



Northern Ireland
Assembly

**COMMITTEE FOR
CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE**

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)**

**Inquiry into Participation in Sport and
Physical Activity in Northern Ireland —
Ulster Gaelic Athletic Association**

18 March 2010

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Northern Ireland — Ulster Gaelic Athletic Association**

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Barry McElduff (Chairperson)
Mr David McNarry (Deputy Chairperson)
Lord Browne
Mr Trevor Clarke
Mr Kieran McCarthy
Mr Raymond McCartney
Miss Michelle McIlveen
Mr Ken Robinson

Witnesses:

Mr Ryan Feeney)
Mr Danny Murphy) Ulster Gaelic Athletic Association
Ms Aileen Tohill)
Dr Eugene Young)

The Chairperson (Mr McElduff):

I welcome representatives from the Ulster Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA). The team is led by the provincial director, Danny Murphy. Please begin with an introduction of your team followed by your presentation.

Mr Danny Murphy (Ulster Gaelic Athletic Association):

I introduce Dr Eugene Young, who is our director of coaching and games. He will lead our presentation, aided and abetted by Aileen Tohill, who is our health and wellness manager. Ryan

Feeney is our community and public affairs manager, and I have the overall responsibility for the association in Ulster. Ryan and I will answer questions when the session is opened up for discussion.

Dr Eugene Young (Ulster Gaelic Athletic Association):

We have a short presentation. I will go through the slides that we have provided to the Committee, because I was very keen to provide visuals of some of the work that is going on. I will take members through the presentation page by page.

I thank the Committee for the invitation. I am sure that members are aware that the GAA is a multi-sports organisation. The key codes with which we work, in particular, are as follows: rounders, hurling, handball, ladies' football, men's football and camogie. Those are central to the work that we do.

We were asked to concentrate on adults, so our presentation is about adult participation and, in particular, some of the barriers that we have experienced to people not being able to participate, and how we have tried to overcome some of those barriers. We will highlight what we think are best practices in our sports and make recommendations as we move forward. In practice, it means taking some of our small stars and making them into sporting stars. However, keeping them involved in Gaelic games when they cease to be sporting stars is equally important. Quite often, it will be as coaches or groundspeople, or as people working through our committees on a voluntary capacity through our clubs. We have also started to engage with active participation, and I will take members through the model of participation that is outlined by Sport NI.

We now move to a picture of my car, which is a Volkswagen. I remember that car when I was growing up. The point is that anything useful normally comes from some sort of model. Over the past eight or nine years, we have tried to model our practice on what we felt was best practice. We have had a lot of help from Sport NI in developing what we feel is best practice and world-class models. The Volkswagen may have evolved into another model. Over the next few minutes, I will engage members' thinking on the models that are being presented by Sport NI, and how we have tried to map our activity on to those models.

Our next slide shows the traditional sports-development model. The new sports strategy has requested that we try to get our participation levels up to around 53% for adults. That model is

fine, but it is probably a bit outdated. The next slide shows how we have tried to map our work on to that model. From a participation perspective, it works with respect to children, up to people who are retired and who have been retained in the association. However, we think that there is a better, more fluid, model, which is now reflected in the Sport Matters strategy. The model that we are working on reflects how people who are involved with Gaelic games can move quickly from participation to performance and then to excellence. Once they have finished at the excellence level, they can move back down to performance and participation.

Our strategy covers five key areas: governance; coaching and games; facilities and infrastructure; culture and heritage; and community development, inclusion and cohesion. Those areas correlate well with the Sport Matters strategy, in which participation, performance and places are the key themes. Both documents highlight the lifelong involvement in sport and physical activity (LISPA) model, and we have deployed that model in our thinking on participation. The LISPA model promotes active living, active recreation, organised sport and high-performance sport. Moreover, physical literacy is important, and although this presentation is not focused on children and youth, it is important to highlight that physical literacy is the building block upon which adult participation continues.

