

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM IOMPAR, TURASÓIREACHT AGUS SPÓRT

JOINT COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORT, TOURISM AND SPORT

Dé Céadaoin, 18 Eanáir 2017

Wednesday, 18 January 2017

The Joint Committee met at 2 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick,	Senator Frank Feighan.
Deputy Imelda Munster,	Senator John O'Mahony.
Deputy Catherine Murphy,	
Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe,	
Deputy Robert Troy,	

In attendance: Senators Gerard P. Craughwell and Neale Richmond.

DEPUTY BRENDAN GRIFFIN IN THE CHAIR.

Sport in Ireland; Challenges, Strategies and Governance: FAI, GAA and IRFU

Chairman: This is the first of three hearings on the issue of sport in Ireland which this committee will be convening over the next three weeks. As Chairman I am delighted to welcome to our joint committee the heads of the three biggest sporting organisations in the country. We are a sporting nation and sport is hugely important to us, therefore, the role of this committee is very important in terms of doing our best to try to advance sport and to support the sporting organisations.

In attendance today are representatives of the Football Association of Ireland, FAI, the Gaelic Athletic Association, GAA, and the Irish Rugby Football Union, IRFU. I am delighted to welcome Mr. Páraic Duffy, Mr. Philip Browne and Mr. John Delaney. All three organisations are to be congratulated for the massive contribution they make to Irish society at grassroots, club and county level but also at the elite level in terms of the international stage.

We are very proud of our sporting organisations and our athletes. In particular, I commend the GAA on its Healthy Clubs initiative, which plans to encourage more clubs to support communities in pursuit of better physical, social and mental health well-being. The GAA championships and the national league are also a vibrant part of Irish society, and it was great to see the GAA inter-county calendar get up and running in recent weeks. The excitement is already building, and we are getting ready in Kerry for the 38th coming of Sam in September; we live in hope.

The developments and achievements in rugby and soccer recently have been huge. I mention in particular the achievement of our national soccer team in 2015, whose members did the country proud in France and who, on another day, might have made it to the quarter finals and possibly beyond them. We can all be very proud of them, and they have got off to a great start in the qualification campaign for the World Cup in 2018. I hope we will have success in 2017 also.

I want to mention the League of Ireland, and the success of the Dundalk team has been a fantastic story. In terms of its success in the Europa League group stages and looking at the tables, four points was a great achievement but when we consider the results, each game was lost by only one goal. That says a lot about how far the League of Ireland has come. There are exciting times ahead for Irish soccer as well with some of the games in the 2020 European Championships coming to Dublin. Hopefully, it will be a case of onwards and upwards.

I congratulate the IRFU on its continuing success and wish it the very best in the Six Nations Championship, which is due to start the first weekend in February. I have to mention also the fantastic results in the autumn internationals. We waited a long time for the result against the All Blacks but good things come to those who wait. The Australia result was outstanding as well. It is very encouraging to see the performance of the Irish provinces in the Champions Cup. I hope there are very good times ahead for Irish rugby. I congratulate all those involved in that.

By virtue of section 17(2)(l) of the Defamation Act 2009, witnesses are protected by absolute privilege in respect of the evidence they are to give to the committee. If, however, they are directed by it to cease giving evidence on a particular matter and continue to do so, they are entitled thereafter only to qualified privilege in respect of their evidence. They are directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given and are asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, they should

not criticise or make charges against any person, persons or entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable. Members are reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person outside the Houses or an official by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable.

I remind our guests that their presentations should take no longer than five minutes. I call on the chief executive officer of the Football Association of Ireland, Mr. John Delaney, to make his opening statement.

Mr. John Delaney: I thank the Chairman, Deputy Brendan Griffin, and the members of the Joint Committee on Transport, Tourism and Sport for this opportunity to meet with them and to take part in this discussion on sport in Ireland.

With regard to governance, the FAI will celebrate its centenary in 2021. It is one of the largest sporting organisations in the country, representing an estimated 450,000 players and participants across Ireland in 2,600 clubs, making football the biggest team participation sport in the country.

Our organisation is run through a democratic governance structure, which is outlined in the FAI rule book. The FAI is affiliated to UEFA and FIFA and must comply with any rules and regulations imposed by those bodies. Our national structure can best be split into three sections: the FAI council, board of management and the standing national committees, and the FAI administration staff. The FAI council is made up of 58 members from across the Irish football family. The council meets at least quarterly when it receives updates and passes major decisions and rule changes. The board of management of the FAI has ten members and all voluntary members are elected. They oversee the strategic direction of the organisation and the implementation of strategy. The board is made up of honorary officers, chairpersons of various standing committees and me, as CEO. The president and vice president sit for fixed terms of four years and chairpersons of each committee are elected every two years. In the year ahead we will welcome our first board representative from women's football, which has now come under the umbrella of the FAI.

Key sub-committees within the association are the governance and risk committees. The FAI executive structure reports directly to me, and I report its activities and actions to the board during monthly board meetings. The FAI holds its annual general meeting, AGM, in July each year. The reports of the CEO, financial director, honorary treasurer, audit committee and standing committees are presented to members and the media at this meeting.

In terms of gender quotas, the FAI has two women on the national council. Women are also represented on the national finance, legal and corporate, international and under-age committees. The chairperson of the audit committee, as well as the heads of the legal and HR departments and the business partnerships director are women, and we have female representation at UEFA committee level. The women's teams played 43 international matches last year. The role of women in Irish football is growing all the time and increasing female participation in the game is key to the strategic plan for 2016 to 2020 and the women's strategic plan 2015 to 2018, both of which we have submitted to the joint committee. The more women and girls who are involved in football, the stronger the game becomes.

In terms of funding and the sports capital programme, grassroots funding through Sport Ireland and many local authorities allows us to have a national spread of 54 development officers, implementing grassroots programmes across all communities including summer soccer schools

which had 31,500 participants; Football for All, which involves 34 clubs; Soccer Sisters, involving the participation of 3,600; and the FAI primary schools five-a-side competitions with 24,000 participants of which approximately 40% were female. Government funding through the sports capital programme allows for the development of vital football facilities locally and nationally. Funding is currently being sought for a number of important projects, including Dalymount Park, the Munster centre of excellence at Glanmire and an indoor pitch at the National Sports Campus. All funding is vital to the lifeblood of the grassroots of the game which underpins the base of the pyramid structure right up to elite level. It is at this broad base that the delivery of resources is funnelled directly, and we are extremely grateful for all support through Sport Ireland funding under Kieran Mulvey, John Treacy and the board of Sport Ireland and we continue to invest heavily in the game ourselves.

While it is important, Government funding only accounts for a fraction of overall expenditure and for every €1 of the €2.7 million invested by the Department and Sport Ireland we invest €3 of our own money, which amounts to approximately €8 million. To put it in another context, funding contributes approximately 6% of annual turnover. Continued funding and our commitment to invest in the game will directly affect the improved well-being, fitness and health of players at all levels, and allow us to develop the game at grassroots level through three key vital cogs, namely, people, programmes and infrastructure. While funding is fundamental to the development of the sport and we could always do with more, I emphasise the need for funding to be consistent, including during recessionary times, when it has previously declined.

In terms of challenges and strategies, our overall challenge is to achieve the strategic goals. The FAI's strategic plan 2016 to 2020 and the women's strategic plan from 2015 to 2018 are the roadmap to deliver improvements across the game for players, clubs, leagues across grassroots and communities for the continued growth and prosperity of the game at every level. The development of football in every town and village in Ireland is to the benefit of all communities. The various challenges we face include continual growth of participation numbers across areas of the game; increasing the number of people working across administration, volunteerism and coaching; the effective delivery of consistent coaching methods through the player development plan to ensure the very best and most appropriate coach delivery to all; changing the mindset of the win-at-all-costs mentality and changing philosophies for children where every child gets game time and is included; recognition of the value of a team sport which has additional benefits in developing life skills and competencies, due to the nature of teamwork, discipline, shared goals and co-operation, which are required to participate in a team environment; the use of football as a social inclusion tool is a priority for many stakeholders and a balancing act for the association to ensure successful football development for all, including Walking Football initiatives, programmes for those with disabilities including Football for All and those marginalised by society, those who suffer from addictions through our Kick Start to Recovery programme, run in conjunction with the HSE, and other socially-disadvantaged groups through our late night leagues, drop-ins and street football; and safeguarding, in the areas of child welfare, anti-doping and addiction support, in order to provide a safe environment for all.

I hope that gives some insight into the work we do and the ambitions we want to achieve for Irish football. I thank the committee for the opportunity to speak to members and for the funding we receive.

Chairman: I thank Mr. Delaney. I now call on an t-Uasal Páraic Duffy, ard stiúrthóir, Cumann Lúthcleas Gael.

Mr. Páraic Duffy: I thank the committee for the opportunity to update it on issues around

governance, gender quotas, funding and the sports capital programme and on the challenges and strategies that currently face the GAA. The GAA is a community-based volunteer organisation with a network of 1,600 clubs in Ireland and 400 overseas. Our vision is that everybody has the opportunity to be welcomed to take part in our games and culture, to participate fully, to grow and develop and to be inspired to keep a lifelong engagement with the association.

In terms of governance, the GAA is run as a democratic organisation in accordance with the rules and constitution which are available on the GAA website. All officers at club and county level are elected, with the exception of a small number of full-time employees, and that is mirrored across the operations of four provincial councils. Between the association's annual congress, the organisation at national level is run by a central council and the management committee. The vast majority of those serving on the committees are also elected.

Good governance lies at the heart of the GAA's activities, exemplified by the transparent nature of its financial practices. All accounts, at every level of the association, are published, shared with the relevant membership and distributed to the media. The GAA enforces a five-year term limit for county officers with terms at provincial and national level limited to three years. A recently published governance guide, which I have attached with the submission, applies to all units of the association and to all its members, volunteers, officials and employees. It outlines key roles and responsibilities, the formal governance policies to be implemented in respect of conflict of interest, term limits, grievance and disciplinary procedures, data protection and information security, diversity and equality, and the Speaking Up policy.

The GAA is an inclusive family-based entity that offers and promotes a role for everyone within the games and administrative structure and is fully committed to the core principle of inclusivity. However, it is worth pointing out that with the exception of some under-age activity, the games are played by boys and men. Although they are independent organisations, we work closely with An Cumann Camógaíochta and the Ladies Gaelic Football Association in the promotion and support of their games. Ladies football and camogie are generally played on GAA grounds and there is a huge overlap in the membership of all three organisations and a sharing of resources, sponsors and partners. An increased number of females have emerged in GAA officer positions in recent years at club and county level, reflecting the expanded role of women in clubs. We are supportive of efforts to encourage greater female participation at all levels of administration within the GAA and believe that, given the increase in such involvement that is already taking place, a better balance of gender membership will occur naturally in the coming years.

In terms of funding and the sports capital programme, in 2016 the GAA received Sport Ireland funding of €2.4 million for which we are extremely grateful. The funding supports the deployment of games development personnel nationwide who are responsible for the implementation of the various activities under the auspices of the grassroots to national programme. From central level in Croke Park, we contribute a further €7.9 million with a similar total investment from provinces and counties. That has enabled us to boost participation numbers. For example, 2016 saw the GAA set a new record in the number of children in the five to 13 years age group who attended the Kellogg's Cúl camps. There were 1,200 camps held across all 32 counties in 2016. These were attended by 127,473 boys and girls, an increase of 25% on 2015. In addition, the number of children aged between ten and 12 who are registered as GAA members increased from 39,778 in 2010 to 61,487 in 2015. The games development personnel provided in excess of 17,000 coaching sessions to approximately 258,000 primary school pupils during 2015.

The return of the sports capital programme has been a most welcome development. Our units embrace its potential fully and its absence frustrated their ambitions for growth and further development. It is important to make the point that, while allocations from the sports capital programme are vital in allowing sporting bodies to provide improved facilities for members and communities, clubs must raise a considerable amount of money on their own initiative in order to bring their plans to fruition.

