



Football Association of Ireland

Joint Oireachtas Committee on Tourism, Culture, Arts, Sport, and Media

13th December 2023

FAI Opening Statement

Cathaoirleach, Deputies, Senators, on behalf of the FAI I would like to thank you for the invitation to address the Committee today. We were of course originally due to address this Committee on the FAI's Facility Investment Vision and Strategy, a critical part of our overall strategy which analyses the current and future infrastructure needs of football in Ireland but, as agreed with the Chair, the session was moved to today to avoid the clash with the New Zealand game on 22nd November.

The primary purpose of our Facility Investment Vision and Strategy is to ensure that every part of Irish football has access to the best possible facilities that it can and that every girl and boy throughout Ireland will have access to basic facilities such as toilets, changing rooms, equipment and playing pitches.

We look forward to discussing this with the Committee in greater detail today.

We also welcome the opportunity to provide clarification on recent governance-related matters regarding adherence to MOU35, one of 163 recommendations set out in Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), our agreement with the Irish Government in respect of restoration of funding and the provision of additional funding support to the FAI for the period 2020-2023.

Firstly, for the record, I would once again wish to apologise unreservedly for what has transpired in recent weeks. While we have made strong progress on governance reform, we recognise that those events have placed the spotlight on Irish football for all the wrong reasons and has evoked memories of the recent past which we know Irish football needs to move on from.

I also regret that these events take the focus away from the phenomenal work being done across all levels of Irish football – from grassroots to our League of Ireland through to our international teams. I also apologise for the difficulty it has caused for our outstanding and hard-working staff as well as for Sport Ireland and the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport, and Media. It has been an unnecessary and unhelpful distraction at a time when there so much good work being done across Irish football and more broadly



across Irish sport

To address the specific issue at hand,

Agreed in January 2020, the MOU between the FAI and the Government was put in place for the period 2020 - 2023. MOU Condition 35 (MOU35) covered the CEO's remuneration and required it to be in line with Government pay guidelines for a Secretary General.

To ensure the recommendations contained within the MOU were being adopted by the FAI, regular audits have been carried out by KOSI on behalf of Sport Ireland. The KOSI reports analyse the FAI's work programme in implementing the MOU and assessing progress in two phases: Set-up and Embedding. Set-up refers to developing the organisation infrastructure and internal control systems, whilst embedding refers to recommendations and new policies that are being implemented as part of the normal running of the Association.

The KOSI limited scope review into MOU 35 which started in June completed in September 2023 was to provide assurance in relation to the financial year 2022.

The outcome of the audit, one that the FAI supported in full with our counterparts at KOSI and Sport Ireland concluded that the FAI had not embedded MOU35 in 2022 and that, in short, the CEO's total remuneration in 2022 exceeded that of a Secretary General.

The key findings included:

- The FAI had not fully embedded MOU35
- The tax treatment on travel and accommodation costs was considered incorrect
- That the CEO of the organisation received payment in lieu of holidays not taken that should not have been paid

Following receipt of the report and the KOSI recommendations within it, the FAI took immediate corrective action, and the monies in question were returned by the CEO in full. The Department are now fully satisfied that MOU35 is embedded, and we welcome the decision of the Department and Sport Ireland to resume funding to the Association. While we sincerely believed we were acting in accordance with the MOU at all times, and while unintentional, we acknowledge that we did not comply fully with MOU35 in 2022. This cannot happen again and a process of identifying and implementing lessons learned has already commenced.

We are now looking forward to 2024 and continuing to build on the progress made in reforming the organisation over the past three years.



We are trying to do the right things for Irish football, to set it up for success for current and future generations.

While these recent events may result in people questioning whether the FAI has reformed itself, the reality and absolute truth of the matter is that we have. The organisation has reformed significantly over the past three years.

Evidence of this is seen across a range of areas including significant growth in commercial and ticketing revenue, Women's National Team qualification for the World Cup and equal pay for the Women's Team and a new digital platform for organising League of Ireland and grassroots football. The FAI have also made considerable progress in governance reforms by implementing recommendations set out in the MOU with 98% expected to be complete by end of 2023 (the end of the MOU). We welcome recent comments from both Sport Ireland and Minister Thomas Byrne acknowledging the significant progress made by the FAI on its governance reform agenda across the period of the MOU.

However, governance reform of the FAI does not end once we have fully implemented all recommendations of the MOU. It is and will continue to be a core part of the Association moving forward. We always want our organisation to be fully transparent and have a trusting relationship with Government, Sport Ireland, and all stakeholders.

