



**Joint Oireachtas Committee on Media, Tourism, Arts, Culture, Sport and the Gaeltacht**

- a) Key Priorities as Chairman of Sport Ireland**
  - b) The Impact of Covid-19 on the Sector**
- 18<sup>th</sup> November 2020**

**Opening Statement by Kieran Mulvey (Chairman, Sport Ireland) and John Treacy (Chief Executive, Sport Ireland)**

**Introduction**

On behalf of Sport Ireland, I would like to thank the Committee for giving us this opportunity to speak with you this afternoon.

I am joined today by the Chief Executive of Sport Ireland, John Treacy.

Firstly, I will give the Committee an overview of my priorities for the coming two years as Chairman of Sport Ireland.

Following this, Mr Treacy will discuss some of the challenges facing the wider sport and physical activity sector as a result of the ongoing Covid-19 related restrictions and public health measures.

**a) Key Priorities as Chairman of Sport Ireland**

Sport Ireland was established on October 1<sup>st</sup> 2015, bringing together the Irish Sports Council, the National Sports Campus Development Authority, the Irish Institute of Sport and Coaching Ireland into one new streamlined body to drive the future of Irish Sport.

During the last five years, there have been a number of significant developments for Sport Ireland.

Sport Ireland has successfully completed the new High Performance Training Centre at the Sport Ireland Institute, Phase 1 of the Sport Ireland National Indoor Arena in 2017, and Phase 2 of the Arena in 2019. This facility now provides indoor training opportunities for over 20 sports, including indoor training for rugby, soccer and GAA.

In 2019, Sport Ireland completed a new state of the art hockey pitch which is the same surface that will be used at the Tokyo Olympics, for our international hockey teams and new training facilities for our international cricket teams.

In 2018, Sport Ireland completed the movement its offices on the Sport Ireland Campus from rented accommodation in Blanchardstown.

We are continuing our engagement with NGB's to locate their headquarters on the Sport Ireland Campus and are currently extending office facilities for existing NGB's on the Campus.

Sport Ireland has recently received approval as a Provider of Higher Education by the Quality and Qualification Ireland, (QQI), meaning coaching qualifications awarded by Sport Ireland Coaching will be recognised through the educational system in Ireland and Europe, allowing Sport Ireland to offer programmes of Higher Education including Degree level awards.

In 2019, Irish high performance athletes won 80 medals on the international stage, while Ireland currently has 52 athletes plus 5 reserves have qualified for the Tokyo Olympic Games, while Ireland has achieved 5 automatic quota places for the Paralympic Games.

I was delighted to be reappointed as Chairman of Sport Ireland for a further two-year term by Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, Catherine Martin and Minister of State Jack Chambers.

Sport is central to the social, cultural and community life of Ireland. Like all facets of society, sport in Ireland has been significantly impacted by the onset of Covid-19 and the resulting restrictions.

This presented a significant challenge to sports sector, but all acted in solidarity with the rest of society in protecting the health of the nation.

The Government has responded to Sport Ireland's representations on behalf of the sector with not only the allocation of significant emergency funding in 2020 – which Mr Treacy will address later – but also a substantial increase in the budget for sport in 2021.

In this context, the need for absolute stability in the sector is paramount; particularly with regard to the oversight of €85 million in Covid-19 funding allocated earlier this month and the unprecedented movement shortly of the Olympic and Paralympic Games to 2021.

### ***Strong Governance Across the Sector***

Sport Ireland's vision is a world-class sports sector operating to the highest standards of governance and accountability and contributing towards the National Policy objectives for sport.

To assist the organisations, Sport Ireland has in place a range of supports in place from seminars to learning opportunities to hands-on interventions. Sport Ireland's work in this area has increased in the last year, along with the strengthening of the Terms and Conditions of Grant Approval for funded bodies.

Sport Ireland has taken over the Governance Code for Community, Voluntary and Charitable Organisations as a Governance Code for Sport. From 2021, it will become a condition of funding that all funded bodies must have fully adopted the Governance Code for Sport on an explain or comply basis.

Before the end of my term, I wish to see all organisations funded by Sport Ireland fully adopting all elements of the Code. Furthermore, I wish to see that all funded bodies have strong boards in place, with members fully aware of their responsibilities and the responsibilities of their executive.

