

1 **Oireachtas report on the elimination of any and all abuse directed towards referees,**
2 **officials and players in sport – submission by Hockey Ireland**

3

4 **Introduction**

5 We would like to thank the Joint Committee for inviting this submission regarding the issue
6 of abuse within sport. This report has been compiled by the Irish Hockey Umpires Association
7 (IHUA) on behalf of Hockey Ireland. The IHUA, as the body responsible for hockey umpiring in
8 Ireland, consists of members officiating regionally, nationally, and internationally, and as a
9 result is best placed to be aware of the issues facing officials in hockey. This provides the
10 platform for the IHUA to understand the efficacy of the strategies in place to combat abuse
11 both on and off the pitch. As part of this report, the IHUA has worked closely with Hockey
12 Ireland to understand and summarise the formal, reported incidents of abuse that have
13 resulted in disciplinary procedures both provincially and nationally within Ireland. The below
14 report is divided into a number of sections, to reflect the issues faced in hockey in Ireland and
15 to consider the learnings that this sport may provide to others:

- 16 1) Background on hockey within Ireland, including umpiring numbers
17 2) Incidences of abuse in hockey within Ireland
18 3) Strategies to combat abuse in hockey both, a) internationally and b) nationally
19 4) Future considerations

20

21 **1) Background on hockey within Ireland, including umpiring numbers**

22 Hockey Ireland is the National Governing Body for the sport of hockey in Ireland leading and
23 developing the sport in all 32 counties. Hockey Ireland was formed in 2000, with the merger
24 of the two pre-existing Unions that governed men's and women's hockey separately. Both
25 pre-existing Union origins date back to the 19th century, 1893 for the men and 1894 for the
26 women. The sport's 150 clubs and 280 schools are affiliated to Hockey Ireland through its
27 provincial branch network. We have a total of 42,110 registered players, 31,562 women and
28 10,528 men. Although the underage and adult outdoor versions of the game are the most
29 popular within Ireland; Parahockey, Masters hockey and Indoor hockey are all seeing
30 continued growth in numbers over recent years. Hockey Ireland has over 28,000 followers on
31 Twitter, 17000 page likes on Facebook and over 19000 followers on Instagram.

32

33 The club hockey season in Ireland runs between September and early May each year with
34 club games taking place each weekend across the country. The International calendar
35 primarily runs between May and September. Between the National League and provincial
36 leagues, there are approximately 58 adult leagues in the country (four national, 22 in Leinster,
37 21 in Ulster, nine in Munster and three in Connacht). Thus, any weekend there may be
38 between 500 and 600 games taking place, each requiring a minimum of two umpires. There
39 is a need for over 1200 people each week who are willing and able to officiate adult hockey.
40 This excludes school games, underage matches, veterans matches and any other cup or
41 indoor competitions that may take place. Additionally, at National League level, the All-
42 Ireland Hockey League (EY league) also requires two extra officials to manage the technical
43 table at each match. These individuals are responsible for the conduct of team benches,
44 substitutions, and the timing of player suspensions.

45

46 One of the issues with understanding the abuse facing players and officials in hockey is that
47 we currently do not know exactly how many umpires and technical officials we have available
48 in our sport. Our National Men's panels consist of 30 umpires, while our Women's panel has
49 24. Additionally, there is a list of 49 individuals who have been assessed for suitability in
50 Women's provincial leagues, and 46 who have been assessed for the Men's provincial
51 leagues. However, not every umpire on this list is still active and not everyone is available for
52 matches each weekend. These individuals are required to umpire a total of 10 leagues
53 between women's and men's games. It is clear that across the national league, and the top
54 provincial leagues in each region, hockey struggles to have enough umpires to manage these
55 matches week in week out. Once we step away from these leagues, we do not currently have
56 a list of people who umpire in the lower leagues, and we are also unclear as to how many of
57 these umpires are suitably qualified to manage these games. In response to this identified
58 gap, within the last year the IHUA and Hockey Ireland have worked together to renew our
59 development pathways to set up a clear structure for how we define and recognise 'club
60 umpires'. Additionally, Hockey Ireland has introduced a new membership system which, as it
61 progresses, will require anyone who umpires club games and are not on formal panels, to be
62 registered as a club umpire on the database. This will aid the IHUA and Hockey Ireland in
63 determining numbers more accurately in future years.

