



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Committee for Social Development

# OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Licensing Bill: Ulster Rugby, Irish Football  
Association and Ulster GAA

14 January 2016

# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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**Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Mr Alex Maskey (Chairperson)  
Mr Fra McCann (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr Jim Allister  
Mr Roy Beggs  
Ms Paula Bradley  
Mr Stewart Dickson  
Mr Sammy Douglas  
Mr Phil Flanagan  
Mrs Dolores Kelly  
Mr Adrian McQuillan

**Witnesses:**

Mr Trevor Annon	Irish Football Association
Mr William Campbell	Irish Football Association
Mr Stephen McGeehan	Ulster GAA
Dr Danny Murphy	Ulster GAA
Mr David Boyd	Ulster Rugby
Mr Shane Logan	Ulster Rugby

**The Chairperson (Mr Maskey):** From the three main sporting organisations that have stadia, I formally welcome Shane Logan, David Boyd, William Campbell, Trevor Annon, Danny Murphy and Stephen McGeehan. I thank you all. You are aware that Judith Cochrane is sponsoring a private Member's Bill to ease some of the difficulties that stadia face with their licensing practices. Without any further ado, I have advised members where the papers are in their packs —

**Mr Beggs:** I declare an interest as a non-playing member of Larne Rugby Football Club.

**The Chairperson (Mr Maskey):** I was going to say that you had not starred on the pitch so far.

**Mr Allister:** It is still an aspiration. *[Laughter.]*

**Mr Flanagan:** I declare an interest as a trying-to-play member of Cumann Lúthchleas Gael.

**The Chairperson (Mr Maskey):** OK. You will be all right when you grow up.

**Mr Dickson:** I declare an interest as a trustee of Greenisland War Memorial Sports Club, which plays soccer and rugby.

**The Chairperson (Mr Maskey):** I can never get the image out of my head of Jim Rodgers running around with his football shorts on during an election campaign a few years ago, but there you go.

**Mr Douglas:** I declare an interest as a member of Harland and Wolff Welders. There are some implications there.

**The Chairperson (Mr Maskey):** You have some insight and knowledge of all the issues. I hope that you also buy drink in the establishments that you go to.

Gentlemen, I look forward to hearing your evidence. I leave it to you to present to the Committee. I assume that you support the legislation, but you will speak for yourselves.

**Dr Danny Murphy (Ulster GAA):** I thank the Committee for affording us the opportunity to be here. We believe that the Bill is appropriate and timely. It is important that an area of the sale of alcohol that is not provided for appropriately in legislation is brought into line. Restaurants, bars, social clubs and off-licences are covered, but stadia such as Kingspan/Ravenhill, Windsor Park and Casement Park are not covered. The restrictions that are placed on social clubs have implications for visitors. People who are members of any social club can go to it, but visitors cannot. Unless visitors are the guests of a member, there will be licensing issues.

The legislation will allow stadia to have licences, and the terms of those licences will be fixed by the courts. The operation will be for management committees and boards. What is proposed is, in general terms, a good thing. It will bring the legislation here into line with Britain and Southern Ireland, and I can see nothing but positives from it. If people are going to games and want to buy a pint, selling it to them legally is the best way. If they are inside a stadium, they are under the management and control of ground regulations, which is appropriate across the three sports. I do not want to speak for the other two sports and can speak only for the GAA.

**The Chairperson (Mr Maskey):** Danny, thank you for that.

Is the Committee happy to take the presentations first and then open it up for questions?

*Members indicated assent.*

**The Chairperson (Mr Maskey):** Thank you.

**Mr Shane Logan (Ulster Rugby):** Chairman and Committee, thank you again. Danny, thank you.

As things stand, we play up to 18 professional games a year. We have to apply to the court each time for an occasional licence, and frequently that will be awarded on the day of a match. That means that, generally, we have no certainty of having our ground licensed until the day of a match. That precludes us from bidding for major events and may preclude us from playing professional rugby either in Europe or in the Pro12 that we play in.

I will give two examples of what has happened in the past at the Kingspan Stadium when, under the current regime, we would not have been able to hold events. The first was last May, when we were the first ever independent venue for the Pro12 final between Glasgow and Munster. There were 8,500 visitors from outside the Northern Ireland jurisdiction. With the current licensing laws as they have been implemented this year for this season, we would not have been able to hold that event; we would not have been able to bid for it. The proposed change in the law would allow us to bid for that event.

In June 2014, just after the stadium was finished and opened, we held Europe's largest disability rugby event, with about 600 children and young people with learning and physical disabilities from five countries and about 2,500 supporters. We would not have been able to hold that event under the law as it stands. We had a disco in the ground for all those people that would have been barred from taking place as it went on after the 9.00 pm watershed. I cannot imagine that the law intends that we cannot hold European rugby finals with out-of-town visitors or events for children and young people with disabilities and their families.