### ***Participation in Sport***

Over the course of the next two years, Sport Ireland will continue to develop its position as the driver for the development of participation in sport and physical activity.

The work of Sport Ireland will galvanise the efforts of our funded bodies in providing participation opportunities for all people, regardless of age, background or circumstance.

In particular, there will be a focus on creating opportunities for traditionally hard-to-reach groups. The Dormant Accounts Fund has been successful in supporting significant strides in recent years and Sport Ireland has demonstrated its ability to provide a solid return on investment. I am delighted that the money being allocated to Sport Ireland through the Dormant Accounts Fund will increase to €10 million in 2021.

### ***Women in Sport***

In 2019 Sport Ireland published its ambitious Policy on Women in Sport. Significant strides have been made in delivering on the actions identified in the policy.

It builds on the significant work that has already been undertaken in this area within the sport sector to date and, in recognising the opportunity to make a significant impact on the lives of women through their involvement in sport, it provides a blueprint for Sport Ireland's future work. It is aligned with the Government's National Sports Policy and forms a key element of Sport Ireland's strategy.

Sport Ireland established the Women in Sport Programme in 2005 and to date over €20 million has been invested through National Governing Bodies and Local Sports Partnerships. A key aim of the programme is to have equal participation between males and females in sport. The gender gradient in sports participation has closed from 15.7% to 3.4% since 2007 according to the most recent Irish Sports Monitor. (2019).

I will be putting particular emphasis on driving this policy forward so that the gender gap in participation will be closed.

### ***High Performance Sport***

High on my agenda for coming period is the publication of the new High Performance Strategy for Irish sport. This document is aligned with the National Sports Policy and the commitments within the new Programme for Government.

We are also looking to ahead to Paris 2024 and Los Angeles 2028 and laying the ground work for Ireland's participation in these Games.

Due to the prevailing global situation, the unprecedented decision was taken to move the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games to 2021. It is incumbent on Sport Ireland to ensure that there is continuity and certainty provided to the high performance system so that our athletes stand the best possible chance of performing to the best of their ability next year.

We are also looking to what lay ahead and the laying of ground work for Ireland's participation in the Paris and Los Angeles has already begun.

### ***Sport Ireland Campus***

The completion of the Masterplan for the Sport Ireland Campus is a priority for me.

This is a significant body of work, which will chart the future development of the Sport Ireland Campus over the next 15 years.

The development of the Masterplan is in its final stages and follows lengthy and detailed consultations with Fingal County Council, the National Governing Bodies for Sport and other key stakeholders.

We are in ongoing discussions with Government in relation to securing funding to realise the impressive plans that are coming together for the Campus.

Securing this funding is vital, as it will see the Campus transformed into a world-class sporting hub that is the envy of others. It will mean that all of our international athletes will have training, support and competition services on the one site.

The Campus will also become a beacon for international sporting events. Indeed, we look forward to welcoming the postponed European Cross Country Championships to our bespoke course in 2021.

Equally as important, the Campus will become a centre of sport and recreation for the local community. The Sport Ireland Campus is for all people and that principle is at the heart of the new Masterplan.

I will hand over to Mr Treacy, who will address matters relating to Covid-19 and the impact on the sector.

### **b) The Impact of Covid-19 on the Sport Sector**

The Committee will have received a detailed statement from Sport Ireland in relation to the impact of Covid-19 on the sport sector.

When restrictions were put in place in March, Sport Ireland responded quickly to its role in terms of protecting public health and supporting the sport sector. Sport Ireland identified four key areas of focus:

1. Making the case for sports' inclusion on the Government's roadmap;
2. Creating an environment where high performance athletes could return to training as quickly as possible;
3. Presenting a strong case to Government to ensure the financial stability of the sport sector during the pandemic; and
4. Looking at how sport could support the Government and society through the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **Return to Sport Expert Group**

The establishment of the Return to Sport Expert Group was a very welcome development. The group was established by the then Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, provides guidance and approval to sport protocols. This allows for a safe, quick and assured Return to Sport where prevailing restrictions allow and is of significant benefit to the sports sector.

The Expert Group considers protocols and other return to sport factors on a level-by-level basis, recognising that this is an evolving situation with changes to public health advice likely. The medical experts on the Group provide a critical role in the assessment of submissions.

### **High Performance Sport**

The Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games have been postponed to 2021.

