extensive interpretations that exist for policy and policies related to  
55 physical activity promotion, Schoppe et al. (2004) provide a definition that describes key  
56 components of policies related to physical activity promotion. This is the preferred  
57 definition for use in this paper;

58 'Physical activity policy is a formal statement that defines physical activity as a  
59 priority area, states specific population targets and provides a specific plan or  
60 framework for action. It describes the procedures of institutions in the  
61 government, non-government and private sector to promote physical activity in  
62 the population, and defines the accountabilities of the involved partners' (p. 9).

63 Many countries have recognized organizations with a remit to promote and invest  
64 in policies and programmes that provide increased and improved participation in physical  
65 activity and sport. A report of such policies and programmes, as well as related  
66 evaluations, has been completed by Schoppe et al, (2004). Organisations with such a

67 remit include Australian Sports Commission (ASC), Health Canada, Sport and  
68 Recreation New Zealand (SPARC), Sport England and sportscotland. A number of  
69 common practices are shared across these countries and organizations. Firstly, all aspire  
70 to create opportunities for people to become involved in physical activity, to retain  
71 involvement and to experience success, with an overall concern to see more people  
72 participating in sport and enjoying its (health) benefits. Secondly, there is an  
73 acknowledgement that this is only possible if stakeholders work in partnerships forming a  
74 ‘joined up’ approach to encouraging people to ‘start, stay and succeed in sport’ (Sport  
75 England, 2004). Thirdly, there is national investment and commitment to acknowledging  
76 (and addressing) the many benefits that lifelong involvement in sport and physical  
77 activity can reap for the individual and society in general.

78         While numerous countries pursue and invest in encouraging lifelong physical  
79 activity patterns in their populations, this is delivered through numerous programmes and  
80 targeted at different populations. These programmes are proactive in highlighting the  
81 benefits and fun associated with sport and physical activity and in encouraging  
82 individuals to stay involved in physical activity. Such programmes include club  
83 development (sportscotland), ‘Healthy school’ strategies (DoH / DfEE, 2000; Ontario /  
84 Ontario Education, 2006), Active Schools (Australian Sports Commission, Sport England  
85 and sportscotland), Active After-school Communities (Australian Sports Commission),  
86 Active Movement (Sport and Recreation New Zealand), TOP Tots and TOP Start (Youth  
87 Sports Trust) and a Junior Sport Framework (Australian Sports Commission).

88         A proposal ‘for’ an Irish framework for lifelong involvement in sport and physical  
89 activity (LISPA) has been developed and, while not formally implemented, is

90 acknowledged in the most recent strategy statement from the ISC (2006). In 2006 the ISC  
91 adopted the LISPA framework and are currently involved in discussions with relevant  
92 Government departments regarding how best to promote the LISPA framework (ISC,  
93 2007). The LISPA framework is broad and ambitious in attempts to promote lifelong  
94 involvement in sport and physical activity, tackle sedentary lifestyles and foster joined-up  
95 policy and decision making. The framework evolved in a bid to address two main  
96 concerns related to creating an environment that enables Irish participants to continue  
97 lifelong involvement in sport and physical activity. Firstly, such a framework would look  
98 to counteract the concern for sedentary behaviour by promoting more physically active  
99 lifestyles from a young age. While the Irish population may be aware of the risk of  
100 inactivity and of its related illness (Health Promotion Unit, 2002; National Taskforce on  
101 Obesity, 2005), such knowledge does little to promote physical activity, as knowledge  
102 alone is insufficient to bring about a change in behaviour. The task ahead is to reshape  
103 Ireland's context to one that facilitates, reflects and promotes lifelong physical activity  
104 during childhood, through adolescence and into adulthood. Secondly, such a framework  
105 is an attempt to establish a cooperative and coordinated approach by all stakeholders  
106 (public, private and voluntary) involved in promoting and delivering physical activity and  
107 sport in Ireland, acknowledging that this is only possible if stakeholders work in  
108 partnerships forming a 'joined up' (ISC, 2005; National Obesity Taskforce, 2005)  
109 approach to encouraging people to remain physically active. These specific Irish context  
110 issues are re-visited, with others, later in the paper.

111           In the context of this paper and discussion of a lifelong involvement in sport and  
112 physical activity model, it is important to clarify the definitions that are used for the terms

113 'sport' and 'physical activity' throughout this paper. Sport refers to all forms of physical  
114 activity that, through casual or regular participation, expresses or improves physical  
115 fitness and mental well-being and forms social relationships (ISC / NCTC, 2005).  
116 Physical activity involves any bodily movement produced by contraction of skeletal  
117 muscle and subsequently increases energy expenditure (Caspersen, Powell &  
118 Christenson, 1985).