We have been awarded the Women's Rugby World Cup semi-finals and finals in August 2017. That is a total of 12 matches, and 12 countries from around the world will play. As it stands, the law means that we would be unable to honour our contractual commitments. Along with our colleagues in the GAA, we are bidding for the right to hold the 2023 Rugby World Cup. If the law remains as it stands,

we will have to withdraw from that. We would not be able to fulfil the criteria for access to alcohol bars and family access to entertainment that are required to allow us to bid for the 2023 World Cup. The new legislation would allow us to do both those things; the current law does not.

There are 38 leading professional rugby clubs across Europe, and they play in the two main European competitions. We are the only one of the 38 that operates under this regime without certainty, and it raises major questions for us about our ability to sign off the participation agreements for our two main competitions: the Pro12 and European rugby. There are no restrictions in force in any of the other 37 clubs that are similar to those that we experience here.

I move now to the hours. We respect our neighbours and have voluntarily agreed to open bars an hour and a half before Pro12 matches and to close them an hour and a half after the match; for European matches, it is two hours. We have no intention of doing anything else. We want things to be tightly controlled, and we realise that we are in a residential area.

Together with the police, we do a good job of ensuring that behaviour is controlled. In that regard, nobody has been arrested in the ground, in the vicinity of the ground or going to or from a match within living memory and certainly not in the last 10 years. There was one possible incident of public urination in the street. The police investigated that, but no cautions or charges were pressed. We certainly recognise that we need to keep tight control, but we suggest that the facts demonstrate that there is not a significant issue on that front.

The three sports are joined together. The fact that our stadium was built first has opened up to us opportunities that we never thought were possible, such as the World Cup, the Women's Rugby World Cup, major disability rugby events and the Pro12 final. At the first point of asking, we have won three of those four. It is vital to us that the other sports are treated consistently, because many European or world-level competition events will come into play that, if two or three of the sports joined up, they could bid for.

**The Chairperson (Mr Maskey):** Thank you very much.

**Mr Trevor Annon (Irish Football Association):** Before I commence, I belatedly declare a potential conflict of interest. I am here this morning primarily as the chairman of the stadium development company of the Irish Football Association (IFA), but I am also chairman of the Mount Charles Group, which is the current provider of bar services to Ulster Rugby. It is appropriate that I declare that at this time.

We have an opportunity to create a world-class venue at the national stadium. That is part of our vision. There is also the aspect of improving and increasing family participation. All of that is allied with the provision of a professionally managed food and beverage service, so that families can spend a considerable amount of the day in the stadium and do not simply arrive for a match and go home immediately it is over.

In our business plan, we anticipate that there will be about 35 or 40 games a year involving our tenant club, Linfield, and the international team. We also intend to build a buoyant conference and banqueting trade in our conference facility. As Shane said, the provision of the controlled sale of alcohol is an important aspect of that. As Shane also said, Ulster Rugby plays circa 16 games a year at its stadium, which presents challenges: if those 16 games were increased to 35 for the IFA and they all had to be treated via an occasional licence, there certainly would be a challenge in persuading the court to grant us those licences, leaving aside how we would handle conferences and banqueting. For that reason alone, we totally support the Bill, but we acknowledge that, for various reasons, there may be occasions when the sale of alcohol may have to be restricted. It is important to make it clear to the Committee that, in such circumstances, we would work and, indeed, are working closely with the PSNI, Belfast City Council, FIFA or UEFA, the stadium safety manager and the stadium management, and their views have priority over any commercial consideration. In other words, should we receive advice that it is not appropriate to sell alcohol during all or part of a game, that advice will be strictly adhered to.

**The Chairperson (Mr Maskey):** Trevor, thank you very much.

**Mr Douglas:** Thanks very much for your presentation. The Castlereagh Road and the Cregagh estate are in my constituency, and I have family living in the Cregagh estate. There have been difficulties in

the past with crowd control, although that has nothing to do with this, Shane. Will you outline your consultation with or your relationship with local communities, particularly in the Cregagh estate?

**Mr Logan:** Relationships are very good. They have not always been good, both on the Cregagh estate and at Ravenhill Park on the other side. There was a residents' association, but it folded five or six years ago, and that, I hope, is testament to the fact that we have dealt with most of the concerns. We do a lot with the Cregagh estate: we have painted a school; we had 25 kids on six- to eight-week rugby programmes; and we did a lot of free tours and had our players talk to the kids. The police deserve a lot of credit. Our crowds have grown from an average of 8,000 four or five years ago to 16,000. With the crowds doubling, there have been a fair number of growing pains. Ulster Rugby and the police have had to come to terms with that, and it now works pretty well. Police staffing is good. Dialogue with people in the Cregagh estate, which was pretty much non-existent, is now good to the extent that we now park there. There was an incident a few years ago when some cars were damaged, whereas now it is almost the exact opposite: we are allowed to use the car park in the community centre. We have come a long way, although you never stop working at it.

