

**Meeting of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on
Transport, Tourism and Sport
National Sports Policy 2018-2027
14 November 2018
Opening Statement by Minister Ross**

Thank you Chairman,

I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to address you today. I am joined by Brendan Griffin, the Minister of State with responsibility for Tourism and Sport. I am also joined by officials of the Department, Ken Spratt, Peter Hogan, Noel Sheahan and James Lavelle. I propose to share my speaking time with my colleague Minister Brendan Griffin.

Brendan and I had the privilege of launching the National Sports Policy towards the end of July at a wonderful venue in central Dublin, specifically at the Laurence O'Toole Recreation Centre in Sheriff Street. That day in Sherriff Street many people came together to showcase the best of the North East Inner City community as local people of all ages participated in a variety of sporting activities on a gloriously sunny day. In so many ways it was the perfect start for this 10-year policy. I wish to extend my thanks once again to all concerned.

There are three High-Level Goals in this National Sports Policy:

- **Increased Participation** across all sports in Ireland.
- **More Excellence** in terms of governance as well as in the sporting arena.
- **Improved Capacity** to allow for more people to get involved in sport, and for those already engaged in sport to improve standards across the board.

Our ultimate ambition is for every citizen to engage regularly in some form of sport and physical activity, irrespective of their background or their physical capabilities. We want to elevate Ireland to the top of the table for participation. To achieve the aims of the policy it is clear that we must prioritise certain groups, to help them to engage more in sport and be more physically active generally. The Committee members know as well as I do the extraordinary benefits this can deliver for people's physical health and mental well-being.

When we launched the policy we highlighted a number of priorities, such as the need to accelerate our Women in Sport Programme by doubling the annual funding provision from €1million to €2 million in 2019. While the gender gap in sports participation is narrower now than at any point over the past ten years, at just 4.5%, I am determined to eliminate that gap altogether. I am very pleased that the necessary funding is in place to begin that journey in 2019.

Many of the great Irish sporting successes this year have been achieved by women and the list of achievements over the past 12 months has been phenomenal.

To name but a few, we have been enthralled by brilliant moments such as:

- the remarkable run of the women's hockey team to the World Cup Final;
- the World Under-20 Athletics Championships successes for Sommer Leky and the women's 4x100m relay squad;
- the Under-18 European Championships medals for Rhasidat Adeleke, Sarah Healy and Sophie O'Sullivan; and
- our medal wins at the World Para Athletics European Championships and the World Para Swimming Allianz European Championships, which were hosted here in Dublin during August.

Our Paralympic sports stars provide a welcome illustration of another area of priority, which is to provide increased opportunities for people with a disability to participate in sport. To drive this initiative, funding has been provided in the 2019 Estimates to introduce a dedicated €1m programme for Disability Sport, which will facilitate the deployment of a Sport Inclusion Disability Officer in all 26 Local Sports Partnerships countrywide.

We have set ourselves a number of ambitious targets, and I would like to highlight the following today:

- To increase overall participation in sport from 43% to 50% of the population by 2027. That means the equivalent of 250,000 more people participating in sport in nine years' time.

- More targeted high performance funding to deliver more Olympic and Paralympic medals. 20 medals is our target for the Los Angeles Games in 2028.
- The adoption by all funded sports bodies of the Governance Code for the Community, Voluntary and Charity (CVC) Sector.

I would like to reiterate my thanks to John Treacy and all at Sport Ireland for their commitment to Irish sport. They have, for example, shown great leadership in the fight against doping in sport and are leading the call for reform in the World Anti-Doping Agency. At the recent anti-doping summit in the White House, the high regard in which John and his team at Sport Ireland are held among their peers was abundantly clear. We will never tolerate anything which compromises the integrity of our sports and that message is emphasised in this policy.

We are also determined to continue our investment in sports facilities, through the Sports Capital Programme and the new Large Scale Sports Infrastructure Fund. The on-going development of the Sport Ireland National Sports Campus is proof that Ireland is committed to excellence and opportunity in sport.

In conclusion, this is an historic document that for the first time outlines the Government's vision for sport and reminds us all of the importance it has in our heritage and culture. We want to ensure sport remains at the heart of our society. And, even more importantly, we want to see Irish people of all abilities

taking part in some sport or physical activity each day for the benefit of their physical and mental health.

Thank you Chairman. I would now like to ask the Minister of State to comment on the policy.....