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## **Submission by the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) to the Joint Committee on Tourism, Culture, Arts, Sport, and Media regarding Social Outcomes Contracts in Sport**

### **1 Executive Summary**

- 1.1 This submission to the Joint Committee on Tourism, Culture, Arts, Sport, and Media has been prepared by the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) in response to discussions at the Joint Committee regarding Social Outcomes Contracts in Irish sport.
- 1.2 There is an abundance of evidence demonstrating the impact of participation in sport and physical activity on various physical, mental, social, and other health indices for child, youth, and adult participants. Benefits of sport involvement are not limited to participants as the benefits of sport volunteerism have also been demonstrated empirically. Volunteerism as well as playing participation in Gaelic games has been shown to result in such outcomes.
- 1.3 The move towards using outcomes to understand the impact of sport on individuals and cohorts is welcomed by the GAA. The Association has invested considerable resources in the development of systems, processes, and people towards employing outcome based frameworks. Notwithstanding this investment, the Association has identified challenges in this move and cautions that moving towards such an outcomes based approach will require significant investment. Equally, judging the value of sport on monetary lines is an approach that will not sit well with all, however there is merit in this approach, especially when considering the financial commitments to sport.
- 1.4 The National Sports Policy (2018 – 2027) identifies targets towards increasing funding across sport and physical activity. Such an increase in funding is both warranted and needed to achieve these aims outlined. Traditionally, sport and physical activity in National Governing Bodies is funded through a combination of event (i.e., match day attendance), commercial, and state funding. It is incumbent on those of us involved in sport to identify innovative funding opportunities, and to demonstrate the impact of such

programmes. The GAA views Social Outcome Contracts as one such innovative funding model for sport.

1.5 While there is broad support towards the development of a pilot Social Outcomes Contract, concerns are expressed about the need for investment in monitoring and evaluation programmes and systems, the focus on an individual club application process, and the perception of profit making on the back of the achievement of social outcomes. Nevertheless, the GAA is willing to work with others to investigate the use of Social Outcomes Contracts and contribute to the development of such a pilot programme.

1.6 The GAA thanks the Joint Committee on Tourism, Culture, Arts, Sport and Media, and Cathaoirleach Niamh Smyth T.D., for the opportunity to make a submission on this important issue.

1.7 The Association remains available for further discussion on this matter.

## **2 Introduction**

2.1 This submission to the Joint Committee on Tourism, Culture, Arts, Sport, and Media has been prepared by the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) pertaining to Social Outcomes Contracts in Irish sport, insofar as these issues relate to the GAA.

2.2 In this brief submission, the GAA will identify some of the pertinent issues related to Social Outcomes Contracts. Beginning with a brief introduction focussing on the benefits of sport and physical activity, issues related to the funding of sport, judging the value of sport and the use of outcome measures as indicators of success are discussed. Within each, the experience of the GAA is outlined alongside discussion on how the GAA plans to progress work in this area in the short, medium, and longer-term. Following this, the Association will discuss such issues specifically in relation to Social Outcomes Contracts. The submission will conclude with a summary of our position and the next steps related to Social Outcomes Contracts.

## **3 The Value and Benefits of Participation in Sport and Physical Activity**

3.1 There is widespread knowledge and a body of empirical evidence on the importance of physical activity, especially for physical and mental health and wellbeing. Regular physical activity can contribute to a reduction in the incidence of obesity, cardiovascular disease, hypertension, non-insulin dependent diabetes, certain cancers, osteoporosis, and

haemorrhagic strokes (Warburton, *et al.*, 2010). Equally, engagement in sport and physical activity can contribute positively to mental health having a positive effect on anxiety, depression, mood and emotion, self-esteem, and psychological dysfunction (Rodriguez-Ayllon, *et al.*, 2019). Beyond the health enhancing effects of physical activity, broader societal benefits include the intra- and interpersonal development for young people, in education and life-long learning, crime and anti-social behaviour reduction, and active citizenship (Department of Health and Social Care, 2019).

