



An Roinn Turasóireachta, Cultúir,
Ealaíon, Gaeltachta, Spóirt agus Meán
Department of Tourism, Culture,
Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media

Oifig an Ard-Rúnaí
Office of the Secretary General

Laura Pathe
Clerk to the joint Committee on
Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, sport and Media
Leinster house
Kildare Street
Dublin 2
D02 XR20

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Dear Laura

Thank you for your invitation to make a submission to the Committee on Inclusion in Sport.

Increasing the level of participation in sport and physical activity across the whole population is a fundamental aim of the Government's National Sports Policy 2018-2027 and is a priority for Minister Martin and Minister of State Byrne and the Department. A key policy aim is to ensure that all persons have the opportunity to partake equally in sport and physical activity, regardless of gender, social-economic status, age, disability, or membership of minorities for example, the LGBTI+ community, the Traveller community or other ethnic minorities. Increasing participation amongst these groups is a core objective of the National Sports Policy. Inclusion in Sport is thus an intrinsic element of the overall sports policy.

I have outlined below some of the actions taken by this Department to ensure greater inclusion in sport.

As you are aware, Sport Ireland, which is funded by this Department, is the statutory body with responsibility for the development of sport, including the promotion of sports participation across all communities and the allocation of funding to National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs) and Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs) to support the implementation of such programmes at national and local level.

For 2023, the Government has provided a current budget allocation of €89.7 million for Sport Ireland which will enable the agency to continue to support the sport sector this year, including support for inclusion in sport.

Sport Ireland launched its first Diversity & Inclusion Policy in May 2022 and the implementation of this policy will be a key focus area for Sport Ireland in the years ahead.

I note that you have invited Sport Ireland to make a submission to the Committee on this matter and their submission will expand on many of the measures mentioned below.

Sports Action Plan - Sport for All

The Sports Action Plan, which covers the period up to the end of 2023, includes a series of actions and initiatives aimed at increasing participation levels across the population. The plan's emphasis is heavily orientated towards increasing inclusion, diversity and equality in sport and it is based on a "Sport for All" approach that is aimed at ensuring that all persons have the opportunity to partake equally in sport.

The plan contains a specific commitment to establish an Inclusion, Diversity and Equality funding stream to promote increased and sustainable participation in sport among children, adolescents and young adults, those from lower socio-economic groups, persons with a disability, the LGBTI+ community, the Traveller community and other ethnic minorities. It further commits that this funding will apply the Sport for All ethos.

Sports Capital and Equipment Programme

In relation to the development and improvement of sports facilities, funding is provided by the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media under the Sports Capital and Equipment Programme (SCEP) and the Large Scale Sport Infrastructure Fund (LSSIF). In considering funding applications both schemes prioritise projects that increase active sport participation **by persons and groups that may be under-represented in terms of participation in sport** including women, persons with disability, ethnic minorities and those from disadvantaged areas. These priorities are **built into the marking scheme for assessment of applications**.

The terms and conditions of the Sports Capital & Equipment Programme stipulate that **all projects must be accessible to all potential users**.

The objectives of the SCEP are to:

- Assist voluntary and community organisations, national governing bodies (NGBs) of sport, local authorities and Education and Training Boards and schools to develop high quality, accessible, safe, well-designed, sustainable facilities in appropriate locations and to provide appropriate equipment to help maximise participation in sport and physical recreation.
- Prioritise the needs of disadvantaged areas **and groups** in the provision of sports facilities.
- Encourage the sharing of sports facilities.

SCEP funding is only available to organisations that are run on a not-for-profit basis and that are owned and run on behalf of the members. In making allocations, priority will be given to organisations:

- that charge modest annual membership fees
- that do not charge significant once-off entrance fees
- that are affiliated to the relevant National Governing Body of Sport [NGB]

If the sport has an NGB recognised by Sport Ireland the applicant should be affiliated to the NGB or supply a very good reason for non-affiliation. Sports clubs and organisations must also be open for new members and **must not have any restrictions on who may join or on who may obtain full membership**

Membership clubs – including sports clubs - are one of the services covered by the Equal Status Acts and, as a general rule, cannot discriminate on any of the nine specified grounds (Age, Civil Status, Disability, Family Status, Gender, Membership of the Traveller Community, Race, Religion, Sexual Orientation) under the Equal Status Acts. In general, discrimination arises if a club has a rule, policy or practice which discriminates against a member or applicant; or if a person involved in its management discriminates against a member or applicant in relation to the affairs of the club. This includes issues of admission, terms and conditions of membership, terminating membership and making reasonable accommodation for members with disabilities. **All applicants** for SCEP and LSSIF funding must agree that from the date of the grant, they will not deny anybody access to any facility or part of a facility for which they receive a grant on any of the nine Equal Status grounds without just, reasonable and proper cause.

Women in Sport

In line with Government policy, Sport Ireland and the Department continue to promote and encourage greater participation in sport by women and girls.

In the National Sports Policy, there is a specific focus on increasing participation by less represented groups including women and girls. Our aim is to eliminate the gender participation gap in sport entirely by 2027. While the Irish Sports Monitor report for the first quarter of 2021 showed that the gender gap was eliminated during the Covid-19 restrictions, as COVID 19 restrictions were lifted a gender gap began to re-emerge. The latest Irish Sports Monitor figures for Quarter 2 2022 show the gender gap at 5%.

This re-emerging gap resulted in a renewed and heightened focus with accelerated and ongoing monitoring of the trend. To this end, many National Governing Bodies have been delivering Women in Sport and Dormant Accounts Funded Programmes this winter, which are actively targeting populations that were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic including females, economically and socially disadvantaged communities, people with a disability and ethnic minorities.