At the onset of the pandemic, Sport Ireland moved quickly to provide an assurance to NGBs that athletes on the 2020 International Carding Scheme will continue to receive funding as normal. Sport Ireland extended this commitment to athletes into 2021 and will allow for new entrants to the Scheme.

A return to training for High Performance Athletes in June was a big relief to the athletes and their support personnel. Sport Ireland has continued to work closely with the relevant Government Departments to facilitate the continuation of high performance training during the all levels of the Government's plan.

The Sport Ireland Institute remains operational under very strict controls and the facilities on the Sport Ireland Campus remain available to facilitate high performance athletes. While the Sport Ireland Institute building had been closed for a period, the expert staff were still working hard to support athletes, taking innovative approaches to ensuring that all areas are covered from strength & conditioning to nutrition, psychology to life skills.

### **Sector Supports**

Sport Ireland has rolled out a number of initiatives throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, aimed at keeping people active, regardless of the current restrictions.

**National BeActive Day** took place on Sunday 28th June in conjunction with the network of Local Sports Partnerships. Families and friends accepted the challenge in households across the country and took part in a series of fun games at home to help them reach their daily physical activity goal.

Also developed by Sport Ireland and its network of Local Sports Partnerships, the **Activities For All Physical Activity Plan** aims to support people with a disability to be more active on a daily basis.

This is accompanied by an **Older Adult Home Exercise Plan**, which aims to support older adults to be more active on a daily basis.

In addition to the ongoing assessment of protocols & support resources from the Return to Sport Expert Group, Sport Ireland has been providing a blend of classroom based and eLearning opportunities for Funded bodies, Club & Community Groups, Coaches, Volunteers & Participants.

These include:

- COVID-19 Compliance Officer Training
- Covid-19 Awareness Course – accessed over 185,000 times
- Return to Sport Guidelines & Infographics

In November 2020 Sport Ireland, with the support of Dormant Accounts Funds, is running a sport and physical activity campaign named **“Your Personal Best”** targeting men over the age of 45 in disadvantaged communities.

Your Personal Best is a project aimed at encouraging men over the age of 45 to stop making excuses and to engage in 30 minutes of moderate physical activity five days a week. The campaign is being supported by various sporting National Governing Bodies and the network of Local Sport Partnerships, who will provide practical support and additional tailored programmes on the ground.

### **Keep Well Campaign**

Sport Ireland is a key partner in the Government's **'Keep Well' campaign**. A key pillar of the campaign is keeping people being active and getting outdoors, even during the winter months; this is important to help physical and mental health and wellbeing.

To support the campaign, Sport Ireland has developed a dedicated 'Keep Well' webpage, which provides comprehensive information on how people can keep active during the coming months. This can be accessed on [www.sportireland.ie/keepwell](http://www.sportireland.ie/keepwell).

There will be a range of initiatives activated over the coming months as part of the keep well campaign, such as:

- A Community Walking Initiative, which will see up to 750 GAA pitches, soccer pitches, rugby pitches, hockey pitches, cricket fields and athletics ground opened up for public walking purposes.
- This will be supported by the development of a Get Ireland Walking app which, along with hosting a 21-day walking challenge, will also be an integral part of the Community Walking initiative. People will be able to book walking timeslots, with all participating clubs listed.
- Local Sports Partnerships will be rolling out a range of inclusive opportunities for people of all ages and background, many of which will be linked to the ever-popular Operation Transformation.
- FitLine is an excellent Freephone advice and mentorship service being run by Age & Opportunity and is a great way to help people who want to feel a bit healthier but just don't have the time or access to online information on where and how to take that first step. The capacity of FitLine will be increased tenfold with mentors providing support to older adults, with cross referrals between all relevant agencies at a local level to ensure we maximise support at a local level. We would encourage anyone looking to get started to contact FitLine on 1800 303 545.
- Sport Ireland will be rolling out a comprehensive awareness campaign around all of the initiatives, as well as providing new content on an ongoing basis on the Sport Ireland website and social media – this will include home exercise videos, tips and advice and motivating stories.

Overall the campaign will reinforce the message that it is important for everyone, regardless of age or circumstances, regardless of the what level of restrictions we are in, to get out and active over the weeks and months ahead.