3.2 The GAA delivers many health benefits through the promotion of sport and physical activity, as well as broader volunteer-oriented social and economic health benefits through its club system. Participation in Gaelic games has been demonstrated to contribute to the achievement of daily physical activity targets in children (e.g., O'Connor *et al.*, 2018), adolescents (e.g., Gavin *et al.*, 2020), and adults (e.g., Mangan *et al.*, 2020). Indeed, programmes such as the Healthy Club programme have been cited as one of the few examples of settings-based initiatives and systems thinking for health promotion in sport (Lane *et al.*, 2021).

3.3 The contribution of sport and physical activity to non-health related outcomes is also significant. Sport can also play a role in tackling societal challenges around anti-social behaviour, as part of broader personal development programmes or in conjunction with community and youth services. Indeed, the GAA is embarking on such a programme in partnership with Dr Stephen Behan of the School of Health and Human Performance at Dublin City University. Further, as identified in the 'Keeping Them in the Game: Taking Up and Dropping Out of Sport and Exercise in Ireland', Hurling is one of only three games that are statistically significant in their causal link to Leaving Certificate results (ESRI, 2013).

3.4 The benefits of participating in sport are not limited to performers. Volunteering in sport can affect well-being through various mechanisms, including enjoyment, developing new contacts, skill development, exercising altruism, employment-relevant experiences, and feelings of being needed (Wicker *et al.*, 2019). Irish sport is characterised by volunteerism. Volunteers play a pivotal role in community sport and physical activity programmes, and their engagement with children and youth sport participants influences the potential for lifelong physical activity participation and consequently the current and future health profiles of young people (Walsh *et al.*, 2011).

3.5 As a volunteer-led organisation, volunteerism is a core principle of the GAA. The contribution of the GAA towards the overall level of volunteerism in Irish sport has been recognised consistently within the Irish Sports Monitor (e.g. Sport Ireland, 2021, 2019). It is our stated aim to support volunteers in their activities, to try to ensure that clubs and county units are self-sufficient (i.e., that they can achieve their aims using internal resources) and sustainable (i.e., that there is long term viability to their activities).

#### **4 Judging the Value of Sport**

4.1 In recent years, there has been an attempt to monetise the impact of sport and physical activity participation in both economic and health terms.

4.2 The economic impact of sport in Ireland has been the subject of several reports produced by Sport Ireland (e.g., *Researching the Value of Sport in Ireland*, 2021b; the *Assessment of Economic Impact of Sport in Ireland*, 2010; *The Social and Economic Value of Sport Report*, 2005) and the Federation of Irish Sport (e.g., *An Assessment of the Economic Benefits of Sport in Ireland*, 2019). Included in such reports are valuations related to sport volunteering (of which Gaelic games were seen as significant contributors), major events (such as national and international sporting fixtures), but also valuations of micro-level participation, including consumer spending on sports-related goods and services.

4.3 The value of the health impact of *non*-participation in sport and physical *in*activity has also been reported, with physical inactivity in Ireland is thought to be responsible for: 9% of the burden of disease from coronary heart disease (CHD); 11% of type 2 diabetes; 15% of breast cancer; and 16% of colon cancer, with an overall estimated cost to Ireland of up to €1.5 billion per year (REFERENCE). It was estimated that over 97,000 cases of disease were prevented in Ireland in 2019 from sport and physical activity participation, which is equivalent to nearly €0.5 billion in health care and wider costs savings. When investment in sport was accounted for, the authors reported that the net gain in health was worth approximately €400 million.

4.4 Equally, the Social Return on Investment of sport in Ireland has been studied, through a case study of Na Fianna GAA Club, Dublin and in a series of studies completed by Munster GAA. which estimated that for every €1 invested, €12 – 15 of social value was created. While it is not possible to generalise the social value generated in one club or Province to all others, there are nonetheless likely to be very many similarities across units.

