



Club Engagement
Survey 2021
FINAL report
NIPBA results
April 2022



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Research aims and methodology

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Research aims and methodology

Research Aims

The purpose of this research commissioned by the IBF, is to determine the level of satisfaction amongst bowling clubs, with regard to existing support mechanisms, gauge their views on relevant topics and help shape the way forward.

This inaugural piece of research is being undertaken, from a desire to better understand the key issues facing clubs, especially during a pandemic and to help inform and shape our strategic vision for the future.

Survey Approach

We have briefly outlined below the key stages of this research.

- Project initiation
- Stakeholder meetings
- Questionnaire design (including pilot)
- Survey implementation
- Reporting

This approach uses sound methodological procedures that will produce results that are statistically robust, reliable and representative.

Methodology

A multi faceted approach was used to help gather feedback utilising an online survey, postal questionnaire and telephone follow up to help maximise the response rate.

To help with response rates, all club secretaries received the online survey link and associated reminders from their own 'association' secretary.

Overall, 124 completed responses were achieved over a five week fieldwork period during November and December 2021, **with 15 responses from the NIPBA.**

*Please note that numbers may not add to 100% due to rounding.

**Please note overall results include data from the Bowling League of Ireland (RoI).

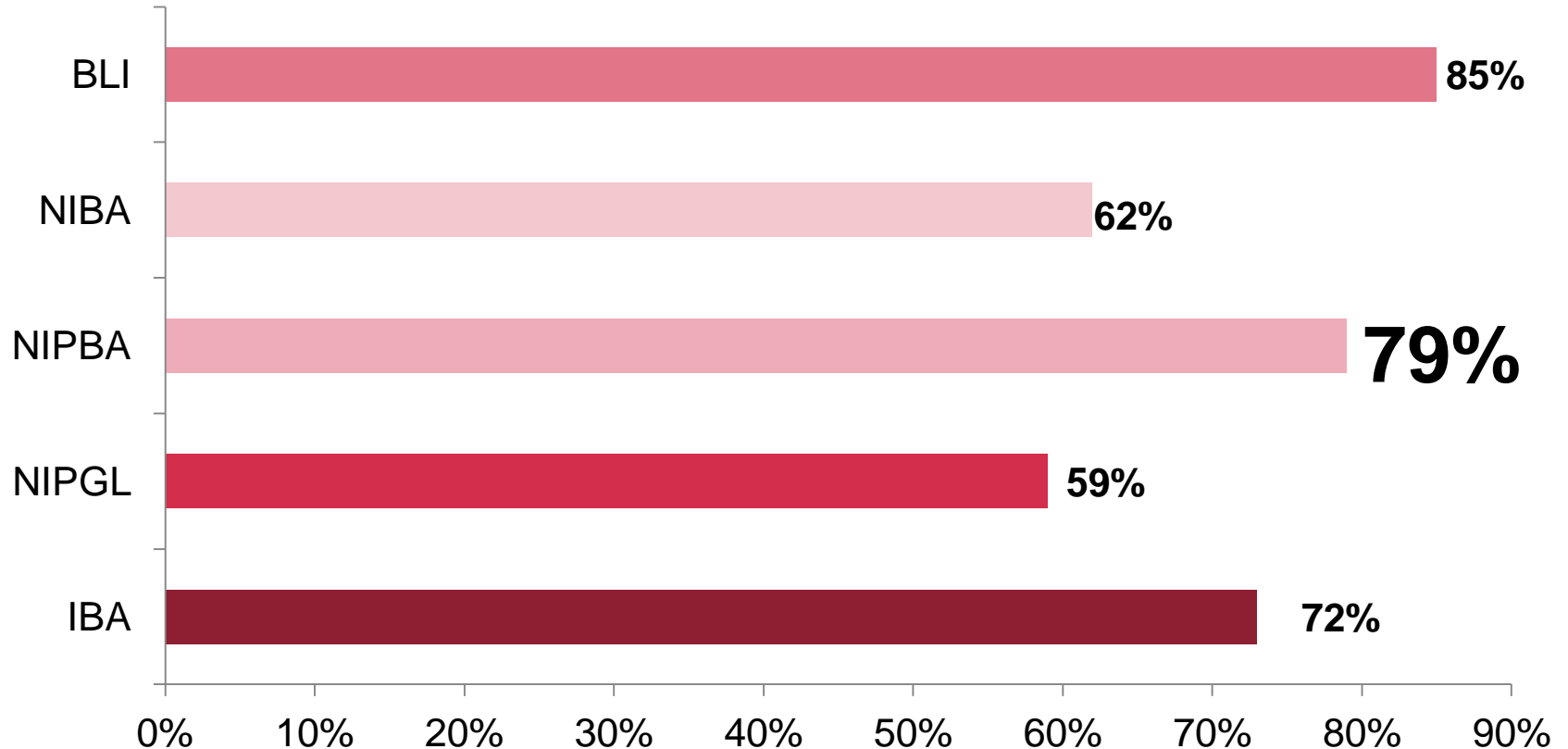


Response rates

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Response rate by Association

The NIPBA achieved an excellent overall response rate of 79%!



Response rate per association

Association	Completed / Issued	Response rate
NIBA	31/43	72%
NIPBA	15/19	79%
NIPGL *	20/34	59%
BLI*	22/26	85%
OVERALL	88/122	72%

NOTE; *Response includes membership figures for both male and female:

BLI – 19

NIPGL – 5

NIWPGL - 1

Overview of Results

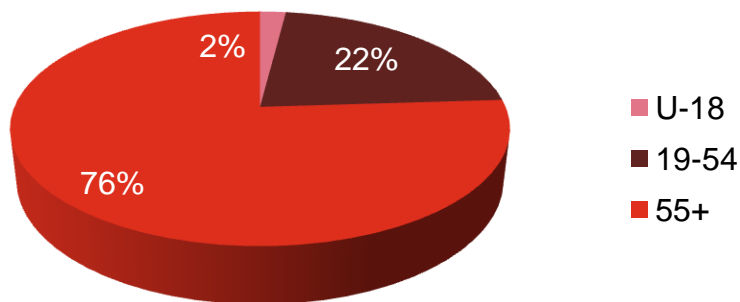
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Membership – categories

How many TOTAL active playing members does your club currently have?

