
Written Ministerial Statement

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Culture, Arts and Leisure

2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games

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Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): I wish to inform Members of the benefits to the North of Ireland from the Olympic and Paralympic Games being hosted by London in 2012.

During 2012 the Games themselves will have a direct impact on the North of Ireland through:

- Torch Relay, which will visit all parts of the North. LOCOG also announced on 18 May that they are exploring the feasibility of taking the Olympic Flame on a short visit to Dublin. I discussed this possibility with LOCOG on 13 June and I know that work on this is ongoing.
- Live Sites – large screens showing Games' events in public areas, located in Belfast and Derry
- Pre games Training Camps and events
- Major events associated with the London 2012 Festival and Cultural Olympiad.

Three high level strategic benefits arise for the North:

- Increasing grass roots participation in sport, particularly by young people – encouraging the population as a whole to become more physically active;
- Exploiting the opportunities for economic growth;
- Promoting community engagement and achieving participation across all communities through the Games.

A number of initiatives are underway to ensure that we maximise the opportunities presented by the Games and deliver benefits for people in our communities. A number of 2012 related programmes and initiatives have been developed to do this.

Pre-Games Training

Over 200 countries will participate in the Games. Whilst 80 teams or countries have some level of agreement in place the majority of athletes do not yet know if they have qualified for the Games, and therefore cannot yet commit to a Pre-Games Training camp. The qualification process for many disciplines will not be completed until late spring 2012 and a lot of work is going on behind the scenes to attract athletes here in anticipation of their qualification. Let me detail this work for Members:

- 26 facilities, catering for 22 distinct sporting disciplines have been accredited for Olympic sports along with three 'hub' venues suitable for hosting Paralympic disciplines in the North.
- A working group, chaired by SportNI, with representatives from DCAL, NI Tourist Board, Invest NI, Disability Sports NI and local government, is committed to attracting both training camps and events to the North of Ireland. The group has identified that the best chance of attracting visiting teams to the North of Ireland for the Games, is to work with the governing bodies of sports who have accredited facilities. SportNI has liaised with all Olympic/Paralympic Governing Bodies and has identified those that are likely to be able to attract a Pre Games Training Camp or Event.
- A wide range of marketing materials have been prepared including promotional DVDs

and brochures under the theme 'Raising your Game in the Land of Legends'. These have been distributed to every International Olympic Committee throughout the world. In addition, both DCAL and SportNI have given presentations in other countries promoting the North as a venue, including Beijing, Berlin, Rotterdam, Seville, Jordan, Palestine and London.

- SportNI have provided funding to Sports Governing bodies to promote Pre-Games Training Camps and Events at a wide range of international sporting competitions, conferences and exhibitions. SportNI recently made a presentation on Pre-Games Training Camps to seventeen South American Ambassadors at an event in the House of Lords which was attended by the First Minister. SportNI was recently represented at the Sport Accord Conference attended by over 100 countries and held meetings with various International Governing Bodies to promote Pre-Games Training Camps and events.

A number of sensitive and confidential negotiations are ongoing and I hope to have positive news to announce once countries become aware of who has qualified for the Games. However, given the recent media interest it is important to describe the progress made to date in some detail:

Paralympic Sports

The World Boccia Championships will take place in August 2011 in the University of Ulster. This is a qualifying event for the Paralympic Games with over 35 countries and 400 athletes participating.

The North of Ireland will also host an International Wheelchair Basketball Pre-Games Tournament January-February 2012.

Badminton

SportNI have been working with the Ulster Branch of the Badminton Union of Ireland. I was delighted to announce yesterday that the Yonex Irish International Badminton Championships would take place in Lisburn in December 2011. This is a ranking tournament for those seeking to compete in the 2012 Games. It is anticipated that 20–25 potential Olympians, likely to be participating in London, will be participating in this event.

Gymnastics

A coaching clinic took place in Salto Gymnastics Centre in Lisburn at the end of May 2011 involving members of the development squad from England, Scotland and Wales. Two officials from China are soon to visit Salto for a familiarisation visit with a view to locating their Pre Games Training Camp here. Representatives from local Gymnastics will be attending International Events in London in the coming months. Relationships with existing contacts are being developed.