I will outline our challenges and strategies. As an organisation we are working towards completion in the implementation of our 2015-17 strategic plan that I have attached with my submission. The key goals of the plan are as follows: to increase player and member participation and support the continued growth of the association; improve support for county and club volunteers; implement a governance code that will strengthen all units of the association; improve the financial, commercial and fundraising framework for our units; utilise all communication platforms to engage effectively with players, coaches, administrators, members, supporters and the wider public; and develop our partnership with ladies football and camogie.

We are confident that we will have met most of these targets by the end of the year but acknowledge that we face many challenges. In particular, the GAA is striving to cope with the growth in population in urban areas and the decline in rural Ireland. We have witnessed a pattern of declining rural population, which has been accompanied by a gradual diminution of services in rural areas. We have witnessed the closure of rural Garda stations, post offices and banks, a reduction in transport links and a growing threat to GP services. Also, broadband roll-out has been much slower than is needed to sustain a rural economy. There has been a decline in employment in all rural towns at the same time as larger urban centres and cities have continued to grow. Young people also move to the larger population centres for third level education and often must stay there in order to pursue employment opportunities. If they cannot find employment, they emigrate. The consequences for the GAA are serious and have already had a negative impact on rural clubs all over the country, in particular clubs in counties along the west coast. For many clubs, this has meant a reduction in the number of teams available to compete in county competitions and for others it has been a struggle to remain in existence. The decline of rural Ireland is a crisis that is not within the power of the GAA to resolve, but it is a problem that must be a priority for the Government.

Chairman: I thank Mr. Duffy for his presentation. I invite Mr. Philip Browne, who is chief executive officer of the Irish Rugby Football Union, to make his opening statement.

Mr. Philip Browne: I thank the Chairman, Deputy Brendan Griffin, and all of the members of the joint committee for the opportunity to meet them and outline background information on our sport. I will cover the specific areas outlined by the committee in its invitation.

The IRFU was founded in 1874 and is the governing body for rugby football on the island of Ireland. The IRFU is a representative body that is grounded on the club as its basic representative unit. The IRFU is a federal body with four autonomous provincial branches to whom the clubs are affiliated. The clubs elect representatives to their respective branches. The branches, which comprise the clubs, then elect persons to represent them at the national level of the IRFU.

Democracy is the fundamental governance principle that underpins the game and its structures in Ireland. Under the current laws, clubs have discretion as to whom they select to represent them at the various levels of the game's administration, including the IRFU at national level. The IRFU, as an administrative body, is made up of a committee of 21 elected representatives with two additional positions held by our World Rugby representatives. There is scope to

co-opt a further two persons. At present, one of these co-options has been used to accommodate the appointment of Ms Mary Quinn to the IRFU committee. Ms Quinn has previously been the chair of the Leinster women's rugby committee in the Leinster branch.

In terms of the women's game, virtually no women's rugby was played in Ireland 25 years ago. Up until 2008, there was a separate Irish Women's Rugby Football Union, IWRFU. It organised embryonic competitions and representative teams through the existing IRFU club structure. In 2008, following extensive discussions, the IWRFU was disbanded and women's rugby came under the umbrella of the IRFU. This was the first major rugby union in the world to integrate. Since then, all IRFU development resources cater for both men and women's rugby. The IRFU now operates the successful national Irish women's team and the Irish women's 7s programme and under-age development squads. However, that does not get away from the fact that contrary to public perception, the women's game, though growing, is still in an embryonic state. Currently there are just under 5,000 females playing the game. In the past ten years, the percentage of clubs with women's sections has increased from 12% to 54%. This is something we have outlined in our current strategic plan. There is an ongoing commitment to promote the participation of women in our game.

Clubs have been proactive in promoting women from within their membership not because they are women *per se*, but because they have been involved in the running or coaching of the game. They are respected as people who have accumulated rugby wisdom or skill sets and an affinity for the game which makes them effective representatives and administrators. Last year, we published our long-term development strategy for the women's game that we will leave with the committee secretariat. The aim of that strategy is to encourage more women to undertake leadership roles in coaching, volunteering and the administration of our game. This is an ongoing project and one that we hope will develop even more women of the calibre and experience of Mary Quinn.

In terms of gender quotas, the suggestion by the Government that it is considering the imposition of gender quotas on sports organisations is a concern for the simple reason that female rugby is still in its infancy and it will be difficult to find suitably qualified female candidates with the accumulated rugby wisdom and skill set to fill such quotas without retreating towards tokenism. Apart from being anti-democratic and a potential breach of the laws of the union, such an activity would be the very antithesis of good governance. The inference behind the suggestion of quotas is that in some way the existing governance model of Irish rugby holds back the women's game. I suggest the evidence is quite the contrary. Since the IRFU took on responsibility for the women's game in 2007, we have seen a threefold growth in the women's game. We have also witnessed the success of our national women's team who have twice won the Women's Six Nations Championship. In fact, the team became the first Irish rugby team to beat New Zealand. We have also witnessed the emergence of a successful and promising Irish women's 7s team. It has worked its way up the rankings and hopes to qualify for the 2020 Olympic Games. Furthermore, our commitment to the promotion of the women's game is second to none, particularly this year with the hosting of the Women's Rugby World Cup in Ireland. I suggest that the evidence shows that regardless of the fact that the emergence of the women's game has not yet been matched by the emergence of women with the accumulated skills and desire to work their way through the democratic structures of Irish rugby, the IRFU has in no way inhibited the development and growth of the women's game. Governance is a constant work in progress. Our governance working party is considering all aspects of rugby governance. The women's game and representation is part of that brief.

In terms of funding and grants, the effective delivery of any sport is based on the work that occurs in communities, clubs and schools to develop male and female players at youth level and beyond. The effective delivery of sport is resource intensive. Resources must be applied to support the volunteers who are the bedrock of most sports and rugby is no different. With the assistance of Sport Ireland funding, the IRFU continues to develop and invest in the foundation that creates our success. Last year, the IRFU's turnover was €72 million and Sport Ireland grants amounted to 3.6% of the turnover or €2.6 million.

The IRFU's investment into the club and community game has grown in recent years to €10 million. The IRFU allocates around €3 for every €1 of funding it receives from Sport Ireland. We are more than grateful for the funding from Sport Ireland. However, it should be noted that its funding declined during the recession. We hope, like the rest of the sports community, that this situation will be rectified by an increase in the budget available for Sport Ireland. Funding must move further up the priority list of the Government given the obvious and well documented benefits of all sports, particularly the role played by team sports in terms of physical and mental well-being of our youth, along with the personal development opportunities that come with team sports.

The capital sports grant programme is imperative for the modernisation of rugby clubs. In the last grant round, rugby only accessed 7% of the available grants, which is a similar trend that occurred in previous funding rounds. Growth in participation has placed increased pressure on our existing club and school infrastructure. The IRFU aspires to have a network of 16 artificial pitches across Ireland that can be accessed by clubs, schools and community groups, especially during periods of heavy weather. The IRFU would like to work with the Department to support clubs accessing grants for this purpose. The IRFU has previously proposed that there is an opportunity for economies of scale through a single application. It is estimated that there would be a list price reduction of 15% per pitch should the IRFU make a signal application for multiple pitches and the development being centrally managed by the IRFU.

My final comment on capital funding relates to the development of the national sports campus. I commend all those involved, including Mr. Kieran Mulvey, Mr. John Treacy and Mr. David Conway of Sport Ireland, and the current Minister and his predecessors. What we see emerging is a world class set of facilities for multiple sports on the same campus. The venue provides the benefit of cross-fertilisation of ideas, philosophies and methods between high-performing sports for the benefit of all of Irish sport. It may end up being a unique international facility and provide Irish sport with a unique advantage over other sporting nations. From a rugby perspective, we urge the Minister and the Government not to lose the opportunity to finish the project. In this regard, I specifically reference phase 2 of the soon to be opened national indoor arena. The phase 2 development incorporates a high-performance rugby facility that will, with additional investment by the IRFU, cater for the needs of our men's and women's international teams at senior and age grade levels. Currently alone among tier 1 rugby nations, we have no training facilities for our successful international teams and rely on the goodwill of clubs or schools. This is far from ideal if we aspire to be the best that we can be in the world of rugby.

Since 2004, the IRFU has published successive strategic plans. We are in the process of finalising our strategic plan for the period up to 2021. Our focus is to continue to grow and promote our game with reference to our core values such as inclusivity and respect. These values ensure we welcome and promote diversity not only in the playing of our game, but in our clubs, governance and administration.

As our playing numbers increase so too does our need to educate and ensure that anyone

who plays our game understands our values and ethos. Last season, we worked with our colleagues in Sport Ireland on a new anti-doping programme. The programme has been championed by our international teams and continues to be rolled out across our clubs and schools. The IRFU is fully committed to the World Anti-Doping Agency, WADA, and Sport Ireland's anti-doping code and regulations. We have utilised new media to reach out to our youth. We use this medium to educate people on anti-doping as well as issues such as player welfare and anti-bullying, which are issues that are also important to the Government. In addition, we operate partnerships with Pieta House on suicide awareness and prevention, and we work with the CARA organisation on tag rugby programmes for players with special learning needs.

A key challenge for rugby and all sports in Ireland is how to continuously adapt to a rapidly changing environment. I will list the challenging areas for the IRFU. The changing and increased regulatory environment for sport has implications for volunteers and clubs in terms of legal liability and costs. On foot of socio-economic changes in Irish society and changing social trends, team sports face competition from a much wider range of pastimes and activities, many of them solitary, than in the past. We also face the challenge of maintaining the competitiveness of our professional teams in the face of competitors based in the larger, more valuable markets in England and France.

I thank the committee for providing me with the time to address it and for the sports funding we receive. We could always use more. I hope members will take time out of their busy schedules to enjoy some of the top quality rugby on offer this year.

Chairman: I thank Mr. Browne and note that the committee plans to have a meeting in late March to address specifically the 2023 Rugby World Cup bid. Hopefully, we will be able to explore how the committee and the Government can assist that. I thank the FAI for facilitating the committee by rescheduling an event in honour of the late Milo Corcoran, which is taking place this afternoon having been due to take place around now or earlier. Mr. Delaney has to leave early, however, and as such, I ask that in the first round of questions any that are specifically related to the FAI be directed to Mr. Delaney. There will then be an opportunity for members to direct questions to the GAA or IRFU. For the first round of questions, we will take Deputies Peter Fitzpatrick, Kevin O'Keeffe and Imelda Munster, in that order.

Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick: I welcome Mr. Páraic Duffy, Mr. Philip Browne and Mr. John Delaney to the committee today. The pleasure, entertainment, organisation and skills they provide to everybody are fantastic. Local communities owe a large debt to all of the organisations. It is a family and an atmosphere whether one is playing football, managing a team, refereeing, acting as a linesman or selling tickets. It is fantastic. I have been lucky all my life to have played soccer, Gaelic and rugby and in fairness it kept me off the streets and set me on the right path. We all talk about sport and winning trophies, but what these organisations really do is provide a family atmosphere and look after young people and that is fantastic.

I have a set of questions for everyone and then one or two individual questions for each witness. I will not be too long. Can the witnesses clarify their organisations' approach to the treatment of concussion among players? This is the approach filtered down through all areas of the organisation and in particular at under-age level. Can the witnesses clarify what policies are in place to allow children with special needs to participate in their sports? Can they clarify what policies are in place to address the issues of mental health among their organisations' members? The win-at-all-costs attitude is still very apparent in sport, in particular at under-age level. What measures have the witnesses' organisations taken to remove this attitude among under-age teams? Are the child protection measures in place not only robust but religiously

enforced at all levels within the organisations?

For the individual questions, I will go to Mr. John Delaney of the FAI first. Mr. Delaney said that every town and village in Ireland benefits from the whole community being involved in sport. In fairness, soccer has been fantastic. I liked what he said about soccer being focused on social activity, as such. Can he elaborate on that? Obesity is a big issue in this country. As the organisation for the biggest sport in Ireland in terms of participation, what is the FAI doing to combat obesity?