64

65 Despite hockey's position as a minority sport in Ireland, when it comes to our umpires and
66 technical officials, we have a track record of producing high quality umpires who are regularly
67 appointed to International events. We currently have five men and five women on the
68 International Hockey Federations (FIH) list of International Umpires. Furthermore, since 2000,
69 Mary Power, Ray O'Connor, Colin Hutchinson, Carol Metchette and Alison Keogh have all
70 umpired at World Cups or Olympic Games. Of these, Alison Keogh is still actively umpiring at
71 International level, while Ray O'Connor, Carol Metchette and Mary Power have achieved the
72 prestigious achievement of officiating for over 100 senior international matches.

73

74 **2) Incidence of abuse in hockey within Ireland**

75 The rules of the sport are outlined by the International Hockey Federation [1] and are applied
76 in all adult outdoor games, with the only difference identified in tournament specific
77 regulations (e.g. the provision of video umpire referrals for international matches etc.).

78

79 Within Ireland, all players, spectators, officials and all others involved in the sport, are bound
80 by the Hockey Ireland Code of Conduct [2], and any additional codes that may be
81 implemented by provincial associations and clubs. The Code of Conduct stipulates that people
82 must:

- 83 • Conduct themselves in a manner that takes all reasonable measures to protect their
84 own safety and the safety of others.
- 85 • Never use foul or abusive language or gestures.
- 86 • Never use physical abuse or threatening or intimidating behaviour.
- 87 • Respect the spirit of fair play.
- 88 • Respect the rights of others, including umpires, officials, team management, other
89 players and spectators.
- 90 • Be ethical, considerate, fair and honest and promote the reputation of hockey and
91 take all possible steps to prevent it from being brought into disrepute.
- 92 • Never approach or confront an umpire or technical official within the 20-minute cool-
93 off period following the end of the match and behave in an inappropriate or
94 unwelcomed manner, or to argue/question decisions made during the match.
- 95 • Urinating close to or at the side of the pitch is not acceptable behaviour.
- 96 • Abide by the Code of Ethics and other good practice guidelines and policies issued by

97 Hockey Ireland.

98

99 Any breach of the above may be considered bringing the game into disrepute which can be
100 dealt with using a Disciplinary Panel. For a panel to be convened, a written complaint must
101 be made to the CEO of Hockey Ireland. The resulting panel will then make a decision as to
102 what sanction, if any, shall be imposed, based on a) the complaint received, b) any additional
103 evidence and c) the evidence of the person against whom the allegation is made. Similar
104 processes exist for each individual provincial association.

105

106 Using the above as guidance, a summary of the complaints and disciplinary actions received
107 by Hockey Ireland since the 2017/2018 season were evaluated. In total 58 incidents were
108 received by Hockey Ireland from 2017/2018 to date. Of these 9 (15.5%) relate specifically to
109 Code of Conduct issues. Although it is possible that some of the accumulated yellow cards
110 and the red cards were also related to abuse during a game, this data is not recorded. Five of
111 these nine (55.5%) relate specifically to abuse directed towards umpires or officials, while the
112 remainder (44.5%) were directed towards other individuals, namely a Hockey Ireland staff
113 member or individual players. It is important to note that of the three reported incidences
114 against umpires, two have occurred in this season (2021/2022) for reasons which are
115 hypothesised later. Hockey Ireland upheld all Code of Conduct complaints, typically resulting
116 in players either being advised of their duty under this code and/or match suspensions.

