



Dr. Úna May
CEO Sport Ireland
Opening Address to Committee of Public Accounts
Thursday 22 February 2024

Chairperson and Committee members, thank you for the invitation to attend this meeting today to discuss the 2022 Financial Statements for Sport Ireland, and to share information on our role in the governance and oversight of funding to the FAI.

I am joined here today by my colleagues Colm McGinty, Director of Strategy and Governance, and Shane Califf, Director of National Governing Bodies.

To assist the discussion today, and in line with the Letter of Invitation, we have submitted some briefing material to the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity afforded me to make this opening statement.

Introduction

Sport Ireland is the statutory authority tasked with the development of sport in Ireland. Established under the Sport Ireland Act 2015 we are tasked with increasing participation in sport, supporting Ireland's high-performance athletes, operating Ireland's anti-doping programme, delivering coaching training, and developing the Sport Ireland Campus.

Sport Ireland Highlights

In 2023 Sport Ireland launched our new Strategic Plan and managed the investment of €40 million in National Governing Bodies (NGBs) and €16m in Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs) to promote the development of sport. Across the sport sector over the past year, we have seen positive results with:

- Participation levels rebounding to surpass the pre-pandemic level (47%, was 46% in 2019);

- Significant international success, with 99 medals won across high performance sporting events, and we had a record level of investment in the high-performance system;
- Compliance with the Governance Code for Sport increasing by 3% to 95%, and;
- Women now make up an average of 44% of board members across sport governing bodies in Ireland.

In addition to Sport Ireland's 2022 Financial Statements, which received a clean audit from the C&AG, we have also shared detail on Sport Ireland-administered funding to the FAI within our briefing document.

Oversight by Sport Ireland and the DTCAGSM of funding to the FAI

It has been well documented that Sport Ireland was tasked by Government with having an oversight and monitoring role in relation to the MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) agreed between Government and the FAI in 2020.

Members will be aware that there were issues around the embedding of MOU 35 (a condition related to CEO remuneration) which were uncovered via a Sport Ireland commissioned audit. Following the audit the FAI took the required corrective actions, and this issue was subsequently resolved.

A report on the overall implementation of the reforms set out under the MOU has been published by the Ministers. In summary, over 90% of required items have been completed, and some very significant and tangible reforms have been delivered by the FAI.

Whilst the FAI's journey of reform and change since 2020 was not without its challenges and setbacks, the FAI have demonstrated that solid progress has been made on its transition to a better governance structure and improved practices. This transition will require ongoing work, resourcing and nurturing to ensure that good governance is at the heart of how the FAI operates and does its business into 2024 and beyond. Sport Ireland is committed to working with, and supporting, the FAI in the continuation of their journey of reform.

COVID-19 Relief Fund

During 2020 and 2021, COVID-19 restrictions led to large-scale decreases in sporting activities across the country. Every aspect of life was profoundly affected and that was

certainly the case when it came to sport, the one thing that brings people together, when we weren't allowed come together. The Government provided targeted COVID-19 Resilience & Recovery Funds which was administered by Sport Ireland. This unprecedented investment addressed the immediate financial and operational needs of the sector. It was for the purpose of offsetting financial losses and additional costs arising because of COVID-19 and to ensure no viable sporting organisation would become insolvent thereby contributing to the public health recovery post pandemic.

The COVID-19 grant schemes were like no other Sport Ireland Investment programmes in terms of the context, size, scale, condensed timelines, and support for grassroots clubs and community groups.

Sport Ireland put an unprecedented post-allocation monitoring and compliance programme in place, which included a combination of executive reporting, as well as external and internal audit reviews.

In 2020, a series of COVID-19 specific audits were undertaken by KOSI representing 90% of that year's funding – all received high ratings of assurance that the funds were spent in accordance with the conditions as set out. We are satisfied that the scheme delivered on its objectives and was well managed by the sports sector.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I want to thank Minister Catherine Martin, Minister Thomas Byrne, and our colleagues in the Department, for their ongoing support. I welcome the discussion with the Committee, and I am happy to answer any questions.

Thank You.