



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

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From: CAL Committee Office

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To: CAL Committee Members

Subject: Key Issues from Stakeholder Event with Sports Governing Bodies

1. Purpose of the Review

In September 2012, the Committee agreed to conduct a review to explore issues faced by competitive sports, other than football, GAA and rugby.

The purpose of the review was: to ensure that the legacy from the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games is fully maximised; to consider whether the right conditions are in place to ensure our athletes are able to successfully compete at international competitions; and to identify measures that need to be taken to address the challenges facing these sports.

The Committee agreed to write to sports governing bodies for their assessment of the above and to hold a stakeholder event with a view to tabling a Committee Motion.

2. Summary of Written Responses

On 8 November 2012, the Committee considered 22 written responses from sports governing bodies, outlining the challenges they face and what measures could be taken to address these challenges and increase awareness and participation of each respective sport.

Despite the diversity of the sports, there was commonality in the challenges that each face. These are:

- Limited / no access to finance or funding, impacting on attendance at international competitions and development of the sport locally;
- Inadequate or limited facilities;
- Limited responses with an over reliance on volunteers;

- Low media profile, in comparison to football, GAA and rugby;
- Some legislative and regulatory limitations.

Some bodies provided suggestions for promoting the sport and increasing participation. These included:

- Joined up government approach;
- Open days to encourage new membership; and
- Build sport into school curriculum.

3. Outcome to Stakeholder Event

22 organisations were represented at the stakeholder event at Parliament Buildings on 22 November 2012. The organisations were split into three groups, and were allocated 5 minutes to deliver an opening statement, followed by a question and answer session with members.

The discussions in the group centred around the following key themes:

1. Legacy for each sport from the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games;
2. Challenges facing each sport and measures that could be taken to address these;
3. Relationship between grassroot and elite sport; and
4. Measures needed to increase participation in each sport and develop elite sports people.

Theme 1: Legacy of Olympic and Paralympic Games

Some of the sports that attended a stakeholder event were represented at the Olympic Games. Others were not an Olympic Sport but are either represented at the Commonwealth Games or at some other international sporting competition. There was, therefore, mixed views on the legacy benefits to each sport from the 2012 Games.

Of those sports that were represented, many were hopeful that there would be a lasting legacy, including an increased profile, a rise in volunteers, and access to funding and adequate facilities. One organisation reported that it hoped to benefit from equipment that was used in London during the Olympics.

Theme 2: Challenges

In line with the written responses, common themes emerged regarding the challenges that each sport faces.

Lack of Finance / Funding

One of the main challenges for all sports was limited or no access to funding. Many expressed frustration at government investment in the spectator facilities for football, GAA and rugby.

The consequence of this lack of investment is that many of the sports have inadequate training facilities and equipment that is not state of the art.

Some found that where funding is available it is directed at elite sports and not at grassroot sport; and others found that the lack of finance has meant that they cannot afford the best coaches.

The cost of travel to competitions was also a major challenge for some sports particularly as there is little or no financial support for this. In some cases, athletes had to raise the money themselves.

Inadequate Facilities and Equipment

Many of the governing bodies reported that existing facilities were inadequate and do not provide an environment for proper competitive training.

Some governing bodies expressed disappointed over the withdrawal of the elite facilities programme, with many stating that an elite facility or a training centre was needed. The lack of such facilities has meant that athletes must travel outside Northern Ireland to train. Also, in the absence of an elite facility, many sports are unable to attract events to Northern Ireland. Equestrian sports and yachting specifically reported this difficulty.

Many of the sports governing bodies needed a new or upgraded sport facility or pitch. For example, cycling, tennis and athletics specifically called for an indoor facility. Swimming rely on local councils for the use of pools, but found that this can often clash with public opening times.

Also, limitations with existing equipment were also identified as a challenge.

Limited Resources

The role of volunteers in sport was recognised and appreciated; however many of the bodies recognised the benefits of having paid staff to fully develop the sport. Many of the sports with development officers found that this greatly benefited the growth of the sport.

Regulation / Legislation

Cycling, motor sports and clay pigeon shooting sports found challenges in existing regulations. For example, cycling reported that the limit on the

number of competitors allowed on our roads has meant that Ulster hosted events are usually held in the three counties outside Northern Ireland.

Motor sports reported difficulties in accessing roads for motor events; and clay pigeon shooting reported that the age restrictions in Northern Ireland is a drawback to the success of competitors here.

Lack of Visibility

The lack of visibility of the sport in Northern Ireland was also identified as a challenge. The cause of this was recognised as an absence of the sport in the school curriculum, and the fact that many competitions are not held here because of the lack of facilities.

Netball acknowledged that they had a large base of players within schools, but that their challenge was building and creating leadership roles to take the sport forward beyond school.

Theme 3: Grassroot and Elite Sports

Sports governing bodies recognised a link in grassroot sports and elite athletes, but found that investment in grassroot sport was lacking.

Many stated that investors were only interested in elite sports and some expressed concern that without investment at grassroots then the number of elite athletes will decline.

Theme 4: Development of Sport and Sports People

The bodies suggested a number of measures were needed to grow their sport and develop elite sports people. These include:

- Looking at ways to improve facilities and equipment for the special requirements of sports other than football, GAA and rugby;
- Invest in good coaches;
- Have someone dedicated to the development and growth of the sport – often paid employees;
- Consider rates relief for sports clubs;
- Have a base for more sports within the schools curriculum;
- Establish an All Party Group on Sport; and
- Identify opportunities arising from the Review of Public Administration.

The potential opportunities from the World Police and Fire Games were identified.

4. Policy and Recent Developments

Policy

The Sport Matters strategy outlines the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure's commitment to sport and physical recreation from 2009 to 2019.

One of the targets in the strategy is:

By 2014 to have a minimum of 10 new or upgraded facilities that will support Northern Ireland payer / athlete development in Olympic and Paralympic Sports.

Recent Developments

In November 2012, the Department announced an additional £1.5m each to IFA, GAA and Ulster Rugby over the next three years, in addition to the significant investment in three regional stadiums.

5. Next Steps

Members may wish to get an update from the Minister regarding the progress in achieving the above target within the Sport Matters Strategy. An option, which has been previously agreed by Members, is to table a Committee Motion for debate in plenary.