117 Given that the provincial associations manage their local competitions, it is acknowledged
118 that the above does not provide the full picture of abuse towards individuals in hockey. Thus,
119 similar evidence was requested from each individual province. Leinster Hockey had 14
120 disciplinary incidents since the 2018/2019 season. Of these, seven related to bringing the
121 game into disrepute or abuse (50%) with three of these (42.8%) relating to umpire abuse.
122 Again, match bans are typically served as the punishment, although a club fine was also used.
123 Ulster Hockey provided details of their Code of Conduct incidents specifically. In the past
124 three seasons there have been five Code of Conduct incidents that were brought forward by
125 officials. Each incident resulted in a disciplinary hearing with the outcome being match
126 suspensions for three incidents and a warning regarding future behaviour for the remaining
127 two. Connacht Hockey had no incidents of Code of Conduct abuse to report. Similarly,
128 Munster Hockey had no Code of Conduct reports to list, however they stated that "*the*

129 *conclusion that discipline in Munster is outstanding is not the correct conclusion. It's a cultural*
130 *thing [to not report Code of Conduct issues], we're just not aware of it or it's perceived not to*
131 *be the done thing."*

132

133 It is this final point from an official in Munster Hockey that summarises much of the issues
134 with the above. Although between 15-50% of disciplinary issues relate to abuse of some kind,
135 it is likely that much of what occurs goes unreported. Indeed, the above figures do not include
136 schools matches, while crowd behaviour has not been reported once. Furthermore, and
137 particularly in relation to umpires, the incidents reported reflect umpires on the national and
138 provincial panels only, and therefore not those officiating in lower league games. Research in
139 other sports would support this hypothesis as it is stated that "*We have seen that there are*
140 *high-profile incidents in a variety of sports at the elite level; however, the wider issue lies at*
141 *the lower levels of sport, at the mass participation levels, where verbal and physical abuse*
142 *towards match officials is the most prevalent*" [3].

143

144 Thus, the concern for Hockey Ireland is that the true picture of abuse towards officials is not
145 known. This is born from 'word of mouth' experiences from umpires themselves.
146 International umpire Alison Keogh, while being interviewed before attending the 2018 World
147 Cup, described an incident which left her in tears [4], yet from our records, this was never
148 reported. Furthermore, in recent years we have noted at least three National Panel umpires
149 who have stepped away from umpiring entirely directly as a result of abuse suffered in the
150 role. For each of these individuals, no single incident caused them to step away, but rather a
151 constant, moderate level of misconduct from players and spectators alike. We identified at
152 national level that team coaches began to realise where the boundaries were, and thus
153 became smarter in the type of comments used towards officials, focusing on tone and
154 comments that are timed for maximum impact. Our concerns surround the possibility that
155 incidents of this manner are more common in our game than we realise, they are simply never
156 reported. If this is happening at grassroots level where we are not even sure of who our
157 umpires are, then we will rarely if ever hear about it, thus losing valuable volunteers. In
158 response, this season, umpires on the National Panel reiterated to members about the
159 presence of the Code of Conduct and how it should be used to support them. Consequently,
160 there have been two reports from this panel this year alone, suggesting that such a reminder

161 needs to be made to umpires and often. However, relying only on the Code of Conduct
162 complaints to judge the current state of affairs in hockey is not sufficient. Going forward there
163 needs to be a significant emphasis placed on alerting all people associated with the sport to
164 its existence, as discussed further in Section 4.

165

166 **3) Strategies to combat abuse in hockey, both a) internationally and b) nationally**

167 Abuse towards officials is likely to be greater than that towards players and others, and so it
168 is prudent to focus on officials first when considering this topic. Compared to other sports,
169 hockey does not see the same incidences of physical abuse and so most cases are related to
170 verbal abuse. We will acknowledge below the strategies that exist in hockey beyond the Code
171 of Conduct, which may also limit the occurrence or the reporting of any incidents of abuse.
172 These are worth noting to better understand the context of our reporting, but also for other
173 sports to consider as many of the strategies prove effective.