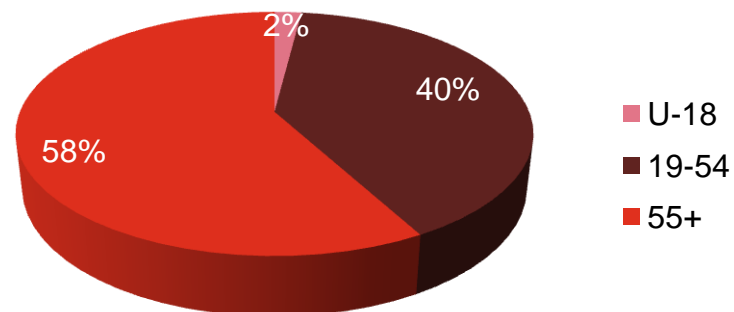
Only 2% of the NIPBA playing membership are in the U-18 category, similar to the IBA, whilst 58% are within the 55+ category in comparison to 76% within the IBA. The NIPBA have 40% of active playing members within the 19-54 age category compared to only 22% within the IBA.

Overall – Age Demographic



Base: 124

NIPBA – Age Demographic

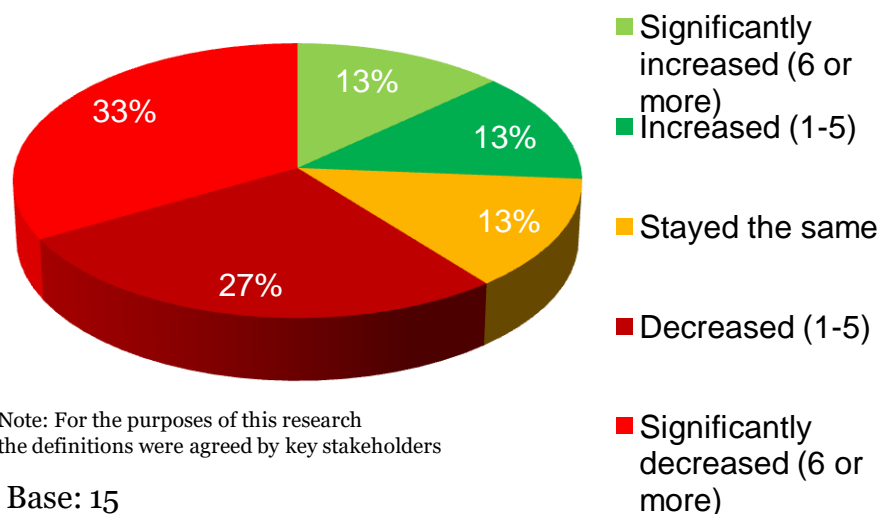


Base: 15

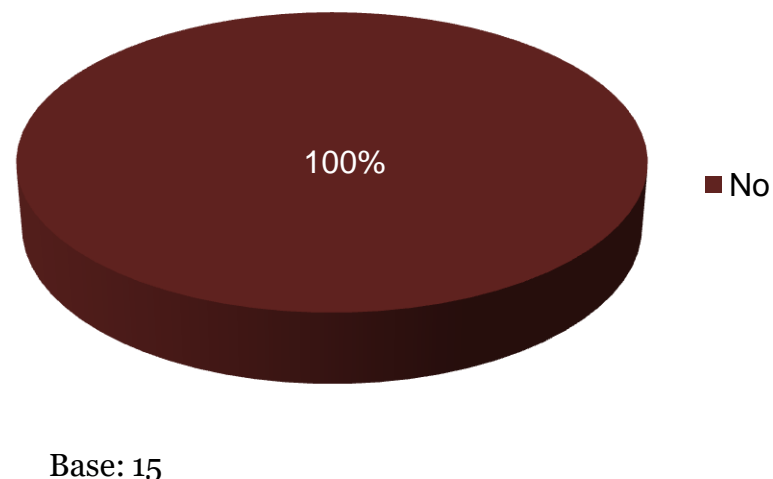
Membership - trends

60% of NIPBA clubs surveyed indicated that they had decreased or significantly decreased in terms of membership numbers, compared to 44% of IBA clubs, whilst 26% indicated that they had increased or significantly increased (IBA clubs – 38%). Reassuringly no NIPBA clubs indicated that they feel at risk of closure due to Covid effects or other compared to 21% of IBA clubs. However, 27% of clubs surveyed have only 25 members or less, which is a key area of concern.

Over the last 3 years has the bowling club membership of your club...?



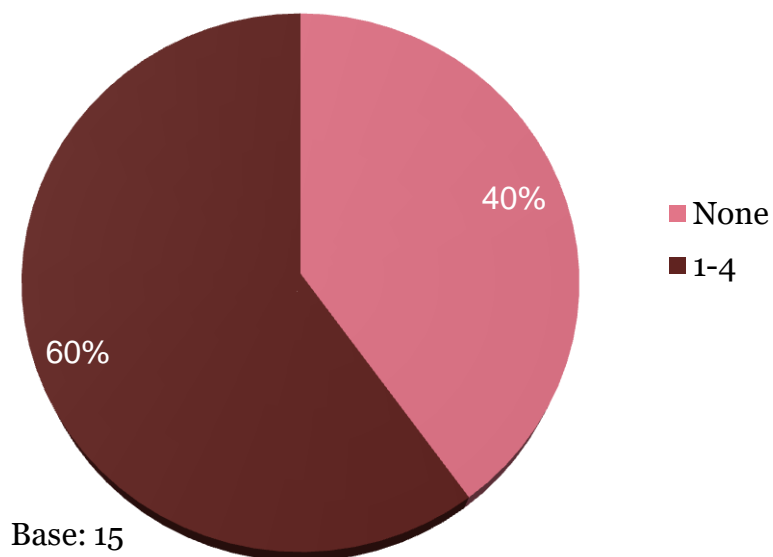
Do you think your club is at risk of closure due to the effects of COVID 19 or other factors?