The road to recovery was never going to be easy. We accept the level of scrutiny around the FAI and know that given previous challenges we are going to be held to the highest standards and will face more scrutiny than others, which is understandable.

I want to assure this Committee, everyone involved in football in this country as well as the wider public that the modern FAI is a different organisation. It is filled with honest, hardworking, talented, and highly capable people some of whom are alongside me here today. Collectively we are working extremely hard to improve the reputation of Irish football and we are united behind a simple vision – using football to inspire a nation and connect communities.

Next to **Gender Equality**

I am pleased to confirm that, at an EGM held last Saturday 9 December, the Members of the FAI voted to adopt a new Constitution which guarantees that henceforth the FAI will have a minimum of 40% female representation on its board. This is consistent with Government policy for National Governing Bodies for Sport as set out in the National Sports Strategy (check title) and meets a key condition in the MOU.



Following the EGM on Saturday, the FAI held its AGM at which it elected and ratified 8 directors bringing the current of directors to 12 of which 8 are male and 4 are female. Increasing the size of the Board to 14 as provided for in the new Constitution will enable the election of one additional female football director and the appointment of one additional female independent director both to be filled early in 2024 at which point 42% of directors will be female.

The FAI is fully and wholeheartedly committed to gender equality. It is key to the type of organisation we want to run and to the environment and culture we want to create for football in Ireland.

We are responsible for the development of football in Ireland, and it is pivotal that our organisation reflects the diversity of the sport and of wider society and communities around it. This is critical given the exponential rise in popularity of women and girls football, the development of our underage international teams and the inspirational achievements of our Women's National Team at this summer's World Cup.

Despite recent challenges, Irish football is in a strong place, and as noted we have made significant strides in many areas in recent years, much of which aligns with our strategic plan from 2022 – 2025, which is being overseen and delivered by a highly capable team including several new senior hires to our senior leadership team.

We have come a long way over the last three years to put the FAI on a more stable and sustainable footing. We have reduced our debt from €63.5 million to less than €43 million, which has been driven by the planned and systematic approach the FAI has adopted to reduce and restructure its debts.

The FAI is also on track to exceed its revenue targets for the year, with our three key revenue pillars all performing well and we expect to post revenues in excess of €58 million for 2023 against our strategic target of €50 million. Within this sponsorship revenues have grown from €4.8m in 2022 to over €8m in 2023 and we have a target of €10m+ for 2024.

Within the next couple of months, and after wide ranging consultation at all levels of the game during 2023, we will launch our new Football Pathways Plan which aims to enhance pathways for all Individuals that participate in football to achieve their full potential. Our Football Pathways Plan is critically important as it will be the first time Ireland will have a long-term and strategic 'whole game' approach from grassroots to international to maximise our potential. The goals of which are to provide positive participation experiences for all: develop more and better routes into and through the game with a specific focus on developing more and better Irish players and producing winning senior teams at club and international level.



As already mentioned, this year we launched our Facility Investment Vision and Strategy which sets out our ambitious but detailed vision to create the infrastructure that will enable football, Ireland's number one participation sport to thrive and grow.

We were also part of the successful joint bid to host UEFA EURO 2028 a hugely positive development for Irish football and which offers strong financial benefits, with a €6.2 million Legacy Fund share for Ireland guaranteed and a significant financial windfall for the Association which will help us to further address that ongoing debt and to invest into more people and programmes.

The SSE League of Ireland continues to go from strength to strength, with growing attendances and more games now being broadcast on television. This year we have 40 men's and women's League and Cup games being covered live on TV, more than ever before and is a trend we see continuing as our audience in the stands and at home continues to grow. The recent all-time record attendance of over 43,000 for the Men's FAI Cup Final feels like a seminal, watershed moment that all of us should grasp to allow the LOI become the very best version of itself that it can be.

Our women's game is the fastest growing of all the field sports in Ireland with numbers growing exponentially. Our senior women's team made history this summer and inspired a nation with their exploits at the Women's World Cup.

In summary, we have done a lot, but we have so much more to do.

While others will have their opinions which of course they are entitled to, I know that we are trying to do what is right for the game. I have a very clear vision for where Irish football needs to go and supported by our brilliant executive, staff and board, the wider football family and our partners in Government, firmly believe we can implement it.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to address the committee today and my colleagues and I are happy to answer your questions.

ENDS