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EU funding opportunities for sport

This paper provides information on some of the options available from the European Union for the funding of sport, with a view to providing for sport within schools. Reference is also made to various education-specific funds, though none of these are geared towards sport.

1 Context for EU sports policy

The Lisbon Treaty provides the European Union with a 'soft competence' on sport, stating that the Union 'shall contribute to the promotion of European sporting issues'. More particularly, Article 165 of the Treaty of Lisbon states that EU action will be targeted towards '*developing the European dimension in sport, by promoting fairness and openness in sporting competitions and cooperation between bodies responsible for sports, and by protecting the physical and moral integrity of sportsmen and sportswomen, especially the youngest sportsmen and sportswomen*'.¹

A European Commission *White Paper on Sport* was published in 2007, and an accompanying 'Pierre de Coubertin Action Plan' contains 53 measures 'to guide the

¹ European Union. 2010. *Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*. (Also referred to as the Treaty of Lisbon): p121.

Commission in its sport-related activities during the coming years while fully taking into account and respecting the principle of subsidiarity and the autonomy of sport organisations².

A major step took place in January 2011 with the agreement and publication of an EU work plan for sport – *Developing the European Dimension in Sport* – to be undertaken throughout 2012 and 2013. This sets out three specific work areas: the societal role of sport, the economic dimension of sport, and the organisation of sport. Of the various actions proposed across these three areas, four actions are perhaps of particular note within a Northern Ireland context: the implementation of national physical activity guidelines, widening the accessibility of sport for those with a disability, making greater use of evidence-based policy-making in the field of sport, and ensuring that grassroots sport is placed on a more sustainable financial footing³.

2 Funding through ‘European Partnerships on Sport’

The Sport White Paper, referred to above, led to the release of limited funding to explore potential areas of future EU-wide collaboration through so-called ‘preparatory actions’.

For the years 2009 to 2011, funding was made available in this way as follows:

	Number of applications	Number of grants awarded	Total funding €m
2009	207	18	4.0
2010	146	12	2.5
2011	106	12	2.1

Table 1: Grants awarded through the ‘Preparatory Action in the field of sport’

As EU sports policy evolved with the creation of a European work plan for sport in 2011, the 2012 call for proposals sought to award funding which addressed more specific issues contained within the work plan. Consequently, it was designed to ‘support transnational projects put forward by public bodies or not-for-profit organisations in order to identify and test suitable networks and good practices in the field of sport’⁴. The following areas were defined as suitable:

- The fight against match-fixing;
- The promotion of physical activity supporting active ageing;
- Awareness-raising about effective ways of promoting sport at municipal level;
- Trans-frontier joint grassroots sport competitions in neighbouring regions and Member States.

² European Commission: Sport. 2007. *White Paper on Sport*:p2.

³ For further details on these actions and the Northern Ireland context, see: NI Assembly Research and Information Service (RaISe). 27.2.12. Research Paper: *EU Sports Policy and the Sport Matters Strategy*. NIAR 442-11: <http://nia1.me/19j>

⁴ European Commission: Sport. ‘2012 Preparatory Action: European Partnership on Sports (Open call EAC/S06/2012)’: http://ec.europa.eu/sport/preparatory_actions/eac-s06-2012_en.htm

A total fund of €3.5m was made available in 2012/13, with a deadline of 31 July 2012 for applications. With this form of funding, there is no minimum or maximum for the grant, but EU funding must be matched by at least 40% co-financing from other sources.

Funding for 'preparatory actions' generally lasts for a maximum of three years, so it seems unlikely that a further call will be issued in April 2013.

However, throughout 2013, plans are expected to be debated and finalised regarding a Sport Sub-Programme, the EU's first ever dedicated funding programme for sport.

3 A Sport Sub-Programme

Within the European Commission's proposed Multi-Annual Budgetary Framework for 2014–2020⁵, €15.2 billion has been earmarked for an education, training and youth programme ('Education Europe'), including a Sport Sub-Programme. If the Sport Sub-Programme is approved by the European Parliament and the Council, it will represent the first ever dedicated funding stream for sport at EU level. Thus far, it has been proposed that this programme will address the following objectives⁶:

- Tackling transnational threats to sport such as doping, match fixing, violence, racism and intolerance;
- Supporting good governance in sport and dual careers of athletes;
- Promoting social inclusion, equal opportunities and health-enhancing physical activity through increased participation in sport.

Grassroots sport is expected to be the main beneficiary, as well as a European Day or Week of Sport.

Whereas the kind of exploratory funding offered in previous years under the 'European partnerships on sport' pilot has been around €2–4m per annum, it has been proposed that the Sport Sub-Programme will provide around €238m over seven years, so around €30–40m per annum.

4 Educational funding

A number of funds are made available by the EU for educational projects, though these are largely aimed at fostering links between different schools across Europe, and none of these sources are specifically intended for sport within schools.

- **Comenius:** This fund provides for partnerships across a number of schools in Europe, opportunities for professional development, and educational authorities in different member states to work together⁷.

⁵ Ec.europa.eu *Financial Framework 2014-2020* <http://nia1.me/14w>

⁶ Northern Ireland Barroso Taskforce. 2013. *Future EU Funding 2014–2020*. Belfast.

⁷ <http://www.britishcouncil.org/comenius.htm>

- **Leonardo da Vinci:** funded through the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme, this fund is intended to foster partnerships for vocational education⁸.
- **Youth in action:** this fund promotes mobility, non-formal learning and intercultural dialogue, and encourages the inclusion of all young people⁹.
- **eTwinning:** this project is also funded through the Lifelong Learning Programme, and is intended to foster class linking, enabling schools 'to connect and work with partners online around Europe, on projects of your choice'¹⁰.

5 Other funding streams

There are other potential funding opportunities from the European Commission which are already in existence, or which may be further exploited in the future¹¹. Some of these examples are provided below:

- SportUrban: This project was funded through **INTERREG IIIc**, involving 24 partners from across the EU. It investigated ways of making sports facilities 'a lever to economic development, urban regeneration, social inclusion and improved image of towns and cities'¹². The SportUrban initiative has an office in Belfast.
- The Irish Football Association's 'Football For All' project involves a **PEACE III** funded programme called 'Looking Back to Move Forward'¹³.
- In the 2011 European Commission Communication which created the work plan for sport, under the heading 'Economic Dimension of Sport' it was stated that one of the work areas involved will be to 'fully exploit the possibilities of the **European Regional Development Fund** to support sport infrastructure and sustainable activities in sport and outdoors as a tool for regional and rural development, and of the **European Social Fund** to strengthen the skills and employability of workers in the sport sector'¹⁴. The intention behind this action is to make other EU funding streams more open to sport in the future, and to raise awareness about such funds among sporting bodies.

⁸ Leonardo: <http://www.leonardo.org.uk/default.asp?section=00010001§ionTitle=Home>

⁹ European Commission: Youth. 'Youth in action': http://ec.europa.eu/youth/youth-in-action-programme/overview_en.htm

¹⁰ British Council. 'eTwinning: Why get involved?': <http://www.britishcouncil.org/etwinning-benefits-new.htm>

¹¹ European Commission: Sport. 'Frequently Asked Questions': http://ec.europa.eu/sport/faq/faq_en.htm

¹² International Urban Development Association: <http://nia1.me/1cl>

¹³ Irish Football Association. 23.1.13. "Football for All' relaunch looks to the future in the City of Culture': <http://nia1.me/1ck>

¹⁴ European Commission Communication. 18.1.11. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: *Developing the European Dimension in Sport*: <http://nia1.me/r>