Membership – disability

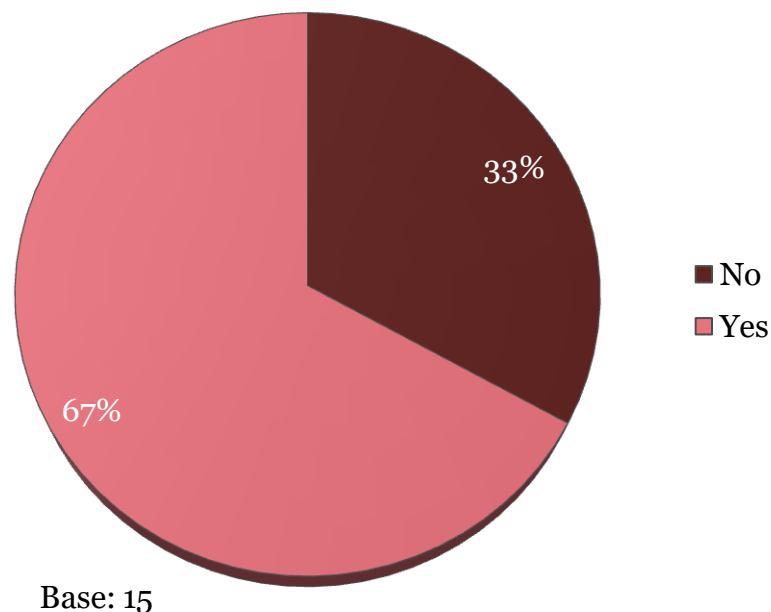
Considering our sport is a 'perfect fit' for all genders, ages and disabilities it is interesting to note that 40% of NIPBA clubs surveyed have NO active playing members with a disability (IBA – 44%) and 33% of clubs of clubs have NO disability provision.

How many active playing member's with a disability your club currently has?



NOTE: (Disability is defined as a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long term effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day to day activities).

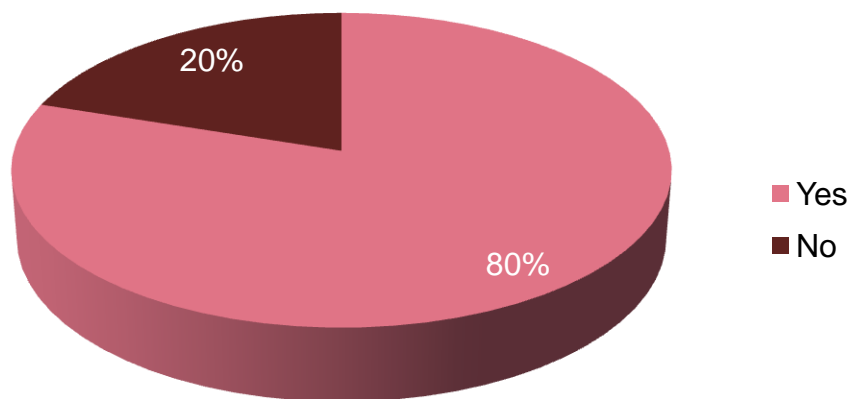
Does your club have any provision for disabled bowlers?



Partnerships

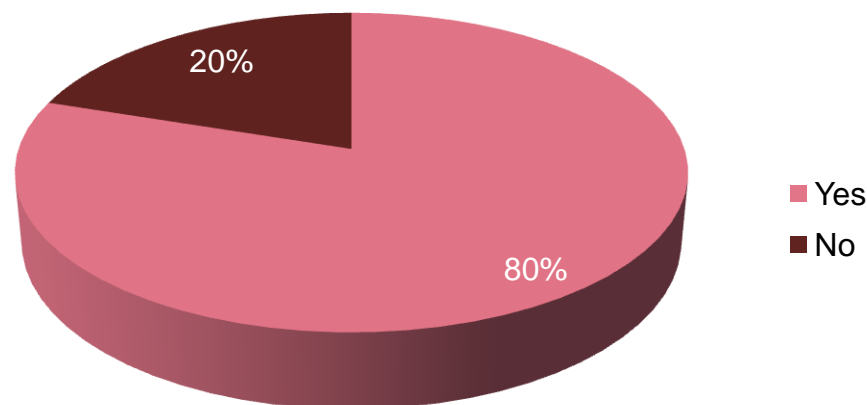
80% of clubs have links with local council and/or Sports development officer. One fifth of clubs (20%) of clubs do NOT actively promote or market the benefits of bowls to the local community. Networking and developing effective community engagement strategies are paramount to the sustainability of our clubs.

Does your club have links with your local council and/ or Sports Development Officer?



Base: 15

Does your club actively promote itself or market the benefits of bowls to the local community?



Base: 15

(using various channels of communication, eg, social media, newspapers, sponsorship, etc)?

Partnerships

Provide details of your clubs promotional activity to the local community?

Of those clubs actively promoting themselves to their local communities, the key channels of communication include the local press, word of mouth and to a lesser extent social media with local sponsorship being utilised to help raise the club profile.

However, feedback would suggest that there appears to be an over reliance with the local press, undoubtedly there is an opportunity to engage more fully with the local community using social media platforms. It is important that our clubs have the necessary support to help them embrace and understand the opportunities provided by social media platforms and e-communications.

“
Photos and write ups in the local press.

Advertising boards and club sponsorship for kit.

We have a Facebook page and a number of local sponsors.

Sponsorship deal with a local company but in other ways our marketing is limited.

Charity BBQ every year and FB page. .

FB page and word of mouth!

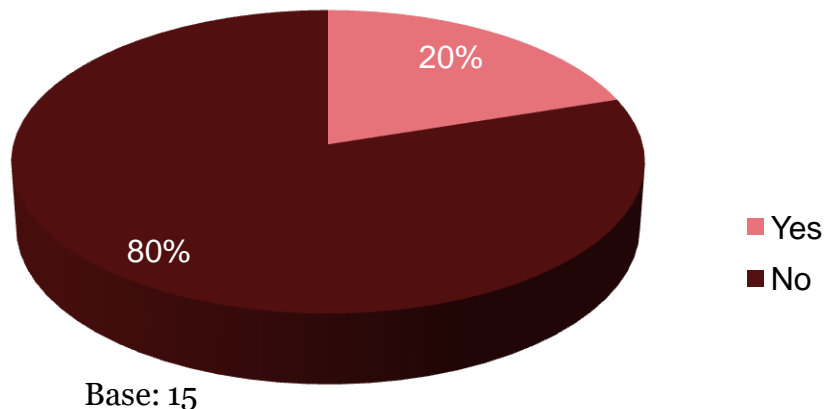
Articles in the local press!