Can Mr. Philip Browne please expand on the point he made that it would be difficult to find suitably qualified female candidates to fill roles in his organisation? Does he feel the success of the provinces has had a negative impact on clubs at grassroots level? In fairness, the four provinces are doing fantastically at the moment, but is that success affecting clubs?

Next, I turn to Mr. Páraic Duffy. As a GAA man and a sportsperson, I have concerns about rural areas, especially coming from County Louth where communities are finding it very hard to get teams together. If there are three or four clubs in a parish, the last thing one wants to do is amalgamate them. Does the GAA have any plans going forward to look after rural clubs? In the urban areas, we seem to have the opposite problem with a lot of people participating in clubs. What is the GAA doing about that rural-urban issue? The biggest problem I find being involved in sport is that the most delicate age for people is between 16 and 18. A lot of people decide when they turn 16 to go out socialising instead. What is the GAA doing to keep people involved in sport between the ages of 16 and 18?

To conclude, I cannot emphasise greatly enough what these three sports have done in my life and the lives of many others. It is a family thing and we should do whatever we can to help. People are talking about homelessness, obesity and everything else at the moment but one thing to note about sport is that it is a fantastic topic of conversation no matter where one goes and no matter if it is soccer, Gaelic or rugby. I cannot emphasise enough the value these organisations give to people. I thank the witnesses for coming in today.

Chairman: I think everyone shares the Deputy's views.

Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe: I welcome the witnesses who have spoken on behalf of the three powerhouses of sport in Ireland on a national or an inter-county basis. One cannot but praise these organisations. Trying to be critical might be impossible but I am sure we will find issues as we go along. One of the issues might be governance. Recently, the Minister of State with responsibility for sport spoke about gender quotas and the witnesses have touched on the approach they are taking. The Minister of State has set a timeframe, albeit in contradiction to his senior Minister. Will the witnesses' organisations need to set their own targets? They may only have three years to get this in place. Are we rushing it too much? Even the ladies themselves feel they need time to fit into place. Can we have a comment on the issue of gender balance and whether we are going in the right direction? In fairness to the three organisations, they are well able to raise money on their own separate to State funding, but there is no point in rushing this too fast.

A very interesting comment was made on the availability of players. Historically, one remembers players depending on the background and tier of the sport they played, even in colleges. Even last week in my own county, Christian Brothers College from Cork city was playing my *alma mater*, St. Colman's College, Fermoy, in the quarter finals of the Dr. Harty Cup, which is a major thing. At one time, one would not have seen a rugby ball inside the gate. Are

we putting fierce demands on juveniles growing up who now have to play in more codes? One saw lately that one of the good rugby players was well known in three codes and eventually had to make a call on one. Should they make the call sooner for the sake of their own health and fitness? It is a big thing. Parishes are under pressure. Mr. Duffy mentioned that people are migrating to the bigger hubs and cities and one sees team amalgamations. I am concerned about player availability and whether we are asking too much in having them play four or five codes when they are in college. Perhaps we should draw a line and set out recommendations in respect of an earlier stage so that they can focus on the code at which they are best. That may be another day's talk.

Is Mr. John Delaney happy with FIFA's decision to increase the number of teams that can qualify for the World Cup? Does that dilute the quality of the eventual finals? More importantly, what can the FAI do to promote the League of Ireland? In fairness to our national networks, the FAI has good coverage, but it is always good to see a crowd at a match. I am not saying I am a great attender myself, but what can we do to get more people onto stands and terraces?

Mr. Browne is on a big road having regard to bringing the Rugby World Cup to Ireland. I wish him all the best in that. The IRFU is making steady progress on the issue. I have asked Mr. Browne previously whether he is happy with the co-operation he receiving from various Departments in the provision of facilities. Lately, we had the unfortunate news that the venue in the birthplace of the GAA, Thurles, would not be considered for use in the Rugby World Cup, which I find alarming. I am not stating it should be used as a host venue, but 50,000 people could get into and out of that little town in one day.

Chairman: We might keep questions on the Rugby World Cup in 2023 for the specific meeting to be held in March.

Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe: My next question is for Mr. Duffy. We have seen the emergence of another players' group, the Club Players Association, CPA. Is the GAA hierarchy willing to work with it? I am very concerned about changes in fixtures and hope this issue will be thrown open to the clubs for discussion at grassroots level. The fixtures agenda is different in some counties from others. There is a large number of clubs in my county and it is very hard to fit in all club and inter-county games.

Deputy Imelda Munster: I thank the delegates for their presentations. Will Mr. Delaney talk us through the rationale for the changes in the League of Ireland, as part of which three teams will be relegated from the premier division, while just one will be promoted from the first division? I understand many clubs and their representatives have issues with this. I, therefore, ask for an explanation for the changes.

Will Mr. Delaney outline the various pay levels for FAI staff? Have cuts been endured by staff, particularly since the recession kicked in from 2008 onwards?

Has the FAI put in place any mechanism to encourage players to remain in the national league? I am speaking, in particular, about Daryl Horgan and Andy Boyle who recently left Dundalk for Preston.

There has long been criticism of the FAI regarding its support for the League of Ireland. Will Mr. Delaney outline the level of funding and operational supports provided? What support does the league receive from the FAI?

Out of curiosity, having heard Mr. Delaney's opening statement, how are members of the

FAI board chosen? Is the CEO re-elected regularly or is there a work contract?

My next question is for Mr. Duffy and is on GAA television rights. Many people throughout the country have been complaining. Will he elaborate on the role played by the GAA in the decision to sell viewing rights to Sky? It has forced many people to go to the pub to see matches. Does the GAA have plans to review or revisit the contract, given the effect the decision has had? Many avid GAA fans believe it is grossly unfair that they should be penalised.

Mr. Duffy mentioned the numbers of women on GAA officer boards. Will he give us a breakdown of the figures and the ratios?

Mr. Duffy also made reference to the issues of rural decline and rural depopulation. Strictly, it is for the Government to deal with such problems, but what initiatives has the GAA taken in the weakest areas? Does it have plans to take corrective measures in these areas, given the issues outlined by Mr. Duffy?

In the case of rugby, player safety is a topical issue. A particular issue is concussion, specifically in the case of younger people. Will Mr. Browne make a statement on it?

Mr. Browne has stated the emergence of the women's game is not being matched by the emergence of women with the accumulated skills who have a desire to work their way through the democratic structures. He made reference to evidence. What is the evidence to back up that statement?

Chairman: I will ask Mr. Delaney to answer the questions put to him first, as I am anxious to have FAI-related questions answered before Mr. Delaney leaves. I will then ask Mr. Duffy and Mr. Browne for their answers.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: I ask that I be included in putting questions to Mr. Delaney.

Chairman: The Deputy is first in the next group.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: I want to be sure he will still be here when I ask my questions.

Chairman: Yes; that is why I have proposed this arrangement.

Senator Frank Feighan: I also have questions for the FAI. Is it possible for me to ask them before Mr. Delaney leaves?

Chairman: I am open to seeking agreement from committee members. Would they prefer to ask Mr. Delaney all of their questions now? Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: I thank the delegates for coming before the committee. Our brief covers transport, tourism and sport and we are very anxious to pay attention to each of these areas. Governance is a topic we very much want to cover because if we do not get it right, we will end up with issues similar to the ones we had last summer which brought sport into disrepute and raised questions about public funding. Another topic we wish to cover is participation in sport. These are the two dominant issues we want to deal with in our work programme, but the one we will discuss today is governance. I am very impressed when we look at the level of participation in the three codes collectively. One cannot be Irish without being interested in sport. Whether one likes it or not, one is drawn into it and I happen to like it.

A number of governance issues are raised in the case of the FAI. The Genesis report was

produced 14 or 15 years ago. It contained a number of recommendations which ended up not being implemented, including that independent non-executive directors be appointed. Why was that the case? It was a big initiative after the events in Saipan and should have fed into the area of governance. Recently, the age until which people could serve on the board was extended beyond 75 years. Some people have been members of the FAI board for many years. Turnover is very important to bring freshness and avoid groupthink. It also helps good governance. Things that are not desirable in terms of good governance are jumping out at me. Will Mr. Delaney address this range of topics?

Finance is another issue about which there is public concern, particularly when public funding is given to organisations. A number of people have commented on the figure of €5 million, including Niamh Brennan and Mike Flynn, but it was not mentioned in the accounts subsequently. Was it a loan? I am referring to the €5 million received after the Thierry Henry handball incident. That matter needs to be clarified because it keeps cropping up. It would be useful to get a resolution in respect of it.

The women's game has been well established for a long time. I am aware of it through a number of clubs in my area. It is disappointing that we are not seeing the throughput of women in sport and are talking about issues such as quotas and so forth. I would like to see that happen naturally. If one looks at the people involved in clubs, even at junior level, including referees and so forth, one sees greater female participation. However, women tend to be involved at a lower level. I welcome the fact that a woman will be appointed to a senior role in the near future. I would like to see more of that but would prefer if it was not by way of quotas. There is a very famous young woman from my area, Ms Emma Byrne, who played for Arsenal and who is a celebrated talent in the women's game.

On the GAA -----

Chairman: I think we need to pose questions to each organisation separately because the clock is ticking.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: That is fine. I am happy to do that.

Chairman: I will give Deputy Catherine Murphy an opportunity to come back in and pose further questions. Senator O'Mahony is next.

Senator John O'Mahony: I welcome the witnesses to the meeting. In the last six months the whole country has been immensely proud of our sporting achievements, including at the European Championships, in Chicago and in Connacht. The GAA is spreading throughout the world, which is a big aspect of its work at present.

I will try to confine my questions to the three issues of governance, gender quotas and funding. Mr. Delaney referred to the democratic governance structures of the FAI. He also stated that the FAI is affiliated to both FIFA and UEFA and must follow their rules too. Those organisations have had huge governance issues, which Mr. Delaney has taken on himself, in the past six months. Does he feel that those issues have had an impact on the FAI? Have matters been resolved at European and world level? What happened was absolutely disgraceful. I am looking at this from the outside and would not know anything other than what I read in media reports. Has it impacted on the FAI? Deputy Catherine Murphy mentioned Mr. Sepp Blatter and Mr. Delaney seemed to have a good relationship with him, particularly in the context of the deal referred to earlier. Was it, from the point of view FIFA, arrived at on the nod?

At every AGM of the FAI, issues seem to arise with regard to League of Ireland clubs. Is that an issue for the FAI in general? As regards funding, I understand that the winners of the league, Dundalk FC, received €100,000 or €120,000. Is that a realistic amount in the professional game or is it merely what can be afforded?

Chairman: I thank the Senator. Deputy Troy is next.

Deputy Robert Troy: I welcome the witnesses. This committee agreed before Christmas to invite them in. The main issue at that time was the lack of consultation before the Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, Deputy O'Donovan, made his announcement on gender quotas and governance in the various sporting organisations. Since then, the organisations have had consultations with the Department.

Mr. Delaney said that his organisation has a democratic governance structure. We are all democratically elected Members of the Houses but we had gender quotas imposed on us in advance of the most recent general election. I was not in favour of that, I must say. I do not think it is the way to make progress. That said, there is no doubt that we should be encouraging more female participation in politics and in sport, particularly in the governance structures of various sporting bodies.

The board of management of the FAI is the premier governing body of the organisation. It appears that only one person on the board of management is female. That signifies a very poor representation of women in the governance structures of the FAI. Mr. Delaney made reference to an FAI report on increasing women's participation. If there was no threat of a gender quota being imposed, what exactly would the FAI's targets, goals and policies be in terms of ensuring greater female participation in the governance structures of the organisation? Deputy Catherine Murphy mentioned the Genesis report and pointed out that some of its key findings still remain to be implemented. In that context, can we be confident that any policies of the FAI relating to increasing female participation will be fully implemented?