The Government has made record funding available to Sport Ireland to operate its Women in Sport Programme, which aims to support the creation of programmes and initiatives to target women and girls. As part of the increased budget allocated to Sport Ireland for 2023, the Minister and Minister of State have requested that an additional €500,000 be allocated for Women in Sport initiatives during the year.

The Women in Sport programme is an important support for sporting bodies in putting programmes in place to increase women's participation in their sports and to progress their strategic objectives for women in sport. Since the programme was established in 2005, over €22m has been allocated in funding and we have seen a reduction in the participation gradient between females and males from 15.7% to 5% in Q2 2022.

Sport Ireland allocated €4m under the Women in Sport Programme for the 2021-2022 period, with 45 NGBs receiving funding. A further €265,000 was invested in the Local Sports Partnerships under the Programme. Sport Ireland will open a new cycle of Women in Sport funding for NGBs in the second quarter of this year.

Sport Ireland launched its Women in Sport Policy in 2019 and will continue to implement the actions and objectives in the policy over the coming years. The Women in Sport policy is aligned to the National Sports Policy and its aims in terms of active participation are to significantly reduce the active sport participation gradient between men and women and to reduce the drop-out by young girls from physical activity and sport.

The promotion and visibility of women's sport is very important if we want to encourage young girls to participate. In that regard, Sport Ireland will continue to run campaigns such as the HER MOVES campaign which was launched on 8th March, coinciding with International Women's Day. The Department supports Sport Ireland in its efforts to increase visibility in women's sport. Last December additional funding of €1 million was provided to Sport Ireland to support a number of specific key projects with a number of initiatives aimed at improving the profile and visibility of female athletes across all sports, with specific support for women in football and women in rugby programmes.

Women in leadership roles

Concrete progress is being made regarding women's participation in sport, not just in terms of active participation levels but also in the important areas of leadership and management roles in sport.

The Sports Action Plan sets a specific target for all NGBs to achieve a minimum of 40% gender representation balance on their boards by the end of this year. It is a priority to enable women to take more leadership positions in sport and the 40% target reflects this prioritisation.

The most recent Board Composition Snapshot, which was published by Sport Ireland in December 2022, shows that the average percentage of women on boards of NGBs has increased from 24% in 2019 to 36% in 2022. The Snapshot also highlights that 33 sporting organisations have already achieved 40% or more female representation on their boards.

Achieving the 40% target is one of Sport Ireland's grant funding priorities from this year onwards and Ministers Catherine Martin and Thomas Byrne have both been clear that future funding will be impacted for any NGB that fails to meet the target by the end of this year. While there has been good progress by many NGBs towards achieving the 40% target, a number of NGBs still have a way to go to meet the target and those NGBs are being encouraged to place a particular focus on this task during the year.

Department officials will continue to engage with Sport Ireland to provide clarity on what these funding implications will mean in reality. This involves an examination of the various supports and funding streams currently available to sporting organisations at all levels, from both Sport Ireland and the Department.

Dormant Accounts Fund - Sport and disability

The Dormant Accounts Fund (DAF) sports programme, operated by Sport Ireland on behalf of the Department, is the primary funding stream deployed exclusively to promote increased sports participation amongst disadvantaged communities and people with a disability. This programme provides financial supports to a wide range of locally inspired community projects undertaken by local sports clubs, associations and other interested parties generally, under the active guidance of the 29 Local Sports Partnerships in each county.

Funding is available to support people with disabilities to become involved in sport and physical activity under a variety of programmes and initiatives that are aimed at reducing barriers to sports participation for people with a disability. Work is underway to embed the Sport for All approach in funding drawn down from the Dormant Accounts funds. The total amount of funding being allocated from the Dormant Accounts funding for such projects this year is €12 million, more than twice the amount available a number of years ago.

In addition, Sport Ireland is continuing its support of the 29 Sport Inclusion Disability Officers across the country by investing €910,000 this year to assist with their work in encouraging and facilitating more people with disabilities to participate in sport and physical activity. Sport Ireland also continues to fund Cara Sport Inclusion Ireland as the key support organisation that plays a vitally important strategic, operational and advocacy role for persons with a disability in Irish sport.

Sport and older people

The Government's National Sports Policy 2018-2027 recognises that Ireland's older population is expected to increase significantly in the coming decades and the challenges and opportunities that such changes in demography present for participation in sport.

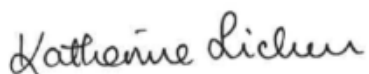
Sport Ireland continues to support the Age & Opportunity Active Go for Life activity programme as part of its commitment to increase participation in recreational sport among older people. The 2023 funding allocation is €620,000. Go for Life aims to get older people more active, and its objectives are closely aligned to the National Sports Policy as well as the National Physical Activity Plan, the National Positive Ageing Strategy and Healthy Ireland.

Return to Sport of all ages and abilities

There is an ongoing challenge for the sports sector in getting people back to sport following the COVID-19 pandemic and the Government is continuing to support the sector in its recovery and development post-pandemic. Significant Government funding of over €162 million has been provided since 2020 to help sports organisations to recover and grow post-pandemic, support the grassroots networks of clubs and local sports partnerships, and ensure that people of all ages and abilities return to sport and physical activity.

In conclusion, inclusion in sport is a core element of Government policy, reflected in the range of initiatives being implemented by Ministers through the Department and Sport Ireland. We look forward also to the deliberations of the Joint Oireachtas Committee in this regard.

Yours sincerely,



Katherine Licken
Secretary General