**Mr Dickson:** Thank you all for your presentations. Any time that licensing legislation is debated, a lot of the discussion is about the consequences of alcohol being made more widely available and the potential for antisocial behaviour. Will you confirm that the reality is that it is not about expanding the consumption of alcohol but about how you regulate your businesses? You claim that there is little or no antisocial behaviour, but residents are fearful and have sent us photographic evidence of plastic cups and other detritus in the street. As far as residents are concerned, this change in licensing will make no change to what happens outside the stadium.

**Mr Logan:** None.

**Mr David Boyd (Ulster Rugby):** None whatever. The difficulty is the logistics of occasional licences and their application. We have no intention of changing our plans regarding what we have openly said that we will present. There is no difference whatever; it is simply about having an assurance that, when we bid for or organising events, we have that security.

**Mr Logan:** We are not trying to change our hours in any way. We simply want to avoid the uncertainty of having to apply for an occasional licence each time. We have come a long way in improving things for our neighbours, but we still have a long way to go. As I said, our crowds have doubled from 8,000 to 16,000, so there are more people to work with. Our stewarding has more than doubled. Our checks on people leaving the ground are much better. Are they watertight? No, they are not, but we need to try to get there. The police are doing a really good job now. A year or two ago, they, like us, were struggling to cope with the increase in demand. We have changed the entrance and exiting at the stadium to take numbers away and to balance it. It used to be that 80% or 90% of people went in through Ravenhill Park. It is now about 60% or 70% through the Cregagh Road, which is not a one-way system and, therefore, has a better flow of traffic and is easier to police.

**Mr Dickson:** That is helpful. It clearly gets out the message that this is more about how you regulate your business than any additional external effects.

**Mr Boyd:** The change in April in council and policing districts has been very significant for us. Prior to that, we straddled two council areas and two policing areas, which led to difficulties for the organisation. As stadium manager, I have seen a huge increase in support from the police collectively since that change.

**Mr Logan:** We also impose voluntary restrictions on ourselves. We play a lot of amateur rugby and schools' rugby there. There is no access for children, but one tiny bar is open on Schools' Cup days. At the request of our supporters, we have made one stand completely dry, and we have no intention of changing that.

**Mr Dickson:** That is very helpful.

**The Chairperson (Mr Maskey):** I am glad that you raised that point. I attended a meeting as a representative of the area at the time. The two policing districts were a cause of concern for everyone, including a number of residents who were there, because police in one district were doing one thing and police in the other district were doing another thing. It was not well coordinated, and, obviously, that has improved. Thanks for drawing that to our attention.

**Mr Allister:** As I understand it, each of the three facilities already has a social club, is that right?

**Dr D Murphy:** Yes.

**Mr Allister:** The GAA has.

**Mr Boyd:** No.

**Mr Allister:** You do not.

**Mr William Campbell (Irish Football Association):** A social club was run by Linfield Football Club under Windsor Park before the development commenced. I do not think that that is still in existence.

**Mr Allister:** Have any of you ever been refused an occasional licence?

**Mr Boyd:** I can answer that on behalf of Ulster Rugby: no, we have not been refused.

**Mr Logan:** With respect, that is not the issue for us —

**Mr Allister:** It is my question.

**Mr Logan:** It is. We have to bid for events with certainty of licensing. It means that we do not have certainty. It is a fair question.

**Mr Allister:** Is it fair to say that the history points to there being no difficulty in obtaining occasional licences?

**Mr Logan:** We have only about six months' experience of it, but, in that time, that is correct, other than it being granted on the morning of a match.

**Mr Allister:** Is the experience of either of the other disciplines any different?

**Mr W Campbell:** We have not been in the position of having to apply for occasional licences, so we do not know how that would span out for us.

**Mr Allister:** The premise of the proposition is that these are regional and national stadia. However, two of the premises are used for local Gaelic and local football. As I understand it, County Antrim plays at Casement, and Linfield plays at Windsor Park. Are you anticipating that the licence would also benefit the occasions on which the stadia are not being used for regional or national events?

**Dr D Murphy:** You are absolutely correct. We have a social club that is covered by the Registration of Clubs Order 1996. Consequently, anyone attending has to be there as a guest of a member of the social club. That can work when you are playing local events, but it does not work when you are playing regional, national or international events. That is where the complication has arisen. That is why, in our submission, we have made it clear that we believe that the terms of any licence issued to a stadium would have to be under the management and control of the stadium board. Consequently, it would then have to ensure that compliance with the licence was adhered to. Ultimately, the terms under which such a licence was issued would be a matter for the court. The court would ultimately have to show what the licence will be allowing and not allowing.