### **Covid-19 Funding**

Since the onset of the restrictions, sporting organisations have incurred substantial losses across all areas including sponsorship, gate receipts, membership, events, summer camps and broadcast revenue. Looking the three main field sports alone this amounts to in excess of €105 million.

While the impact on smaller NGBs is not as great in financial terms, relatively speaking it has had as significant an impact on the operations of all.

In particular, the cancellation or postponement of major events has been difficult on National Governing Bodies, including:

- Euro 2020, where Dublin was due to be a host city
- The 2020 European Cross County Championships, not postponed by a year
- The Women's Mini-Marathon
- Dublin Marthon

to name just a few.

On November 2nd, Sport Ireland announced the allocation of an unprecedented €85 million in Covid-19 funding for the Irish sport sector.

This funding will address the existential threat to National Governing Bodies and their club networks. The significant investment will reach all levels of the sport sector with National Governing Bodies, Local Sports Partnerships and thousands of grassroots clubs across Ireland set to benefit. Approximately €20 million will benefit thousands of clubs through the various schemes.

An Emergency Fund to the value of €5.8 million has been ring-fenced to offset losses incurred by sports organisations during the current Level 5 restrictions and the remaining period of 2020. Sport Ireland is currently engaged with funded bodies in relation to the allocation of this funding.

The recent budget announcement of an increase of €26 million in current funding for Sport Ireland next year by the Ministers has reinforced a sense of confidence across the sector that support is available and we look forward to working with our funded bodies to address their needs in 2021. This is accompanied by capital funding of 9.7million for Sport Ireland.

Throughout the entirety of this pandemic, the Government has demonstrated support for the sport sector. This has been appreciated by the sector, particularly when looking at international counterparts that haven't enjoyed the same level of support.

### **Adaptability of the Sport Sector**

The number of adults that participated in sport and recreational walking during Covid-19 restrictions is unprecedented in the history of Sport Ireland research.

According to the research, which was conducted by Ipsos MRBI on behalf of Sport Ireland, the participation rate in sporting activity in May was 51%.

A further promising finding from the report is that the combined effect of the participation in sport and recreational walking means that the proportion of adults described as sedentary in the National Sports Policy declined to 11% compared to 22% during the same period in 2019. This is the lowest level of sedentarism ever recorded by Sport Ireland.

Sport Ireland will be publishing an update on this research in the near future.

Another positive to emerge from the COVID-19 crisis is the innovation of our National Governing Bodies, Local Sports Partnerships, clubs and groups.

Since the onset of the nationwide restrictions in March, sporting organisations have shown great adaptability to support their memberships and communities. In particular, social media and other online platforms have been used to great effect to continue to provide fun, engaging and regular advice, classes and challenges to people of all ages.

The sport sector has shown itself to be agile and adaptable in the face of uncertain and testing circumstances. Through the support of Government, sports are heading into the winter months with an additional level of confidence, which is vital for the ongoing viability of the sport sector in Ireland.



## **The Impact of Covid-19 on the Sport Sector**

### **Briefing for Joint Oireachtas Committee on Media, Tourism, Arts, Culture, Sport and the Gaeltacht**

**18<sup>th</sup> November 2020**

In March of this year, organised sport in Ireland came to a standstill as necessary restrictions were put in place to control the spread of Covid-19. In recent weeks, the country has been elevated to Level 5 of the Government's Plan for Living with COVID-19, which has again curtailed many of our sporting activities.

This has presented a challenge to sporting organisations and clubs, but all have acted in solidarity with the rest of society in protecting the health of the nation.

While the landscape may be somewhat different, over the last eight months we have seen that sport has made, and will continue to make, a major contribution to public health and to the successfully reopening of Irish society.

When restrictions were put in place in March, Sport Ireland responded quickly to its role in terms of protecting public health and supporting the sport sector. Sport Ireland identified four key areas of focus:

1. Making the case for sports' inclusion on the Government's roadmap;
2. Creating an environment where high performance athletes could return to training as quickly as possible;
3. Presenting a strong case to Government to ensure the financial stability of the sport sector during the pandemic; and
4. Looking at how sport could support the Government and society through the Covid-19 pandemic.

#### ***Covid-19 Funding***

Since the onset of the restrictions, sporting organisations have incurred substantial losses across all areas including sponsorship, gate receipts, membership, events, summer camps and broadcast revenue.