With respect to performance, we have 72 development squads from the age of 14 upwards. We have about 18 squads at under-18 level, 18 at under-21 level and 18 senior teams. Through the LISPA programme, about 600 clubs participate annually in our competitions and in our coaching and games development programme. The active living aspect is an important part of club activity, and we will discuss that later. Once people stop playing, they do not stop being involved in the sport. Gaelic games involve various different activities, and I want to make two points about that. Drink, Drugs and Sausage Rolls is a health-related programme that supports participation in our games. We try to drive a health message along with the activity that we promote. In a similar vein, we have a healthy-eating programme for primary schools that supports the physical literacy aspect of some of our work.

That is overall picture. I will now examine each area and give some practical examples of how we try to address them. There are several barriers to playing Gaelic games, which the GAA has tried to reduce in as many ways as possible. However, we recognise that some barriers remain, and we are trying to break them down. Furthermore, there are various filters to participation, and hitting any of those filters could exit a person from the process. From a

governing body perspective, and even from Sport NI's perspective, we need to get around those filters to enable people to participate in our games.

First, people must have an interest in the game. That is the most important aspect. Moreover, they must have the opportunity to play the game. I will use myself as an example. I am not a hurling player, because I never had the opportunity to play hurling. I am football person. I could have been the best hurler who ever came from Derry. However, that is not the case because I did not have the opportunity to play hurling and, as a result, never got involved.

Given the nature of our sports and the fact that they are contact sports, participants need to have a certain level of personal fitness and health. Cost is also a factor. For example, hurling is a very costly sport because sticks and helmets are expensive. That could be a barrier to participation. Location and transport are two other key factors. A lot of communities have their own Gaelic sports clubs, which is not necessarily a barrier because those clubs are normally within walking distance.

Physical literacy is highlighted in our submission because a key issue for anyone involved in sport is their ability to perform it at a reasonably competent level. Physical literacy is the ability to move and to participate in any games or individual programmes. Therefore, the importance of physical literacy is embedded early; the GAA is very strong on that and works with the IFA on embedding good physical-literacy programmes.

Family commitment is important: will the family support the individual who is participating in the games? There is certainly a fear of injury, particularly when young people move away, start to get married, take out mortgages and so on? They may not gravitate to contact sports such as ours because they are afraid of getting hurt. The self-employed in particular have a fear of not being able to work. As a result, they dip out of sport.

Time is an issue, particularly for women whose focus moves once they get married and start to have families; they start to shy away from and then exit sport. Disability access is another concern. Although Sport NI emphasises the need to make facilities accessible for people with disabilities, constant improvement is required, particularly with respect to changing rooms.

Stereotypes and attitudes, the expertise to support development, lack of companionship, peer

pressure, structured programmes and facilities are all barriers to participation, which, without going into in detail now, we may address in answering the Committee's questions.

Our presentation continues with hard examples of issues around active recreation. Chicks with Sticks — I apologise, the name came directly from the association — and Gaelic 4 Mothers are two female adult-participation programmes currently running. The advantages are that there are free facilities at the clubs where the programmes are available; the downside or barrier is that changing facilities are often focused on men. Pitches are also a problem for clubs that are operating with only one, which is insufficient when ladies' codes are brought on board. The challenge is to provide more and better facilities.

For adult males, the question is this: what happens when I stop playing? Do I go out to pasture, or can I remain involved in games? Over the past three or four years, we have been developing a recreational Gaelic games programme for men over 40 who can operate between or within clubs. As I said earlier, the challenge is the fear of injury. We have tried to get around that by adjusting the rules to make the sport non-contact — one-touch or two-touch football. The biggest challenge for us is to provide enough opportunities for these people to play at that level.

Engagement with foreign nationals is another barrier to overcome for adult active recreation. The gentleman pictured in our submission to the Committee is called Abdul, and he is from Nigeria. He has been playing Gaelic games for about eight years and has also started to referee. Tooling up GAA clubs to cope with language barriers and people of differing cultures and customs is a challenge that we are trying to address through our ongoing education programme. The idea is to give people who have never played Gaelic games the chance to have a go at the sport. Our presentation continues with handball —

The Chairperson:

Will you please conclude in the next three or four minutes to allow time for questions. The last three minutes of the presentation may have to be rushed.

