



Northern Ireland
Assembly

**COMMITTEE FOR
CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE**

OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)

Role of Sport NI

23 June 2011

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE FOR CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Miss Michelle McIlveen (Chairperson)
Mr William Irwin (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Dominic Bradley
Mrs Brenda Hale
Mr David Hilditch
Mr Michael McGimpsey
Mrs Karen McKeivitt
Mr Cathal Ó hOisín
Mr Robin Swann

Witnesses:

Mr Nick Harkness)
Professor Eamonn McCartan) Sport NI
Dr Shaun Ogle)

The Chairperson:

Good morning. You are very welcome to the new Committee; thank you very much for attending this morning. We have already met Nick. As you will appreciate, there are a number of new members, so we welcome this morning's presentation and will follow up with a few questions.

Professor Eamonn McCartan (Sport NI):

Good morning, Chair and members; thank you inviting us here to provide you with a briefing on the role of Sport NI (SNI). At the outset, I offer my personal and SNI's congratulations to you all on your election and on being returned to the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure. One or

two faces are a bit more familiar than others. I see those who have been very much involved in sport, such as former Minister McGimpsey, former members of the Committee and people who are involved at the coalface, whether in soccer, rugby, or Gaelic. We are delighted that you are here because we share a common aim. We had a very strong relationship with the Committee in the past, and its members were great advocates for the case for sport. While working together, we progressed sport quite significantly under the previous Minister in the past four years. So, we are absolutely delighted to be here.

I am accompanied by two colleagues. Truth be told, if we had enough seats, we would have four, because the director of corporate services is in the wings. If you have any difficult questions, you can ask him, and we will take the easy ones. We congratulate the Chair on being elected. I understand that this is your first Chair of an Assembly Committee. We wish you good luck. Nick is in charge of our facilities and community sport — I am abbreviating these titles — and Shaun is essentially in charge of performance sport and the Sports Institute. Nick also has great responsibility for some of our other facilities, including the wonderful Tollymore National Outdoor Centre. At some time in the near future — as with previous CAL Committees — it would be absolutely tremendous if you could come to one of our fantastic facilities, whether it is the cricket ground at Magheramason, the centre at Tollymore or the Sports Institute. We extend that invitation to you. I dare say that you will want to discuss that. If, after your discussions, you feel that it is worthwhile, we would be delighted to organise that.

So, with your permission, Chair, the presentation today will cover the rationale and the key challenges for investment in sport and physical recreation. It will also cover the Northern Ireland's Government's response and commitment to addressing the challenges facing sport. It will cover Sport Northern Ireland's vision, key achievements and priorities, and will also touch on the London 2012 Olympic strategy, which was developed by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) in 2007. With your permission, I will move speedily through it.

Essentially, there are two reasons to invest in sport; the intrinsic value of sport and the extrinsic value of sport. Sport for sport's sake, and investment in sport for the good. Everyone deserves, as a human right, to have the opportunity to participate in a sport of their choice and at a level of their choice. Of course, the extrinsic benefits of sport are those things that sport can

actually deliver to society to make society and the individuals that live in it somewhat better. We can look at it in relation to improved health and well-being, and focus particularly on obesity, one of the issues of the day. We can look at the tsunami of obesity that has come across the Atlantic from America into Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom, and is on its way across into Europe. We are all aware from the press of the cost that that will have, currently and in years to come.

We are also going to look at better education. We know about physical education and physical activity within schools and how sport, physical education and physical activity can contribute not only to the physical well-being but the academic achievements of students. We are looking at the stronger economy, and how sport and the sporting sector can contribute to growing the economy of Northern Ireland, whether it is through sports tourism or golf. We are all aware of the great successes that we have had this year in golf, and we will touch on them many times. When success comes, I do not think you should mention it only once. We had Graeme McDowell, Rory McIlroy, Darren Clarke in the New York Open, and we had Michael Hoey, who is at the institute, in the Madeira Open. That is just to mention four golfers; we will mention many more as we go through.

We have the role that sport can play in building and developing inclusive communities, and improving good community relations, and of course we have the very important role — which has been clearly evidenced over the last period of time — of the positive image of Northern Ireland. Sport can send out a very positive image through the performance of its sportsmen and sportswomen.

If we look at the improved health and well-being, sport, physical activity and physical recreation help tackle overweight, obesity and reduce the risk of chronic diseases, such as type 2 diabetes, mild depression, etc. There is empirical evidence for that, so it is not just my opinion. In doing that, sport saves society money, because it produces healthy, well-balanced people, and we all know the costs of ill-health and unbalance. It can produce better education. There is empirical evidence to show that academic performance, self-esteem and self-worth can be enhanced. It is a great vehicle for re-engaging marginalised youth in particular. We know lots of young men and young women who, for whatever reason, have chosen to almost step outside

society. We believe that sport, regardless of the level at which it is played, is a great vehicle for bringing them back in.