119 This paper is divided into three main sections. Firstly, the paper presents a critical  
120 review of current pathway models, drawing on strengths and weaknesses, to inform the  
121 need for a broader and more encompassing framework that encourages lifelong  
122 involvement in sport and physical activity. Secondly, the paper will focus on the existing  
123 situation in Ireland with regards to the governance of sport and patterns in  
124 (non)participation that a lifelong involvement in sport and physical activity framework  
125 aims to resolve. Finally, we report the LISPA framework as a policy 'for' complementing  
126 current pathway models and addressing the particular physical activity and sporting  
127 requirements within the Irish context.

128

129 Critical review of current pathway models

130 There are a number of useful current pathway models that look to advance the sports  
131 development continuum, each with strengths and weaknesses in respect to addressing  
132 specific populations and the social and cultural context in which they operate. Lyle  
133 (2002) defines models as 'representations of phenomena, the complexity of which is  
134 difficult to represent solely in words' and that subsequently it is difficult to 'represent  
135 complex interactions, continuity of process, variation in scale and variations in practice'

136 (p. 81). Lyle (2002) highlights a number of issues that we should be cognizant of when  
137 working with models and these include the acknowledgement that models are generic  
138 representations, components within a model cannot always be quantified, that the  
139 relationship depicted between the components of a model imply causal, simplistic and  
140 conditional qualities, that environmental effects are difficult to control and measure and  
141 that there are a significant range of variables that impact of the model.

142 In reviewing coaching process models Lyle (2002) distinguishes between the  
143 operational model (model 'of' the coaching process) and the ideal model (model 'for' the  
144 coaching process). The model 'of' is usually derived from practice or research, with a  
145 clear operational structure. The model 'for' is based on assumptions which are developed  
146 into a more idealistic model for practice, 'The model builder may not expect the model to  
147 be found in practice in exactly its idealized form, but it provides a useful analytical tool  
148 for identifying the issues that are worthy of further attention' (Lyle, 2000, p. 82). Lyle's  
149 (2002) distinction between model 'of' and model 'for' is useful when discussing models  
150 of participation in sport and physical activity.

151 A number of current pathway models are evident. The 'pyramid' concept, also  
152 known as the sports development continuum (Houlihan, 2000; Kirk and Gorely, 2000),  
153 supports the ideology that by encouraging access to a broad base of positive participation  
154 across the whole population, i.e., through opportunities linked with physical education,  
155 extra-curricular sport, recreation and leisure, there is a direct correlation with the  
156 decreasing number of people who will look to develop their sporting abilities at a  
157 performance stage before committing to elite performance (ISC, 2003). The pyramid  
158 design conveys the implication that the broader the base of participation the higher the

159 pinnacle of achievement, at the expense of those who reach the top of one level but are  
160 unable to progress to the next. The pyramid way of thinking does not make explicit where  
161 such individuals can go within sport (Kirk and Gorely, 2000). Two pathways are  
162 identified in the pyramid concept – progress through the foundation, participation,  
163 performance and elite levels or exit from the system. A restriction of the pyramid design  
164 is the identification of only one experience that regulates progression to the next level.  
165 There is no detailed relationship between stages of the model, i.e., how an incremental  
166 improvement in one level establishes a link to the next, and this may be contributed to the  
167 difficulty in illustrating the relationships between levels in a diagram (Lyle, 2002).  
168 Subsequently, it is a model ‘for’ involvement in sport as it is not derived from empirical  
169 studies on sport development.

170         A Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) model is heavily supported in  
171 Canada, Ireland and the UK (referenced by Canadian Sport for Life, 2005; DCMS  
172 Strategy Unit, 2002 and NCTC, 2003 respectively). The LTAD pathway is a series of  
173 phases that underpin the balanced and long-term development of high performance  
174 athletes. It is classified as a ‘specialisation’ model with the intention that, from the  
175 ‘FUNDamentals’ phase, athletes / participants will strive to move through a number of  
176 phases until they reach the final phase of ‘Training to Win’. These intermediate phases  
177 are ‘Learning to train, ‘Training to train’ and ‘Training to compete’. A sixth phase  
178 ‘Retirement and retainment’ caters for those players / athletes who retire from  
179 competition permanently. The model also identifies key capacities (physical, mental,  
180 technical, tactical, lifestyle and personal) that regulate progression from one phase of the  
181 model to the next. A strength of the model is the empirical evidence, particularly in the