Dr Young:

Chairman, the next two slides cover handball, which can be played right up to veteran level; we have world champions who are aged 70 and over. We are also engaging with people with disabilities and with special needs, and, particularly, with other organisations that deliver in that

area: for example, we work closely with Positive Futures. I will move to the slide that refers to active recreation through the Youth Justice Agency, which is an engagement with young adults who have offended but are returning to society, which is another key area.

I move now to targeting areas of high social need and highlighting the social benefits of participation in sport, such as discipline, building relationships, and encouraging a sense of civic responsibility and co-operation. That is the active recreation side. We thought that we would have had more time, with due respect, but we will park our presentation at this point, and if members have any questions on any particular slides, we will come back to those.

The Chairperson:

Thank you. I will ask the first question. What single change in government policy do you think would have the biggest impact on increasing participation in sport and physical activity?

Mr D Murphy:

If I were in a position to advise the Committee, I would encourage it to look at sport's involvement in the community and in society and how it relates to so much of what we do. A cross-departmental approach is required because, although sport is within the remit of this Committee, some of the major involvements and benefits that emerge from sport relate to other Departments: for example; social cohesion, antisocial behaviour, health, education, equality and a number of issues in that area.

Whatever strategy emerges for sport should become the central policy for several Departments that are dealing with the outworkings of those items, and sport should then be seen as an arm of delivery. Sport is not specifically referred to in the current Programme for Government, but it is included under several headings, because it is probably the most essential instrument for delivering better interactivity, a better sense of health and better physical preparedness for people to deal with modern society. All of the various issues in the Programme for Government could be dealt with by sport to some degree. We maintain that there are seven Departments that have an impact on the delivery of sport.

Mr McCarthy:

Thank you very much for your presentation; you are very welcome. You mentioned the need to overcome the barriers for females. The GAA is a multi-sports organisation. Do you have figures

for the percentages of men and women who participate? I notice that there are programmes such as Chicks with Sticks and Gaelic 4 Women. Do you have a percentage figure?

Dr Young:

There are probably around 90,000 men participating in the men's codes. In the ladies' codes there are around 22,000 participating in football, and around 10,000 participating in camogie. Those are ballpark figures for participation. One of the things we are trying to achieve, driven by Sport NI, is full integration of the ladies' and men's codes, because they are separate associations as such. We now have a confederation of Gaelic games, through which all of those governing bodies come together and operate under one umbrella. That allows us to share resources and expertise. They buy into some of the coach education programmes that we run. That is working quite well, but we still have a bit to go on that.

Mr McCarthy:

Do you want to create a situation where there are no barriers, and encourage as many women as possible to get involved in all the sports?

Dr Young:

Yes; without a doubt. Aileen may want to speak about the active living side, because one of the things we want to do is encourage ladies, particularly older ladies, to use our facilities.

Ms Aileen Tohill (Ulster Gaelic Athletic Association):

Eugene has said that more than 30,000 ladies participate in ladies Gaelic football and camogie. Two of our other codes, rounders and handball, are multi-participant sports, and males and females of all ages actively participate in those codes throughout their lives. Therefore, it is not only within the female-only codes that female participation occurs.

Accessibility of programmes and facilities is crucial for female uptake and reference is made in our presentation to Gaelic 4 Mothers, Gaelic 4 Girls, Chicks with Sticks and Hens with Hurls for the over-40s. *[Laughter.]* Those initiatives form the female-friendly approaches to Gaelic football and camogie. Eugene also referred to the coach education programme and, crucially, that programme also provides females coaches and role modelling for young girls to continue their involvement in sport. The integration process, which hopes to enhance all Gaelic games, has gained momentum over the past three years and there has been a significant female uptake in that

programme.

For females, the family unit is very important, and the GAA prides itself on the fact that it is a family organisation. The GAA talks about participation from the cradle to the grave and wants everyone in the family unit to be involved throughout their lifetimes. An important factor for females is to have accessibility to whatever is going on the pitch, and, for example, if a woman is playing on one pitch and her six-year old is playing on the other, that eliminates the need for childminding facilities. The GAA community has examined ways of endorsing that family organisation and through some of its active living programmes, such as its well women and cancer prevention clinics, it incentivises participation and provides a social outlet for females.