It produces a stronger economy. I will give you a very interesting statistic. There are approximately 18,500 jobs associated with the sports sector, from sports clubs, sports bars, sports restaurants, golf courses, groundsmen, horse racing, etc. Sport-related activity adds £638 million to our economy and accounts for roughly 2.3% of gross domestic profit.

In relation to inclusive communities, sport helps build social capital. To quote a former Prime Minister and Taoiseach, Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern have contended publicly that sport is the strongest agent for building social capital. Of course, above all, it produces a very positive image of Northern Ireland when it is demonstrated and conducted properly.

That is what we believe, and we thought that we would share it with you because this is a new Committee. I will move on now to the rationale and challenges for investment in sport. One of the key areas that we are involved in is trying to increase participation. Remember, we believe that it is a basic human right that people should have the opportunity to participate in a sport of their choice at a level of their choice.

We wish to increase participation and thereby afford everyone that opportunity, but we have a lot of work to do. One of our biggest challenges is to increase participation. A recent survey demonstrated that only 37% of adults participate in sport and physical recreation at least once in seven days. Therefore, our task is to drive up participation levels, and we want to work closely with the Department and with the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure on that. One of the key areas that we need to work harder on is primary schools. Only 17% of primary schools and 9% of post-primary schools in Northern Ireland deliver two hours of physical education a week. The rest of the United Kingdom aims for five hours, and we are falling short of two hours.

We have limited time, and I am flying through this, so I will now talk about performance. One of the aims of Sport NI is to increase the performance of our athletes in national and international competition, and we seek to build a world-class, high-performance system. The director of that objective is on my left, and he will talk about that in greater detail. We are on our

way in that process. A couple of years ago, we built a sports institute, costing between £10 million and £12 million, at the University of Ulster, which is one of our key partners.

Already, the results of that can be seen in the performance of our sportsmen and sportswomen, whether that is in golf, which I just outlined, or in the Commonwealth Games — the 2010 games were our most successful for a very long time. We were the sixth most improved nation in the Commonwealth Games. A world-class system is being put in place for Northern Ireland sportsmen and sportswomen, whether the sport is golf, boxing, motorcycling or surfing. Indeed, Nick Harkness, to my right, is an international surfer.

Please bear with my enthusiasm. We seek to indentify the talent. For example, Rory McIlroy's parents identified a talent in him, and they grew that talent as they might grow a tree. They provided him with the appropriate support services, including sports science, sports medicine, physiotherapy and coaches. They took Rory's very raw talent to him becoming the winner of the US Open. There is plenty of talent in Northern Ireland, and, as we go through the development of our world-class, high-performance system, we will produce more champions. We are producing lots of champions. We have a list of 87 people who, in the past three or four years, have won a medal in major European and world competition.

One of the other challenges that we seek to meet with our investment is to improve our facilities. Although we have some very good facilities, we still have a little way to go when they are benchmarked against other areas of the United Kingdom. One of the challenges is that we need to meet with local authorities and governing bodies to ensure that we play that little bit of catch-up to ensure that our athletes and our citizens have the same opportunities to access facilities of the same standard of those in the rest of the United Kingdom. For example, you may or may not know that 70% of local authority facilities are in the region of 20 years old. Any of you who know about buildings and houses will know that, as buildings get older, they require higher levels of refurbishment and become less attractive.

One of the great statistics is that 60% of school sport facilities have no community use. Of course, Sport Northern Ireland has been an advocate of dual use. In other words, when we plan the sporting estate, we advocate that it should cater for the school and the community. In his

report, Sir George Bain, the former vice chancellor of Queen's, advocates that no schools should be closed at the weekend. I hope that there are no headmasters on the Committee.

One of our big challenges is to use sport, physical activity and physical recreation to improve health and healthy well-being. I have said enough, and I will pass you over to my colleague Nick Harkness, who will talk on the strategy for sport, Sport Matters.

Mr Nick Harkness (Sport NI):

The policy context for sport, the development of sport in Northern Ireland and the work of Sport Northern Ireland is articulated in 'Sport Matters: The Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation, 2009-2019'. For the first time, this document outlines the Northern Ireland Government's commitment to addressing many of the challenges facing sport. It sets out the case for ongoing and increasing investment in sport, much in the way that Eamonn has done already. It emphasises the views and aspirations of 150 organisations and consultees who contributed to the document and its thinking, and it is used to determine the investment priorities for Sport Northern Ireland and for our partners over the next 10 years. The document was agreed by the Northern Ireland Executive.

On page 8 of the slides that we have provided, the 26 targets are summarised into three pillars. Those areas include participation, which has 11 targets; performance, which has nine; and places for sport facilities, which has six associated targets. Seven of the targets within the strategy reflect the absence of suitable baselines. Those are short-term targets to resolve the matter, and five of those have been achieved. Seven of the targets are medium term, and 12 are long term, outcome-focused targets. Their impact and achievement will be measured at the end of the strategy's life cycle.

A research framework will provide an evidence base that will inform the measurement of progress against the longer term vision of the strategy, which is a culture of lifelong enjoyment and success in sport.