182 area of developing talent in young people, which has informed its formulation. Evidence  
183 includes optimal trainability, maturation process and levels, onset of peak height velocity  
184 and trainability windows (Balyi, 2001). Subsequently, it is a model ‘of’ sport  
185 development, providing sport specific pathways. The pathway looks beyond short-term  
186 results and identifies the relevant physical, psychological and social capacities that  
187 athletes need to possess in order to maximize their potential at all stages. A restriction of  
188 the LTAD model is the focus on a linear progression that suggests all athletes should  
189 strive to reach the ‘Train to win’ phase, with involvement and improvement in one phase  
190 automatically leading on to the next. Continuous movement through the model is further  
191 pressurized by the lack of exit points in the model other than ‘Retirement / Retainment’,  
192 which is seen to be occupied by those who have retired from competition permanently.  
193 Another restriction is the commitment to movement through these phases being closely  
194 tied to age, implying that by a particular age you should be performing at a certain level.  
195 There is no acknowledgment that it is acceptable for individuals to remain in one phase  
196 and not strive to progress through the remaining phases of the model. Linear models,  
197 such as the ‘pyramid’ concept and LTAD, have weaknesses that make them  
198 unsatisfactory as singular frameworks to encompass the richer concern of lifelong  
199 involvement in sport and physical activity for all.

200 In contrast to linear, prescriptive models, Côté and Hay (2002) propose a model  
201 of (young) people’s socialisation into sport. The development model of sports  
202 participation (DSMP, Côté, 1999; Côté & Hay, 2002; Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2007)  
203 accommodates a progression from the ‘sampling phase’ to the ‘specialising years’ and  
204 then to the ‘investment/recreation phase’, acknowledging that at any stage of involvement

205 young people can choose to move to take part on a recreational basis or drop out. The key  
206 features of the sampling phase are that young people participate in a range of sports, that  
207 their key motivation is fun and enjoyment, and that the emphasis is on structured or  
208 deliberate play rather than training or deliberate practice. The specializing phase involves  
209 more deliberate practice and a reduction in the range of sport activities while still  
210 retaining fun and excitement as central elements of the sporting experience. The  
211 investment phase signals a likely focus on one activity and a commitment to intensive  
212 training and competitive success. The recreation phase is when young people participate  
213 regularly in sports without aspiring to reach an elite level of performance. The DMSP  
214 model is less prescriptive than the LTAD model in identifying when individuals should  
215 be encouraged to move from one phase to another. The DMSP model is a model 'of'  
216 involvement in sport as it was built on research with elite and recreational athletes in a  
217 variety of sports.

218         A number of elaborated developmental frameworks are very closely aligned with  
219 the Irish framework that will be discussed in due course. The Queensland Junior Sports  
220 Council model of lifelong involvement in sport illustrates how people can stay involved  
221 in physical activity and sport at varying levels of performance and across the lifespan. It  
222 also identifies clear pathways across performance stages – recreational participation,  
223 developmental, talent and high performance – providing a 'map of possibilities' (Kirk &  
224 Gorely, 2002, p. 125) to encourage retention in physical activity and sport. The Draft  
225 Long Term Participant Development Pathway is proposed by sports coach UK as a  
226 central principle of the UK Coaching Framework, ensuring that participants are supported  
227 at all stages of their development by skilled coaches (Duffy, 2007). The generic route

228 map for Scottish sport development (sportsotland, 2006) strives to promote an integrated  
229 development structure within Scottish sport.

230         A distinction can be made between performance-oriented models and  
231 participation-oriented models. Performance-oriented models tend to have a scientific  
232 background (including research evidence) and are classified by a particular sport while  
233 participation-oriented models cater for all levels of investment and abilities in available  
234 sport and physical activity opportunities. The LTAD model is a performance-oriented  
235 model, providing sport specific pathways that athletes / players progress through in  
236 respect to their developing competencies. While performance-oriented models cater for a  
237 minor percentage of participants in sport they are similar to participation-oriented models  
238 in being underpinned by fundamentals, that is, encouraging multi-skill and multi-sport  
239 experiences in the early years. Both the LTAD and DMSP models acknowledge that in  
240 some sports where peak performance is reached at a young age (e.g. women's  
241 gymnastics) early specialisation is often necessary to reach elite performance (Côté &  
242 Fraser-Thomas, 2007). The challenge for early specialisation sports, whose participants  
243 usually skip the early 'sampling' years is to amalgamate the early phases of sports  
244 development appropriately to lessen the negative impacts associated with early  
245 specialisation e.g. burn-out, over-use injuries and lack of enjoyment (Côté & Fraser-  
246 Thomas, 2007). The extent to which Ireland has addressed the inter-relationship between  
247 the LTAD and DMSP model, with 'some mixture of prescription (...) and the more  
248 ecologically informed approach grounded in the reality of young people's sport  
249 socialization experiences' (MacPhail & Kirk, 2006, p. 73), has been mooted elsewhere  
250 and is re-visited in more detail in this paper.