Boxing

SportNI are working with prominent boxing officials to attract teams to locate their Pre-Games Training Camps in the North. The boxing officials have had significant discussions with a number of teams in recent weeks with one high profile team giving a strong indication that they will locate their Pre-Games Training Camp in Belfast.

Fencing

The World Junior Fencing Championships were held at Jordanstown in 2009. A representative of the local Fencing Federation has met with several leading International coaches and administrators. SportNI representatives are working hard to secure a further Pre-Games Event that has the potential to lead to a Pre-Games Training Camp.

Table Tennis

SportNI and representatives of the Ulster Branch of Table Tennis Association have been in discussions with a number of bodies to attract teams to the North of Ireland. It is anticipated that two or more teams likely to qualify for the 2012 Games will come here for an event next spring

Athletics

SportNI and local Athletics Association representatives have met with representatives of a number of countries and progress has been made in attracting a Pre Olympic event and/or teams to locate here.

Judo

Representatives from the local Judo Federation will be attending the British Open where a variety of International coaches will be present. Initial contacts have been made with a number

of African countries. It is hoped that existing contacts will be developed and a Pre Games Event will be secured.

Hockey

SportNI have had discussions with Lisnagarvey Hockey Club regarding attracting a team to play an exhibition game in Lisburn. The qualifying competition for 2012 has not yet been completed.

Sailing

The Royal Yacht Association is hoping to attract potential Olympians for some Pre-Games Training event prior to the 2012 Games.

Hosting such events offer immediate opportunities and longer term benefits. In the short-term having international athletes train and compete here provides a unique opportunity for our home grown talent and rising stars in sport to meet, greet, observe and possibly compete with world-class athletes and international sporting heroes at home. It is difficult to measure the inspirational impact in economic terms that such a once in a lifetime opportunity provides. However, it will inspire our young people to participate and achieve and bring the spirit of the Games to our communities.

For the visiting athletes, teams and countries, and their support network including coaches, competing in our local venues will provide them with first hand knowledge and experience of what we have to offer as well as a guaranteed warm welcome and the opportunity to visit iconic sites and see our outstanding scenery. It is anticipated that those positive experiences will be influential in the decision making process when the time comes for the respective athlete, team or country to make their selection for pre-games training in the lead up to the Games.

A number of other significant initiatives are underway to maximise the benefits to the North of Ireland from the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

5 Star Disability Sports Challenge

Developed by Disability Sport NI, funded by my Department and supported by Department of Education, the '5 Star Challenge' is increasing awareness amongst children about people with a disability. It promotes understanding that disability is not an obstacle to achieving

physical and sporting success. Almost 20,000 children across our schools have participated so far with up to 30,000 planned by 2012.

Activ8

Developed by SportNI 'Activ8' is a sports participation campaign that encourages primary school age children (and their families and friends) to get active and stay healthy. Over 25,000 children have participated already with the potential to engage 91,000 young people across the North to choose sport, to get them involved in some kind of physical activity and to stay healthy. With the high incidence of suicide in disadvantaged parts of the North and not least problems with obesity both '5 Star Challenge' and 'Activ8' are key and will support implementation of DCAL's overarching Policy and the Strategy for Sport 'Sport Matters'.

Volunteering

Volunteer Now leads on volunteering, and my department provides funding for a Volunteering coordinator to secure benefits from the 2012 Games.

The aim has been to build on the capacity and capability of volunteering in the North in order to make a major contribution to the successful delivery of the events taking place here in the lead up to the Games in 2012 and beyond, including the World Police and Fire Games in 2013, which will require over 5,000 volunteers, and with further opportunities for volunteers as part of the Derry City of Culture celebrations, and the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow 2014.

Over 900 applicants from the North were interviewed recently by the London Organising Committee at Queens University. DCAL, in partnership with Volunteer Now, has developed a Volunteer Bursary Scheme that will provide up to £30,000 of financial support to local people from disadvantaged backgrounds to enable them to go to London if selected.