Reference was also made to the FAI's AGM. I remember when the organisation came to Athlone, under the stewardship of its former president, Mr. Paddy McCaul. It was very welcome then and would be most welcome to come again. On that day, we travelled around Westmeath with representatives of the FAI and saw the unbelievable good work it is doing, especially in areas of high deprivation. The FAI does great work in promoting participation in sport. Many previous speakers have outlined the benefits to society of participation in sport, in terms of improving health and well-being and I must acknowledge the role played by the FAI in that regard.

What percentage of the FAI's overall annual budget is derived from direct State funding? Sometimes the State can try to take a heavy-handed approach to organisations that it does not fund adequately.

I also have a question about something that seems, unfortunately, to be increasingly prevalent in our communities, namely, sudden adult death syndrome, SADS. Some of it is linked to over-exertion from a sporting perspective. I am not saying it is all related to that but it is certainly a factor. What is the FAI doing in terms of screening, not just at the higher level but also at club level, to prevent incidents of SADS?

Finally, on big sporting occasions such as All-Ireland final day or the occasion of major international rugby or soccer matches, the people who have given most in a voluntary capac-

ity cannot get tickets to attend. Earlier this week, we heard that tickets for a forthcoming U2 concert have been resold at multiples of their face value. What is the FAI doing to ensure the elimination of ticket touting?

Chairman: I thank Deputy Troy. Senator Feighan is next.

Senator Frank Feighan: I will try to be brief. I welcome the witnesses. We are very proud of each organisation in terms of their work at local, national and international level.

I am the Co-Chairperson of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly. I also previously served as Chairman of the Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. Two of the three organisations here today operate on an all-Ireland basis, while one only operates in the Twenty-six Counties, with the Irish Football Association, IFA, operating in Northern Ireland. The Irish Football Association recently took a case to the Court of Arbitration for Sport where it was determined that players from the Republic of Ireland could play for Northern Ireland and players from Northern Ireland could play for the Republic of Ireland. They had dual nationality. What is the view of Mr. Delaney on that?

Somebody ran a double-decker bus to Germany in 1988. We went for two weeks and in the *Evening Press* we were told where we could or could not go. That was the organisational capacity of the time but we have moved on. There are now iPhones, fan zones and Republic of Ireland supporter clubs. One thing seems to be lacking, which is a fan embassy. I am part of an *ad hoc* cross-party group in Leinster House. The Welsh fans have embassies that work closely with its department dealing with foreign affairs. We are hoping to work in the same way. It was joyful to see the fans from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland in particular working together. There will always be a bad apple and I am always afraid that the exuberance could get out of hand. We need to put fan and supporter clubs on a particular footing and I understand there are fan embassies all over Europe now. We are working closely with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to try to get this up and running. What is the view of the witness and does the FAI welcome it?

Chairman: I apologise to Mr. Duffy and Mr. Browne but we will come to them. I have a question on the sports capital programme. I am not asking Mr. Delaney to bite the hand that partially feeds his organisation but could this be improved for applicants and the FAI? There is the issue of governance in the organisation. Unfortunately, we have seen within the League of Ireland some problems with crowd trouble. It is a small amount in the vast minority of games but it is something that must be absolutely nipped in the bud. Is the governing body taking this very seriously and how does it plan to address it?

Mr. John Delaney: I thank members for their questions and I will try to deal with them in as detailed a way as I can in the order in which they were asked. We are one of the most inclusive organisations in the country and our approach to the game is that everybody has the right to play, irrespective of ability, disability, colour, creed or sex. Getting kids away from PlayStations and on to playing fields is our ethos. It is a pyramid structure from grassroots. If one is building a house, one builds a foundation first and the chimney is at the top. The chimney for us is international football but we cannot have a chimney without a very strong foundation. Inclusivity is what we are all about and anybody working closely with us or who knows us sees that at first hand.

We operate to the highest standards with regard to the concussion issue. We have a medical committee, including Dr. Alan Byrne, who works with the international team. He has spoken

before committees here about concussion and how we deal with those matters. We deal with them to the highest professional standard. We are quite emotive about special needs. We have 24 clubs and Football for All is one of our strongest programmes. There are kids with cerebral palsy, the amputee team, the homeless team and blind supports. We give international caps for people who play the sport under the auspices of the Football for All programme. We are very strong in allowing every kid the right to play, irrespective of their ability or disability. There are 24 clubs in Ireland formed specifically for the Football for All programmes, including special needs.

We dealt with winning at all costs under the player development plan. The ethos and thinking behind the removal of win at all costs, particularly at the key younger level, is to give every kid the ability to love the ball. They are taught to pass it and not kick it long, which was the approach when I was growing up. There is the rolling on and off of substitutes so every kid can play and we do not keep competitive tables until the age of 12, which is something we feel strongly about. It is outlined in our player development plan, which was introduced recently under our technical director, Mr. Ruud Dokter. Effectively, this allows kids to enjoy playing football. It gets competitive later in life but when they are younger, they should really enjoy the experience and learn not to be afraid to make a mistake with a football.

With regard to mental health, our Kickstart 2 Recovery programme helps with addiction issues. Coach education is very important for mental health if we give people a role in life. We have 32,000 or 33,000 people who are coaching and it gives people status. We work very hard at coach education, which provides good training, and we run many programmes through our development officers all over the country on mental health. I have spoken as a guest at many functions on suicide prevention. I feel very strongly about that as it is a scourge on our society. Everybody in this room, and not just sporting bodies, could do more.

With regard to child protection matters, I refer the committee to our statements of 25 November and 1 December last year. We take these matters really seriously, given the events in the UK. We have a child welfare officer and committee. We operate to the highest standards that sports bodies would be on these matters. Every parent, including me, would want their kids to be safe. Members spoke about social aspects and we run some tremendous programmes. We have the midnight soccer league, working with different agencies, including local authorities and the Garda Síochána, identifying children at risk. In the areas where we play these games at night, crime has dropped tangibly. In Ballymun the rate has dropped by 60% or 70%. There are approximately 30 or 40 of these programmes being run all over the country and if we had more funding, we would run more of them. We have given a snapshot of what is being done in the community and that programme identifies kids at risk. It is about working in true partnership and not ticking boxes. We work with the Garda Síochána, local authorities, football clubs and different agencies to achieve real results.

Gender quotas have been mentioned by most members. The Women's Football Association of Ireland ran women's football in Ireland until recently. It was responsible for the development of the game. It is a bit like Mr. Duffy's comments about GAA counterparts. I will read what the chairperson of the WFAI, Ms Niamh O'Donoghue, wrote in the strategic plan. She states "We are fortunate indeed that the FAI believes in the future of women's football and has clearly demonstrated its commitment to the development of the game." That is her quote and not mine. We took over the running of women's football and developed eight regional committees which report to a national committee within the FAI. That national committee is responsible for the development of women's football in this country. Within the next 12 months, the chairperson

of that women's committee will become a member of the board of the FAI. We have appointed women to very senior positions in the association and our target is to get to 25,000 registered players by 2021. When I started as chief executive officer, there were approximately 8,000 registered women players. We have played 50-odd international matches, as I outlined, and we are very strong in the development of women's football. It is okay for me to say it but I refer the committee to Ms O'Donoghue's quote. If one studies our organisation, one can see our actions. Approximately a year ago we took over women's football, established a women's national committee with eight regional committees beneath it and within the next 12 months the chairperson of the committee will come to our board.

There was mention of FIFA increasing the number of teams in the World Cup to 48. Many years ago I addressed a UEFA congress - I think it was 2007 - about increasing the number of teams from 16 to 24. Along with many colleagues, I spoke about increasing the number of teams. I am a big follower of hurling and if Kilkenny play Tipperary, they do not have to play the French champions. The rugby world cup is easier to qualify for than the FIFA equivalent, although Mr. Browne might disagree. For countries like us, such as Norway, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Iceland, it is difficult to get to major tournaments. It is important that we do in order to celebrate with our great supporters and do well for a sense of national pride. I brought the proposal to a UEFA congress and I won by 48 votes to five on the day. It has proved a big success to go from 16 teams to 24 in that competition. It did not affect the quality of the competition and most of the narrative on the European Championships has been very strong.

In theory the FAI is supportive of increasing the number of teams to 48. There will be meetings at UEFA next Monday and Tuesday under the top executive programme to see how it affects UEFA. Currently, there are 13 European teams at a World Cup. How many extra slots would that mean for UEFA? I would support any opportunity that gives Ireland a greater opportunity to get to a World Cup, in theory or in principle.

When the FAI took over the running of the League of Ireland, the collective losses of the clubs were €7 million. I am a big League of Ireland supporter and my father was chairman of Waterford United Football Club. I was secretary when they won the cup in 1980. As a young boy I travelled to League of Ireland matches every Sunday even though we lived in Tipperary. Richie Hall and Al Finucane, who lived in Limerick, came to our house and every Sunday we went to Kilcohan Park or another stadium around the country. The League of Ireland is in my DNA and it is a big part of what we want to improve in this country.

We took over clubs with a collective loss of €7 million and they are now at about break-even and there will be a profit this year because Dundalk has had such a great year. It has been difficult because we have had to impose club licensing on many of them. There are great people in the clubs, as well as great supporters, but we are trying to drill them down in order that they are not just senior clubs. We created an under-19 national league and an under-17 national league while an under-15 national league starts this August. This will give pathways to players in Cork, Waterford, Sligo, Dundalk and Drogheda to play for all these levels and then progress to the highest level.

We formed a marketing group with the clubs to market the league better. I had a meeting last Monday morning with Michael Cush, who has been appointed by the clubs and club members. We are seeing how we can collectively improve and a report was produced just before Christmas.

The improvement of facilities is crucial to everything we do with clubs. Deputy Munster

asked me about going from a premier league and first division of 12 and eight teams, respectively, to ten and ten in the year after this season. This was based on the recommendations in the Conroy report, an independent report done a year or so ago. We asked the clubs for their opinions and recently they informed us, through Michael Cush, a barrister, that they would prefer to go to ten and ten. Based on that, the FAI accepted that three teams would go down and one would go up in the coming season. There will never be a unanimous view on what a structure should be and Páraic Duffy will tell members the same as regards hurling and Gaelic football. We got the report from Declan Conroy and then asked the clubs for their position and they voted, in the majority, to make it ten and ten.

More than 180 employees work for the organisation. During the more difficult times there were pay cuts, like everywhere else, which we are now restoring. The staff in the FAI love what they do because they are being paid to be involved in association football and that is a privilege for them. We have very good staff who work day in and day out, particularly the development officers in every part of the country. It is very difficult to get players to stay because of the money they are offered when they go abroad. Séamus Coleman played for Sligo Rovers but he obviously gets a greater salary and a greater profile at Everton, and that is the nature of Irish soccer. For many years players have been developed in Ireland and then go to the UK to play and get paid at a higher level. Our aim is to keep the players for longer in order that they do not go at such a young age. An under 15, under 17 and under 19 national league will help enormously in keeping the players and will give them a good education before they go. Daryl Horgan made his full debut for Preston last weekend and played very well, and ultimately the best players in world football will go to play against the best, at club, county or international level.

Deputy O'Mahony made the observation that it is not just about prize money; it is about what we do for clubs. We were significantly involved in saving Dalymount Park, getting a certain amount of the debt written down and getting Dublin City Council to buy it. Now we are looking to the Government to fund its redevelopment. Turner's Cross would be the same. It is an excellent stadium now, with 7,000 seats, and the Belarus game was held there recently. The FAI has invested a lot of money in that and the same is true of Eamonn Deacy Park. We took the Wexford Youths ground out of receivership and saved it for football and we made a strong financial contribution to the regional sports centre in Waterford. We need, from the committee and the broader Government and Chamber, to have more investment in the infrastructure of the League of Ireland, because with better facilities there is a greater chance of getting people into the grounds.