We have included some examples of those active living programmes in our presentation to the Committee. Many of our clubs now have walking tracks around their perimeters, which is a simple way to encourage female participation, particularly in rural areas, where the club's floodlights provide a safe environment for females to exercise. That is a very simple way of how clubs use their facilities to ensure lifelong female participation away from the games themselves.

Lord Browne:

I thank the witnesses for their colourful presentation. Although we are considering the falling levels of adult participation primarily, it is important that we examine youth participation as they feed into the system. What specific changes do you think should take place in the education sector and how is the Ulster GAA engaging with young people? It is a worrying fact that there seem to be fewer young people coming into sport.

Dr Young:

One of the key things for the Ulster GAA is the Department of Education's physical literacy programme. That programme establishes generic good movement skills in children, which can be used in any sport. I am not sure whether the representatives from the IFA spoke about that programme, but the IFA and Ulster GAA are both involved in it. It is essential that we instil those skills in children from the word go, because, once those are embedded, the young people will have the confidence to play any sport, not just Gaelic games.

The second important factor is to have some form of organised sports activity. Large governing bodies such as the Ulster GAA have a range of organised games. There are more than

3,500 games in Antrim each week, yet, surprisingly, there are only 71 games for ladies. Therefore, we have a massive job to promote ladies Gaelic football in Antrim, and we recognise that. Another factor is opening up facilities and giving people greater access to them.

Lord Browne:

Should schools be opened up more to do that?

Dr Young:

Yes. That is crucial. To have facilities lying empty from 5.00 pm when two or three local clubs are struggling to find facilities for any type of participation is — I will not say scandalous, but it must certainly be looked at very seriously.

The Chairperson:

Did you say that that is “scandalous”?

Dr Young:

No, I did not. However, it is important that that issue be looked at.

What else can be achieved through education? We use the Drink, Drugs and Sausage Rolls programme to promote awareness among young people in third level education who are living away from home that they need to eat right, watch what they drink and be sensible. It is almost no longer the case that students in higher education have Wednesday afternoons free to take part in sport. Some universities are now programming classes on a Wednesday afternoon, and I think that that is a backward step. On Wednesday afternoons, students used to be free to take part in inter-campus and inter-university sport. That issue must, therefore, be considered.

Now that my daughters are 17, they no longer have to do PE in school. Young people are only required to take part in PE until they are 16, but I think that they should be required to participate in some sort of activity, such as keep fit, until they are 18. That is one of our recommendations.

Mr D Murphy:

I wish to elaborate on the point about school facilities. I think that in the Sport Matters strategy, there is the analogy of the percentage of recreational space in England, Scotland and Wales compared with that in Northern Ireland. It shows that 39% of the recreational space in Northern

Ireland is met outside the education estate, and that the total percentage of recreational space in Northern Ireland is 51%, which demonstrates the overall significant under-provision of open-recreational space facilities.

Mr McCartney:

I have two questions. I wish to take up Eugene's point about children opting out of physical education at schools. How do we prevent that from happening? What initiatives can be taken to address that? My children try to get out of going to PE in school, and yet by 3.30 pm the same day, they want to go to training somewhere else. They view football training or whatever differently from how they view PE. How can we make PE more attractive, so that young children do not opt out of it when they are given the opportunity? I thought that young people who are interested in sport would view PE as a free lesson, but they do not.

My second point is about how this is taken forward. Your presentation was excellent. I was struck by Danny's comment that seven Departments are involved, in one way or another, in relation to sports provision or responsibility for sport. What role should governing bodies play in initiatives? I think that the best initiatives for changing people's attitudes are those that are driven by the sporting organisations themselves. For example, I think that the Live to Play campaign will have a greater impact than some of the other excellent road safety initiatives. When a sporting organisation gets involved in a campaign, the message has a particular ring to it, because of who is leading it and why.

Dr Young:

First, our elite players are the ambassadors for our sport. We put those people up front when we take the lead in campaigns such as Live to Play, because they are the face of the association, and because they are the people whom we want to be the face of the association.