Education and Skills

The Olympic and Paralympic Games provide an opportunity for our schoolchildren to get involved with the Games through the 'GetSet' programme. Almost 250 schools in the North are involved and benefiting from Olympic related education materials, access to competitions, resources and exchange opportunities with schools and young people in

other countries across the world. Ten schools are in regular exchange with schools in Jordan. My Department fully supports this programme and is working with partners such as DENI, British Council and a 2012 Sponsor to support an opportunity for those young people to meet their counterparts in Jordan. Young people will have the opportunity to forge international links, promote diversity and exchange cultural values.

Cultural Olympiad

Derry will host an opening event for the 2012 Festival on the 21 June 2012, in aid of Peace One Day, which will attract international attention in the build-up to the Games.

In Belfast the 'Land of Giants' programme will deliver a major outdoor event in June 2012 on the Titanic Slipways, and is one of four major outdoor celebrations to be held here and across England, Scotland and Wales in the run up to the Games.

Live Sites

Live Sites are large screens in public spaces which will screen major events and other content. These are designed to animate local public spaces, helping contribute to a shared sense of place. There is one already in Belfast and another will be installed in Derry by the autumn. These screens provide a tangible benefit and genuine legacy from the Olympic Games.

Torch Relay

I am delighted that my Department has secured the Olympic Torch Relay for four days next June. The torch will be hosted at overnight celebration sites at Portrush, Derry, Newry and Belfast and work is at an advanced stage to develop the final route. Eight thousand Torchbearers will be required overall with approximately 600 of these needed here in the North of Ireland. The public have been invited to nominate local heroes to carry the torch through their communities. I would stress that torch bearers are normal every day people and I encourage all of my colleagues to promote this opportunity to participate in the nomination process which closes on 29 June 2011.

I am confident that the torch relay will showcase our local stars, iconic sites, stunning land and our inspirational communities, to an international audience. This will demonstrate

that we are a welcoming place to visit, to live, to learn and to do business with.

Business

My Department has been working closely with Invest NI, who lead on the business area of our plan to deliver economic and business benefits from the Olympics. To date more than 40 local businesses have secured Olympic contracts valued at over £30m with examples including:

- Lagan Construction, who have won a contract to build a bridge right at the heart of the Olympic Park and will see thousands of people use the bridge during Games Time;
- The McAvoy Group who have won a major contract to build modular buildings at the Basketball Arena;
- Ulster Weavers Home Fashions Ltd have won a major licensing contract to produce official London 2012 kitchen textiles;
- Macrete are supplying pre-cast concrete; and
- Baronscourt Technologies have won a software contract with the Olympic Delivery Authority.

With over half of Olympic related contracts still available from the London Organising Committee many opportunities still exist for contracts in the areas of food, security, sports, and the arts, amongst others. InvestNI continue to work with key partners including local government to raise awareness of those opportunities through hosting business conferences, seminars, workshops and delivering training that will help grow the confidence of local businesses and encourage them to secure Olympic-related work.

Tourism

NITB lead on Tourism in respect of 2012 Olympics and my Department is working in partnership with DETI and NITB to maximise the opportunities to increase visitor numbers, bed nights and change perceptions of the North internationally. 2012 is being highlighted as the North's year of opportunity by DETI, and a 2012 Programme will include promotion of 'Titanic Built in Belfast' along with numerous other events, activities and initiatives which are currently being developed.

In Conclusion

As you may be aware recent media reports have expressed doubts as to whether the North will benefit from the Games. This Assembly paper aims to inform members of the wide range of activity underway to secure benefits from the Games, and progress that is being made.

There is no doubt that we have challenges in respect of the Olympics. Not least of these is the fact that over £41m was diverted from lottery to fund the construction of the Olympic Park; no actual Olympic or Paralympic sporting events are taking place here during Games time; and the perceived distance from London and the Games which may be a barrier to some. However, my Department has forged excellent partnerships with government departments, their arms length bodies, local government, community organisations and important private sector organisations. These have enabled good progress to be made. With just over one year to go, I would encourage you all to work with my Department and the other partners already engaged in this process so that we fully exploit this unique and once in a lifetime opportunity for us all.