Delivery structures for implementation have been set up. The Minister chairs the Sport Matters monitoring group, and there are three Sport Matters implementation groups — one for

each of the three pillars in participation, performance and places. Sport Northern Ireland has reconstructed its own committee structures to reflect those three salient pillars within the strategy.

No single organisation has the human or financial resources to deliver the strategy on its own. A genuine partnership approach is required. That partnership includes district councils, various Departments and public and private sector bodies. Only through that joined-up approach will the targets and aspirations articulated in the strategy be fully realised.

Dr Shaun Ogle (Sport NI):

I am going to try to drill down a bit more into the work of Sport Northern Ireland and say something about our vision and what we intend to deliver. We live in a constantly changing world. One of the things about sport is that everybody is an expert on it, whether they are armchair experts or whether they play it. That makes our job extremely difficult from time to time, but we try our best.

We have and share the vision of a culture of lifelong enjoyment and success in sport, which contributes to a healthy, fair and prosperous society. Not only do we say it, we live it out. Last weekend, you saw that through Rory McIlroy.

I am going to reinforce some of the things that Eamonn and Nick said. Of particular concern to you as elected representatives is that nine out of 10 people in Northern Ireland value sport in some way. They want to see people in Northern Ireland succeed at the highest level. That is fantastic; there is a positive, good story in there. We have to support you and, hopefully, vice versa, in delivering against that public value. We have to put in place things which, over time, are going to lead to people such as Rory and many others succeeding on that scale. I say quite simply that we are in the export business. If you are exporting that, you cannot get much better; it is absolutely fantastic. To achieve that, we have to start way back. It is all the deliberate practice that Rory did in his front garden and all the boring bits that you do not see in the gym and elsewhere. It starts in the community and in the schools. We have 91 community coaches working with 100,000 people; the involvement of 200 primary schools and 100,000 children; and 30 community sports development officers. It is an achievement to get all of that on the ground. That has produced. Over the past three years or so, we have won 89 medals in major sporting

events, including the Delhi Commonwealth Games, which was the highlight for many of us. We have 80 full-time equivalent posts working in 33 governing bodies of sport and a sports institute. I echo what Eamonn said, in my role as executive director of the institute. We have performer development centres, and we are investing in 81 athletes to enable them to compete across the world and to get the training and backup that they require. We invested over £85 million of lottery funding into new and approved sporting facilities. We have a magnificent new centre at Tullymore and 46, if not more, health-and-safety projects running across a multitude of different stadiums.

I will sum up the impact that we make. In all areas, we connect people with an opportunity that improves their quality of life at a local level and, indeed, at the highest level of international and global sport. I firmly believe that the grass roots are intimately connected to the top of the sport. If you get it right, you can put a system in place. As Eamonn said, we have a multitude of talent in this country — enough to replicate Rory time and time again.

Our approach to delivery is simple. We have three catchwords: lead, invest and enable. We are not only a funding organisation. There is an enormous amount of expertise in Sport Northern Ireland in community sport, coaching, high-performance sport, capital project management, safety at sports grounds, governance and accountability, event management and much more besides. We use that to ensure that the money granted to us is used in the best possible way. We combine our knowledge, expertise and skills with those of others. I reinforce the point that the strategy could not possibly happen without that joined-up approach.

We have key priorities for going forward. To increase participation, we have an Active Communities programme, and many of you will have constituents involved in that; an Awards for All programme; a highly successful Activ8 Eatwell programme; and we have been working with the Special Olympics and Disability Sports Northern Ireland.

We want to establish linkages that create a performance system. One of our biggest legacies from London 2012 must be that we give people in Northern Ireland the same opportunity as people routinely have elsewhere in the UK to experience what it means to be part of a world-class sporting system. We are making considerable progress on that. We will continue to provide

hands-on services to our best athletes through the institute — that is an incredible story. With 24 or 25 sports representatives and between 300 and 400 athletes, we are moving forward. We hope to attract up to 10 pre-Games training camps to Northern Ireland.

We are about to start investing £110 million in the development of three regional stadiums, and we are in the throes of completing the 50 m swimming pool. Community-based schemes are at phase 3, and the implementation of the safety at sports grounds legislation is ongoing, so we are busy.

Professor McCartan:

In addition to being busy, we are, I hope, being productive. Let me put on record that productivity comes about as a result of the work of not only Sport NI but many other stakeholders. Sport could not exist without the governing bodies of the various sports or volunteers. The governing bodies include those of Gaelic games, rugby, soccer, badminton, equestrian sports, and so on. Some 98% of sport in Northern Ireland is amateur. If we find that figure to be inaccurate, we will write to the Committee correcting it, but it is roughly 98%. However, a huge amount of sport is delivered through volunteerism. We are trying our best to increase the professionalism of volunteers and increase their capacity. We work closely with local authorities, which expend a large amount of capital and revenue on the delivery of their leisure services. We also work with the Department of Education in schools and colleges. There are also other stakeholders with whom we work. As Nick will tell you when he talks about Sport Matters, delivery of the sports strategy is not solely our responsibility. However, by pulling all the strands together, we can deliver a very strong sporting system in Northern Ireland, and such a system is beginning to emerge.