174

175 The sport of hockey has two umpires officiating each match. Each umpire is solely responsible
176 for a single scoring (goal) end, while the other areas of the pitch are divided evenly between
177 each. At international level - teams have the right to refer decisions in the scoring (goal) area
178 to a video umpire, however this requires significant investment in camera equipment and the
179 associated costs are not possible for games outside of international remits. Within national
180 and provincial level league games, the two umpires have sole control over the game. Hockey
181 differs from some other sports, such as rugby, in that the rules of the sport allow for a large
182 amount of interpretation. Theoretically, this may make the role of an umpire more difficult
183 as it introduces a level of subjectivity that can lead to perceived or actual inconsistency in the
184 application of the rules, depending on the level of the game and the umpires overseeing it.

185

186 a) Internationally

187 There are a number of strategies inbuilt within the game that have evolved in recent
188 years to diminish the opportunities for abuse to be directed towards officials. Firstly,
189 hockey has three cards for offences that occur within games. Each of these cards
190 results in a form of suspension. During a match - a green card results in a two-minute
191 'game-time' suspension, a yellow can result in either a five or a 10-minute 'game-time'
192 suspension (based on the umpires discretion), while a red is a permanent suspension

193 from that game. When an umpire issues a card to a player, they stop the match time,
194 display the card, and then restart the match time. However, the time served on the
195 card does not start until the player has left the field and sat down. Thus, if players
196 were to stand and argue at the umpire, they would simply be increasing the time
197 served on their own suspension while the game continues without them.

198

199 Within this card structure, verbal abuse can be met with a green card (for mild abuse
200 or arguing), a yellow (for higher level abuse or swearing) or a red (for suggestions of
201 cheating). Cards can also be issued for abuse towards other players (both physical and
202 verbal). Similarly, when an umpire makes a decision on the field, if more than one
203 player approaches them to question it, it can be deemed crowding. Crowding is dealt
204 with through the use of a green card suspension. While cards are useful in dealing with
205 immediate incidents of abuse, the result of this is that they are dealt with acutely, and
206 so umpires will often not report these incidents further once with the game has
207 reached its conclusion. The guiding principles regarding how cards are issued, along
208 with other interpretations, are publicly available on the Federations (FIH) website [5],
209 thus increasing the transparency around these potentially subjective issues.

210

211 Finally, the International Hockey Federation (FIH), and the European Hockey
212 Federation (EHF) do considerable work in humanising the umpires and officials who
213 are regularly seen on the screens officiating matches. Multiple articles and interviews
214 appear online in the lead up to tournaments or upon the announcement of
215 appointments, in order to endorse the work of umpires, and to promote the efforts
216 that they put in [6-9]. It is important to note that such work is not done to make
217 celebrities out of the officials of the sport, but to highlight their achievements
218 alongside those of athletes.

219

220 b) Nationally

221 Within Ireland, we adhere to the rules of the International Federation (FIH), meaning
222 the rules around cards and suspensions are the same across the globe. Additionally
223 and in conjunction with the code of conduct, within the National EY Hockey League, a
224 20-minute ‘cooling-off’ period was successfully introduced in recent years whereby

225 coaches, players and officials are advised not to engage with each other until 20
226 minutes after the game has concluded. Anyone who persists in engaging or attempting
227 to engage with others within this period risks being reported to the provincial branch
228 or NGB under the Code of Conduct. This rule was introduced to allow teams and
229 officials to restore calm after the completion of a game, prior to engaging in questions
230 around contentious decisions.

231

232 Additionally, we offer training and development sessions for both existing umpires
233 and those looking to begin umpiring throughout the year. Umpires on the National EY
234 league undertake bi-annual training sessions which are facilitated by our international
235 umpires and umpire managers, thus learning from the experiences they get from the
236 elite level of the sport. Furthermore, coaches from the national leagues are engaged
237 with to offer areas of improvement in their experience, therefore opening the lines of
238 communication between those who are aiming to improve consistency in umpiring
239 and the coaches of the top teams. Umpires also have access to all the match videos
240 used by teams to reflect and review game situations and are actively encouraged to
241 watch over their own games to identify potential areas for improvement. With regards
242 to new and beginner umpires, the IHUA and Hockey Ireland collaborated in 2020 to
243 update the national umpire development pathway. This pathway outlines clearly how
244 to develop as an umpire and has moved a lot of content online to increase the
245 transparency and consistency of the content across provinces [12].

