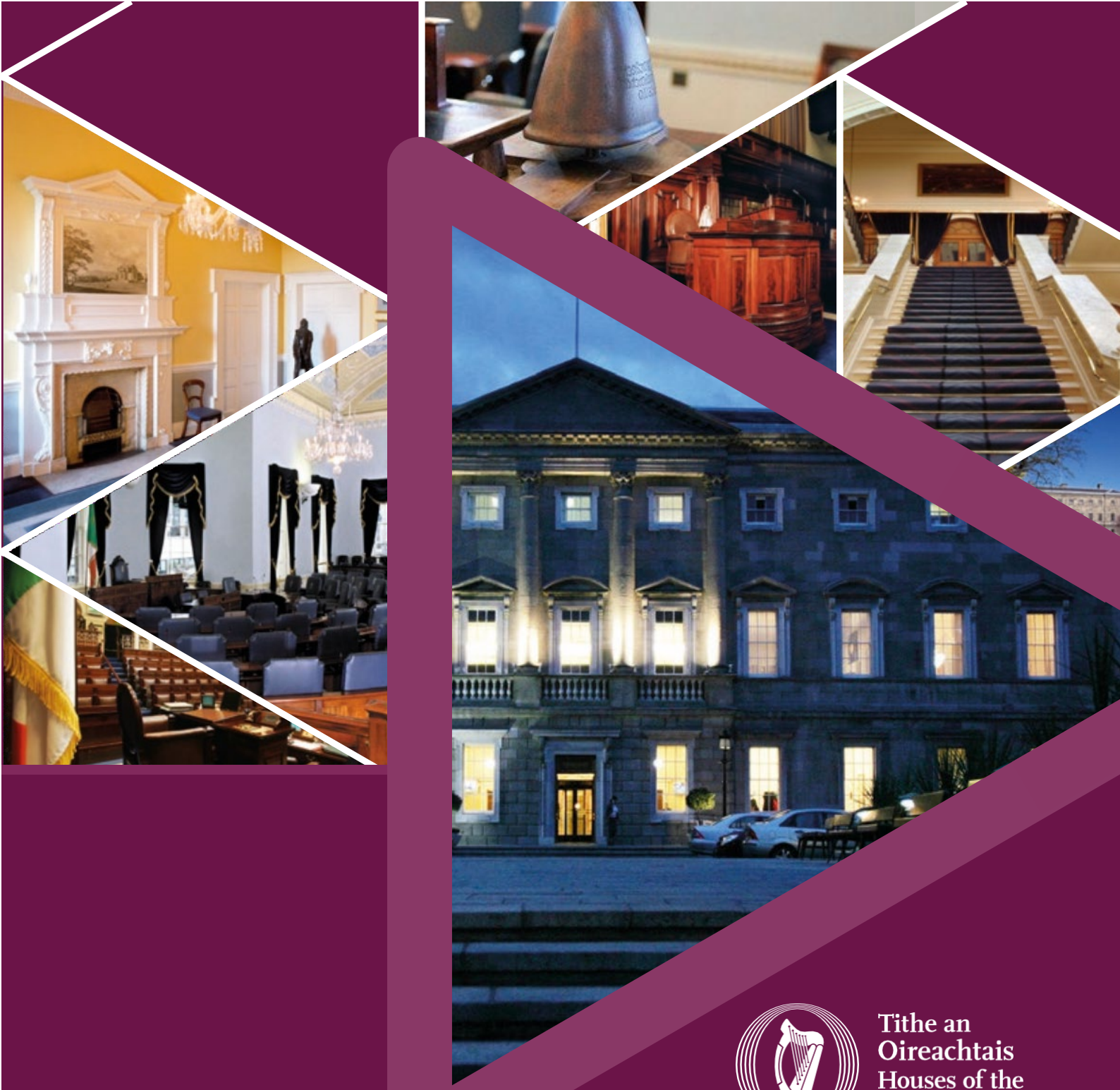


Tithe an Oireachtais
Houses of the Oireachtas

An Oifig Buiséid Pharlaiminteach
Parliamentary Budget Office

Ireland's Costly Love Affair with Greyhounds

Publication 26 of 2026

Séanadh

Is í an Oifig Buiséid Pharlaiminteach (OBP) a d'ullmhaigh an doiciméad seo mar áis do Chomhaltaí Thithe an Oireachtais ina gcuid dualgas parlaiminteach. Ní bheartaítear é a bheith uileghabhálach ná críochnúil. Féadfaidh an OBP aon fhaisnéis atá ann a bhaint as nó a leasú aon tráth gan fógra roimh ré. Níl an OBP freagrach as aon tagairtí d'aon fhaisnéis atá á cothabháil ag tríú páirtithe nó naisc chuig aon fhaisnéis den sórt sin ná as ábhar aon fhaisnéise den sórt sin. Tá baill foirne an OBP ar fáil chun ábhar na bpáipéar seo a phlé le Comhaltaí agus lena gcuid foirne ach ní féidir leo dul i mbun plé leis an mórphobal nó le heagraíochtaí seachtracha.

Is de chineál ginearálta í an Fhaisnéis. Baineann éiginnteacht le ráitis réamhbhreathnaitheacha agus d'fhéadfadh go dtiocfaidh nithe suntasacha chun cinn mar thoradh ar an bhFaisnéis. Ní sholáthraítear ráiteas cinntitheach leis an bhFaisnéis i ndáil le haon saincheist ar leith nó i ndáil le himthoisc phearsanta. Ní comhairle atá san Fhaisnéis. Ní mór a dheimhniú duit féin go bhfuil an Fhaisnéis a sholáthraímidne, an Oifig Buiséid Pharlaiminteach agus Coimisiún an Oireachtais (lena n-áirítear seirbhísigh, gníomhairí agus conraitheoirí na hOifige agus an Choimisiúin) oiriúnach agus iontaofa. Ní ghlacaimid aon fhreagracht as cruinneas ná oiriúnacht, ná eile, na Faisnéise agus ní thugaimid aon ráthaíocht ná aon ghealltanas ná aon bharánta i leith an chéanna; ná go mbeidh ár leathanaigh ghréasáin nó an Fhaisnéis nó ábhar eile saor ó earráidí, saor ó víris nó saor ó shárú. Ní ghlacaimid aon dliteanas (lena n-áirítear i leith éilimh maoine intleachtúla) a eascróidh as aon ábhar tríú páirtí nó aon suíomh