”

Partnerships

Similar to IBA, 80% of NIPBA clubs have NO links or partnerships with local schools/ community group, however small pockets of good practice are evident. Ensuring that clubs have the necessary support and tool kit to help engage and build sustainable partnerships with local schools and community groups is essential.

Does your club have any links or partnerships with local schools/ community groups?



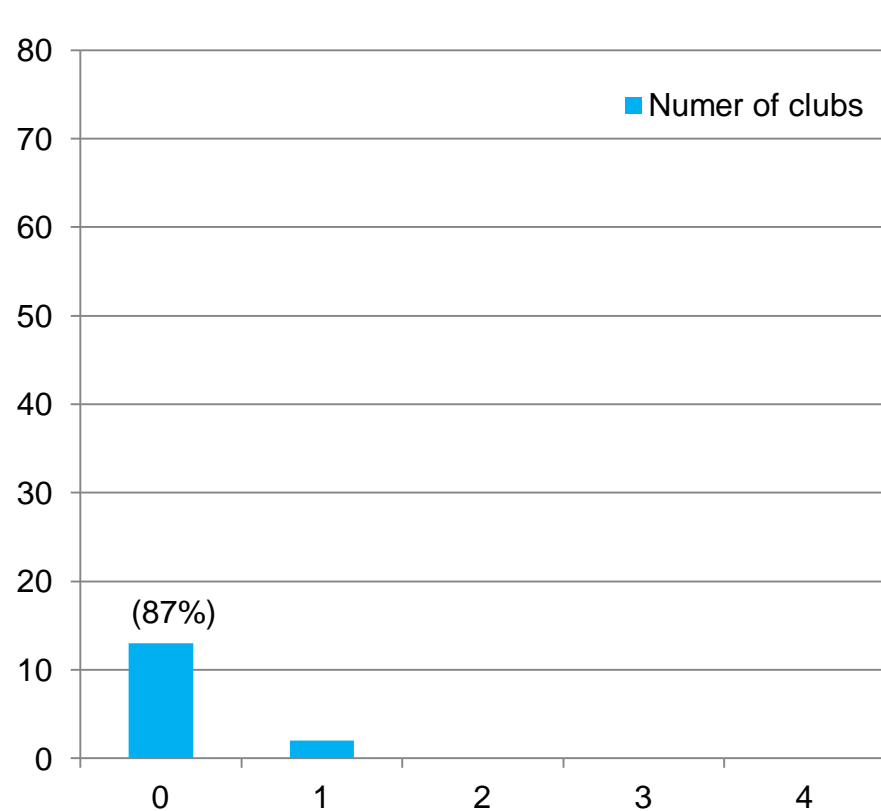
“The facilities are currently used by schools and community groups”

“Project Reboot led to engagement with local community groups and schools”

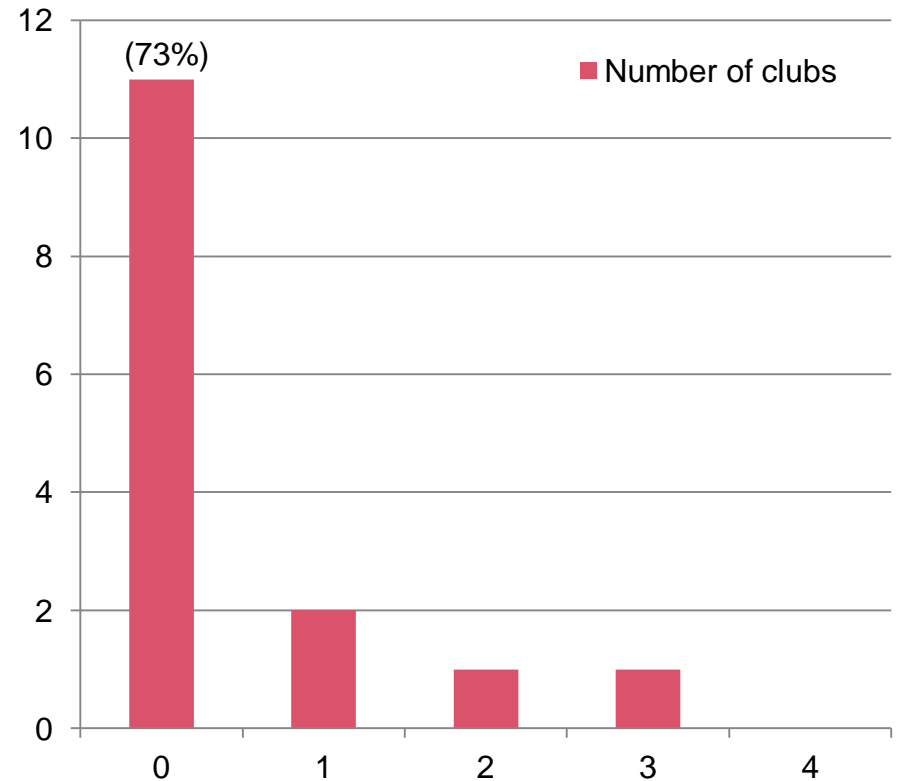
Coaches and Umpires

87% of NIPBA clubs have NO qualified coach at their club and 73% of clubs have NO umpire at their club.

How many qualified coaches your club has?



How many qualified umpires your club has?