**Mr Allister:** My question was this: are you anticipating that, for example, when Casement Park or Windsor Park is not being used for international events, the licence granted under this legislation, if it goes through, will be there to be availed of by whomever was utilising the premises?

**Dr D Murphy:** My view is that that would be a matter for the stadium board or the management of the stadium. In other words, if there is a game involving two local teams in Casement Park, the bar facility, with some level of speculation, is unlikely to be extended because the social licence would apply.

**Mr Allister:** Is there anything in this legislation, as drafted, that would restrict it to the international-type occasion?

**Dr D Murphy:** As I read it, it is simply setting it at regional and national level.

**Mr Allister:** Yes, it is bestowing a licence on the premises, irrespective of use, is it not?

**Dr D Murphy:** I believe that it is appropriate, and I use that term because I think that it is setting it at a regional or national level.

**Mr Allister:** I do not think that we are disagreeing. What this legislation purports to do is to bestow a licence on the premises irrespective of who is using them. Is that not correct?

**Dr D Murphy:** Yes.

**Mr Allister:** For example, when Linfield are using Windsor Park, they will have the benefit of a full licence because it is Windsor Park, and no other club will have that when they are playing elsewhere.

**Mr Annon:** In that context, it is important to remember that Linfield, under the terms of the agreement, become a tenant of ours when they play their home games. There are a couple of points that may be helpful. At international games, we have a capacity of circa 18,000, but there are statistics to show that an average Linfield game can have a crowd of between 1,500 and 4,000. The numbers involved are significantly lower. It remains and will remain within the gift of the stadium company when and where alcohol will be sold on any occasion. You are right that the licence will be granted to the ground, but it is up to me as chair of the stadium company to make sure that drink is dispensed and sold only in areas where it is appropriate on the day.

**Mr Allister:** Mr Annon, you have already told us that your ambition is to get into banqueting.

**Mr Annon:** Yes.

**Mr Allister:** So we are not just talking about the use of the licence when there is an international match on; we are talking about introducing hotel-like banqueting facilities at Windsor Park, Casement or Ravenhill, where someone can have their wedding reception, their birthday party or whatever and avail themselves of the licence. That is really what you are talking about.

**Mr Annon:** Yes, I commented on the generation of income via banqueting, and that is part of our business plan. This is the case with practically every other stadium that I am aware of.

**Mr Allister:** You will utilise this legislation to facilitate that.

**Mr Annon:** Yes, but, again, I do not think that the numbers involved in banqueting can exceed 500, and it is unlikely that we will have banquets any more than 20, 25 or 30 times a year at best.

**Mr Allister:** Whether it is once a year or 200 times a year, the point is that, under this legislation, a banqueting enterprise could avail itself of the licence that would come with this legislation.

**Mr Annon:** That is correct.

**Mr Allister:** Therefore, you are in the position, in these heavily and densely populated settings, as each of them are, of introducing something that could be equivalent to the building of a hotel in the facility in that you are doing the same business. You are banqueting. You are having wedding receptions. You are having birthday parties. You have strayed a long way from being sporting stadia, have you not?

**The Chairperson (Mr Maskey):** Sorry, Jim. I will just draw your attention to the fact that, in relation to the suitability for functions, the explanatory notes on clause 6 advise that it relates to:

*"a maximum of 6 functions in any year."*

**Mr Allister:** It is clear what the ambition of some of the interested parties is.

**The Chairperson (Mr Maskey):** I am not disputing that.

**Mr Stephen McGeehan (Ulster GAA):** I will pick up Mr Allister's point. From the governing bodies' point of view, the primary intent of the creation of sports stadia assets is the regularisation of our major sporting events. What Mr Allister raises is in relation to the ancillary uses. The business cases that each of the governing bodies and project boards have put forward envisage and anticipate a level of ancillary use. It is clear that some further work in line with the legislation may need to be done to finesse what that actually means.

**Mr Allister:** Or to have the legislation specify what can and cannot be done.

**Mr McGeehan:** There are some parameters in the legislation as it is drafted.

**The Chairperson (Mr Maskey):** OK. Obviously, our job is to tease all that out.

**Mr Allister:** I have another couple of points. Mr Logan, you told us how good relations were with local residents and how things had improved. Are you saying that there is no problem with street-drinking after matches, for example?

**Mr Logan:** I am certainly not saying that. We work hard, and we will continue to work hard. However, there can be issues when you have 16,000, 17,000 or 18,000 people. I would not deny that.

**Mr Allister:** Let me just read you some of the evidence that has been supplied to the Committee. A local resident said:

*"I have been woken around midnight on a number of occasions by the sound of groups of people singing rugby songs and generally making a nuisance of themselves."*

Others say that there are cans and evidence of people having been drinking as they pass their house. They leave their containers in their gardens and all of that. This is primarily in Ravenhill Park.