Secondly, I think that young people aged 16, 17 and 18, who have finished their GCSEs and who are now doing their AS levels should be required to do physical education, whether that be keep fit or Gaelic 4 Girls, until they leave school. I do not know how easy or hard it would be to implement that, but it is the way forward. Young people start to drop out of physical education at 16, 17 and 18. They are out the door, and they are not really as interested in sport as they once were. Therefore, the structured environment of formal education provides an opportunity to ensure that young people continue to take part in physical education until they leave school, and

perhaps, once they get older, they will want to continue with that.

Mr D Murphy:

I will deal with the issue of governing bodies. I think that governing bodies must be the central drivers behind ensuring people's participation in sport. There are 86 different governing bodies that fall that within the remit of Sport NI, and those bodies have a responsibility to develop the sports for which they are responsible. They must organise competitive sport, where that is a part of the sport. They must also organise their structure and organisation on a whole range of levels, including coaching. The overall drive for all governing bodies must be to increase participation in sport and to ensure that they retain participation in sport.

All of those things feed into the various strategies and agendas of the different Departments. I will run through the Departments that have a role to play. The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure has to be the lead Department since it is directly responsible for sport and physical recreation. Its responsibility includes the role of Sport NI, which, as part of its remit, deals with the governing bodies through the Northern Ireland Sports Forum. The Department for Social Development is responsible for regeneration, social exclusion and a number of other areas.

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety is the single biggest beneficiary of the work of sporting bodies, because, if more people participate in sport, that should ultimately engender a healthier society. If that is achieved, the Health Department will be a significant beneficiary. The Department of Education has several roles to play, because, as Eugene said, sport, in curriculum, is part of the future development of any positive education programme. I also feel that that Department has access to the single biggest estate outside that controlled by local authorities and governing bodies, and its facilities are significant.

The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister also has a responsibility, because it sets policy on equality in several areas, including equality for people with disabilities and those from ethnic minority backgrounds. OFMDFM has a responsibility in the delivery of a shared future.

The Department for Employment and Learning has a role to play. That might seem strange, but it is responsible for delivering part of the safety at sports grounds legislation, because the training requirements for stewards, supervisors and safety officers will have to include

qualifications. Those requirements are being set at NVQ level 2 for stewards, NVQ level 3 for supervisors and NVQ level 4, which is currently unavailable, for safety officers. The Department for Employment and Learning will also have a programme running under SkillsActive, which could be exceptionally helpful in developing local community volunteers and recognising their accreditation.

The Department of the Environment has a significant role, because it is responsible for the reorganisation of public administration and for local government. Therefore, it is responsible for the provision of facilities by local government and the provision of sport within the remit of local authorities. All of that is essential to building a wider sporting consciousness and building facilities for the playing of sport. I hope that I have answered your question.

Mr McNarry:

Ladies and Gentlemen, you are welcome.

With my tradition and background, I know nothing about how you play your games. However, I take on board what you say, because I do not know whether you are bluffing. I commend you on your presentation: every time you come here, I learn something more about what you call “your family” and how it operates. That is a credit to what you do in your communities. Your organisation seems to be tightly knit within your communities, and that is the way that you are organised.

Last week, we heard evidence from bodies that called for more professional coaches in sport. In other words, they wanted the public to pay for more professional coaches in virtually all sports. Do you employ professional coaches?

Mr Ryan Feeney (Gaelic Athletic Association):

Yes, we do. We are lucky that we are funded by Sport NI and the Department of Education, as the IFA is, to provide professional coaches. However, I stress that the vast majority of coaching and development work in the GAA is done on a voluntary basis. We are a voluntary and amateur organisation, and our players do not get paid. There are professionals who are available to support the volunteers. We also have a coach and games development manager in every county, which is funded by the central body in Dublin. Eugene will correct me if I am wrong, but we probably employ about 70 people in the coaching and games sector.

Their job is to provide coaching education and to support the volunteer coaches on the ground, because we feel that they are the people who will make the most impact at community level with regard to participation.

Mr McNarry:

I will come to that in a minute as I am interested in the voluntary sector. You may not be able to tell us now, but could you furnish us with the funding that you get for those professional coaches and how much money is spent on it? I do not know whether there is a comparative pay scale between a coach in one of your sports and coach in rugby and in soccer — although we can get that information — but if there was, that information would be useful. Those who gave evidence to the Committee last week were calling for more professional coaches. You say that you are receiving funding. However, I wonder how much money we need, our how much money our people would want, for that.