The 2012 Olympic strategy is owned by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. The Games will commence in London on 27 July 2012. DCAL has identified three public service targets. The first target is to maximise for the whole of Northern Ireland the social, economic, political and cultural benefits that emerge from that major event. There is no point in calling it a major event; it is a mega-event. Nothing is bigger than the Olympics. The second target is to secure a torch relay for Northern Ireland. The torch was here recently, at a boxing club in the city centre and at one of our schools. The third target is to seek to attract at least 10 national teams for

pre-Games training and holding camps and events.

When preparing this presentation, I was going to include a quiz, but I thought that, at our first meeting, it might be a bit cheeky to quiz members on the difference between training camps and holding camps. What are training and holding camps? Pre-Games training and holding camps are a relatively new concept that has evolved over the past three Olympiads. They are generally associated with the larger, wealthier countries, and one of the best, if not the best, was the British Olympic Association's camp organised under the leadership of its then chief executive Simon Clegg. The association sought to bring its whole team of 300-plus people, although the number varies from Olympics to Olympics, to a single site in order to generate the notion of fraternity, team spirit and oneness. Although a number of countries followed that example, a huge number did not. Therefore, training and holding camps mean different things depending on one's country of origin.

A training camp is where athletes — the number of athletes varies from a handful to 300-plus — come to train as part of their preparation for the Olympics. That training includes tasting the food and water, becoming acclimatised and getting used to the language and systems that operate in the host country. In that way, athletes are not seeing everything for the first time only one day before competing in the biggest competition of their life. There is tremendous variation. Some countries will have training teams of three or four athletes: the boxers might decide to go here, the swimmers there, and the track and field athletes elsewhere. Many countries will have extremely small teams. In my professional judgement, the bigger countries will try to get as close to London as they possibly can.

There is rarely humour at these meetings, but, when we were trying to find the easiest way to describe a holding camp, we decided that they were a bit like Swiss finishing schools. A week or 10 days before competing in boxing, soccer, fencing or whatever, the athletes stay in the holding camp to finish off what they have been doing. A holding camp is exactly as it sounds: athletes are on hold for between four days and a week before competition. Of course, in a holding camp, the focus is intense. The outside world does not exist, and opportunities to interact with the community and outside groups do not exist. Athletes' focus is on their first event and the competition.

We are seeking to bring 10 training/holding camps to Northern Ireland, and we already have quite a number in place. There will be, for example, an Olympic qualifying boccia event at the University of Ulster, which will involve the world champions. Just last week, the University of Ulster held a test event for the GB team, which, I understand, contains the largest number of Olympic and world champions, to ensure that there will be no hiccups when a significant number of boccia athletes come to the Games.

We are discussing other events that we hope to bring in the near future. If I may draw a comparison with inward investment, you will note that Invest NI does not tell the world which companies are coming to Northern Ireland until it has signed them up, and we are a bit like that. We deal in a wide range of sports such as boxing, athletics, badminton and event championships. For example, the Minister recently announced that Lisburn will host the Irish International Badminton Championships, which are funded by Sport NI. That competition is a qualifying event for the Olympics, so a host of Olympic potentials will go there to try to qualify for London 2012.

The Olympics could generate three legacies: sporting, economic and social. We are taking the lead on a number of issues, because we regard the Olympics as an accelerant to implementing the strategy for sport and increasing the participation legacy. My colleague Nick said that 100,000 young people participate in Activ8 and Active Communities. The 50 m pool will be our places legacy. We would have liked more, but that may be for another day. Our performance legacy will come from the preparation of our athletes, who are performing well on the world and European stages, and the hosting of pre-Games training, camps and, most importantly, events.

We have tried to outline the position, and we fully recognise that we have done so quickly. We would be more than delighted to come back at any time if you were kind enough to invite us. Why should there be continued investment in sport? Sport NI is capable and competent, along with the other stakeholders, the governing bodies of sport and the volunteers, and we have a proven capacity and capability to lead, co-ordinate, plan and develop sport. The implementation of Sport Matters is crucial and is not, to be perfectly straight with you, solely the responsibility of Sport NI or DCAL. It is the responsibility of a multitude of Departments, including the

Department of Education, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and others. Sport NI is fully committed to delivering the strategy for sport and the Olympic strategy. I fully recognise, Minister —or Chair — *[Laughter.]*

Mr D Bradley:

There is a leak somewhere.

Professor McCartan:

I fully recognise, Chair, that that was a speedy run-through, and I apologise for such haste. I hope that, in some small way, we have demonstrated our enthusiasm. We will try to answer questions as best we can. If we do not have answers now, we will try to provide written answers.

The Chairperson:

The Committee is left in no doubt about your enthusiasm for sport.

Nick focused on Sport Matters. We had a briefing from Dr Hull before you arrived on the resource requirement and the difficulties that the 2011-15 Budget presented. Will you develop that for the Committee?