gréasáin tríú páirtí a gcuirfimid nasc ar fáil chuige nó dá ndéanfaimid tagairt. Ní ghlactar le haon dliteanas ar bith, a mhéid is mó a cheadaítear faoin dlí is infheidhme nó (i) as aon iontaoibh a chuirfear san Fhaisnéis nó san ábhar ar ár leathanaigh ghréasáin nó (ii) as aon chaillteanas nó damáiste a eascróidh as an úsáid a bhainfidh tú as na leathanaigh ghréasáin sin nó i dtaca leis an úsáid sin. Féach ár bhFógra Séanta cuimsitheach anseo. I gcás aon easaontacht a bheith idir an Séanádh seo agus ár bhFógra Séanta cuimsitheach, is ag an gceann deireanach a bheidh an forlámhas.

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1. Key Messages

- **The greyhound racing sector remains heavily reliant on State funding.** Exchequer support accounted for 45.9% of RCÉ's total revenue in 2024 and remains central to sustaining racing activity, welfare, regulation and infrastructure.
- **Attendance has fallen sharply over the past decade.** Total attendance declined by almost 45% between 2015 and 2025, while average attendance per race meeting fell from 388 to 235. This sustained decline raises questions regarding the policy rationale for continued State support for the industry.
- **Welfare and traceability remain major issues.** Significant concerns remain around post-racing outcomes, mortality, exports, rehoming capacity and the need for robust lifecycle tracking of greyhounds.
- **The evidence base for continued funding is limited.** Economic-impact claims continue to rely mainly on a 2021 report, and detailed attendance data by venue and attendance type is not readily available. The evidence that is available raises questions about whether continued Government support is justified.
- Taken together, the available information shows a sector with continued and increasing public funding, falling operating surpluses, declining attendances and persistent welfare concerns.