On the question of my role on the board of the FAI, it is written in the rulebook that the CEO is a board member and that was recommended by the Genesis report many years ago, to which Deputy Murphy referred. We met Alistair Gray of Genesis subsequent to the implementation of the report and he said they were more than satisfied with what we had done. The report was issued and we went through an implementation process. As a young honorary treasurer we went around the country trying to reduce our board from 23 members to ten as well as making other changes. Genesis gave us a health check and was more than satisfied by what we had done. The FAI currently has a governance group chaired by a woman and an outside person to look constantly at governance within the organisation. There was a rule change recently. There is an age limit of 75 on the board but a member re-elected before the rule change can stay beyond that. Our board is changing and a new member will be elected in Abbotstown today. We will have a new president and vice president next year and we will have an additional woman on our board in the next 12 months.

The €5 million fee was a contentious matter and a committee here decided, a year or two ago when Senator O'Mahony was Chairman, that it would not be discussed in this House. All the money was properly accounted for and signed off by our auditors. A sum of €1 million was given initially and €4 million was given a later year. We issued a detailed statement at the time.

We were all disappointed with how events turned out in FIFA but I would not describe Sepp Blatter as a good friend of mine. We voted for the new president, Gianni Infantino, who is bringing in some reforms at the moment and I am hopeful more reforms will come. We also support Aleksander Čeferin, the Slovenian president, for president of UEFA, and on Monday and Tuesday next week we will get updates on how reforms are progressing in UEFA. The brand of FIFA was very much damaged by events and they will continue to unfold over the next period as certain cases take place.

Our AGM was a huge success. Deputy Troy commented on it and Senator O'Mahony was present in Mayo. There was no negativity from the League of Ireland at the AGM in Tipperary last year and we came to an agreement during the week on giving it an allowance towards developing strategic plans. We visit a county extensively and give out in excess of €100,000 in grants, bringing people like Martin O'Neill, Ray Houghton and current footballers like Keith Andrews with us. It is a remarkable success and something that is very close to me. In my time I have visited 2,200 clubs throughout the country, and last Saturday I was at Achill Rovers on Achill Island. I am booked out every weekend. Supporting grassroots clubs is key to what we do and the AGM is a great snapshot of that. Deputy Troy spoke about women's participation on the board and I have dealt with that. I have dealt with the women's national teams committee and with the Genesis report. As I outlined in my opening remarks, only 6% of our overall turnover in the year gone by was State funded, so we got €2.7 million while our turnover was €46 million.

I am sure Mr Browne and Mr Duffy would agree that we would like it to be illegal to sell tickets at above face value, but that would depend on Government legislation. All the sporting bodies can do is distribute tickets as best we can through our supporters clubs and affiliates, and if it is brought to our attention that anybody is profiting, we will deal with it severely. I urge Government to bring in legislation to make it illegal in this country because once that happens, it will help us greatly.

Senator Feighan brought up the case of Daniel Kearns, but that was many years ago. We have a very good relationship with the Irish Football Association. Its president, David Martin, is a good president and is someone with whom we would have a very good relationship. Ultimately, my view and that of the association is that it is the player's choice. If James McClean wants to play for the Republic of Ireland, it is his choice, but if he wants to play for the Northern Ireland football association, the Irish Football Association, we are not going to interfere. To my mind and that of the association, it should always be down to the player. The player should pick the national association he or she wishes to play for.

I support the Deputy's view regarding the fans' embassy. Naturally, our supporters were fantastic in France. They got the award from the mayor of Paris and a UEFA award as well. They are probably the best ambassadors this country will ever have and we are very supportive of anything that would help that. We have a supporters' club network that represents 2,000 season ticket holders. I meet them regularly and will do so in the next week or so. We take on board any issues they bring to our attention and we try to work with them as closely as possible.

In response to Deputy Griffin, we welcome the fact that sports capital grants were brought

back over recent years. They are the lifeblood of grassroots clubs. As I travel extensively through the country, I want to help more. The national associations have a very good overview of where the money can be best spent and should continue to have more involvement in the allocation of sports capital grants because, ultimately, we would know through our strategies where best to spend the money, be it Mounthawk Park in Kerry, Glanmire in Cork or Dalymount Park. I could give the committee many more examples. We would like more of an involvement but we appreciate the programme, which is a great programme.

In respect of the behaviour of a minority of supporters at League of Ireland matches, the vast majority of League of Ireland supporters are very good football people. We have noticed that a small minority have engaged in what I would call unacceptable behaviour, particularly in the past year. Workshops are being held with the League of Ireland clubs under the direction of our head of security, Joe McGlue. We treat these matter seriously, as do the clubs, and we are working with clubs to ensure the behaviour of fans at League of Ireland matches creates a family environment. I reiterate that most League of Ireland supporters are great supporters of football. It is only a small minority.

Chairman: Senator O'Mahony and Deputy Fitzpatrick indicated that they wanted to ask supplementary questions. I ask them to be very brief.

Senator John O'Mahony: In respect of the AGM, I certainly attended the FAI's activities in Mayo and would praise what it does. It involves tremendous promotion around the county with the clubs that have received grants from it. That is not what I was talking about. I was talking about the actual meetings. I am reading from the media reports, so perhaps we can blame the media, but all I know is that every year, I read about the AGM and there seems to be a lack of information. I am just putting it to Mr. Delaney. I am not saying it is right or wrong. I want to hear his comments on it. In respect of the report mentioned by Mr. Delaney concerning the League of Ireland, the reports seem to suggest that the person who produced it did not have a full knowledge of the League of Ireland.

Mr. John Delaney: There are two reports. The J. J. Gabay report before Christmas was a marketing report. Mr. Gabay travelled extensively-----

Senator John O'Mahony: Again, I am only asking for Mr. Delaney's comments.

Mr. John Delaney: The Declan Conroy report, which is the overall strategy for the League of Ireland, was an independent report. We are working with Michael Cush, who is a barrister appointed by the clubs, and we are working with the clubs on the implementation of that report. Everyone in this room knows that the media are important in Irish life but sometimes they do not reflect what is really happening. We work very closely with League of Ireland clubs and they accept that. As recently as 8 a.m. last Monday, I had a meeting with Michael Cush and three clubs on the future of the league.

Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick: How can the success of Dundalk in the Europa League in 2016 benefit the League of Ireland? I have seen children in Waterford, Cork and Limerick suddenly start wearing Dundalk jerseys. Many of those playing for Dundalk are household names. How can we take that extra step forward? I believe the League of Ireland is a better league than the Scottish Premier League because it only has Celtic as such. I have seen how teams like Cork City and Shamrock Rovers are looking up to Dundalk and want to reach that level. How can we benefit from the success Dundalk had in 2016?

Chairman: Could Deputy O’Keeffe and Deputy Catherine Murphy also put their questions because we are over time and I want to be fair to the witness?

Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe: Did Mr. Delaney indicate whether the timeframe regarding the gender quota requested by the Minister of State would be reached? Regarding the reconfiguration of League of Ireland clubs, do the first division clubs have any vote in this process?

Deputy Catherine Murphy: My question goes back to the point made by Senator O’Mahony regarding the AGM. Obviously, it is a very important event. I understand that the media must submit questions in advance. Why would they do that? I would say there is great support for sport and when one is very forthright, it almost says that everything is all right. It seems very controlled. For example, there have been no questions at recent AGMs. The publication of the FAI’s accounts has been a point of criticism by the likes of Niamh Brennan. Would it not be better to publish them on the website? It strikes me that going about it in this way is good governance and avoids questions in the future.

Mr. John Delaney: In response to Deputy Fitzpatrick, what Dundalk achieved was exceptional and made everybody in Ireland proud, especially those in Irish football. Everybody adopted Dundalk as their League of Ireland team, particularly in respect of its performance in Europe. We have given an allowance to all the clubs to develop a strategic plan and 15 strategies are in. We will work with the 20 clubs when the full strategies are in regarding how we implement them. The key to making League of Ireland clubs stronger is making them stronger in the community. Therefore, the under-15, under-17 and under-19 national leagues are really important, as are the improvement of facilities and infrastructure. When Dundalk and Cork, which did very well in Europe as well, reach certain standards and do well, it means that other clubs will aim to raise their own standards. In the case of Shamrock Rovers, the third stand in Tallaght has been completed and the club has an academy in Roadstone. Again, this is an example of a club that is on the rise again.

In respect of gender quotas, what I said clearly was that we have come to an agreement with the WFAI, which is very happy about what we have agreed in terms of consultation, namely, that there would be one woman on the board of the FAI. Along with Mr. Browne, I do not see the requirement for gender quotas. If the game is being developed correctly with the affiliate and it is happy with how we are developing participation and giving representation, we are better off doing real stuff and making it happen rather than engaging in tokenism. It can be seen and there is no doubt that the association has achieved a lot of success in women’s football and will definitely achieve more into the future.

The decision regarding the ten teams of ten came from the Premier Clubs Alliance which voted on that. I understand that the first division clubs did not have a vote on that matter.

In response to Deputy Murphy’s question, sometimes what someone may read is not always the way it is in reality, so perhaps some of the Deputy’s impressions were formed through media reports. We publish our accounts. We hand them to the media on the given day. Our accounts are freely available to anybody who wants to see them. Questions in advance are requested but the real work of the FAI at committee level is done week in, week out. There are hundreds of meetings, including national committee meetings, executive meetings, board meetings and national council meetings. Many questions are asked at those meetings. The AGM might just be a snapshot in time but the real work of the association is done in the other 364 days and many questions are asked daily. I assure the Deputy that when I leave this chamber, there will be many questions waiting for me.

We do publish our accounts and, under the new governance structures requested by the Minister of State, we will put them online. In respect of the new governance structures the Minister of State recently outlined at a meeting giving all the sporting bodies a few years to implement them, I assure the committee that we will comfortably meet anything asked of us.

Chairman: I call Deputy Troy for a brief final question.

Deputy Robert Troy: It was actually answered.

Chairman: We are exactly ten minutes over time. I again thank Mr. Delaney for facilitating us. I also thank the members for their brevity in their questioning.

Some of the members have already submitted questions for answer to Mr. Duffy and Mr. Browne. I ask the remaining members to ask the questions they want to put to the representatives and then we can take the answers. I call Deputy Catherine Murphy, followed by Senator O'Mahony, Deputy Troy and Senator Richmond.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: Within the GAA, boys and girls seem to participate together and then separate at a particular point. Certainly at summer camps and at the early stages there seems to be joint activity. Is there any thought of a greater amalgamation or is that anathema to both organisations? They are using the same facilities in many cases. That would seem like an obvious thing to do.

On governance issues, I am impressed by the 400 organisations overseas. That can be seen in some of the press coverage and things like that. I understand that a club in Ireland is vested in headquarters. What happens with clubs overseas? Is it a similar type of model? Is that unique? Is there a governance issue in that regard? Is that different in other parts of the world? The GAA is very public in terms of its AGM and its accounts, which is very welcome. It means that the scrutiny is almost self-scrutiny, which is very welcome.

Regarding the IRFU, I really enjoyed the win in Chicago; who did not? Mr. Browne talked about skill sets. None of us was expecting the quota announcement. When talking about the skill set, is he talking about women representing women's rugby on the board? What kind of skill set does the IRFU require for the board? We have all been on boards. Very often governance and board-related items do not relate to the experience of, in this case, playing a game, but to the kinds of things that make up good governance. What is the skill set that women would not have given that we have 50% of the intelligence or something like that? I am curious about Mr. Browne's thinking in saying that. I imagine that if there is to be an amalgamation of both, then both genders should be represented on the board in order to develop rugby in general.

Senator John O'Mahony: I will confine my questions to governance, funding and gender quotas, and will start with gender quotas. Based on the presentations, I take it that both organisations have a concern about it. Wearing my sporting hat, I agree with them. They need to create the conditions in which there is equality of opportunity such that male or female does not matter provided the person is good enough. I ask both Mr. Browne and Mr. Duffy if there is any way that the deadlines will be met.

On governance, the GAA requires a two thirds majority, which I know well. Does Mr. Duffy see that as a help for good governance or is it becoming a restriction? In other words, is it holding back change?