**Mr Boyd:** I will make two operational observations on that. First, as part of our operational order, we refuse to allow people to leave the ground carrying any drink. There are receptacles at each gate, and stewards are placed there for that specific purpose. Obviously, at the final whistle, when you have a huge number of people going out, it is difficult to detect them all. However, the policy is that no one leaves the ground with any drink in their hands. From the clean-up point of view, I will not dispute that there could be litter caused. However, the first task that our cleaners do in the morning immediately after the game is to go around the neighbouring area and collect any litter that they find.

**Mr Allister:** The Committee has been supplied with some evidence from local residents — we will hear oral evidence next week — who appear to dispute the rosy picture that you paint of self-imposed discipline at the gate and suggest that people make their way up Ravenhill Park swigging away at their drink and then throwing down that from which they have been drinking.

**Mr Boyd:** As I said, I cannot dispute that that can take place. However, the procedures are in place to try to ensure that it does not happen.

**Mr Allister:** With the Aviva Stadium, we are told that there is a monitoring committee, with local residents represented on it. Are you embracing that idea?

**Mr Logan:** We have no difficulty with that. We hold open nights for residents. We meet regularly with residents. I am aware that three or four pieces of evidence have come in from residents. I have no doubt that, on occasion, there are things that happen that should not happen. To deny otherwise would be wrong. I think that, generally, we work well with the police and the residents. I am surprised about the reference to midnight because we are closed well before then, often a couple of hours before midnight. However, we are up for anything that can improve things with residents. There used to be a residents' committee, as I have said, but the residents have not seen the need over the last four or five years to keep that going or indeed resurrect it. However, if there is something there, we will gladly work with them.

**Mr Allister:** The hours of operation may be relevant to that. I am sure that Mr Annon can help us. This licence would introduce a general licence for these premises up to what hours?

**Mr Annon:** Up to, I think, 11:00 pm. In terms of Ravenhill, which is the most relevant one, the premises have to be cleared and locked down by 11:00 pm at the latest, so there is certainly no one leaving the premises after 11:00 pm.

**Mr Allister:** Is it possible to apply for an occasional licence beyond 11:00 pm under current licensing law?

**Mr Annon:** An occasional licence can take you up to 1:00 am with the granting of the court. If I may comment on the example of cans being left as litter: Ulster Rugby, through us, does not sell any canned products.

**Mr Allister:** The photographs we have are of plastic.

**Mr Annon:** Sorry, I thought you said "cans".

**Mr Allister:** If I did, I withdraw that. However, part of the concerns of local residents could be ameliorated if there was, for example, a restriction that a licence operated until only half an hour after the end of a game or something like that.

**Mr Logan:** We would not be allowed to play in the competitions that we play in. We would not be allowed to hold —

**Mr Allister:** Who says?

**Mr Logan:** The participation agreements stipulate what you have to do.

**Mr Allister:** What do they stipulate about the duration of drinking facilities after a game?

**Mr Logan:** The ground usually has to be open for one and a half or two hours after the game. It is similar for the Women's Rugby World Cup.

**Mr Allister:** The ground has to be open for licence purposes.

**Mr Logan:** Yes.

**Mr Allister:** It says that in the agreement.

**Mr Logan:** It does. Similarly for the Rugby World Cup, we would put ourselves out of the running. For the other 37 professional clubs and our primary bidders — France, Italy and South Africa — the same restrictions do not apply, so we would be at a significant competitive disadvantage. We would probably have to withdraw.

**Mr F McCann:** I have been to stadia across these islands occasionally and have enjoyed the facilities on offer. Those facilities are taken for granted and are par for the course in not only running a stadium but providing a good service for fans, whether home or away. I wish you all the best in the bid for the Rugby World Cup because bringing a feast of rugby to these shores would be exciting. The Assembly has been going out of its way to bring international competitions to these shores so that people can enjoy them.

I represent West Belfast, and I know that at inter-county matches at Casement, GAA members take responsibility for stewarding people in and out of the ground. I have seen that in and around Ravenhill and have been to games at Windsor where the same thing takes place. I view this as being an anomaly that simply restricts growth. There are tens of thousands of young people who look to sporting organisations for not only their futures but their enjoyment. As we progress and as inter-sport partnerships are formed that make it more exciting for young people to go, why would you consider putting an anchor around people's necks that would stop the likes of the Rugby World Cup and other international tournaments taking place in that stadium?