4.5 Judging the value of sport in this way will no doubt not sit well with many. In attributing a monetary value to sport and physical activity participation, a mix of hard data, proxy measures and reasonable estimates are employed. We are often more familiar and comfortable discussing the physical, mental, social, and other benefits of sport as discussed above. However, it is equally useful to identify the value of sport and physical activity in such social and economic terms.

## 5 The Use of Outcomes in Sport Evaluation

5.1 The GAA welcomes the move to place a greater degree of focus on the outcomes achieved from the provision of physical activity and sporting opportunities. Traditionally, monitoring and evaluation in sport has been dominated by an *outputs* based assessment model. In recent years, the GAA has begun to transition away from this model and is attempting to embed an *outcomes* based approach. In doing so the Association has invested substantially (and supported by the Sport Ireland Innovation for Sports Inclusion Fund) in personnel and systems to support this transition. Within this process, the Association has attempted to identify the most appropriate outcome measures for our various programmes. This has been a challenging process, and representatives of our Coaching and Games Development directorate have engaged with colleagues in Ulster University in building a collaborative process through which such indices are identified.

5.2 This process is not without its difficulties and given the numerous potential benefits which may arise from physical activity and sport participation, significant consideration will need to be given to the identification of the indices of success. Equally, the development of systems to monitor and report on the progress of such programmes, especially on a scaled basis will require considerable investment, training, and support.

5.3 The contribution of Gaelic games towards the health and wellbeing of Ireland has been demonstrated repeatedly, and expansively. The Association is committed to maintaining and increasing this involvement in sport and physical activity. Our recently released strategic plan – Aontas 2026 – Towards One GAA for All – details this commitment. Based upon the proven benefits of participation in sport, it is our belief that further investment in Irish sport is both needed and warranted.

## **6 Funding of Sport in Ireland**

6.1 The commitment towards increased funding for sport outlined in the National Sports Policy (2018 – 2027) is to be welcomed. The GAA has recognised the importance of adequately funding its sporting system. In the five years 2015 – 2019, the Association committed an average of €11.32m annually (17.6% of all expenditure) to coaching and games development programmes, and a further €6.7m (or 10.4% of all expenditure) to player welfare initiatives, each of which are supported by funding from Sport Ireland. Indeed, Aontas 2026 commits the Association to modernising the games development funding model to increase funding for strategic development projects within counties, a process which is currently on track for completion during 2023.

6.2 While the Association's core funding is predicated on income derived from match attendance, commercial partnerships, and support from public funds provided by government, regional and/or local authorities, it is recognised that in order to maintain the expansion of development and welfare programmes that alternative sources of funding should be investigated. Currently, programmes such as the Healthy Club initiative have benefitted from corporate social responsibility and philanthropic support. The GAA views Social Outcome Contracts in sport as an extension of such income streams.

## **7 Social Outcomes Contracts**

7.1 Having discussed the benefits of sport, the issues related to monitoring, evaluating, and valuing sport as well as funding of sport, we would like to place these points in the context of Social Outcomes Contracts.

7.2 The potential and realised benefits that arise from participation in sport and physical activity make it incumbent on all of us involved in sport to consider how this might best be funded. Notwithstanding the impact of volunteers, there are costs associated with sporting programmes. Funding from commercial and state sources is finite, and where opportunities arise for imaginative solutions to be explored, we are obliged to do so.

7.3 Bringing together state, organisational, commercial, and philanthropic funding partners is an innovative model. That it has been used in other jurisdictions and contexts provides an opportunity for us to study how the system can be optimised. Government responsibility for increasing participation in sport is clearly outlined in the National Sport Policy 2018 – 2027. Equally, the GAA has similarly committed to increasing participation in sport and

physical activity. From the Joint Committee discussion on this matter, it appears that a focus on the inclusion of traditionally marginalised groups in sport could form a significant part of any pilot project. We believe that the guidelines to be developed for the implementation of any Social Outcomes Contracts, including the identification of the various roles and responsibilities is key.