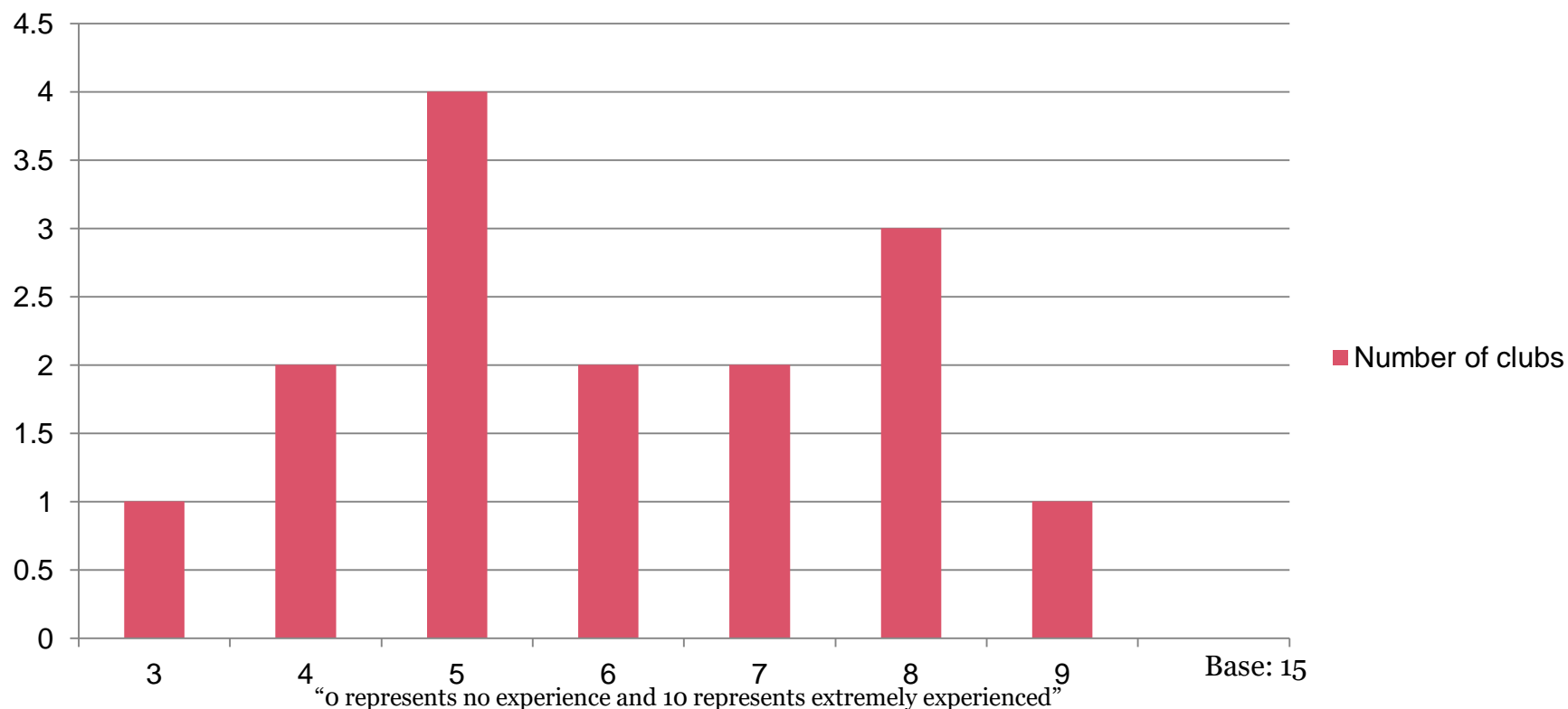


Base: 15

Social Media

47% of NIPBA clubs rated their level of experience with 'social media and e-communications at 5 or less. It is important that our clubs have the necessary support to help them embrace and understand the opportunities provided by social media platforms and e-communications. Furthermore, 47% of NIPBA clubs indicated that they would welcome help focusing upon social media up-skilling and website/ development.

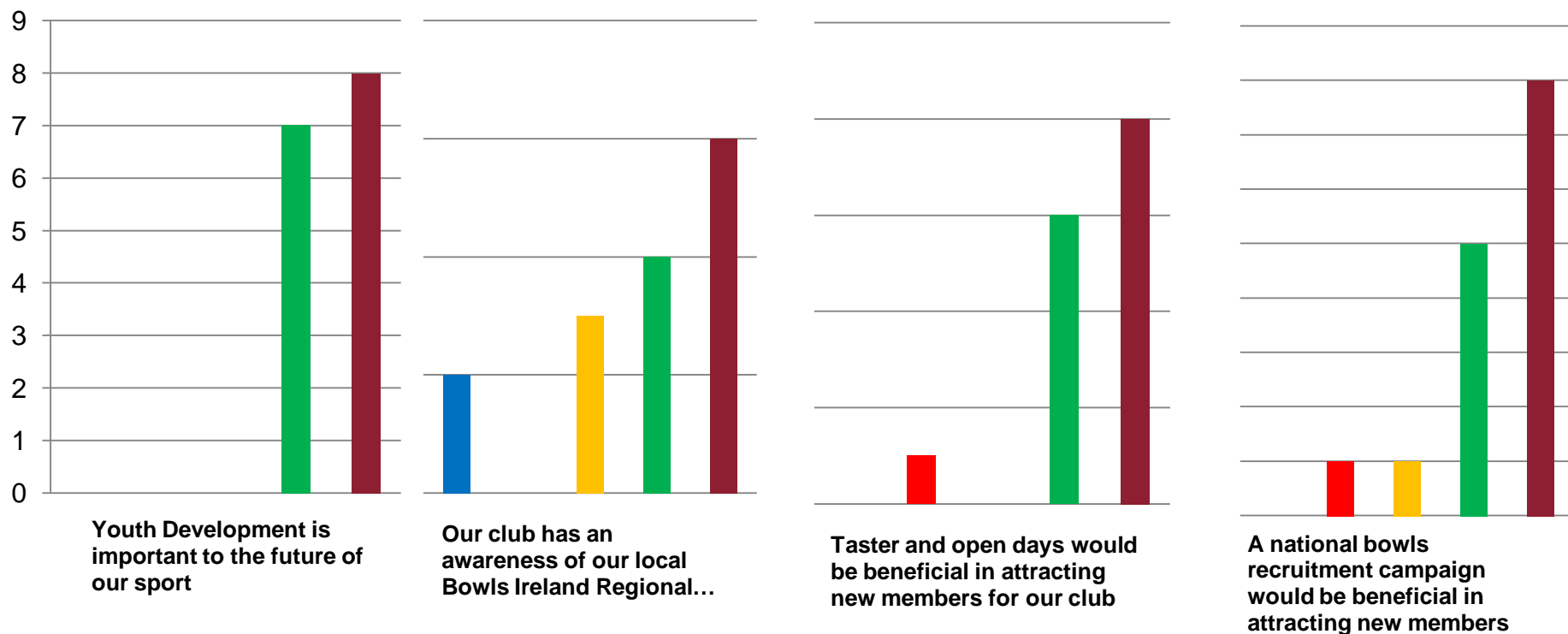
How would you rate your clubs overall level of experience with social media and 'E-communication'?