Mr Harkness:

Eamonn referred to elite facilities, and the Committee, in its former guise, considered an elite programme. Certain aspirations are articulated in the strategy, one of which was 10 upgraded or new Olympic-related facilities, which, from the point of view of budget, remain aspirations. However, the speed at which delivery is achievable may have to be reconsidered in light of budget constraints. As Eamonn said, Sport Matters is a joined-up strategy across a number of Departments, public bodies and the private sector. The involvement of fewer partner organisations and other Departments, in conjunction with reduced resources, might affect the speed of delivery.

Professor McCartan:

Our difficulty will be pace. I am fairly confident that we will, eventually, achieve all the targets in Sport Matters. In the good times, we would have achieved them a bit quicker. We are in not-

so-good times now, so we have to adjust the pace according to our funding. However, it is still our aspiration to have those facilities because, as we said at the beginning, we need to ensure that our facilities are at the same level as those in the rest of the United Kingdom. We will get there, but the pace will be a bit slower.

The Chairperson:

Eamonn, you emphasised the need to use publicly owned land and the importance of open access to schools. I note that the Committee for Education also has an interest in that. What discussions have you had with the Department of Education? Are you on course to meet your target of 2014 in Sport Matters?

Professor McCartan:

I am happy to update the Committee on that. Towards the end of the previous mandate, meetings were held between the two respective Ministers, their officials and us with a view to determining how best we can do that. It is, obviously, easier to meet that target with newbuilds than with older buildings. Nonetheless, much can still be done.

I will give you a practical example. In a former life, I was a PE teacher, and my school was located in one of the areas of greatest social deprivation. When the school closed in June, the 25 m pool, handball courts, two outdoor basketball courts, the running track and three grass pitches closed. I understand the maintenance and refurbishment needed. However, that can all be planned and managed. Our thesis is that, particularly when the available capital is limited, we need to sweat the capital that we have. We have two sets of considerations: those of the public and those of the school.

In England, Scotland and Wales, dual use is a 30- or 40-year-old concept. For various reasons, dual use did not pick up here, but we now live in a new world. We should pursue dual use, whether that be, with respect to Mr Hilditch, the availability of a school's soccer pitches for his club or for the local GAA club.

Mr Harkness:

There are some fantastic examples of dual use throughout Northern Ireland: Laurelhill

Community College in Lisburn, St Patrick's High School in Keady and Downshire Primary School in Hillsborough. In all those cases, a catalogue of funding created a school infrastructure, possibly with a link to the community association, and the facilities are being opened up to the community. We are working to help to achieve greater dual use. Eamonn talked about meetings between the two Ministers, and there is a meeting with Department of Education officials in the diary for Friday, so that work is ongoing.

The Chairperson:

That is useful. Would it be possible to get some feedback?

Mr Harkness:

Yes. We would be delighted to provide it.

The Chairperson:

The previous Committee also had an interest in the issue as part of its inquiry into participation in sport.

Mr Hilditch:

I declare an interest as a project officer on two recent Sport NI-funded projects and having availed myself of a number of Sport NI coaching and event management courses.

It is becoming increasingly evident that fees charged by associations, one in particular, for coaching courses and badges are now five times what they were six or seven years ago. As your role is advisory, Eamonn, the issue does not relate to you directly. However, volunteers at the grass roots find it difficult to raise the sort of funds needed to coach at that level. In the past year, one particular association probably showed a profit of about £0.5 million. We have all been trying to get sponsorship for guys to go on those courses. However, for the working-class bloke who wants to coach at his local playing field, it is becoming increasingly difficult to afford to qualify as a coach.

Professor McCartan:

I have a funny feeling that I know the organisation in question, but for the purposes of this

meeting, we will talk in the abstract. Coaches are crucial. I must advise the Committee that voluntary coaches are the backbone of every association sport: association football, soccer, rugby, Gaelic football, badminton, hurling, handball, or whatever. Therefore, at the level of policy and principle, in order to ensure the supply of coaches, it is important that access to the coaching continuum should be as easy as possible. There is no doubt that where the cost of coaching courses is prohibitive, it restricts the development of the sport, whether that is at the grass roots or high-level performance. Therefore, if we are to achieve our objectives of increased participation and improved performance, we must provide appropriate coaching courses at the level required, and price should not be a deterrent.

There are ordinary working-class people who volunteer to coach young people on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, and maybe even on Wednesdays and Fridays, and devote 20 or 30 hours of their time every week. If somebody tells those people that it costs x for the coaching course, it is not a great incentive, it is not a great statement of value to the people who devote their time, and it is, undoubtedly, a prohibiter. Then, there is the domino effect from not having coaches. Young people need qualified coaches to help with the technical side of the sport and to satisfy other related matters, such as child protection. So we are strongly in favour of exercising our influence on governing bodies to ensure that the fees charged for their coaching courses, which can be astronomical, are reduced.