**Dr D Murphy:** May I respond to an important point that was raised there? At a meeting that I attended in London with regard to the 2023 World Cup, two things were astounding. The first was the demand for what they called corporate facilities, which very few stadia on this island, never mind here, would be able to complete or compete with at this minute in time. The second one that is very important is the media. The size of the media operation for the 2023 World Cup at, say, quarter-final stage will be well beyond anything we have seen in this country. The media requirement alone could be for well in excess of 2,000 people. An hour and a half was mentioned: the facilities to keep media personnel accommodated — that means catering — would be needed for a much longer time than an hour and a half. I am just making the point that Mr McCann's point on the Rugby World Cup just focuses on one aspect of the matter that we have to address.

**The Chairperson (Mr Maskey):** Danny, thank you for that.

**Mr Flanagan:** Shane, I am interested in exploring the litter problems around Ravenhill. What type of litter is found? Is it merely products related to the consumption of alcohol, or are bags of crisps and empty cans of Coke found as well?

**Mr Boyd:** It can be any of those things. Generally, it would be plastic things, but I would draw attention to the fact that there is a degree of litter there, irrespective of whether we are there. It is hard to distinguish. Any pint glasses obviously come from Ravenhill, and they are attended to immediately or as soon as possible. For instance, next Saturday, we will have a 1.00 pm kick-off, which is unusual for us as they are normally evening games; so, our cleaning process will actually happen after the match on Saturday so that these things are not blowing about. Generally, as we play evening games, the clean-up is done first thing the following morning.

**Mr Flanagan:** How important is it to patrons who attend Ravenhill that alcoholic products are available for consumption? I have attended a couple of Friday night games, and the atmosphere is second to none. I am a GAA man, but I think the atmosphere at Ravenhill on a Friday night is really unique on this island, and we should encourage it in any way that we can. How crucial is the ability to drink alcohol at an Ulster Rugby game in securing the Friday night atmosphere?

**Mr Logan:** Thank you. There are 4,200 hospitality spaces out of the 18,000 capacity. Our experience is that roughly 20% of our crowd is under 18. At the minute, at 9.00 pm, you have to take children out of any licensed area, which means that parents either go home or kids are just running about throwing a ball and that sort of thing. It is damaging to us because it means that families cannot stay together. Typically, we think that 40% to 50% of our crowd go as families. It is jeopardising to the family. The family thing is vital to us. We want all generations to be there. We want an electric atmosphere, but we want good behaviour and respect for the opposition, the referee and the kicks. We do not want to skew the crowd to being only over-18s. For us, it is vital that it is a family atmosphere, first and foremost.

**Mr Boyd:** I will give you an example that I was hit with two matches ago of the problem with the current children order situation. A supporter and his family group had travelled by bus from Donegal with their local rugby club. There were several families on board, and it was their big day out at Ravenhill for the year. He was complaining about the fact that, at 9.00 pm, he could not be with his children, yet the bus was not due to leave to go back to Donegal until 10.00 pm. That had separated the family connection, and he did not have any control over it because he had no control over when the bus left. This is a typical example of where the difficulty is at the moment.

**Mr Annon:** Indeed, I will just expand on that slightly. There are occasions when a game finishes after 9.00 pm, so you have the rather ludicrous situation where children cannot see the end of the game if they are in a licensed area. As Shane alluded to, they either have to leave that area and stand outside, with or without their parents, or the parents and children have to leave the premises.

**Mr Flanagan:** It is certainly not a perfect scenario. Is it your view that there is nearly an anomaly or an oversight in the fact that indoor arenas can get licences of this nature but outdoor ones cannot? What is your collective view on that?

**Mr Boyd:** At the time that the arena got its licence, if we had the forethought in terms of the stadia, it would probably have been appropriate to do the one licence around the whole thing. What we face now with the current occasional licence has highlighted that and has drawn us towards the arena option as the suitable alternative.

**Mr Flanagan:** Is there much difference between the family-friendly environment at Belfast Giants games and the environment at soccer, rugby or Gaelic matches?

**Mr Annon:** I might be able to help the Committee with that because I was the service provider at the Odyssey Arena when it opened in 2000, and it had to operate under an occasional licence until 2004. If, at that time, two words — "and outdoor" — had been added to the legislation so that it covered indoor and outdoor arena, that would have assisted us greatly. The Odyssey Arena, now the SSE, is very much built on a family theme. The Giants games are very much a family occasion, but there are approximately 105 to 110 events a year in the SSE, as distinct from the rugby capacity of 16 or 18 games.

**Mr McGeehan:** In response to Mr Flanagan's point, on the links with the SSE, members will have noted that, in the responses from the governing body, that has been mentioned by way of comparison with an indoor venue. It is outside the discussion today, but it makes a link between what is happening with indoor venues and new stadia. In the likes of the old Windsor Park, Ravenhill, which is now Kingspan, and Casement, spectators and patrons standing on cold, wet terraces had no desire to consume alcohol, despite the fact that there may have been some provision. The difference now is that we have new, modern, comfortable stadia. We are in the business of sport; the patrons who come to our games are in the business of being entertained. They have come to expect the same experience at places such as the two new stadia and, hopefully, Casement in the future, as they have experienced in the SSE. That is why it is good that the comparison is being made. Similarly, from the point of view of the safe sports grounds legislation, interestingly, a new review by the Sports Grounds Safety Authority (SGSA) is looking at safety in sports grounds being combined with that in indoor arenas. That recognises that indoor arenas and stadia are being treated in a similar way.