Mr. Duffy referred to the rural-urban issue. The GAA has problems in urban areas because

of too many numbers and problems in rural areas because it has too few numbers. He spoke about the Government closing post offices and Garda stations. That is certainly an issue for the Government. Will the funding structure of the GAA not result in a continuance of this?

I want clarification on this because I am not aware of the answer. Funding that came through the Irish Sports Council was ring-fenced for Dublin GAA about ten or 15 years ago. Is that ring-fenced by the Government or by the GAA? I do not in any way suggest that money be taken away from Dublin because the outcomes have been hugely successful for the investment, in other words, it has been value for money. Wearing my sporting hat as well as my political hat, I believe there is a major issue for the GAA down the line unless extra funding is distributed to the weaker counties and the weaker clubs in the counties because otherwise we will perpetuate the problem. Mr. Duffy can perhaps rightly be critical of successive Governments over rural policy. However, we do not want to see that in a sporting sense.

I come to Mr. Browne and the IRFU. We will not talk about the Rugby World Cup because that is coming up later. I was delighted to hear his reference to Abbotstown. I have been out there and have seen the magnificent GAA facilities there. What are the IRFU facilities on the site at the moment? What is the potential for rugby there?

We have talked about the fantastic success of the rugby clubs and the international teams. The way Irish rugby has adapted to the professional game has shown the rest of the world how it can be done in that respect. When it is professional at the top level, one of the downsides can be getting volunteers. I would not be aware of it in rugby clubs but it seems to be suffering at the moment.

Deputy Robert Troy: It is good to get an opportunity to speak again. I would be far more aligned to the GAA than I would be to rugby, but not nearly as much as my two colleagues on the right, Senator O'Mahony and Deputy Fitzpatrick, based on their inter-county successes over many years. They have played a very meaningful and positive role in the GAA.

I want to focus on the gender quotas in both organisations. I have served as treasurer in my local club in County Westmeath. I can say without fear or favour some of the best people on the committee were the women. There was no gender quota. Sometimes AGMs are held at which people are coerced into being members of committees. I refer not only to women but also to men. I have a grave reservation about this. We are talking about volunteering, be it at club level, county level, provincial level or all-Ireland level. Are we taking a sledgehammer to try to crack an egg? I suggested we discuss this at a meeting of the committee because the proposal emanated from the Government without any consultation. I am interested in hearing whether the delegates and the bodies they represent feel any more confident that the concerns that emanated from the various sporting bodies when the announcement was made through the media one Monday morning are been addressed.

Before Mr. Delaney left, I asked him what is being done about sudden adult death syndrome. Within the GAA, screening is compulsory at intercounty level. I believe we need to have screening at club level, however. Has the GAA any plans in this regard?

One of the biggest issues from the GAA's perspective is the amalgamation of clubs. I apologise to the IRFU for concentrating so much on the GAA. I am glad that the GAA highlighted how rural areas have been decimated over recent years with a reduction in services. As Senator O'Mahony rightly said, we do not want to see our rural clubs going in that direction. Quite often, rural football clubs are the only organisations gelling communities together, even at junior

level, as in the case of my club for the first time in many years. I am interested in learning what role the GAA can play in offering support in this regard.

Signing up to a deal with Sky is forcing people to go to the pubs to watch matches. If only every pub were subscribing to Sky. Now many of the pubs cannot afford to do so because they face an increase in the fee for commercial premises. Since there is a decline in the rural pubs, they do not have the capacity to offer the service. It is disappointing that an organisation founded in 1884 and based on volunteerism has gone so much towards commercial activity. Perhaps the delegation will offer its rationale in that regard.

It appears the IRFU has but one lady representative. The organisation is correct in that it does not want to be seen to be promoting somebody for the sake of doing so or having a token candidate. I do not believe any woman would want to be in any position exclusively based on her gender. We must do something, however, because women have a huge role to play. From my experience at club level in the GAA and from working within my political party, I believe women have a huge, meaningful role to play. They bring a different thought process and perspective to many decisions. They need to be in key positions. Mr. Browne said he has reservations about the proposals of the Government. What are the IRFU's proposals to support greater female participation in governance roles? I asked the president of the FAI the percentage of the annual budget derived from State funding. What is the IRFU's percentage?

Senator Neale Richmond: I thank the Chairman for allowing me to attend the meeting. I apologise to the witnesses because I am trying desperately to master the skill of bilocation with the Joint Committee on European Union Affairs.

My question or point applies to both organisations. My impression is based on the rugby scene and my experience in my club, as Mr. Browne will know. It touches on what Senator O'Mahony mentioned in regard to the plight of clubs. I refer not only to rugby, Gaelic games and soccer. I am very concerned over the drop-off rate in active participation among adults. When I played mini-rugby in the 1990s, there might have been 20 children for the entire club. We now have 450. When I used to go to watch matches, I went to watch one of seven or eight adult teams but now we are lucky to get three or four in any one club. I appreciate the pressures associated with being able to watch so much sport on television, be it terrestrial, free-to-air or pay-per-view. I appreciate also the lure of the gyms and the attraction of going to watch professional teams of the highest level, which opportunity might not have arisen in the past. The IRFU's document mentions this as a challenge. How can we address the challenge associated with a falling off in the number participating? We are constantly talking about getting children active, active society and "Operation Transformation" and all that go with them but I believe involvement in clubs and team sports, especially in the community, is far more beneficial to mental and physical health than CrossFit or FitPit, or whatever one opts for. What are the two organisations doing to address this challenge? How could the sports capital grants target areas in this regard? Is the problem a lack of high-quality changing facilities and playing facilities and is there a need for more all-weather turf and floodlights to allow for evening games? Is it a matter of general emphasis?

Chairman: I thank the delegates for their patience. They are waiting a long time to respond.

With regard to governance, what are the organisations doing to ensure the very best possible standards to prevent the use of performance-enhancing drugs in their respective sports? Unfortunately, a sad aspect of sport is that some participants cheat. It is in everyone's interest that the risk be minimised. What measures are being taken at all levels of performance to ensure drugs

are not taken and that, if they are taken, the practice is stopped?

My next question was raised by Deputy Fitzpatrick. I am very concerned about concussion in all sports. It is unfair that rugby sometimes stands out in this regard. It is associated with more high-profile cases. All sportspeople are susceptible to concussion. The more physical the sport, the higher the risk. It is an area of concern. Speaking to parents of young children, I know it is in the interest of both rugby and Gaelic games to ensure people are confident the matter is being addressed. From speaking to parents in my constituency, I note there is concern over starting children at underage level in rugby because of the fear of concussion. In recent days, a number of high-profile individuals expressed further concern arising from the incidents at the Champions Cup games at the weekend. The recent George North issue was very high profile. Could the delegates comment on this matter?

Mr. Páraic Duffy: I will respond to the people who are present first and then answer the other questions. I will first respond to Deputy Fitzpatrick, who raised three points. The challenges in rural areas were raised on several occasions. It is a considerable matter for the GAA. We are finding it tough. The heart of the GAA is in rural Ireland. We are currently finding it tough simply because of the movement of population from west to east. Depopulation along the west coast, in particular, has made it hard for clubs. I am not blaming the Government. It is very hard for the GAA to solve the problem. All we can do is examine our own structures and make arrangements, through our own rules, to allow clubs to stay in existence. We have done that and are trying to be much more flexible in terms of things coming together, forming independent teams for particular competitions, amalgamations and so on but it is a real challenge. If society is to be increasingly built around urban areas, it will be hard for the GAA because our strength is in rural areas, probably much more so than with rugby and soccer. That is a real concern for us. Our contribution is to make our rules as flexible as possible to allow teams and clubs to continue in existence. I will come back to some of the other points that were raised about this later. It is a challenge for us. In urban areas, we have had huge growth in numbers participating in the GAA, as Senator O'Mahony mentioned, particularly in Dublin, but the problem we have there is the availability of facilities. The GAA model very often is that one tries to form a club and one establishes a community around it with a social centre, pitches and so on. It is almost impossible to do this in Dublin because one simply cannot afford the cost of land and the cost of facilities is so high. In fairness, we get support from local councils and so on, but the challenge in urban areas is that there are so many big clubs in Dublin that have the numbers but simply do not have the playing facilities to cater for all those who want to play. In the west of Ireland there are facilities and not enough players. This is not something we can easily solve. We are very aware of it. We are doing the best we can, but it is a challenge for us.

Senator Richmond and several others mentioned the drop-out rate. This applies to Mr. Browne's organisation as much as to ours and to Mr. Delaney's as well. We lose many children and young people from sport from the age of 15 or 16 onwards. Some of the answers to this are within our own organisation in terms of our competitive structures and so on. One of the things that happens is that kids play all sports up to ten, 11 or 12 but, as time goes on, they realise that perhaps they will not be good enough to play at a competitive level and they drift away. Young people develop other interests and hobbies as they go through their teenage years and adolescence. The drop-off in participation in sport at this age is a worldwide problem and covers a multitude of sports. We are all trying in different ways to remedy this. This year we brought in what we call super game centres whereby we had 80 different places throughout the country where kids who were not affiliated to clubs could come and play the games at particular times and organise games. We are making efforts in this regard, but it is a huge challenge.

To come to Deputy Murphy's points, the first she raised concerned the issue of the separation of boys and girls. She is right that in the summer camps, up to the age of 12, they are together in one group and then the organisations go their separate ways. It is very important that I make the point that the GAA is a stand-alone organisation, but the Camogie Association and Ladies Gaelic Football are independent organisations. Having said that, we have a very close relationship with them and they play all their games on our grounds, which is what we want.

The GAA would like in the long term to become one organisation with the Camogie Association and Ladies Gaelic Football, but we cannot force this on these organisations. They know our views on this. We are working very closely with the three CEOs of the three organisations to put together a template for working together at club level. This is already happening. The GAA is very open to the idea of one organisation encompassing all these organisations but we will not force it because we are the largest organisation and we do not want to be seen to be putting pressure on the other two. However, we are very open to and would be very happy to have the closest possible relationship. Our previous president, Liam O'Neill, and our current president, Aogán Ó Fearghail, have made this message very clear. In the long term, I would love to see one Gaelic games organisation covering all the sports. That is our aspiration. In the meantime, we will continue to support the two women's organisations in every way we can, financially or otherwise. On the point of gender quotas, this makes us a little different because the GAA *per se* only caters for the boys' and men's games. I will come back to gender quotas in a moment but I ask the committee to remember that we are separate from the camogie and ladies' football organisations, which have their own structures, governing bodies and management boards.

Deputy Murphy asked a second question, an interesting one, about clubs overseas. She is absolutely right that the model overseas is very different. The clubs abroad are at club level virtually all amalgamated, whether camogie, ladies' football or GAA, because that is the only way it would work. This is the first thing that is different about the overseas clubs. The second is that in Europe most of the clubs do not have their own grounds and properties so the issue of vesting property does not arise. In America, however, it does. We have grounds in places such as Philadelphia, New York, San Francisco and so on. The vesting model is different, but the clubs or units have their own grounds. They are vested in the GAA, but it is a different model than operates here for legal reasons. Generally speaking, securing property abroad is not as big an issue as it is here. In a number of places outside Ireland the GAA is part of a wider cultural centre and a broad Irish-American unit. Deputy Murphy's point is a good one. There is huge growth overseas and it is growing very quickly.

Senator O'Mahony also raised the point of gender quotas. To be fair to the Minister of State, Deputy O'Donovan, although this has caused a huge controversy, whatever else one might say, at least he started a debate, which is no bad thing. People can have their views on the level of consultation or the lack thereof and so on, but one must say at least he has created a debate. For any organisation, ours included, there is nothing wrong with that. A certain percentage within a certain space of time would be very difficult to achieve. All I will say is that the GAA is open to engage in this debate. We have many female people in responsible positions, certainly at county level: county chairmen, county secretaries and county treasurers responsible for pay-rolls. On our management board we do not because everybody there, bar two people, is elected, and we have not had women standing for those posts as of yet. This will happen in time. We are open to engaging in this debate as it goes on. As I said, it would be better if it were not done through enforcement and if one could get agreement. I do not think this is impossible. I am sure all the organisations would be quite happy to work with the Government to see how this

might be achieved without being too draconian in how it is done.