Dr Ogle:

We flagged that up with the association and plan to have a mature discussion with it on the benefits of coaching to the development of skills, particularly in young players. We need to get that right, because 16 of the 26 targets in the strategy for sport rely on coaching. We are acutely aware of the pull of coaching courses as an income generator and of the tension that creates. We have opened those discussions and would be delighted to keep you up to date.

Mr Hilditch:

I am glad to hear that. Thank you.

Mr Ó hOisín:

I declare an interest as someone with a lifetime's involvement in GAA at club and county level,

including in Sport NI-funded projects.

Although the funding is critical and very welcome, you would also acknowledge that community investment down through the years has got us to this position. In my discipline, if you go to any crossroads, village or parish, there are GAA grounds owned by the organisation and run on a voluntary basis.

Some people say that the success of the GAA is because of the involvement of the community. On occasion, people do not want to see me coming, and it is not because I am a politician; it is because I normally have a pocket full of tickets with me. Other sports look on with envy and feel that they are regarded as Cinderella sports.

Last week, I shared a taxi to here from Glengall Street with the chair of the Ulster Boxing Council, and we talked about various subjects. My local boxing club, of which my son is a member, currently holds county, Ulster, Irish, British, and European titles. Had it not been for Amir Khan in April, we would have had a world title as well, but I will not dwell on that.

Eamonn O’Kane is one of the Commonwealth champions to whom you referred. Much of the success and improvement in our performance at the Commonwealth Games was down to boxing. Boxing is looked on as a Cinderella sport and one in which the amateur ethos prevails. I wonder whether the promotion of the Olympics in particular and the Sport Matters programme, which, according to all estimates, will result in an £81 million shortfall, will have more adverse effects on smaller sports such as boxing?

Professor McCartan:

No. First, I will comment on the importance of boxing. I will give you a simple statistic: if memory serves me right, boxing has won more Commonwealth and Olympic medals than all of the other sports put together. There is no doubt that amateur boxing has produced tremendous European, World, Commonwealth and Olympic medallists. We hope that the sport will continue to grow, and we have invested heavily in a significant number of boxing clubs, though not as many as we would like.

For whatever reason — it might be capacity — most, but not all, boxing clubs tend to use facilities that fall well short of satisfactory. It is incumbent on us to build the capacity within the association and to build the proper, modern, fit-for-purpose facilities enjoyed by all the other sports. In doing so, we must also build other strands of the sporting capacity, such as capacity in the organisation itself, capacity in coaching and capacity in the athletes, who are excellent. Many of those athletes benefit from using the Sports Institute.

Dr Ogle:

We certainly do not regard boxing as a Cinderella sport. If you lined up all your pound coins on the table and had to make a return from an investment, what sport would you go for? Boxing would be top of the pops. We currently have a number of boxers in one of our performing development centres in Belfast and several more working with us at the institute. We have plans with the institute that will, we hope, come to fruition at a later stage. Boxing definitely does not lose out when it comes to investment in its athletes. We have a fantastic North/South relationship with the centre of excellence in Dublin and the coaches there.

We brought a number of boxers into the institute, which is quite a clinical facility and looks very different from other boxing clubs I know. The younger athletes were so impressed that they wanted to base themselves there. That is an example of driving up standards and letting coaches work in a different way. We make quite an investment. What Eamonn was saying was that we need to develop a relationship with the governing body of boxing. We need to work more closely with those in the sport so that they do not feel threatened by what is happening much of the time. We already have a close relationship with Eamonn O’Kane and others.

Professor McCartan:

We regard boxing and boxing athletes as, if not our number one priority, certainly contesting that spot. We sponsor simple events such as the Ulster Elite Boxing Championships. When they could not get a sponsor, we agreed to step in for three years. We have heavily funded a number of clubs, including that of the former Ulster Boxing president, Pat McCrory, and Monkstown and Holy Trinity boxing clubs. We got a great return on our investment in boxing clubs, and boxing is a priority for us.

Mr D Bradley:

Eamonn, I timed you, and I think that you are in line for the gold medal for the speed of your presentation and the amount of ground that you covered.

I want to return to the topics that we are discussing, one of which was the community use of schools. My view is that, in many cases, there is a duplication of facilities by the education and local government sectors. Quite often, schools provide grass pitches and a sports hall when those facilities already exist elsewhere in the community. Do you agree that there should be more joined-up planning of the sports estate by local government and education? Rather than duplicating existing facilities, we should be trying to provide facilities, which are not already available in the area, on a joint basis between education and local government?

Professor McCartan:

I could not support the question posed more, and I could not put it as eloquently as you did. We need to share planning. The Committee may or may not know that the Department of Education has a planning guide book, known as the “green book”. We are trying to ensure that, when we build a facility, it is built to a standard that meets the needs of the school and community. We do not build two thirds of a football pitch, seven eighths of a basketball court, or dust pitches. We recognise that there will be increased use, but there is tremendous new technology. I say to those of you around the room who are of a similar age to me that 3G and 4G pitches are a revolution. There is very limited use of grass pitches because they eventually go bare. However, the 3G and 4G pitches, which are now suitable for most major games, can be used almost 24 hours a day. If you go into that planning model that we fully support, as you quite rightly say, with a local authority and a school, plan the facilities to meet both sets of needs and take into account what is there and what is not, you could get a great return on investment in times of capital shortage.