Topical Club views

NIPBA clubs recognise the importance of youth development, however not all have an awareness of the 'Bowls Ireland Regional Academies' (BIRA). A high proportion of clubs agree/strongly agree that taster/open days and a national bowls recruitment campaign would be beneficial in attracting new members.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree /disagree Agree Strongly Agree



Base: 15

Key themes to increase participation

What additional steps does your club need to take to get more people participating in our sport?

Some of the key themes identified by clubs to help get more people participating in our sport include the more effective use of marketing tools, targeting schools and the local community. Utilising open days/ taster events, as vehicles to encourage the local community to try bowls.

We have a development plan submitted to the council and have plans to increase our membership, particularly from under-represented groups.

*More use of open days!
Get official coaches!*

Open days at the start of the season and continue them into the summer.

Re-introduce 'fun nights' for locals and visitors and publicise it.

Running out of options.

Be proactive, be engaged and willing to help your club.

*Get the schools Interested!
More media contact.*

Developments to League/Cup formats

How could the current league and cup structure be developed better to meet needs?

Many differing views were expressed however some themes were evident around being reasonably happy with the current formats. Some potential improvement suggestions were around the reduction in the number of players and ends played.

“

Shorter formats – be innovative and introduce something new and exciting!
Reduction of matches to 18 ends.

Return to rinks play for the top divisions and allow the lower divisions to play 12 players.

The current set up is fine for us.

Better matching of skill levels within league and cup competitions.

Keeping team games triples instead of rinks.
Smaller team numbers.

”

NGB support for clubs

What can your National Governing body do to help your club get more people participating?

Key areas of support requested by clubs included marketing, coaching support, club development and more effective leadership.

“

Utilise international players to help support our sport.

Be supportive of club development activities like other sports and show leadership to drive our sport forward in the new modern world.

Financial support and advertising programme to support our game.

*More communications with the grass roots!
Provision of material to help encourage new participants and promote coaching lessons with qualified coaches to allow our members to then coach beginners.*

More showing of bowls material on social media.

Help with increasing publicity. It is very disappointing to witness the coverage decline when compared to other sports.

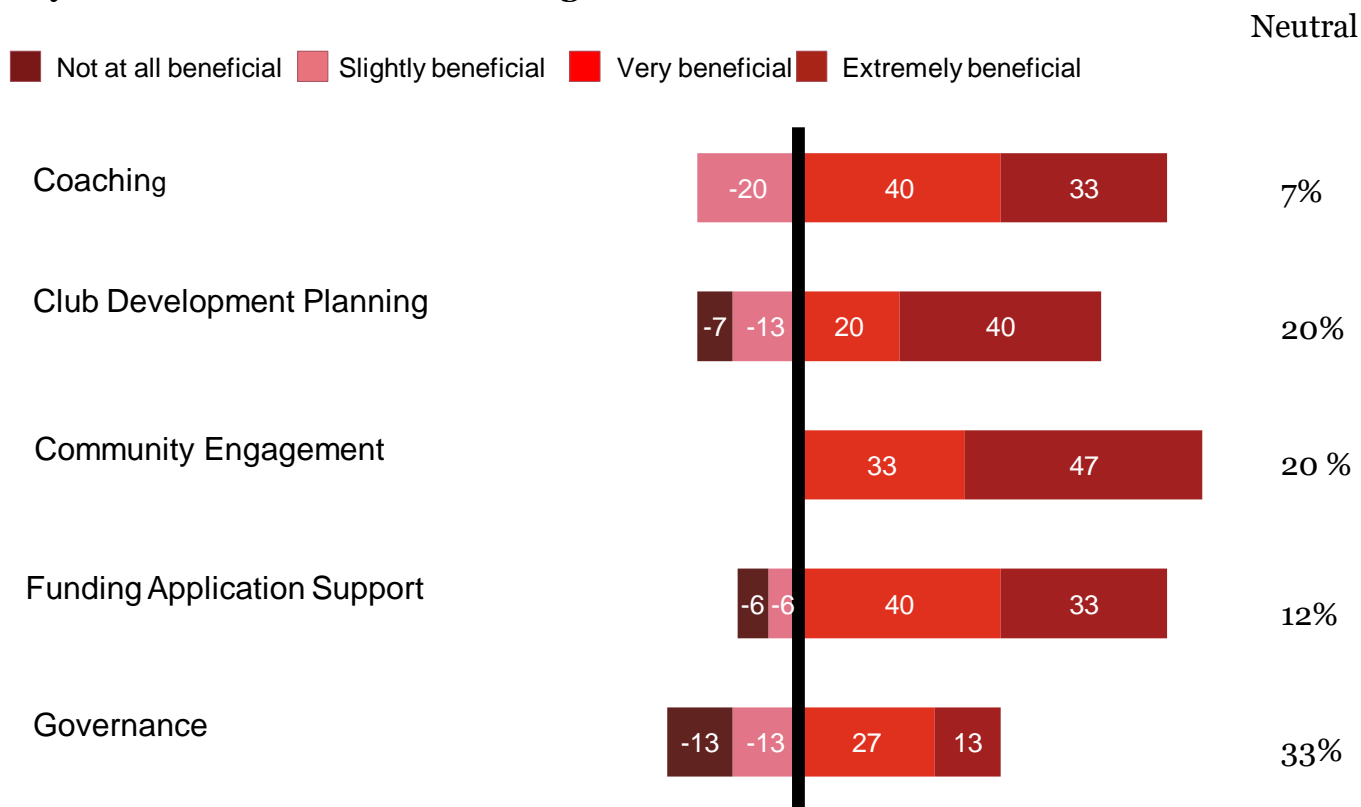
More assistance in the setting up and arranging of club open/coaching days.