**Mrs D Kelly:** It is good to see you all here together. When you said in your opening remarks that Northern Ireland was outside what happens elsewhere, whether it be the South of Ireland or GB, I wondered about best practice. Presumably, you have taken soundings from your counterparts elsewhere on how to manage the situation and remain on good terms with your neighbours.

My other point is one that the PSNI raised in its response to the consultation. The PSNI said that there should be no mixed retailing and that you should have a fixed point of sale in the stadium. I would like to hear your view on that. Is that your intention?

**Dr D Murphy:** I will deal with the initial points raised. Our understanding of where this legislation is taking us is that the court will define the area in which the sale of alcohol takes place. Therefore, the responsibility passes directly to the stadium to comply with the defined area. The use of hours is also a matter for the court to define. A triple-lock check makes the ground management comply with the legislation. If the police are unhappy with how we run our affairs, they can object to our licence. There is also the potential for people to challenge us on the grounds that we are not compliant with the law. What this legislation is trying to achieve would improve matters.

You asked whether we had looked at what happens elsewhere, and the answer is yes. A very good example is a club currently in the Premiership in England. Watford play at Vicarage Road, and they have a licence that is also used by a rugby club that plays on Saturdays and Sundays. Stephen referred to the fact that some of the arrangements will be regularised, and I think that that needs to be done in Britain because the rules that apply to the rugby club and those that apply to Watford FC are not entirely the same. Experience from major stadia shows that encouraging people to enter the stadium earlier leads to better management, better control and better respect for neighbours. All of those areas are improved. This is not about anyone looking for open season on the sale of alcohol. The Justice Bill that is going through the Assembly places substantial responsibilities on the organisers of events, and any legislation that is in place will not set aside any of those responsibilities.

**Mr Logan:** The three of us also looked at what happens in Dublin at the Aviva Stadium and Croke Park, and the Bill would bring us into line with what happens in the South. It is not exactly the same, but it is very similar and, importantly, provides certainty, which allows those grounds to bid for the major international events from which we are currently precluded.

**Mr McQuillan:** I will be brief. I support the legislation because I think that it will make things easier for everybody.

Trevor, you mentioned banqueting. What difference would that make to the likes of Irish league clubs that have corporate days in their social clubs?

**Mr Annon:** In theory, not an awful lot. We talked about banquets, but there is also a market for conferences, which are largely a daytime trade. That might allay Mr Allister's concerns about evening trade. We would be competing with the open market to generate business in those areas. It is quite normal for that to happen. It is a way of helping us to make the whole stadium financially more sustainable by generating third-party income.

**Mr McQuillan:** I agree with you. A while back, I attended a conference at St James's Park in Newcastle, which is perfect for hosting that sort of thing. I even got a tour of the ground as part of the conference.

David, you said there is a bit of a problem when the final whistle goes because, with everybody rushing out the gate at the same time, it is hard to see who is taking cans or plastic glasses out with them. Surely, with this legislation, people might not rush out as quickly after the final whistle. They will leave more slowly, which will be easier to regulate.

**Mr Boyd:** The example that I gave probably refers only to the first five minutes immediately after the final whistle. A very substantial number of the crowd remain in the ground afterwards. Indeed, we restrict quite a lot of that flow by running two park-and-ride services that operate from outside the gate. The people using those services do not walk through the residential area because they board their bus immediately outside the ground, and that restricts the flow.

**Dr D Murphy:** I have a quick point, Mr McQuillan. Our experience at Croke Park is that people do not leave in such a hurry. On average, they stay for an hour.

**Mr McQuillan:** Why do people stay at Croke Park for an hour after the game? Is it to go to the social club or just to hang about?

**Dr D Murphy:** They interact with people and might go for a bite to eat or a drink.

**Mr F McCann:** It depends who wins.

**Dr D Murphy:** In general terms, people stay on. If a match finishes at 5.00 pm, people might not vacate the ground until between 6.00 pm and 6.30 pm.

**Mr McQuillan:** I go to the Coleraine Showgrounds fairly regularly, and the same thing happens there. People stay on and go into the social club to see the football results. I do not see the banqueting side as being any different from what Coleraine, Ballymena or any other Irish league club does regularly.