Mr D Bradley:

I noticed the three Ps in your presentation. The first two were participation and performance. Obviously, participation comes before performance. Quite often, however, participation moves into a competitive mode of performance and many participants then fall out. I mentioned to the Committee that I was at a presentation of some research that Bosco Gaelic Football Club did in Newry on the 18-22 age group. It found out that there was a huge dropout of players because

they were not achieving first-team status. Quite often, they went to university and were not good enough to get on the elite teams there. Do you have any schemes or programmes to ensure that people who were engaged and quite active in sport can be re-engaged in it, not just at that age group?

Professor McCartan:

You highlight one of a number of difficult age categories. For example, that tends to take place very much for boys between 16 and 21; it is that transition from minor to senior. It also tends to take place very much for girls, who are relatively good in participation terms up to around 14 or 16 and then fall off the cliff face. There are a number of ways. I will lead with one, and perhaps Shaun and Nick will follow. One reason why there is a failure to continue participating is that, generally speaking, people participate in one sport and are very quick to recognise whether they are going to be good at it and get on the team. However, multi-sports clubs offer an opportunity for someone who does not particularly develop in one sport to participate in others. Coming out of Cooke Rugby Club, for example, you have rugby, cricket, athletics and aerobics — I cannot remember the technical name for it. Five or six sports take place there. That affords people opportunities to participate in a sport other than the sport that they started in. That is one of the ways in which they can do it.

Dr Ogle:

It comes down to the individual finding the level with which they are happy. A lot of dropping out is about more than not being good enough. They find a level and decide to go with that, but many other things are happening in their lives. Few people commit to what we term deliberative practice. I keep returning to Rory McIlroy, but all of our successful sportspeople took the decision to not do other things and concentrate on their sport. People will find their own level. There is no silver bullet that will end dropout. Obviously, the governing bodies of the sports have to be very conscious that they do not contribute to that by there being too much competition and not enough time devoted to training. People need to be given more time to come through the system, and so forth. It is a whole mixture of things, but it comes down to the individual. If the opportunity is there and they have time to practice deliberately and they improve gradually as they go along, they will take a decision as to what they want to do. As you know yourself, you can only get so many players on to the park.

Mr D Bradley:

Has Sport NI any programmes for re-engaging people who were actively involved in sport?

Mr Harkness:

The strategy for sport identifies a model framework called LISPA (lifelong involvement in sport and physical activity), which recognises the fact that people participate for some years, perhaps to competitive level, and then want to go somewhere else. It brings them back to the bottom again for physical activity reasons, rather than competitive sport reasons.

We have been doing a lot of work with the Department of Education on physical literacy. When you learn to read, write and count, you need literacy and numeracy skills: a foundation that allows you to build on that for the future. To have a physically active life, you need physical literacy skills, such as jumping, throwing, catching, falling and rolling — all those types of skills. Eamonn has talked about multi-sport clubs. We have been working to develop a network of multi-skills clubs, with some based in district council facilities and schools, so that young people who do not have the aspiration for competitive sport could know, appreciate and value being physically active. They learn those sorts of physical skills. It is around multi-skilling and not multi-sporting, if you know what I mean. A lot of the governing bodies, including the GAA, to give it great credit, have started junior programmes, where the coaching is not based around the specific sport but more on the physical literacy skills, in the hope that young people might take up that sport or a different sport whenever they have that building block of skills that would allow them to develop.

Professor McCartan:

It provides them with a base, so that when they leave the sport of their choice, either because of their ability or something else, they have developed the fundamentals.

I will put a wee test to the Committee, and I hope that there are no golfers here. I play golf very badly. When I started to play golf, I thought that I would play fairly well. Much to my amazement, I am not as good as Rory McIlroy. In fact, I play “searcher golf”. When I hit the

ball, I spend the next half hour searching for it. I have no doubt that, with good practice — which is your point — and if I decide to practise, I will improve. However, I may decide not to practise golf.

Mr D Bradley:

Excuse me, but what is boccia?

Professor McCartan:

Boccia is a paralympic sport. It is a form of bowls for people who are fantastic athletes but are paralympians. It is played by people who are in power chairs, which is a wheelchair that is controlled by a gearstick. I played the world champion and Olympic gold medallist on Thursday or Friday of last week, and he beat me.

Mr Swann:

I have a question on sporting facilities. You said that most of the local councils, from 20 years plus, are looking to have our three national stadia in probably another three to four years' time. In your opinion, are we ready or do we have the facilities for the World Police and Fire Games?

Professor McCartan:

We have the facilities to hold the World Police and Fire Games. Those facilities have been approved by the World Police and Fire Games Federation.

Mr Swann:

Have they identified which sports —

Professor McCartan:

They have identified them all, and we are in the process —

Mr Harkness:

We have staff seconded to the World Police and Fire Games who will be working on that. They have gone through a process of identifying facilities that would be suitable, and a number of hubs have been identified. Centralising a number of sports in a series of hubs for administrative,

volunteering, security and other reasons is the most economical way to run those games.