251 Consultation and feedback on the performance-oriented LTAD model in Ireland  
252 resulted in support for a development model of sports participation, initiating the LISPA  
253 participation-oriented framework. Consequently, LTAD provided the initial step towards  
254 the LISPA framework being the favoured framework for sport and physical activity  
255 participation in Ireland. This does present a problem in the Irish context in that there is no  
256 apparent link between performance and participation. While the Irish Sports Council  
257 (ISCs) promote the ‘pyramid’ concept there is limited evidence that individual sports  
258 allocate money to allow a broader base of participation to result in more people  
259 committing to elite performance. It is difficult to see the alignment between performance  
260 and participation in the Irish context with national governing bodies (NGBs) being given  
261 the autonomy to proportion their allocated state funding towards performance or  
262 participation, in most cases with no percentage agreement on how much is allocated to  
263 each.

264 Perhaps the most significant aspect of any model for Ireland is the alignment and  
265 integration of all agencies involved in providing sporting and physical activity  
266 opportunities. Currently there appears to be no national and local alignment or integration  
267 between government departments with a role to play in the promotion of sport and  
268 physical activity, the ISC, Sports Council Northern Ireland, the Irish Institute of Sport,  
269 Coaching Ireland or the NGBs. All agencies need to identify and uphold their roles and  
270 responsibilities as part of a national and local alliance to promote a sport development  
271 model which engages the Irish population in participating in sport and physical activity.  
272 While there are a number of national initiatives that promote physical activity (Sport for

273 All, Women in Sport) they do not have shared outcomes or do not identify how they can  
274 make best use of staff expertise or facilities across initiatives.

275

276 Specific Irish context

277 With a view to appreciating the context in which there is need for a wider sport  
278 development framework in Ireland, a number of related issues in the Irish context are  
279 shared. These include the influence of the main Irish amateur sporting association, the  
280 execution of sport policy in Ireland, rates of participation in physical activity and concern  
281 with the likely rise of premature deaths in Ireland attributed to obesity.

282 The Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) was founded in the late 1800s to preserve  
283 and promote the Gaelic games of Gaelic football, hurling, camogie, handball and  
284 rounders. The GAA is the largest and most popular amateur sporting association in  
285 Ireland with an estimated 700,000 members and active supporters, accounting for 15% of  
286 the overall population (Fahey, Layte & Gannon, 2004). The effectiveness of the GAA  
287 (the cultural dominance of Gaelic sports and the provision of GAA facilities) partly  
288 explains the absence of direct state intervention in sport until comparatively recently due  
289 to the government encouraging the GAA to organise the sporting life of the country, with  
290 the privileged position of the GAA inhibiting debate on national sports development  
291 strategy (Houlihan, 1997);

292 ‘(...) the Irish government has, only from the late 1970s, begun to refine its policy  
293 on sport and, more importantly, establish an administrative capacity backed by the  
294 commitment of significant public funds for policy implementation. But while  
295 much of the increase in the prominence of sport within public policy has been

296 stimulated by government, it has not been possible to establish neat administrative  
297 arrangements (...) the diffuse nature of the sport and recreation policy area has  
298 produced a fragmented administrative structure' (Houlihan, 1997; 87).

299 The GAA is not structured or does not operate in the same way as other NGBs due to its  
300 size and participation levels. With respect to the appropriation of funding, the GAA,  
301 along with the Irish Rugby Football Union and the Football Association of Ireland,  
302 dominate the Irish landscape, funded independently of other NGBs.

303 The execution of sport policy in Ireland is primarily the remit of the Department  
304 of Arts, Sport and Tourism (DAST), a central government department. DAST's mandate  
305 is the (a) formulation, development and evaluation of public policy to support and  
306 influence increased participation in sport, (b) improvement in standards of performance  
307 in sport and (c) development of sports facilities at national, regional and local level  
308 though sports capital funding and funding of the Irish Sports Council (ISC). The DAST  
309 appointed the ISC as a statutory body in 1999 to ensure the promotion of increased  
310 participation in sport and implementing better ways of promoting, planning and  
311 delivering sport. The provision of sport tends to fall to National Governing Bodies  
312 (NGBs) of sports, i.e., individual bodies responsible for the coaching and promotion of  
313 specific sports. The ISC supports the work of the NGBs with annual grants towards the  
314 costs associated with the development and promotion of their sport (ISC, 2000). More  
315 recently, there has been pressure on the DAST / ISC to take a more active role in  
316 providing facilities, support and funding with an intensification of pressure on the  
317 government to participate more effectively in sport policy (Houlihan, 1997). With this

318 has been a change in emphasis from a focus predominantly on elite athletes, with funding  
319 being allocated to initiatives that encourage opportunities for mass participation.