Looking the three main field sports alone this mounts to in excess of €105 million.

While the impact on smaller NGBs is not as great in financial terms, relatively speaking it has had as significant an impact on the operations of all.

On November 2nd, Sport Ireland announced the allocation of an unprecedented €85 million in Covid-19 funding for the Irish sport sector.

This funding will address the existential threat to National Governing Bodies and their club networks, allowing sports organisations to off-set significant losses incurred in recent months and add a semblance of certainty to planning for 2021.

The significant investment will reach all levels of the sport sector with National Governing Bodies, Local Sports Partnerships and thousands of grassroots clubs across Ireland set to benefit.

Recognising the continually changing landscape, an Emergency Fund to the value of €5.8 million has been ring-fenced to offset losses incurred by sports organisations during the current Level 5 restrictions and the remaining period of 2020. Sport Ireland is currently engaged with funded bodies in relation to the allocation of this funding.

Key to the funding announced is support of grassroots across the country through schemes delivered through Sport Ireland's network of Local Sports Partnerships and through National Governing Bodies. Approximately €20 million will benefit thousands of clubs through the various schemes.

The recent budget announcement of an increase of €26 million in current funding for Sport Ireland next year by the Ministers has reinforced a sense of confidence across the sector that support is available and we look forward to working with our funded bodies to address their needs in 2021. This is accompanied by capital funding of 9.7million for Sport Ireland.

### ***National Governing Bodies***

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Sport Ireland worked closely with National Governing Bodies (NGBs) to plan for and address challenges that may arise as a result of the crisis. The sport sector has been resilient and agile in their response to the crisis. NGBs and other sporting organisations have been proactive in developing return to activity protocols, which continue to be reviewed and approved by the Government's Return to Sport Expert Group.

At an early stage, Sport Ireland committed to operating in a flexible manner as much as possible to support NGBs in recognition of the fact that this crisis affects each NGB and sport differently.

The Government Support Schemes introduced during the crisis have been essential to ensuring the continued operation of many organisations. Specifically, the Wage Subsidy Scheme has allowed NGBs to retain staff during a period of great uncertainty.

Government directives to address this crisis fundamentally changed the operations of all NGBs. NGBs recognised their role in ensuring their membership and participants stayed safe during the crisis. To adapt and comply with restrictions, the following actions were taken across the sector:

- Cancellation or postponement of upcoming club, regional, and national events
- Cancellation of daily training sessions and camps for all members
- NGB staff working remotely.
- Social media channels of NGBs used to communicate messages from the Health Service Executive (HSE) and Government. Many NGBs are also providing guidance on staying active in a safe manner during this period.

Notwithstanding the financial challenges associated with the restrictions through loss of gate receipts, membership income and commercial activity, the primary challenge for National Governing Bodies is the uncertainty associated with planning for the future, particularly the planning of competitions and events. We are particularly mindful of the challenges facing sports that are primarily indoor based and most active during the Winter period.

### **Return to Sport Expert Group**

The establishment of the Return to Sport Expert Group arose from specific concerns within the sport sector regarding the Chain of Approval of their return to sport protocols. The then Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport established the Expert Group under its remit and provides guidance and approval to protocols that pass through the Group. This allows for a safe, quick and assured Return to Sport where prevailing restrictions allow and is a significant benefit to the sports sector.

The Expert Group assesses protocols submitted by NGBs and other organisations with reference to the provisions and conditions contained in latest public health guidance.

The Expert Group considers protocols and other return to sport factors on a level by level basis, recognising that this is an evolving situation with changes to public health advice likely. The medical experts on the Group provide a critical role in the assessment of submissions.

## **High Performance Sport**

The Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games have been postponed to 2021. Sport Ireland moved quickly to provide an assurance to NGBs that athletes on the 2020 International Carding Scheme will continue to receive funding as normal. Sport Ireland gave reassurance to NGBs that the current crisis will not have a negative impact on the 2020 International Carding Scheme. Sport Ireland extended this commitment to athletes into 2021 and will allow for new entrants to the Scheme. This will bring an additional cost to the Scheme, which currently stands at €2.4m.

Sport Ireland has worked closely with the relevant Government Departments to facilitate the continuation of high performance training during the all levels of the Government's plan. The Return to Sport Expert Group has assisted the continuation of high performance training by advising NGBs on specific measures required for the unique training environments associated with high performance sport.