246

247 Finally, Hockey Ireland follows similar practices to the International Hockey Federation
248 (FIH) in that it also works to promote the work of our umpires to the wider community
249 by celebrating their success and by alerting people to how they can develop [13-16].

250

251 These strategies and rules are commonplace across hockey governing bodies and help to
252 establish communication lines between umpires and others. This openness and awareness of
253 the accepted limits is a key driver of hockey's general success in reducing abuse towards
254 others. However, as previously noted, while the sport does well at an international and elite
255 club level in supporting umpires to protect themselves and others, within an Irish context we
256 need to consider how to ensure existing structures are promoted more clearly and utilised to

257 their full potential. This is especially true given that, in truth, we cannot accurately quantify
258 the problem that exists or know where it occurs.

259

260 **Future considerations**

261 Hockey as a sport excels in ensuring that structures are in place to highlight to clubs that abuse
262 is not tolerated and can be dealt with if reported. However, there is still progress to be made.
263 It is acknowledged that umpiring decisions can, and sometimes should be, questioned but the
264 manner in which this questioning occurs needs to be carefully managed and occur within the
265 remits of the Code of Conduct. Recent high profile examples of disappointments relating to
266 officiating decisions for Irish hockey teams, suggest that we still have some way to go with
267 this even at an elite level [17-19].

268

269 Of greatest concern is grassroots hockey where essentially we are blind as to what is or is not
270 happening. While it is not right to assume there is a widespread issue, it is equally dangerous
271 to assume that there is no problem. Recent work within the United Kingdom has highlighted
272 how there is a need for sport's governing bodies to act responsibly when it comes to a 'duty
273 of care' for all participants. This has been defined as "*wider responsibilities that those who
274 facilitate sport and recreation offers have to ensure the welfare, personal safety and mental
275 wellbeing of participants, volunteers and staff*" [20]. While it is clear that hockey has multiple
276 structures in place that we are proud of and which we believe other sports can learn from,
277 we also need to acknowledge that these current structures do not reach far enough. Panel
278 and non-panel umpires need to be made aware of the availability and protection offered by
279 these structures. Furthermore, there is a need to understand how Code of Conduct reports
280 are changing from year to year to better determine any trends that may exist. However, this
281 will not alter embedded cultural issues faced not only by those in hockey but those in sports
282 in general.

283

284 There is a focus in many governing bodies on player development, followed by coaching
285 development. 'Officials' development is needed but often not a priority, despite the
286 continuous need for more official's week in week out. While those mentoring officials draw
287 from their own personal experiences, there is a lack of support structures for those suitably
288 qualified to engage with trainee officials unless paid for privately. Code of Conduct issues, if

289 reported regularly will help, but we are punishing the issue ‘after the fact’ when at times that
290 may be too late? There is, therefore, a need to consider how to prevent these issues from
291 occurring in the first instance. Thus, within the context of sports in general, we would ask the
292 commission to consider the following:

- 293 - Is there a need for a sports ombudsman whose role is to focus not only on
294 safeguarding but on the promotion of duty of care issues across all sports [20].
- 295 - Recent research in this area has focused primarily on football. A lead researcher in the
296 United Kingdom is doing positive work in this area [21]. Should funding for similar work
297 be made available for Universities in Ireland.
- 298 - Ramifications for abuse need to be consistent and severe enough to prevent and
299 discourage further incidents
- 300 - National Governing Bodies need to routinely employ a paid ‘Official’s Manager’ whose
301 role it is to aid umpire development and to promote umpiring/officiating as a valuable
302 and enjoyable pathway. The funding for this needs to be available for all sports.
- 303 - Sport Ireland and National Governing Bodies need to collaborate on a number of social
304 media and mainstream media campaigns to promote the value of officiating, the need
305 for officials, and the need for respect for all officials and people involved in sport at
306 every level of the game.

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