Your presentation states that to address the levels of adult participation in your sport, the Government must show that they value volunteers. What specific steps can the Government take to address that issue? Now that you have identified that you employ professionals, will you give a comparison as to how many volunteer coaches you have, and the volunteer structure? I value volunteers in every walk of life. They are hard to get.

Mr Feeney:

I want to qualify an issue. Where we do get funded support by Government, 85p out of every pound that is invested by punters in the GAA goes back to grass-roots clubs and county development. We employ quite a few coaches ourselves, and we try our best to keep that focus at club and community level, and also through infrastructure investment.

Mr McNarry:

Do you get much money for television?

Mr Feeney:

There is a revenue income from television streams, which comes into the association, and there is also a commercial revenue stream. However, we have a very strict rule with regard to the commercial stream money that comes over the gates, and our annual accounts have just been

published. That money is reinvested in clubs and counties, and also into coaching and participation.

To answer your question about volunteering, obviously volunteers are vital to the GAA: it cannot survive without them. We have 250,000 volunteer members in Ulster and 90,000 players. Eugene will correct me if I am wrong, but there are between 60,000 and 90,000 volunteer coaches delivering on the ground. They are qualified to a high standard. Through the work of Eugene and others, we have a range of different coaching qualifications. There is foundation coaching, which takes the coach into three separate areas: adult, youth and children. Those are the three different stages of coaching and games development.

Without volunteers delivering on the capacity side of things and being involved in participation on the ground; for example, secretaries, chairpersons, treasurers, those involved in getting child-protection and health-and-safety issues in place, fund raising for the local club, looking at facilities, and those lobbying government on a range of issues, the association would collapse. The way in which we value our volunteers is very simple. We have to continue to encourage them and to support and protect them from certain issues. We have a range of award schemes in place. The president's awards were announced during the week, when two people from Ulster won awards. We highlight the fact that we call the volunteer the last man or woman standing, because we reckon that the volunteer gives up about 20 hours a week to develop sport at grass-roots level, which is a massive economic input and of massive economic and social benefit.

Mr McNarry:

Do you find that the volunteers are attached to the children, and that as the children grow up, there is a fall-off?

Dr Young:

They work their way through the system, starting with the children. The problem is trying to retain them once the children move into the adult game.

Mr McNarry:

It is a bit like the Boy Scouts.

Mr D Murphy:

I want to talk about two points that were raised. We simply could not exist without the very substantial number of people who run our clubs in a voluntary capacity, those who referee our games in a voluntary capacity, and those who coach and manage our teams voluntarily right across the age spectrum. Essentially, we are now finding that a lot of the professional coaches who have been referred to us have to ensure that we meet the standards set by the association. More recently, and probably one of the essential things that has to be dealt with, is the impact of legislation on the volunteers. That covers a whole spectrum, including the need to meet recognised standards on a whole range of fronts, from child protection to coaching qualifications. Ultimately, legislation is there, and is upgraded on an ongoing basis. If there is not someone working on what we call capacity building within the structure, the volunteer will be left totally exposed.

Mr McNarry:

You say that there are 250,000 volunteers — I wonder what on earth they do during the rest of the week. Is there a structure?

Mr Feeney:

Our structure is democratic. Clubs elect representatives to county committees. The county committees then elect representatives to the provincial council, which is the governing body for Gaelic games in Ulster, and it elects representatives to the central council, which is the overall governing body for the association both nationally and internationally. It is a democratic structure. There are one million members of the GAA across the world. We have overseas units, and five provincial councils, including the provincial council of Britain and those in the four provinces of Ireland. That is the democratic structure that is followed.

Danny is the chief executive of Gaelic games in Ulster, and is answerable to an officer board of totally elected volunteer officials, who are answerable to a council of totally elected volunteers, all elected from the grass roots. That is the system that we work.

Mr D Murphy:

To clarify, I draw your attention to the slide in our presentation that shows the number of games played by the GAA and by Ladies Gaelic Football in the period from 30 September. It is not the complete year, but those are the figures from that time.