Senator O'Mahony asked a question about the two-thirds majority in the GAA in terms of governance. This is tricky. I know first hand that when one tries to introduce reforms, it is very hard to get a two-thirds majority. At last year's congress a number of very good suggestions for change fell because they got a majority but not a two-thirds majority. We have our annual congress in Croke Park at the end of February. There are a number of motions to change this rule, some suggesting a 60% majority, one suggesting a bare majority. The problem is that to change the rule will require a two-thirds majority because this is the rule, so it is a bit of a catch-22. I agree that two thirds is a little high. I think 60% would be fair. I can understand why people want to have more than a 50% majority, but two thirds is high and does make change rather difficult.

On the issue of funding and the funding for Dublin, to which Senator O'Mahony referred specifically, when the money was originally allocated to the GAA, it was allocated specifically for Dublin, for the development of hurling and football. I think this was when Bertie Ahern was Taoiseach. To be fair, this has been very successful in broadening participation in the games in Dublin. Now, as I think Mr. Browne mentioned earlier, the funding we all get from Sport Ireland or through the Government is much less than it used to be. We understand this is because of the recession and so on. At the moment the funding is not ring-fenced. It is a matter for us to decide how it is used. We have a manner of deciding how to allocate it. We still allocate a considerable amount to Dublin for two reasons: first, because there is a huge level of activity there; and second, because the initial process that was put in place was that full-time development officers were appointed to clubs all over Dublin, there are people in employment there, that funding pays half of their employment costs and the club pays the other half. Clearly, if one were to remove that funding just like that from those clubs, they probably would not be able to afford to keep those people in place. However, we are aware, particularly our organisation in Dublin, of the need to rebalance that. This is happening at the moment with the approval of the GAA in Dublin. There will be a reduction in the funding going to Dublin, allowing us to invest in other places. Senator O'Mahony's question is a valid one. This is happening and will continue to happen.

Regarding the general distribution of funding, so many parts of the organisation would benefit from more and more funding, both from our organisation and from Government, but much of the time it is a matter of availability of resources. Like every other organisation, we could do an awful lot more if we had more funding, however we get it.

I think I have responded to Deputy Troy's question about gender quotas already.

Regarding sudden adult death syndrome, Deputy Troy is right that players at inter-county level generally are tested. One would love to test every single player at club level for heart issues, but the cost is the big factor. Many players get tested of their own volition, but simply because of the cost factor, we as an organisation and most clubs would not be able to afford to fund testing for every single player. However, we are very well advanced in health training and the use of defibrillators and so on and have done much work around that.

Regarding the amalgamation of clubs, as I said, we prefer it when clubs can retain their own identities. The ideal, even if they are small, is that they can remain separate. If they cannot, the next step is amalgamation. Both models are happening, particularly in rural areas. As I said, we would like them to stay on their own, but if they cannot, amalgamation is the next best thing. What one does not want is a club or an area losing its GAA identity. So far we have done fairly

well to retain this, but it is very challenging.

Deputy Troy raised the question of Sky Sports, as did Deputy Munster. I am glad they did because it is important that I respond to this. I wish to put a few points from the GAA's point of view to the committee on this because there are a few myths out there around it. First, we want people to go to the games. Second, if they cannot go to the games, clearly, we would like to give the opportunity to people at home and abroad to watch them on TV. It is important that people realise that now and over the next five years, more than 100 live games per year will be shown on terrestrial free-to-air TV. It is important to keep this in perspective. Sky has only 14 live games exclusively. It has six more, including the finals - football and hurling semi-finals and all-Ireland finals - which it shows at the same time as RTE. This allows people in Britain-----

Deputy Robert Troy: Over five years.

Mr. Páraic Duffy: Yes, it is a five-year contract. A huge number of games are shown live on free-to-air, including all the big games, as I said. That is the first point I want to make. I will make another couple of points. People have an idea that because a number of games are on Sky, many games that they could watch in the past cannot be seen now. It has always been the case that certain games are not shown on television. Every year, many championship games are not shown live on television. I want to give a little perspective to it.

The other point I would make is that we were very anxious. We had a huge demand. I attended the Global Irish Forum in Dublin Castle on several occasions. We were hammered because people were unable to see our games abroad. This was a huge issue during the five years prior to the signing of the original deal with Sky. Through GAAGO and Sky, we have opened up our games to the Irish abroad in a way that was never possible before. People in New York, Sydney and elsewhere can now watch more than 100 games per annum free to air through GAAGO. People in Britain can access our games on television. It is great for the GAA in Britain that games are now available on Sky.

I would like to respond to the assertion that it is disappointing that the GAA has been driven so much towards commercial activity. We are in a competitive world. We spoke earlier about the need to invest in GAA facilities and coaches in rural areas and in Dublin. We cannot do that without finance. As an organisation, we have to be aware of commercial realities. That means engaging in commercial activity and that is what we do. The Croke Park venue hosts concerts and is a commercial vehicle for us. The television rights we have sold to RTE, TG4 and Sky are hugely important for us. We have to get the value of our products. If we do not do so, we will be unable to compete. With respect to Mr. Browne and Mr. Delaney, we are competing with soccer and rugby for resources and for the minds and hearts of young people in Ireland. We have to be able to put coaches into schools. We employ 350 full-time and part-time coaches all over Ireland. We go into thousands of primary schools every year. We need funding to do that. The money we get from our commercial activity is absolutely vital for that.

I would like to dispel the myth that the arrangement with Sky was foisted on the GAA by people in Croke Park. Last year, a terrific motion was brought to the GAA congress proposing that a new rule be enacted to provide that all televised intercounty championship games should be available on free-to-air television. The motion was defeated by 200 votes to 36. People within the GAA understand and accept why this arrangement has been reached. I appreciate that in a perfect world, everybody would want every single game to be live and free on terrestrial television. People in the GAA understand why a small number of our games are televised on a subscription channel.

The Chairman raised the drugs issue. Like all the organisations, we are in total compliance with the rules of the World Anti-Doping Agency and Sport Ireland. I think we have an excellent record in this regard. We have blood testing. Our players are open. We meet all the requirements. That will always be the way. In fairness to the GPA, it does a lot of good work to educate our players. This is an absolute priority for us. That will always be the case.

We had a seminar on concussion before Christmas. It was attended by personnel from the University of Pittsburgh, which is a world leader in this area. Our policy is that if there is any doubt about a player who has received a knock on the head, he is taken out of the game and he stays out. I would like to make a point about concussion that I suggest is valid for all organisations. I think we all do pretty well at national level. That is fine when big games take place in Croke Park or the Aviva Stadium, but I am worried about what happens when a fellow gets as big a knock during a junior B game or rugby fifth team game down the country as anyone might get in the Aviva Stadium or Croke Park. If there are no doctors or first-aid people on the sidelines, will those in attendance know what to do? That is why we are trying to tell people our view is that if there is any doubt at all, they must take the player in question out.

Mr. Philip Browne: Some of this ground has already been covered. We will keep going. I will begin by dealing with concussion, which was raised by Deputy Fitzpatrick and a number of other speakers. We have a zero-tolerance position in cases of suspected concussion in the amateur game. If a player has a suspected concussion, he comes off and is banned from playing for two weeks. A player under the age of 18 is banned for three weeks. A person in these circumstances is required to get a certificate from a doctor before he can come back to play. Rugby is probably one of the leading sports in the world at the moment in relation to concussion because of the focus that has been on us in this regard. Education is the key issue. It is a matter of educating players, coaches, parents and doctors. There have been cases in which doctors have not been able to comply with the concussion regulations. We have invested heavily in a significant educational exercise throughout our club and school system. This is a zero-tolerance area as far as we are concerned.

The situation is slightly different in the professional game. Under the concussion protocols that apply in the professional game, the doctor and the medical team can withdraw a player for a head injury assessment in the event of a suspected concussion. In international games and in some professional provincial games, they have an opportunity as part of the assessment to look at replays of video footage to check what happened to the player, who is put through certain protocols. One of the misnomers in all of this is that people think the ten-minute head injury assessment is there to diagnose a concussion. That is not the case. The assessment establishes whether there is a suspected concussion. If there is a suspected concussion, the player does not go back on the park - he has to go through graded return-to-play protocols that are generally put in place via the neurologists we employ and our own team doctors. Concussion is an extremely serious issue for sport and in general. There is as much chance of a child getting a concussion while running down the school corridor as there is of him or her getting a concussion playing Gaelic football, hurling, rugby, soccer or any other sport in the park. I think the Department of Health needs to have a role in making people throughout the schools system aware of the dangers of concussion. People have started to gain a greater understanding of this issue in recent years. That is our position on concussion.

I was also asked about our policies regarding children with special needs. We have started a relationship with the Cara Centre. We are trying to find a short form of the game that would be suitable for children with special needs. That is an ongoing work in progress. As rugby is

a contact sport, we have to find non-contact forms of the sport to allow children with special needs to participate in it. We are very supportive of that.

I would like to respond to the questions that were asked about mental health issues, child protection measures and the win-at-all-costs mentality. The IRFU set up a committee approximately 18 months ago to run its spirit programme, which tries to communicate the specific values of rugby and sport. The spirit committee has rolled out educational programmes to support the mental health of our players within the club game and to ensure everyone understands what is required from a child protection perspective. We have a full-time welfare officer who goes to schools and clubs to educate our administrators on all aspects of child protection. Obviously, we follow the child protection guidelines that are in place. The spirit committee has worked with Pieta House to roll out the “mind your buddy” mental health programme, which provides supports for players, coaches and volunteers within clubs, makes them aware of mental health issues and helps them to recognise such issues as they arise.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: Does the spirit programme receive public funding?

Mr. Philip Browne: No. It is funded by the IRFU. We would welcome such funding. We sometimes find that there could be a little more joined-up thinking between the Departments of Health, Transport, Tourism and Sport and Children and Youth Affairs in availing of the ability of the three major sporting organisations to provide certain supports and resources through our channels. The great advantage we have as organisations is that we have the infrastructure to access the cohort of the population that the three Departments are all looking to access. We are thrashing around looking for funding to roll out programmes that are part and parcel of our social responsibility to our children and to the people who fall under our wing. I think this probably needs to be looked at a little more carefully.

Regarding gender quotas, people ask about what we mean by “suitably qualified candidates”. The skill sets to which I referred were rugby skill sets in terms of understanding the game, how clubs work and how clubs and the game fit within the structure of Irish rugby. One of our main issues is that we have few ladies involved in coaching and administration. The few that we have are very good. Without having to change the laws or structure and governance of our game and reverting to our clubs and branches to ask them to tear our governance up and start again, it is unlikely that we will have sufficient numbers of women in the club game coming through the branches up to the union committee within the proposed three-year period. It probably takes the average IRFU committee member ten to 15 years to get there. They have gone through running the minis in clubs, coaching in clubs, handling administration in clubs, moving into their provinces to run competition and disciplinary structures and so on before being elected. We are conscious of this issue. Last year, we used one of the two co-options allowed under our governance to bring Ms Mary Quinn, who has been an effective administrator in Leinster’s women’s rugby, onto the IRFU committee.

We are starting to see some changes. We have women’s committees in each of the four provinces and women are involved in those. I am confident that women will come through the system, but if we tear it up, with what alternative will we end up? Will this make any difference? Deputy Munster probably took me up wrong regarding evidence. What I meant was that there was no evidence to suggest that not having women on the IRFU committee had held the women’s game back. As far as we are concerned, the roll-out of our rugby programmes is for women, men, girls and boys. We draw no distinction between them.

We would have some difficulty in reaching a quota of two thirds, one third or whatever it is

within a three-year period without ripping up our governance structure. That said, we have a working party that is examining our governance. Due to our democratic and federal structure, that party comprises representatives from each of the four branches. The party will make its recommendations. This is one of the issues that it is examining, given that it needs to be addressed.