**Mr Douglas:** I have one very quick question, which follows on from what Adrian mentioned. It goes back to Windsor Park, so, Trevor, maybe you will comment on this. The point has been made that Linfield would be able to avail itself of the benefits of the licence, which I, personally, would support. Is there any downside for any of the other Irish league teams? I go to football matches, and many clubs have their own social club. Apart from banqueting, are there any other issues for the other clubs?

**Mr Annon:** Maybe William is better geared to answering that than I am.

**Mr W Campbell:** We do not anticipate any. As you said, the other clubs have their own arrangements, whether in Ballymena or wherever, with social clubs, and some use their facilities for events on match days and on other occasions. If this goes through, it will enable Linfield to have the same sort of facility as others have.

**Mr McQuillan:** If it does not go through, Linfield will not have that facility at Windsor Park. Is that what you are saying?

**Mr W Campbell:** We would have to look at occasional licences.

**Mr Logan:** May I raise a related point? People in rugby have asked, "If Ulster do very well and the crowds grow, will it cannibalise revenue and activity?". I think that is true of all sport. Our experience is that our crowds have doubled. Our experience in the club game is that it also has grown. As three sports, we are not about trying to have the big bit dominating the small bit. Our aim is to grow everything, whether it is the women's game, the disabled side, people on the fringes or people at the

top end. The three sports help each other to grow, and we get European and world best practice. Such practice lifts the sights, inspires, is successful and trickles through every part of our sport and society. It is not a win-lose. Because the sights are raised and the standard is raised, it is about all three sports winning, all parts of all three sports winning and, indeed, other sports, winning.

**Mr Douglas:** I live slipper distance from Kingspan and go to some of the matches. Shane, you talked about Kingspan and how Ulster Rugby has expanded. I was surprised, when I started to go, by the number of families there. It is the same with the Northern Ireland football team. I have been following Northern Ireland all my life and see a big change — a very positive change — in the number of families going. You would expect that to expand as well.

**Mr Annon:** I want to expand on your comment about any potential disadvantage to regional clubs. Without getting into the specifics, part of our business plan policy is that, if the stadium makes a surplus in any one year, some of that money will be diverted to local football. It is not a question of building up a big bank of money that will just sit there; it will be ploughed back into the game.

**Mr Douglas:** Very good point.

**Mr Beggs:** I want to return to hospitality and the banqueting side. I am trying to ascertain how important that aspect is in developing match day experiences — food before, food afterwards etc — enabling that investment and maintaining the quality of that experience. How important is it that there are additional occasions, other than match days, to enable quality facilities to be developed for the match day experience?

**Mr W Campbell:** We are looking at added value. These are sports events and sports stadia. Our primary emphasis is on running sports matches — football matches, Gaelic matches, rugby matches. That is what we are in the business of doing. We are in a wonderful position: Kingspan is complete, the Windsor Park development is almost complete, and we look forward to seeing what comes from the Casement issue. When all of that has been concluded, we will have three world-class venues in the city. We want to ensure that people want to come to them and that we have facilities that people will want to use. Mr McQuillan mentioned attending a conference at St James's Park in England. We know that the model used in football clubs in England and Scotland is that their facilities are not used only for football at weekends or midweek. If the clubs have facilities, they try to expand them and use them so that they become a more rounded business, but that is added value, and our primary aim has to be the running of the sporting events.

**Mr Beggs:** Presumably, for you to provide that experience at a sporting event, investment is required. The event will be better if you can add value. Otherwise, potentially, the facility is empty for the vast majority of the time.

**Mr Annon:** The member raises a very good point. Fitting out the catering facilities in the new stadium will cost approximately £300,000. That gives you a flavour: if those facilities were to be used only six or seven times a year, it would be difficult for anyone to justify that investment. That is why it is necessary, as Mr Campbell said, to bring some added value to the revenue.

**The Chairperson (Mr Maskey):** No other members have indicated that they have a question. A fair number of members have already put questions, and it is probably fair to say that the greatest volume of concerns addressed here reflected what we have heard from local residents. Some of us have direct experience of representing them in these circumstances over the years. It is great to see all of you from the three sports here together.

If I were to encapsulate what you are saying, it would be that you support the Bill. You are very clear in your assertion — I think that Danny made the point — that it is not open season on the sale of alcohol; it is about trying to get certainty for your business and for the operation of the stadia that you have responsibility for. You see the legislation helping to create a better management process so that the ground works more successfully and enabling you to meet the continuing need — the essential need — to build good relations between your neighbours and the fans. Those are the points that you were making. You see it as being all to the benefit of your sport. Is that fair enough?

We are to have evidence sessions from the PSNI and residents. If there is anything else that you feel that you need to come back on, feel free to do so. Likewise, if we want to query anything, we will come back to you, if you do not mind. Are you happy enough that you have made your case, or do

you want to add anything? No. Thank you all very much for being here this morning. You have set a good example of working together.