320 A higher than average number of Irish young people is reported as being  
321 physically active in comparison to 34 World Health Organisation (WHO) countries  
322 (Office of the Minister for Children, 2006). Numerous studies report the pervasive nature  
323 of sport and physical activity participation amongst young Irish people (Collier, MacPhail  
324 & O'Sullivan, 2007; Connor, 2003; de Roiste & Dineen, 2006; Fahey, Delaney &  
325 Gannon, 2005; Kelleher et al., 2003), sports participation among Irish adults (Fahey et  
326 al., 2004) and a strong economic and social value of sport (Delaney & Fahey, 2005).  
327 International sports participation trends are also evident in the Irish context and include a  
328 significantly higher proportion of active males to females (Fahey et al., 2005), dramatic  
329 dropout rates of teenage girls (de Roiste & Dineen, 2006; [www.womeninsport.ie](http://www.womeninsport.ie)) and  
330 dramatic drop-out rates of 30- to 35- year olds who have given up team sports (Fahey et  
331 al., 2004). The impact of gender on frequency and type of participation in physical  
332 activity (Fahey et al., 2005; Fahey et al., 2004; Woods, Foley, O'Gorman, Kearney &  
333 Moyna, 2004) is beyond the remit of the paper.

334 Research has indicated that most adults do not wish to participate in organised  
335 structured physical activities, particularly as they get older (Fahey et al., 2004). They  
336 wish to pursue activities that improve physical health and increase social opportunities in  
337 a cost-effective environment without too much pressure on time. Within Ireland, Fahey et  
338 al. (2004) highlighted the dramatic dropout rates of 30- to 35- year olds who had given up  
339 team sports and this informs the type of experiences and activities (Woods et al., 2004;  
340 Connor, 2003) that are necessary to re-engage this population.

341           Along with other countries, the prevalence of overweight and obesity has  
342 increased in Ireland, with reports that 39% of adults living in Ireland are overweight and  
343 18% are obese (National Taskforce on Obesity, 2005). The report suggests that physical  
344 inactivity has made a significant impact on the increase in overweight and obesity and  
345 encourages the public, private, community and voluntary sectors to work in partnership to  
346 promote active living and the required amount of minutes of moderate physical activity  
347 per day necessary to prevent excess weight gain.

348           In Ireland, there is a lack of an integrated and coordinated framework to support  
349 and coordinate the introduction, retainment and re-engagement of individuals striving to  
350 pursue lifelong involvement in physical activity and sport. In some cases, organisations  
351 are vying for the same young people to play their sport at the school / and or club level  
352 with minimal regard for the developmental needs and interests of the individuals  
353 involved, such as encouraging the development of generic skills and knowledge required  
354 to engage in and appreciate all forms of sport and physical activity (sportsotland, 2006;  
355 Whitehead & Murdoch, 2006).

356           As Ireland moves towards the further development of its sports system, the need  
357 to clearly map out a framework for lifelong involvement in sport and physical activity has  
358 become evident (ISC, 2006). The need for a wider, all-inclusive LISPA framework  
359 within Ireland was first proposed in April 2004, following a wide consultation on  
360 ‘Building Pathways in Irish Sport: Towards a plan for the sporting health and well-being  
361 of the nation’ (NCTC, 2003). This consultation document drew heavily on the work of  
362 Istvan Balyi and outlined a proposed Irish model of Long-Term Player/Athlete  
363 Development. Feedback from the consultation (NCTC, 2004) highlighted the need to



364 cater for recreational and lifelong participation in physical activity and sport and that the  
365 basic principles of a person-centred approach to suit individual needs and the role of  
366 agencies in the delivery of such lifelong participation needed to be further explored. The  
367 ISC commissioned a working group to develop a consultation document to guide the  
368 development of a LISPA framework. The ISC is a statutory agency that is mandated to,  
369 among other responsibilities, develop strategies for increasing and promoting  
370 participation in sport and physical activity (ISC, 2006; 2003; 2000). The working group  
371 was also to identify agents and agencies that have a role in promoting lifelong  
372 involvement in sport and physical activity. In October 2005, the consultation document  
373 (ISC / NCTC, 2005) was launched at the ISC / Sports Council Northern Ireland  
374 Conference in Dublin. The consultation period ran from October 2005 to January 2006.  
375 Feedback from the consultation (NCTC, 2006) was received and collated and  
376 recommendations from the feedback informed and refined the thinking behind the LISPA  
377 framework. The refinement of such a framework is the focus of the remainder of this  
378 paper.