Mr Swann:

It is possible to get a list of where they will be?

Mr Harkness:

They have not been approved by the board of the games. We have made some recommendations, and the work is ongoing. A limited company has been established to run and take responsibility for that, and we are advising it.

Mr Irwin:

Thank you for your presentation. Sport is a big player out there. You talked about a joined-up approach between councils and yourselves. I am not sure that it works as well as it should work. For example, I visited Loughall Football Club last week, and it has 200 children involved in different teams and games, and they are led by volunteers and coaches. Early years are important, but they are finding it difficult to raise small amounts of funding. I am not talking about mega money, but small amounts of funding for different projects. The council even charges the club for the facilities. Therefore, sometimes, it just does not work right through. Those early years are very important, and small amounts of funding can make a big difference, but that club is finding it difficult.

Professor McCartan:

I could not agree with you more. Sometimes, we get carried away and talk in millions, tens of millions, thousands, and hundreds of thousands. I have been a member of small clubs, and I know that £200 or £300 is an absolute fortune to many small clubs, and it enables them to buy all sorts of equipment, such as footballs. It also enables them to pay for transport. I will defer to Mr Hilditch on this, but, if I recall, it costs £60 or £70 to buy a soccer ball. An O'Neill's football costs about £50. An old man called Jimmy used to count our balls, and he would have asked you to go into the river after them.

Mr Ó hOisín:

I think every club has a Jimmy.

Professor McCartan:

Balls are very expensive, and it is very hard to play a football match or a hockey match without a ball. We have run a number of programmes over the years.

Mr Harkness:

Originally, the programme was lottery funded, and it was called Awards for All. It was a multi-lottery distributor programme, but, for various reasons, it fell apart. However, we kept it going and called it Awards for Sport. With budget restrictions, it is one area that is difficult to keep going, but, this year, we expect to have somewhere in the region of £300,000 available as a pot, with maximum funding of up to £10,000 per award. My expectation is that it will be launched before the end of September. That is for revenue investment not capital. Therefore, it is for items under £1,000.

Professor McCartan:

That is the exact thing that we are talking about.

Mrs McKeivitt:

I really enjoyed the presentation. As a new Member not only to the Assembly but to the Committee, I found it very helpful. However, I was a bit disappointed to hear that 70% of local authority buildings are over 20 years old and that 60% of schools and sports have no community involvement. I come from a rural area, and I am interested to know whether you have any plans where schools have no facilities at all, particularly in rural areas, to expand sports development in rural communities.

Professor McCartan:

I will go back to what we said. We are working very closely with the Department of Education to try to see if there are ways and means of building dual-use facilities, that is, facilities that can be used by the community and the school. One of the technical difficulties is the green book. I think it was Cathal who talked about the need to plan. You referred to somewhere earlier.

Mr Harkness:

Keady.

Professor McCartan:

Keady is a classic example of good practice where the school is used extensively outside of school hours. We have many examples of that.

Mrs McKeivitt:

St Colman's College in Newry is to get a running track, funded in conjunction with yourselves and Newry and Mourne District Council, and it is due to open in September. That is one example that the whole community will be able to avail themselves of. Mr Swann talked about the World Police and Fire Games. There is a lot of talk about the facilities and the achievements that will come around that. I take it that the hubs that they speak about are not all Belfast based.

Mr Harkness:

It is a policy decision of the company that the games are Belfast-centric, but if facilities do not exist in the immediate Belfast area, they will go elsewhere. Sea fishing, for instance, is likely to go to the north-west, shooting is likely to go to Ballymena and sailing and water sports will have to go outside the Belfast area, as will some of the cycling. If the required infrastructure does not exist in the immediate Belfast area, it is my understanding that they will go outside.

The Chairperson:

The previous Committee was lobbied at one stage by Special Olympics Ulster, and I know that the Committee was very much involved around various Departments and so on through the Committee system. We were advised that funding was being allocated on a cross-departmental basis and that Sport NI was the deliverer of that funding. Can you give us more information on the amount of funding that has been made available and how much was made available from each of the Departments?

Mr Harkness:

I did not come prepared with the facts. We are the lead funders. There is a memorandum of understanding between the various Departments. We have a joint group comprising

representatives from various Departments and we have held the first meeting. We have done a due diligence exercise within Special Olympics, which has been very positive with regard to their state of readiness to receive public money. A governance review is taking place, and we expect to be in a position to write a letter of offer. It is around £3 million, I believe, but I will get a written submission to the Committee, if that is in order.

The Chairperson:

That would be very helpful.

Professor McCartan:

I would like to put on record our thanks to the Committee for the lobbying, because it was successful. At one stage, we had a concern, now the concern is being diluted. We have the funding, and I know for a fact that Special Olympics are very grateful for the funding, and I am confident that they will put it to very good use.

The Chairperson:

Thank you for your time and presentation.