7.4 The focus on outcomes, especially those that might extend beyond health and sporting indicators, is to be welcomed. The identification of these outcomes and the agreement on how the achievement of the outcomes will be measured will be a significant part of this process. Aligning with the UN Sustainability Goals provides a framework for this process.

7.5 However, we would caution that the assessment of the achievement of outcomes can be challenging. As stated, the GAA has invested significantly in personnel and systems to transition to an outcomes based method of monitoring and evaluation. The need for similar investment in this regard for Social Outcome Contracts is especially so, given the stated aim that government funding would only be utilised where the agreed outcomes have been achieved. While the detail of the proposed Social Outcomes Contracts programme have yet to be identified, there will be a need for strong, independent assessment on the achievement of outcomes. Perhaps a body such as Rethink Ireland may be part of this solution, especially given that any return on investment for corporate partners will be dependent upon such analysis.

7.6 The potential return on investment from corporate partners in Social Outcomes Contracts was discussed by members of the Joint Oireachtas Committee. Members discussed the suitability of physical, mental, social, and other outcomes being used as a profit making exercise by commercial partners. All investment brings with it the possibility of risk – perhaps the outcomes will not be achieved in the manner originally thought. It was noted in discussions that it was the commercial partners that were assuming the risk, in that state funding would only apply where the outcomes have been achieved. Hence the need for a dividend above and beyond the funding committed to the contract. The GAA finds the concept of a for profit approach to the achievement of social outcomes through sport and physical activity concerning, and we would share Joint Committee members concerns towards the commodification of social outcomes.

7.7 At the previous Joint Committee meeting it was noted that the use of Social Outcome Contracts was not intended for 'the big three' and that it would be aimed directly at clubs. Primarily, the Association has advocated for its constituent units on a collective basis in accessing many of the commercial and state funding opportunities. Feedback from our units who have sought to apply for funding on an individual club basis has consistently identified the need for specialised support in making such applications.

7.8 As discussed by members of the Joint Committee, often those clubs most in need of support may lack the internal skills or expertise to successfully apply. Those that may be successful often speak of the workload required to maintain and report upon the programmes that have been funded. There is a concern that by targeting Social Outcomes Contracts at individual clubs that those clubs most in need may not have the capacity to access funding. The support services provided at County, Provincial, and National level provide a degree of security for funders and end users and the GAA would urge committee members to consider this approach. Indeed, taking an Association wide approach can lead to wider achievement of desired outcomes. The GAA Health Club initiative is an example of how such an approach can work.

7.9 The previous presentation to the Joint Committee referred to the creation of a pilot Social Outcomes Contract for sport. Given the potential benefit of participation in sport and physical activity across a multitude of outcomes, the GAA believes that a pilot approach is worthwhile.

7.10 Notwithstanding the concerns expressed above, the GAA believes that it is well positioned to support the achievement of social outcomes through sport and physical activity. If a pilot programme is to be undertaken, the GAA is willing to take part to further assess whether this model of funding for sport can be progressed.

## **8 Summary Points**

8.1 The benefits of sport and physical activity to physical, mental, social, and other health indices are well demonstrated empirically. Volunteerism as well as playing participation in Gaelic games has been shown to result in such outcomes.

8.2 An increase in funding towards sport and physical activity is both warranted and needed to achieve the aims outlined in the National Sport Policy (2018 – 2027). It is incumbent on



those of us involved in sport to identify innovative funding opportunities, and to demonstrate the impact of such programmes.

8.3 While there is broad support towards the development of a pilot Social Outcomes Contract, concerns are expressed about the need for investment in monitoring and evaluation programmes and systems, the focus on an individual club application process, and the perception of profit making on the back of the achievement of social outcomes. The GAA is willing to work with others in the development of such a pilot programme.

8.4 The GAA thanks the Joint Committee on Tourism, Culture, Arts, Sport and Media, and Cathaoirleach Niamh Smyth T.D., for the opportunity to make a submission on this important issue.

8.5 The Association remains available for further discussion on this matter.

## **9 Contact Details**

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