379         The Council's most recent strategy statement (ISC, 2006) states that 'it is an  
380 appropriate time to revisit the national strategic framework for sport and the Council is  
381 prepared to contribute fully to a national debate on a new national strategy for sport' (p.  
382 16). The LISPA framework addresses this ambition by providing the foundation to  
383 underpin all ISC strategies from participation through to high performance. This  
384 encourages the ISC to pursue (1) a review of the programmes and activities in line with  
385 promoting lifelong involvement in sport and physical activity and the devising of  
386 appropriate interventions and (2) the coordination and promotion of essential working

387 partnerships between all Irish bodies involved in promoting physical activity, sport and  
388 recreation. The issue of alignment between all agencies is revisited later in the paper.

389         The Council announced the creation of a new Participation Unit, responsible for  
390 the implementation of the Council's plans for participation in sport and the essential role  
391 of a LISPA framework;

392         'The highlights of that strategy [implementation for participation in sport] include  
393 the implementation of the Lifelong Involvement in Sport and Physical Activity  
394 model across all sports. This model for physical activity caters for recreational  
395 and lifelong participation that will be child centred, open to all sports and  
396 adaptable to individual needs. It must provide a quality introduction for young  
397 people and continue with different interventions throughout the life cycle' (ISC,  
398 2006, p. 24).

399 In 2006 the ISC adopted the LISPA framework and are currently involved in discussions  
400 with relevant government departments regarding how best to promote the LISPA  
401 framework (ISC, 2007). In June 2008 the LISPA framework became an all-Ireland  
402 initiative, with the Sports Council Northern Ireland 'buying into' the framework. Up until  
403 this point it has been difficult to see how the LISPA framework was to be promoted  
404 effectively and implemented. The ISC referred to LISPA in their latest strategy document  
405 (ISC, 2006) but not as a framework which raises the concern regarding it not being  
406 positioned to form the basis of their policy areas. There is hope that with the on-set of the  
407 LISPA framework becoming an all-Ireland initiative that this will provide the impetus for

408 the necessary promotion, funding, development of policy and implementation in a  
409 participation-orientated model.

410

411 The LISPA framework

412 The LISPA framework strives to ensure that every person (regardless of age) has the  
413 opportunity to enjoy playing, participating and competing in the activity or sport of their  
414 choice at a level appropriate to their ability. This results in a number of key foundations,  
415 or what Lyle (2002) terms ‘building blocks’, that we believe are essential for an adequate  
416 sport development framework including (1) a person-centred approach to involvement in  
417 physical activity and sport, (2) a quality introduction to physical literacy (sportsotland,  
418 2006; Whitehead & Murdoch, 2006) and, (3) accommodating particular needs of  
419 populations that require to be addressed if they are to become lifelong participants in  
420 physical activity and sport, including disability, pre-school aged children, adolescent girls  
421 and older people (Coalter, 2005; Fraser-Thomas, Cote & Deakin, 2005; Nicholson,  
422 2004).

423 The movement within the LISPA framework is fluid (see Figure 1), i.e., continual  
424 movement between different physical opportunities to suit the individual is encouraged  
425 rather than a prescribed set of stages which individuals are guided to pursue. There is an  
426 acknowledgement that the same person can occupy different opportunities in the  
427 framework as reflected in their engagement in different activities. For example, an  
428 individual may be operating as a high performer in basketball and also choosing to swim  
429 recreationally twice a week. The framework also accommodates exit from, and re-

430 engagement with, physical activity, aware that not all individuals will have had the  
431 opportunity to experience the foundations of the framework at an early age. It is  
432 anticipated that the fluidity of movement within the framework will attract and retain a  
433 greater number of participants from different target groups.

434 [Insert Figure 1 here]

435

436 *Movement through the LISPA framework*

437 ‘Active Start’ focuses on infants, toddlers and preschoolers being provided with  
438 opportunities to participate in daily physical activity that promotes fitness and movement  
439 skills (Canadian Sport for Life, 2005).

440         The objective of the FUNdamental phase is to learn fundamental movement skills  
441 (running, jumping, throwing and catching, and confidence in water skills), experience  
442 social and mental attributes associated with physical activity and develop physical  
443 literacy through a positive fun approach. All skills should be developed using basic,  
444 appropriate and enjoyable activities. Participation in a wide range of physical activities  
445 and sports is encouraged at the FUNdamental phase.

446         The LTPAD pathway resides within the LISPA framework and acknowledges  
447 high performance success (see Figure 2). Figure 2 is not dissimilar to the twin track  
448 approach for mass participation and international success proposed by the UK based  
449 DCMS / Strategy Unit (2002; p. 124). The Learning to Play and Practice phase should be  
450 about developing skills, playing a range of sports and becoming familiar with the habit of  
451 practice and playing. Specialised movement skills are developed after fundamental skills  
452 have been acquired. Bypassing the fundamental and specialised skill development phases

453 is likely to have a negative effect on the child's future engagement in sport and physical  
454 activity (Côté & Hay, 2002).