Mr Feeney:

It is important to highlight that all of our players are also volunteers. Players who play at the highest level, including county and elite standard, are all volunteers. They do not get paid to play Gaelic games.

Mr McNarry:

So there are no perks?

Mr Feeney:

They are paid expenses.

Mr McNarry:

They do not get a job, or a car?

Mr Feeney:

No, they do not get a car, but because of the way society works in Ulster, usually the local community people look after them. We find that people who have a high profile in Gaelic games do very well in their careers, but we do not pay players. That is how we are able to invest so much money back to the grass roots.

Mr D Murphy:

You ask a very important question. What we have found is that people who are organised in sport learn several very important disciplines, including good time management, a focus on what they want to achieve and, probably most importantly, the ability to work well in a team. People are normally very employable. I do not feel that there is any great number of people employed simply because they are playing.

Mr McNarry:

On the question of discipline, how did Barry McElduff slip through the net? *[Laughter.]*

Mr D Murphy:

I was not around at the time. *[Laughter.]*

The Chairperson:

Thank you, David. You are always very helpful.

Dr Young:

Where possible, we try to work in partnership with as many organisations as possible. Aileen is involved with the Ulster Cancer Foundation and other health organisations, and we are involved with the local authorities, particularly through the Active Communities programme that is coming online. The target population for that programme are women, older people, people with disabilities and young people. Through that programme and the partnership that was set up a number of Active Communities coaches will be on the ground by the end of April to facilitate that.

Mr K Robinson:

Thank you for your presentation, it has been absolutely fascinating. Before I forget, I congratulate you on both those schemes; it is an excellent way to reach out to the community on health and safety matters. I hope that will be taken up by other sporting organisations. Thank you very much for that. Being on this Committee is great, because our language skills develop. We now have Chicks with Sticks.

Mr McCartney:

We should ask Aileen to comment on that.

Mr K Robinson:

Last week we had gym bunnies and the Lycra crew. The word discipline was mentioned, and I am very interested in discipline. Obviously your organisation maintains strict discipline with spectators. When we were at Casement Park we spoke to some of the stewards. Local stewards know local people, and local potential troublemakers, etc. Spectator indiscipline presents no great problem. However, there is an image of indiscipline, sometimes by rival players and officials on the field after a match, which provides quite a good sideshow. I would like you to think about that image problem.

Now to the question that I was told to ask: in your submission, you stated that you were going to address falling levels of participation via the government, who would have to improve facilities at community level. The submission states that the only way to halt that decline is to address it

through participation in sport rather than through the development of the elite. That is where a wee bit of contention creeps in. Do you want to develop at community level, where you seem to be very well developed? Do you want to develop elite players who can raise the profile of the game even further? From what we have heard, yours is a well organised and funded organisation; so why should government help? Is there a drawing apart in what you have said?

Mr Feeney:

No, Mr Robinson. Our organisation also has elite players, but I emphasise, and the Committee knows, that encouraging participation means looking at the needs of the many rather than those of the few. In 2001, a report by former Cabinet Office Minister Dr Jack Cunningham into how a country can cultivate more gold medallists highlighted the importance of participation in community sport at grass-roots level. His report clearly emphasised that getting more kids to play games will generate more elite players.

In terms of investment in sport, we are saying that we — the GAA, IFA, rugby and others — invest highly in our facilities. However, there is an onus and a statutory responsibility on local government to also provide facilities. We can provide only so many; therefore, where there is a shortfall we look to local government for provision. The GAA and local government are both to blame for the current lack of provision for Gaelic games in Ulster. We are and hope to continue to address that issue with many different local authorities. For example, we have had a very good response from local government bodies that we have been dealing with — they have said that they will consider Gaelic games when they think about the development of facilities. A single GAA pitch can also be two soccer pitches and a rugby pitch, which is a good shared use of space and an example of how to promote a shared-future agenda. We are trying to address that issue.

We totally accept and advocate that the governing body should have the key role in developing sport, but that must be done in partnership with government. We get funding from government, and through working with local government we can increase grass-roots participation at community level.

Mr K Robinson:

Would that approach involve the GAA giving up any sovereignty in any way to local or central government?

