



Dr. Úna May
CEO Sport Ireland
Joint Committee on Tourism, Culture, Arts, Sport, and Media
Wednesday, December 13, 1.30pm

Introduction

Chairperson and Committee members, thank you for the invitation to attend this session today to discuss our role in the monitoring of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in place between the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Sport and Media and the Football Association of Ireland. I am joined here today by Colm McGinty, Director of Strategy and Governance and Jason McLoughlin, Director of Finance in Sport Ireland.

Sport Ireland is the statutory authority tasked with the development of sport in Ireland. Our main function is to increase participation in sport, support Ireland's high-performance athletes, operate Ireland's anti-doping programme, deliver coaching training, and develop the Sport Ireland Campus in Blanchardstown.

In January 2020, Sport Ireland was tasked with an oversight and monitoring role on an MOU agreed between the Government and the Football Association of Ireland in respect of "restoration of funding and the provision of additional funding support to the FAI for the period 2020-2023". Sport Ireland is not a signatory to the MOU.

The MOU sets out the terms upon which funding support is provided to the FAI and encompasses requirements for the FAI to meet and implement in respect of more than 160 recommendations. A Governance Oversight Group was established in May 2020, to oversee FAI progress on implementation of governance reforms over the lifetime of the MOU.

Since the MOU was agreed, the FAI has made good progress on implementing the various governance reforms and over €60m has been issued in public funding to the FAI by Sport Ireland.

MOU condition 35 requires the remuneration of the FAI CEO to be in line with Government pay guidelines for the grade of Secretary General. In early 2022 Sport Ireland raised queries with the FAI

on aspects of the CEOs remuneration. An MOU compliance audit later in 2022 in respect of the 2021 financial year concluded that Condition 35 was not embedded within the FAI. In their response to the audit finding in relation to 2021, the FAI highlighted that there were unique and mitigating circumstances in 2021 surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. In May 2023, Sport Ireland commissioned a follow-up audit by independent auditors, KOSI, to assess whether the FAI had implemented this condition in the 2022 financial year. The audit found that the FAI had not adhered to MOU condition 35 in 2022. Sport Ireland is disappointed at the findings of the audit and the payments made to the FAI CEO that were in breach of this condition. This issue has cast a shadow on the good work done over recent years.

Since the audit, Sport Ireland has engaged with the FAI on the corrective actions taken by the organisation in response to the audit findings. This entire process gave rise to a delay in the release of funding to the FAI in 2023. However, funding to the FAI was resumed on the 1st of December 2023 following agreement from the Ministers to do so, on the basis that the corrective actions have been satisfactorily addressed by the FAI.

Sport Ireland notes and welcomes the recent statement from the FAI Board expressing the Board's regret at what happened.

Another of the MOU conditions (MOU 14) required the FAI to commit to the target of 40% female membership of the FAI Board, and we welcome the result of the EGM last Saturday where the FAI's general assembly voted for a proposed constitutional change to allow two additional female candidates to join the FAI Board, thus allowing for the FAI to meet the gender-balance requirements.

Work continues on monitoring the FAI's adherence to the conditions of the MOU, and Sport Ireland has been asked to prepare a report for the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media and the Minister of State for Sport & PE by year end, on the overall implementation of actions set out under the three-year MOU.

For the benefit of football in Ireland, everyone can agree that it is important for the FAI to implement and sustain best governance practices which enable them to lead and support vital grassroots work, and the development of the game at all levels. Sport Ireland looks forward to working with the FAI's new Chairperson, Tony Keohane, the new President, Paul Cooke, and the renewed FAI Board, in the continuation of the journey of reform of the FAI.

Thank You.

Dr Úna May