”

Club Services

Clubs indicated that support in all 10 areas would be welcomed with the key areas being identified as recruitment and retention, coaching, funding application support, community engagement, social media and e-communications and youth development.

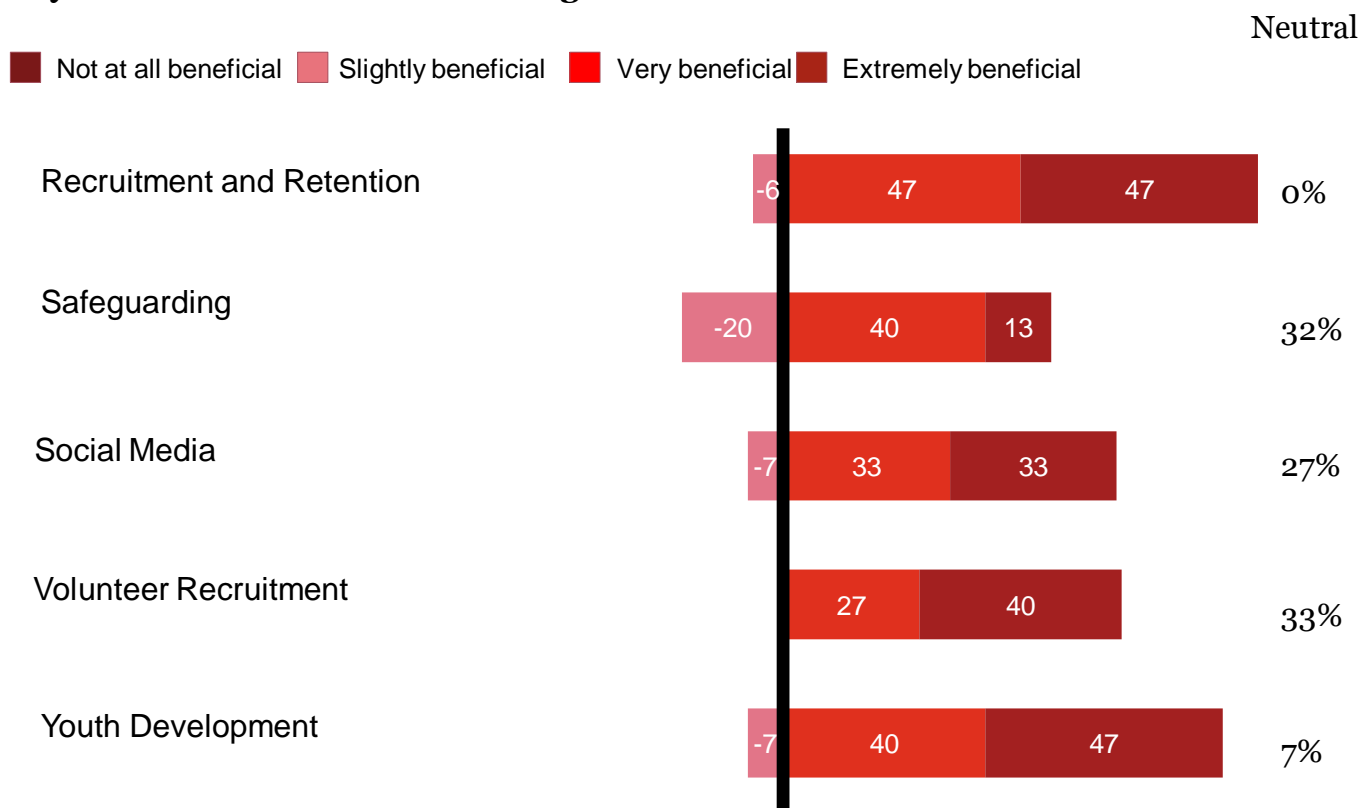
Please give your club views on the following statements:



Club Services (contd.)