All team sports face concerns about the club game and the grassroots level. Solitary sports have grown in recent years, creating difficulties for team sports. Mr. Duffy referred to population movements within and outside Ireland. They have caused difficulties for all major sports. We have done a great deal of work with the ESRI regarding the population. When one compares the numbers playing the game with population trends, rugby is probably holding its own. However, the overall population in the 17-25 age bracket is declining. Inevitably, fewer people in that bracket will be playing sport or be available to play. The good news is that there is a demographic bulge coming up through the system. The three major sports have to gear themselves up and get fit to deal with that bulge and provide access for those people.

We could also try to provide different versions of the sport. Due to the distractions of modern life - the fact that people have to earn a living and how difficult it is to get about compared with previously, particularly in urban areas - people are looking for something different. They are not necessarily looking for 20 or 30 weeks of rugby. They might be looking for only ten weeks of rugby. We are trying to find competition structures to offer them different ways of playing the game, for example, tag or touch rugby. We need to be more innovative in our offering. The same applies to GAA and soccer. We have had some reasonable success in that regard.

I will reiterate Mr. Delaney's point on ticket touting, in that we would be delighted if the State introduced legislation on this. It is as much a headache for us as it is for anyone else. Legislation would help to resolve some of the problem.

Senator O'Mahony raised a good point about creating the conditions for equality of opportunity between the genders and trying to get women involved in the game. As part of our women's strategy, we have rolled out a programme that tries to upskill and encourage women to get involved in the various levels of the club game. Unless they are willing to put themselves forward and feel confident about doing so, it will be difficult to know from where women administrators will come.

The Senator also referred to Abbotstown. We have been a strong supporter of its facilities from the word go. We have seen similar facilities elsewhere in the world. Almost by accident, even though I suspect that Mr. John Treacy had a design in the back of his mind, Ireland is in danger of creating a unique facility at Abbotstown that has multiple sports, including all of the high-performance ones, on-site. We can exchange information, ideas, philosophies and methods. It could create a unique environment that gives Irish sport a sporting advantage.

We are waiting for phase 2 of the national indoor arena to be built. That phase will include a high-performance rugby facility, a half-sized covered artificial pitch, a world class gym and facilities for our national coaching staff and our various national teams. The IRFU is making an additional investment to put three pitches into the facility. We have no presence in Abbotstown currently beyond our lease over some of the land, which we hold on the basis that we will eventually be able to move onto the site. Phase 2 is important for us and we will welcome its progress. While I understand that there are financial issues, I hope that they will be overcome.

Chairman: Our committee might visit Abbotstown, as getting a better understanding of

what is there would be worthwhile. Perhaps we will discuss that idea during private session and arrange a visit.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: It does not look like there is any funding in the 2016 capital envelope for phase 2. I received a reply to a parliamentary question on the master plan to the effect that other sources of capital were being explored. It looks like phase 2 will not be publicly funded. Am I right in taking it that they are looking for the IRFU to fund their particular component? Is that an impediment or am I reading that wrong?

Mr. Philip Browne: We could not afford to build the facility that is being proposed in phase 2. It is, effectively, a facility that is appended to the national indoor arena. The FAI is part and parcel of the phase 2 development also. That is State funded. We would be provided with a grey box that is the building and we must provide the funding to build the three pitches and to kit it out.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: There is a sequence to this and the IRFU cannot do its piece until-----

Mr. Philip Browne: We cannot put our money in or build pitches on the vague promise that-----

Senator John O'Mahony: I believe there was substantial funding in the 2016 budget but perhaps there is not in the 2017 budget to continue.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: I particularly ask it in the context of the rugby World Cup.

Senator John O'Mahony: I believe it was a vision of a previous Minister of Arts, Sports and Tourism, John O'Donoghue, to finish it totally at the time. I do not know if that has changed or not.

Mr. Philip Browne: Deputy Troy is not here now but I believe I have dealt with the issue of gender quotas.

With regard to the issue of sudden adult death syndrome, I have the same position as Mr. Duffy. All our professional and academy players fall under the medical supervision of our professional teams. With the rest of the game, the sheer cost of trying to provide screening would make it impossible. Most clubs would recommend that any kids coming in to play the game would have a medical in advance.

Deputy Troy asked about the percentage of State funding. It is about 3.6% for the IRFU. Senator Richmond asked about the plight of clubs and I believe I have addressed that issue. On the issue of the World Anti-Doping Agency, the IRFU is fully subscribed. The IRFU set up anti-doping tribunals in the 1990s ahead of the State and the Irish Sports Council. We have been all over anti-doping for a long time. It is part and parcel of our Spirit of Rugby programme. Anti-doping education falls within the brief of our welfare officer. I have addressed the issue of concussion.

Senator John O'Mahony: I have a quick supplementary question to Mr. Duffy if I may. Reference was made to ticket touting and the upcoming concerts. Can Mr. Duffy indicate if there are any plans on announcing a second U2 concert?

Mr. Páraic Duffy: I would love to be able to say so but unfortunately no.

Senator John O'Mahony: Are three concerts allowed?

Mr. Páraic Duffy: We are allowed three. We have two at the moment; Coldplay and U2 but that is all I know. No, there will not be a second one. My information is that there will not be a second concert. We would have liked it if there was but there will not be.

Senator John O'Mahony: But that would be within the three allowed?

Mr. Páraic Duffy: Yes, under the planning permission we have we can do three.

Senator John O'Mahony: Is it that Croke Park does not wish to?

Mr. Páraic Duffy: If we go beyond three concerts we would have to go for a licence and we would not seek a licence without the support of the residents around Croke Park.

Senator John O'Mahony: There are only two concerts at the moment.

Mr. Páraic Duffy: At the moment there are only two.

Senator John O'Mahony: So is there another slot?

Deputy Catherine Murphy: Garth Brooks is probably coming to the Hill. Is Mr. Duffy keeping it under wraps?

Mr. Páraic Duffy: Do not start that again; it will not be Garth Brooks.

Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe: Bring him down to Páirc Uí Chaoimh.

Mr. Páraic Duffy: To be honest we would like to have three concerts and we are still hoping that we will have three, but it will not be U2. That is my information.

Senator John O'Mahony: So there is obviously another concert in the pipeline also.

Mr. Duffy made reference to Sky. We had a big discussion about this in the last committee. The witness said that there are so many games on free-to-air, and I agree with him. I was glad to see it was not increased. The previous time I believe it was more about promotion. Now it seems to be the finance side of it. In fairness, the money the GAA gets for those broadcasting rights such as those when Croke Park was opened up to rugby and soccer, was disseminated round the State. The GAA has centres of excellence and so on.

There are some anomalies there and I will be parochial for a minute. I believe that four of Mayo's championship games were exclusive on Sky last year - or it could be Kerry, I do not see that Dublin would be beaten this year. Mr. Duffy makes the point that the GAA wants people to go to games but certain people just cannot go to games. Deputy Troy pointed out there is no Sky Sports in the small rural pubs either because they cannot afford it. The issue was discussed previously that Sky would give special deals to clubhouses - I believe it was mentioned at this committee. Did anything ever come of that?

Mr. Páraic Duffy: It did but I am not sure what the take-up was. It did at the time. I want to go back to the first point. It is not just about the finance. I made this point when I responded to Deputy Troy's query. Three years ago, when we made the first arrangement with Sky it was part of an arrangement to try to have our games broadcast all over the world. That was successful. We have achieved that through Sky in Britain in particular, which I believe has been terrific for the diaspora over there, and also through GAAGO. This time around we want to continue that,

which we have done. It is about finance also but it is not just about finance. Consider Senator O'Mahony's point about Mayo. Sky take 14 games, eight of which are qualifier games. It happened that last year, because Mayo lost to Galway in the first round, it was in the qualifiers the whole way through which was a bit unusual. I understand, however, why people in Mayo would feel that all their games were on - it was because they came through the qualifiers. It was just bad luck in the number of games but the point to remember is-----

Senator John O'Mahony: If I may interrupt for a moment, I would see the success of the promotion through GAAGO right throughout the world. Myself, my family, everyone seems to have it and it is fantastic. From a promotional perspective the figures being given by Sky do not seem to justify it.

Mr. Páraic Duffy: I am not here to defend Sky or to get into figures, but Sky gave figures for Ireland. Nobody ever expects that Sky will reach the same level of figures as RTÉ. That was never going to happen. The key for us was to have the games available to the diaspora in Britain-----

Senator John O'Mahony: No, I-----

Mr. Páraic Duffy: -----and I accept the Senator raised a valid point.

Senator John O'Mahony: In fairness it did not increase and that was watched.

Chairman: We are conscious the witnesses have been in the committee for two and a half hours already. I want to ask the witnesses about the availability of grant assistance to the grass-roots of their respective organisations? For example, say a small club in Kerry is looking to do X, Y or Z, to reseed or drain the pitch or whatever. We have the sports capital programme, which is a great programme. It is ideal but may be a bit difficult to apply for and get the application valid. Not everybody gets funding. How do the grant schemes work with the witnesses' own organisations?

Mr. Páraic Duffy: In terms of club grants we fund our major grounds and if we can, we fund county grounds. That has been difficult in recent years but we certainly do all the major grounds. We have two huge commitments at the moment. We are redeveloping Páirc Uí Chaoimh, which, as members know, is an €80 million project. We are very grateful that €30 million of this funding is being provided by Government. The remaining €50 million, however, must come from the GAA. Some €20 million will come from Croke Park, €10 million will come directly from Cork's own savings of €30 million, and the rest must be raised.

Of the €80 million for Páirc Uí Chaoimh, the GAA must provide €50 million. It has been a very difficult process but we are also in the process of redeveloping Casement Park and the GAA contribution towards that is £15 million. One of the few advantages of the sterling situation is that we have benefitted in a small way. The point is that the GAA must provide not far short of €70 million for those two stadia and to be fair they absolutely must be redeveloped. If we do not develop them they will fall down. It is also very important for us to have major stadiums in our major cities. We have one each in Dublin, Cork and Belfast. They are also important in the context of the rugby World Cup. They are a huge financial burden on the GAA.

In answer to the Chairman's question, we also fund the clubs through the provinces and make grants available through the provinces. In the Chairman's own province for example, the Munster council gets a grant every year towards club grounds and it adds to that fund from its own resources. There are grants available for all the things mentioned by the Chairman. Mun-

ster is very good in that space. The level of grants would depend on the amount of money that they have. We fund clubs to a much lower level through the provincial councils.

Chairman: Is there a particular time of year that they would apply or is it open all year round?

Mr. Páraic Duffy: No, it is open for most of the year for applications. I am not sure of the dates and so on. Clubs would be very familiar with that.

Chairman: So most of the year round. Does the IRFU have a similar arrangement?

Mr. Philip Browne: We operate a loan scheme for which we have €2 million earmarked. It is a revolving scheme. Clubs have ten years to pay back the loans, at nominal interest. We also offer an interest subsidy scheme which helps them to get finance from outside, third party sources. That is a very successful scheme.

Chairman: Very good. Are there any other questions?

Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick: It was a very good meeting. Well done.

Chairman: It was. Happy new year and, on behalf of the committee, I thank Mr. Duffy and Mr. Browne for their time, as well as Mr. John Delaney, who had to leave earlier. It was a long meeting. We appreciate it. Speaking as someone who has a keen interest in sport, I thank the witnesses, their employees and their thousands of volunteers throughout the country for the fantastic work that they do in bringing us sporting joy both at a local level and at a county and international levels as well. The work that is done is amazing. As was mentioned by numerous contributors earlier, the work that is being done in communities is preventing many bad things and changing lives for the better. It makes a positive impact on our health, on society and on communities. I cannot overstate how grateful we are as a committee for the work that the sporting organisations and the people in them do, and I thank their witnesses again. I propose that the committee go into private session to deal with some housekeeping matters.

The joint committee went into private session at 4.32 p.m. and adjourned at 4.45 p.m. until 9 a.m. on Wednesday, 25 January 2017.