455 [Insert Figure 2 here]

456

#### 457 *Opportunities for Continued Involvement*

458 Many opportunities are afforded in the LISPA framework to accommodate an  
459 individual's preference to the extent they wish to continue and develop their involvement  
460 in physical activity and sport. Opportunities are not necessarily discreet from each other,  
461 and individuals can occupy more than one at the same time and can move wherever and  
462 whenever appropriate. 'Active living' is a way of life that values physical activity as an  
463 essential part of living, characterised by the integration of physical activity into daily  
464 routines, e.g. walking. 'Active recreation' is the use of leisure time for activities that  
465 require moderate energy expenditure and produce health and/or social benefits, e.g. going  
466 to the gym. 'Organised sport' is participation in sports that have a significant element of  
467 planned and purposeful physical activity with competitive goals, e.g. local leagues in  
468 basketball. 'High performance' is long-term commitment to training and competing at the  
469 highest standard in pursuit of excellence at national and international levels.

#### 470 *The promotion and delivery of lifelong involvement in sport and physical activity*

471 The framework is not intended to impede the current work of those involved in  
472 promoting and delivering physical activity opportunities, e.g., national governing bodies  
473 (NGBs), schools and coaching bodies. Rather, it is to support those involved in the

474 promotion of long- term involvement in physical activity and establish a more  
475 collaborative approach in pursuing a commonality in approach and objectives. The  
476 success of the framework depends on teachers, coaches, administrators, officials,  
477 volunteers and other individuals who create opportunities that motivate young people and  
478 adults to lead a physically active lifestyle (Leargas / DES, 2005).

479         Many individuals and organisations have a role to play in creating, promoting and  
480 maintaining lifelong involvement in physical activity and sport. Irrespective of the extent  
481 of involvement and responsibility, the LISPA framework provides a way in which each  
482 can invest in pursuing a common strategy. While organisations have, through their own  
483 strategies, identified physical activity and/or sport as important to their organization’s  
484 aims (perhaps with a particular focus on either addressing access, training and/or  
485 support), the LISPA framework will allow such agencies to be cognisant of how their  
486 work can relate to planning and implementing a common strategy towards lifelong  
487 involvement in physical activity and sport, pursue and maintain strong links between  
488 organisations at national and local level and continue to provide opportunities for  
489 involvement in physical activity and sport throughout an individual’s life.

490         It is possible to group stakeholders who have similar vested interests in endorsing  
491 lifelong involvement in physical activity and sport and being involved in its delivery and  
492 promotion. Such stakeholders include parents / guardians, play and childcare  
493 organizations and community groups, GP referrals, schools (particularly primary and  
494 post-primary physical education), third-level institutions, coaches and sports clubs. In the  
495 Irish context, particular stakeholders include the ISC and the National Governing Bodies.  
496 It is important to acknowledge that stakeholders may be involved in a number of stages

497 and that they may have different roles at different times of an individual's involvement in  
498 physical activity and sport. For example, coaches and clubs would be seen to have a role  
499 to play during the 'FUNdamental' and 'Learning to Play and Practice' stages as well as in  
500 the promotion of active recreation, organized sport and high performance. The LISPA  
501 framework encourages groups of stakeholders to pursue and maintain links. The  
502 framework is most likely to be effective if stakeholders can identify at what particular  
503 phase(s) of the model they can provide a quality experience and equal access for  
504 involvement in sport and physical activity.

505

#### 506 Conclusion

507 The LISPA framework is informed by, and presents a modified version of, current  
508 pathway models. The intention of the framework is to be more comprehensive and  
509 detailed than previous models, acknowledging that 'the twin ideas of sporting excellence  
510 and mass participation are not mutually exclusive' (sportscotland, 2006, p. 3). The LISPA  
511 framework set out to emulate a similar concern to that of the previously mentioned  
512 developmental frameworks (Duffy, 2007; sportscotland, 2006), where everyone is free to  
513 choose to participate at any age and at a stage that is appropriate to their level of  
514 development. The LISPA framework embeds LTAD within the more ecologically  
515 informed approach grounded in a developmental socialisation perspective of sport  
516 experiences (Côté & Hay, 2002).

517 It is imperative to understand that 'models can never reproduce the subtlety and  
518 nuances of real life and there is a danger of expecting too much', acknowledging that,  
519 'model building and use should be a dynamic affair' (Lyle, 2002, p. 91). With this in

520 mind, Lyle (2002) proposes a six-stage process for refining models. The first two stages,  
521 ‘begin with assumptions’ and ‘develop the model’, is currently as far as the LISPA  
522 framework has progressed. The aptness of the model by comparing to practice, the  
523 modification of initial assumptions, the re-designing of the model and retesting is yet to  
524 be pursued. It may well be the case that the model is stronger in structure than function  
525 (Lyle, 2002) and it is anticipated that this will be explored in examining how best to  
526 promote the LISPA fraework (ISC, 2007).