Mr Feeney:

We work in partnership with local and central government now. Although we have targets to meet to try to secure their funding, we believe that they benefit our strategy and the rolling out of our programmes. We are on our third strategic plan, which we wrote bearing in mind the Programme for Government and government strategies. We always made sure that in most cases our association's targets matched those of government.

Mr D Murphy:

I will come in on two of the points raised. The first is the provision of facilities. Regardless of whether those are provided on a regional or local government basis, there is significant under-provision of such facilities for Gaelic sport. Therefore, we want to engage with local authorities to ensure that that is addressed.

My other point addresses an entirely different side of the matter. Elite sport was referred to, but our elite players also play for their local clubs. It is almost unique to our structure that, as we say in one of our promotional DVDs, the biggest stars could also be your next-door neighbour playing for the local club side. At the end of the day, although fellows play for their counties, provinces and country, they also continue to play for their club, and, if asked, most would say their club is still the most important.

Mr K Robinson:

It is very important that that process continues. Will somebody answer my question on indiscipline?

Mr D Murphy:

I will deal with discipline. Ultimately, that is part of my responsibility. I sit on several bodies which deal with discipline, and although Mr Robinson presented a scenario, significant indiscipline is relatively rare. We have a clear disciplinary code. Disciplinary issues arise in a relatively insignificant percentage of the overall number of games played. We deal with them fairly forcibly. Where people step to a certain level, we would go from closing grounds to participation disqualifications.

Mr K Robinson:

Do the media perhaps overemphasise the more eye-catching events rather than —

Mr D Murphy:

My view is very simple: if we have a disciplinary issue and the media are present, they are fully entitled to report it. However, we deal with it very efficiently and very fairly. We have an exceptionally fair system. We have a competitions control committee, which recommends the penalty. The affected individual or unit has the right to decide whether to accept the outcome of that disciplinary determination. If they decide not to accept it, the matter goes to a hearings committee, which, effectively, establishes facts. It deals with the matter on the basis of the facts that are established. There are pre-ordained penalties depending on the gravity of the offences. If someone does not like the outcome, they can take the matter to an appeals process. The appeals are heard by an entirely separate group of people in the structure. The group includes people from the legal and the volunteer sides of the association.

Finally, but by no means lastly, a person can challenge any outcome on the basis of arbitration or mediation through the disputes resolution authority. They can also take a case, which, effectively, is legally presented because it falls within legislation that deals with arbitration. Although the outcomes are contestable in a court of law, they are not normally challenged there because they are normally legally correct. At the end of the day, we have a fair and very robust system.

Mr K Robinson:

The issue of stewarding was brought to our attention. The local stewards can identify potential troublemakers and nullify that from a spectator point of view.

Mr D Murphy:

I can deal with that very efficiently because I have been responsible for running all of the major games in Ulster since 1992. Several factors are of big help to us, the first of which is that we have volunteer stewards. They all come from the clubs. Secondly, the spectators are predominantly family orientated. When families are present, the opportunity for people to misbehave is quite substantially reduced.

Finally, most people know everyone who attends matches. The best way of stopping somebody misbehaving is for somebody else to tell them that they know who they are or know their club. Going back to our discipline, we have a wonderful little piece of legislation. We hold

the unit concerned responsible for the conduct of its members and known partisans. We do not have to prove that they are members; we can identify them as supporters. Therefore, there is an onus on everybody from club upwards to make sure that their people who go to games behave themselves.

Mr T Clarke:

I apologise because I had to leave for part of your presentation, but I enjoyed what I heard. Dr Young gave a very full presentation, albeit one that was cut slightly short by the Chairperson because of time constraints. Mr McNarry remarked that the Chairman was possibly overlooked. I suggest that he was not overlooked. I was looking at slide 2, and I think that you did give him courtesy. The first picture probably sums him up well. I am sure that you were giving him courtesy but did not want to comment at the time.

The Chairperson:

Thank you, Trevor. Was there a question in there? *[Laughter.]*

Mr T Clarke:

No; just information.

The Chairperson:

I knew that you would be helpful. You always are. I think that you should succeed David as the Deputy Chairperson. I thank the team from Ulster GAA for coming today.