The Sport Ireland Institute remains operational under very strict controls and the facilities on the Sport Ireland Campus remain available to facilitate high performance athletes. While the Sport Ireland Institute building had been closed for a period, the expert staff were still working hard to support athletes, taking innovative approaches to ensuring that all areas are covered from strength & conditioning to nutrition, psychology to life skills. This was vitally important.

The overall budgetary implications for the postponement of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games will not become clear for some time. However, the working assumption must be that costs will rise and the commercial programmes of the Olympic Federation of Ireland and Paralympics Ireland will be impacted

## **Adaptability of the Sector**

Another positive to emerge from the COVID-19 crisis is the innovation of our National Governing Bodies, Local Sports Partnerships, clubs and groups. Since the onset of the nationwide restrictions in March, sporting organisations have shown great adaptability to support their memberships and communities. In particular, social media and other online platforms have been used to great effect to continue to provide fun, engaging and regular advice, classes and challenges to people of all ages.

The importance of maintaining physical and mental wellbeing is evident in all facets of society during the crisis especially in the earlier stages where a high level of restrictions were in place. NGBs have recognised their role in contributing to this and have adapted their offering to the public in an innovative and positive manner.

We have also seen many examples of sporting organisations answering 'Ireland's Call' and providing assistance to the elderly and vulnerable members of society, whether through delivering groceries,

collecting medicines are just calling to check-in. The actions of these clubs and groups is to be commended.

There have been some stand-out examples, one which I would like to highlight is FitLine.

Delivered by Age & Opportunity, FitLine is a volunteer-led telephone-based motivation line, which encourages callers to get more active.

FitLine is a great way to help people who want to feel a bit healthier but just don't have the time or information on where and how to take that first step.

Callers to FitLine can find out about clubs, groups, and facilities in their area. They will also be able to get lots of ideas about how they can do simple physical activities as part of their day-to-day routine to suit their lifestyle.

There are many more innovative examples.

### ***Sport Ireland Initiatives***

Sport Ireland has rolled out a number of initiatives throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, aimed at keeping people active, regardless of the current restrictions.

**National BeActive Day** took place on Sunday 28th June in conjunction with the network of Local Sports Partnerships. Families and friends accepted the challenge in households across the country and took part in a series of fun games at home to help them reach their daily physical activity goal.

Despite the current Covid-19 restrictions, Sport Ireland's network of Local Sports Partnerships continues to deliver national initiatives and support to keep people active.

Also developed by Sport Ireland and its network of Local Sports Partnerships, the **Activities For All Physical Activity Plan** aims to support people with a disability to be more active on a daily basis.

This is accompanied by an **Older Adult Home Exercise Plan**, which aims to support older adults to be more active on a daily basis.

In November 2020 Sport Ireland, with the support of Dormant Accounts Funds, is running a sport and physical activity campaign named "**Your Personal Best**" targeting men over the age of 45 in disadvantaged communities.

This is an exciting project encouraging men to stop making excuses and to engage in 30 minutes of moderate physical activity five days a week. The campaign is being supported by various sporting National Governing Bodies such as Cycling Ireland, Athletics Ireland, Get Ireland Walking and Swim

Ireland, who will provide information, advice and programmes for men who want to become more active.

The campaign is also being supported by the nationwide network of Local Sport Partnerships, who will provide practical support and additional tailored programmes on the ground.

### **Keep Well Campaign**

Sport Ireland is a key partner in the Government's **'Keep Well' campaign**. A key pillar of the campaign is keeping people being active and getting outdoors, even during the winter months; this is important to help physical and mental health and wellbeing.

To support the campaign, Sport Ireland has developed a dedicated 'Keep Well' webpage, which provides comprehensive information on how people can keep active during the coming months. This can be accessed on [www.sportireland.ie/keepwell](http://www.sportireland.ie/keepwell).