527         The LISPA framework is currently a model ‘for’ lifelong involvement in sport  
528 and physical activity, with an expectation of becoming refined as empirical findings  
529 become available, particularly with respect to identifying the extent particular  
530 environmental factors have on individuals’ interest and investment in remaining  
531 physically active. The LISPA framework acts as a template for research with respect to  
532 this issue and, as empirical findings become available, can be used to analyse and  
533 contextualise the likely patterns of lifelong involvement for different populations. There  
534 is more research informing the stages of participant development in performance-oriented  
535 models than the key experiences, processes and transitions involved in participation-  
536 oriented models.

537 In reviewing studies of policy implementation, Houlihan (2005) reports that there is a  
538 need for precise prescriptions for effective management of the implementation process,  
539 acknowledging the importance of the central government departmental location of sport.  
540 The essential pre-condition to the implementation and success of the LISPA framework is  
541 government support. The ISC now need to lobby for an infrastructure that will enhance  
542 the implementation of the framework as well as capital investment in resources and



543 training. A collaborative approach between all agencies involved in the promotion of  
544 long-term involvement in physical activity needs to be established. Implementation  
545 requires the investment of time and effort by all stakeholders to buy-in to the ethos of the  
546 LISPA framework, i.e., to attract, retain and re-engage individuals into lifelong physical  
547 activity. The extent of ‘degree of discretion’ (Houlihan, 2000) encouraged from the  
548 different stakeholders in the implementation of the model ‘on the ground’ is yet to be  
549 determined. An overarching implementation group will be essential and there have been a  
550 number of calls for the establishment of a national alliance that would be best placed to  
551 build connections between the various stakeholders involved in promoting long-term  
552 involvement in physical activity (Leargas / Department of Education and Science (2005);  
553 National Taskforce on Obesity, 2005). It is the interaction between the  
554 stakeholders/interested groups that provide the important dynamic in the process of  
555 implementation (Houlihan, 2005).

556         While there has been a tendency within Irish sport to focus on the promotion of  
557 discrete areas of participation, performance and physical activity, it is envisaged that the  
558 ISC and SCNI are now in a position not only to convincingly align the work of the two  
559 organizations but to hold a stronger position in Ireland to encourage buy-in with all  
560 related agencies and promote alignment between all agencies along with linking to  
561 related government objectives such as health, education and physical development. It is  
562 envisaged that an all-Ireland initiative certainly enhances the likelihood of this happening  
563 with both organizations being accountable (to each other) for the implementation of the  
564 framework. Allocated funding to the roll-out of the framework and a lack of coordination  
565 between the ISC and SCNI could impede implementation. While a lack of available funds

566 for the implementation may be a concern in the current economic climate it is anticipated  
567 that the implementation of the LISPA framework will, in the long term, through shared  
568 resources and a coordinated approach, be a more efficient and effective way to resource  
569 sport and physical activity. If funding for NGBs was linked to whole sports planning  
570 through the LISPA framework it is suspected this would encourage buy in from the  
571 NGBs. By matching their commitment and involvement in the LISPA framework NGBs  
572 are being provided with a marketing strategy that encourages them to be inclusive of all  
573 those who wish to be involved in their sport, whether at the 'Active Start' level or high  
574 performance. Performance indicators of successful implementation would be more people  
575 involved in sport and physical activity and a more aligned sports system, from schools,  
576 clubs and NGB's to government departments. While such performance indicators have  
577 been achieved internationally (Bergsgard, Houlihan, Mangset, Nodland & Rommetvedt,  
578 2007), it appears unlikely that Ireland will move towards delivering these performance  
579 indicators unless there is a strong driving force behind the implementation working  
580 towards a coordinated approach that is policy driven. Such a driving force needs to be  
581 positioned to impact the system not only be encouraging buy-in from all related agencies  
582 but having direct access to inform and work with those individuals and organisations that  
583 oversee the implementation of an all-Ireland sport and physical activity framework.

584         The LISPA framework strives to provide an inclusive approach to the relationship  
585 between all opportunities for involvement in physical activity and sport throughout an  
586 individual's life, a broad and ambitious goal. The framework has been adopted by the  
587 ISC as the model to underpin all its work aimed at improving participation rates in sport  
588 in Ireland, although the Council have yet to identify how best to promote the framework.

589 What happens to the LISPA framework beyond this stage of formulation is an area of  
590 concern, acknowledging that ‘arrangements for implementation are integral to what  
591 policy becomes’ (Kay, 1996). It will be interesting to observe in what way the current  
592 framework evolves through the implementation phase and the related process of  
593 contestation this entails.

594

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