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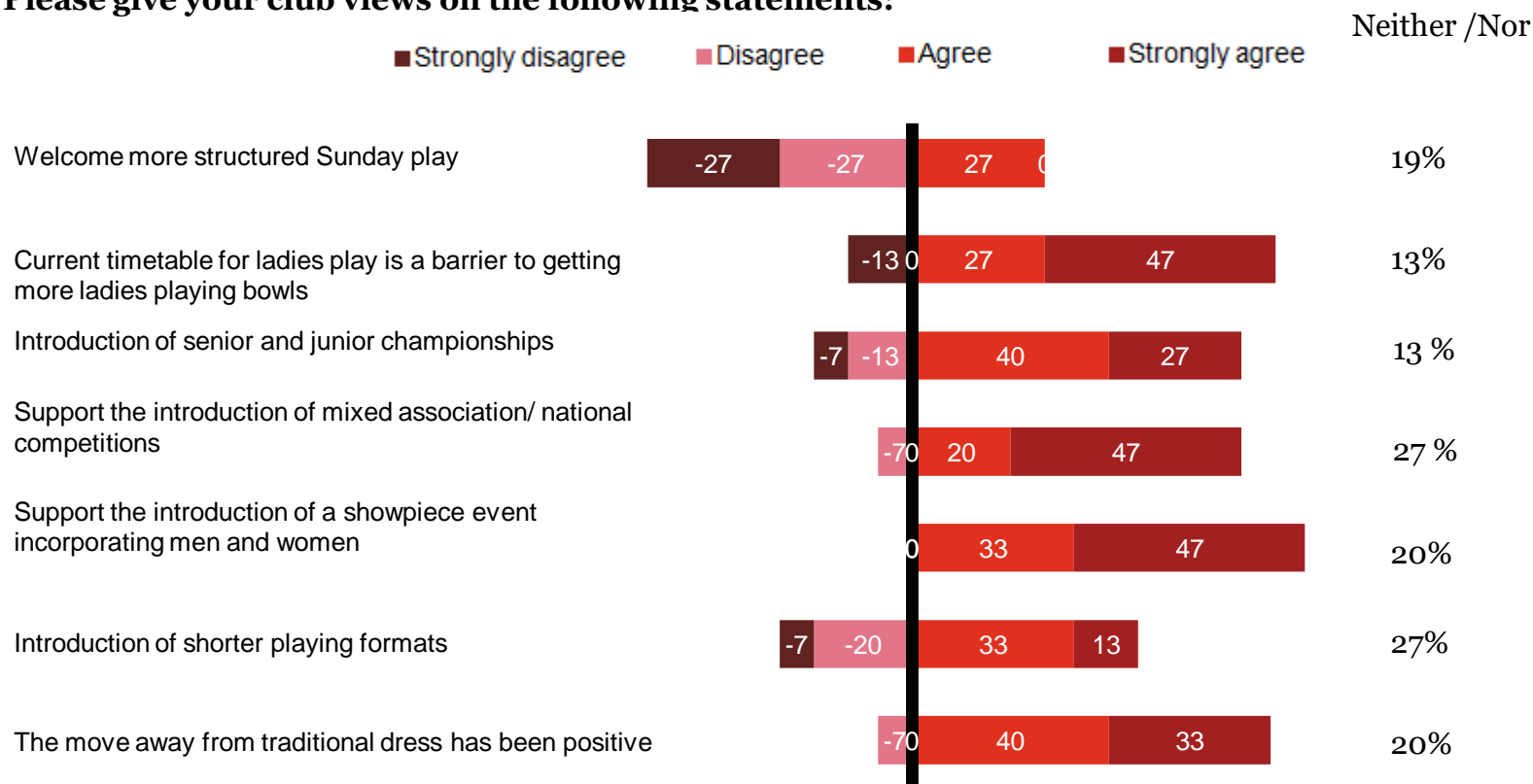
Please give your club views on the following statements:



The Way Forward

54% of NIPBA clubs **disagree** with the introduction of more Sunday play. 74% of clubs either agree/strongly agree that the current timetable for ladies bowls is a barrier to attracting players. 67% of clubs either agree/strongly welcome the introduction of senior/junior championships. A high proportion of clubs (67%) agree/strongly agree with the introduction of mixed association/national competitions. 80% of clubs support the introduction of showpiece event incorporating men and women. Shorter playing formats provided a more mixed response with 46% of clubs advocating for the concept. The move away from traditional dress received broad support with 73% agreeing/strongly agreeing with the change.

Please give your club views on the following statements:



Base: 15

Club Engagement Survey 2021

Key challenges facing clubs

What are the key challenges facing bowling clubs over the next 5 years?

In order of frequency the key challenges identified by clubs over the next 5 years include:

Recruitment and Retention

Retention of current players and recruitment of new members.

Recruitment of younger members is a priority.

Survival

Smaller clubs will not survive due to older members not being fit to play.

Survival of clubs, attracting new members and apathy with clubs and associations.

Financial costs

Increasing financial pressures especially for private clubs due to declining and stagnant membership.

Marketing and Promotion

Remaining visible in the community is of paramount importance.

Encouraging new ways of thinking.

Key Messages

4

Key findings

MEMBERSHIP

UNDER REPRESENTATION

40% of clubs have no active playing members with a disability and 33% have no provision.

AGEING DEMOGRAPHIC

55+ category represents 56% of the total playing membership.

Only 2% are U-18.

SURVIVAL

NO clubs feel at risk of CLOSURE!

27% of clubs have a membership of 25 or less!

59% of clubs have experienced a decrease in membership over the last 3 years.

OUR CLUBS

CLUB SUPPORT

Development of a club support structure and continue engagement with stakeholders.

Key areas identified include retention/ recruitment, coaching, community engagement and social media and e-communications.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT/ PARTNERSHIPS

20% of clubs have no links with council or SDO

20% of clubs do NOT promote

80% of clubs have no partnerships with local schools/ community groups

SOCIAL MEDIA

A need to up-skill is evident as 47% of clubs rated their level of experience with social media and e communications at 5 or less.

CLUB VIEWS

LEAGUE/CUP FORMATS

Generally a broad welcome for the continuation of the current set up.

However, some potential improvement suggestions were around a reduction in the number of players and ends.

THE WAY FORWARD

More effective leadership from NGB's would be welcomed.

The introduction of a National bowls recruitment campaign received positive support

Over 70% of clubs either agree/ strongly agree with the following:

- The introduction of mixed assoc/ national comps
- The introduction of a showpiece event featuring men and women
- A move away from traditional dress has been positive
- Support the intro of mixed association/ national comps.

Recommendations and next steps

5

Recommendations and next steps

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

The **key findings** identified from our club engagement survey will help **target priority areas** and should inform future strategic direction in the future.

Plans should be developed to address priority areas and these building blocks if implemented will help grow the sport of bowls through the development of appropriate club support systems, effective planning and decision making, which will result in ensuring clubs are more welcoming, sustainable, prepared for growth and ideally the heart of local communities.

EMERGING PRIORITIES

Build a more positive and inclusive sports culture with the **provision of more sporting opportunities for women and people with disabilities**.

DEVELOPMENT OF A CLUB SUPPORT PROGRAMME/ TOOLKIT ..

Focusing upon priority areas, for example, recruiting/retaining club members, which continues to be critical for many clubs especially on the back of COVID and a downward trend in membership. Without intervention this trend will continue.

PROMOTE WELLNESS AND WELL BEING

Our clubs require support to help them **engage effectively** and sell the benefits of our sport to **local communities**, eg, physical/ mental health and social interaction

STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT

Continue the strategic planning process by engaging further with stakeholders and putting the building blocks in place for the development of a new strategic plan to help keep our sport moving forward and to chart an exciting course for our sport.

79%
response
rate!

**DEVELOPMENT
OF A ROBUST
CLUB
STRUCTURE!**

The last word

6



THANK YOU
to all clubs
for taking the time to
consult and provide
feedback!