There will be a range of initiatives activated over the coming months as part of the keep well campaign, such as:

- A Community Walking Initiative, which will see up to 750 GAA pitches, soccer pitches, rugby pitches, hockey pitches, cricket fields and athletics ground opened up for public walking purposes.
- This will be supported by the development of a Get Ireland Walking app which, along with hosting a 21-day walking challenge, will also be an integral part of the Community Walking initiative. People will be able to book walking timeslots, with all participating clubs listed.
- Local Sports Partnerships will be rolling out a range of inclusive opportunities for people of all ages and background, many of which will be linked to the ever-popular Operation Transformation.
- FitLine is an excellent Freephone advice and mentorship service being run by Age & Opportunity and is a great way to help people who want to feel a bit healthier but just don't have the time or access to online information on where and how to take that first step. The capacity of FitLine will be increased tenfold with mentors providing support to older adults, with cross

referrals between all relevant agencies at a local level to ensure we maximise support at a local level. We would encourage anyone looking to get started to contact FitLine on 1800 303 545.

- Sport Ireland will be rolling out a comprehensive awareness campaign around all of the initiatives, as well as providing new content on an ongoing basis on the Sport Ireland website and social media – this will include home exercise videos, tips and advice and motivating stories.

Overall the campaign will reinforce the message that it is important for everyone, regardless of age or circumstances, regardless of the what level of restrictions we are in, to get out and active over the weeks and months ahead.

### ***Increased Participation***

The number of adults that participated in sport and recreational walking during Covid-19 restrictions is unprecedented in the history of Sport Ireland research.

According to the research, which was conducted by Ipsos MRBI on behalf of Sport Ireland, the participation rate in sporting activity in May was 51%. Three sports in particular dominated the sporting landscape with approximately 710,000 participants in exercise, 680,000 runners and 510,000 cyclists.

The research was in five phases, beginning on 28th February with the latest phase covering 30th April to 15th May. In total over 5,000 interviews took place during this period.

A further promising finding from the report is that the combined effect of the participation in sport and recreational walking means that the proportion of adults described as sedentary in the National Sports Policy has declined to 11% compared to 22% during the same period in 2019. This is the lowest level of sedentarism ever recorded by Sport Ireland.

The numbers of adults walking for recreation increased throughout the crisis, increasing by a cumulative 18% over the five phases of the research. The figure of 83% is the highest level ever recorded and is equivalent to over 3.1 million regular walkers. More than half of the adult population (52%) report that they are engaging in sufficient levels of activity to meet the National Physical Activity Guidelines.

Sport Ireland will be publishing an update on this research in the near future.

## ***Supports to the Sector***

Throughout the COVID-19 crisis, Sport Ireland has been providing ongoing support to the sport sector to increase its capacity to deal with the challenges it has faced.

This includes a range of practical supports to ensure that sporting organisations, and their members, are equipped to manage the safe return to sport.

In addition to the ongoing assessment of protocols & support resources from the Return to Sport Expert Group, Sport Ireland has been providing a blend of classroom based and eLearning opportunities for Funded bodies, Club & Community Groups, Coaches, Volunteers & Participants.

The following supports have been rolled out to date with a number of additional eLearning resources targeting NGB Clubs, LSP Community Groups & the broader sporting community being realised across the various phases of the Roadmap.

- ***COVID-19 Compliance Officer Training***

Sport Ireland developed a bespoke 3-hour workshop aimed at supporting funded bodies in their return to sport.

The workshop was delivered to over 100 organisations and covers the key responsibilities for sporting bodies in relation to Covid19.

- ***Covid-19 Awareness Course***

Sport Ireland created a 'Covid-19 Awareness' eLearning Course. This online course is a practical support for NGBs, LSPs, Clubs, Community Groups and the public as they return to sport in a phased manner. The course covers the most up to date public health advice and how it applies to organisers & participants in a sports setting. This has been accessed over 185,000 times since publication.

- ***Return to Sport Guidelines & Infographics***

Sport Ireland has produced a number of practical guidance documents & infographics. The resources aim to support both funded bodies and the general public on the return to sport & physical activity in a practical and responsible manner while adhering to public health guidelines.

## **Outlook**

The acknowledgement of the role of sport in the resilience and recovery of the country in the Government's Plan for Living with Covid is welcomed. Level 1 to Level 5 stipulate specific measures for

sport depending on the particular level of alert at local and national level. The Return to Sport Expert Group will remain a key contributor to navigating the period ahead.

Looking forward to 2021, Sport Ireland anticipates further challenge ahead for the sport sector. However, the resilience shown to date gives Sport Ireland confidence that through our continued collaboration with all partners we will see a full return of sport in a thriving sector.