2. Introduction

Regular review of public expenditure is important to ensure that State resources continue to support clearly defined policy objectives. Spending reviews use available data and evidence to assess the effectiveness and sustainability of public expenditure and to inform the continuation or reform of policy interventions. Although a formal Spending Review has not been conducted in this area, the PBO has applied a similar analytical approach to State funding of the greyhound racing sector.

This paper provides an overview of the fund's institutional and funding framework and examines the policy rationale for Exchequer support. It considers whether the available evidence indicates that the funding is achieving its stated objectives. State intervention in the greyhound sector was originally introduced to support and develop the industry under the Greyhound Industry Act 1958. Over time, however, the rationale for intervention appears to have evolved. Legislative changes and responses to Parliamentary Questions (PQs) suggest that Government support is now primarily justified by reference to the sector's contribution to rural employment and local economic activity, alongside the need to maintain regulatory oversight, traceability and welfare standards for greyhounds. [1] Rather than reflecting a clearly defined policy objective, these considerations have emerged as the principal rationale advanced for continued Exchequer support. Given this evolution, and the absence of a recent comprehensive statement of purpose, a restatement of the rationale for state intervention is now merited.

The analysis considers trends in attendance, industry activity, commercial income and Exchequer support. It questions whether the activity would occur without State funding, together with the opportunity cost and wider economic cost of allocating public resources to the sector. These considerations are particularly relevant in the context of declining market demand and changes in the international greyhound

[1] Houses of the Oireachtas, Parliamentary questions - Greyhound Industry: Questions 13 (July 2026).

racing industry, with other jurisdictions recently implementing a ban on the activity.[2]

The note focuses specifically on the Greyhound Racing fund rather than the wider Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund. Its principal focus is Rásaíocht Con Éireann (RCÉ), also known as Greyhound Racing Ireland, the commercial semi-State body responsible for regulating, developing and promoting greyhound racing in the State.[3]

2.1. Institutional and funding framework

Greyhound racing receives State support through the Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund, established under the Horse and Greyhound Racing Act 2001. The Minister has stated that the statutory distribution continues on an 80:20 basis, with 80% going to Horse Racing Ireland and 20% going to RCÉ.[4]

Recent Budget 2027 announcements set the total fund allocation as €102 million, of which RCÉ is expected to receive €20.4 million. In Budget 2026, the total fund was set at €99.1 million, of which €19.82 million was allocated to RCÉ. The same broad allocation applied in Budget 2025,[5] while RCÉ's 2024 annual report recorded a €19.0 million allocation from the fund in that year.[6]

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (the Department/DAFM) has stated that continued funding to RCÉ is contingent on welfare measures. In parliamentary replies, the Minister said that at least 10% of the annual allocation must be ring-fenced for welfare and integrity, with RCÉ reporting allocating 20% of

[2] Greyhounds bound for Australia as New Zealand racing ban takes effect, Greyhound racing to be banned in Wales after Senedd vote, Greyhound racing outlawed in Scotland after MSPs back ban
[3] Houses of the Oireachtas, Parliamentary questions - Greyhound Industry: Questions 907 (May 2026).
[4] Houses of the Oireachtas, Dáil Éireann debate - Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund Regulations 2025: Motion (November 2025).
[5] Department of Public Expenditure Infrastructure Public Service Reform and Digitalisation, Revised Estimates for Public Services 2026 (December 2025) p.127.
[6] Greyhound Racing Ireland, Annual report 2024 (2025) p.9.

its funding to traceability, care and welfare in 2024 and 21.19% in 2025.[7] As such, analysis of these welfare measures is core to the policy rationale for the funding.

DAFM commissioned an external review of the governance of the Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund in October 2025. One of the report's key recommendations was to increase the share of the funding ring-fenced for welfare purposes.[8]

2.2. Organisation and operation of the sector

RCÉ is a commercial semi-state body, established under the Greyhound Industry Act 1958 which has responsibility for the control and development of the greyhound industry. It is important to note that RCÉ is a separate legal entity from the DAFM with funding monitored through annual parameters, quarterly welfare reporting and ongoing governance meetings.[9]

RCÉ's published material presents its remit as covering four areas: namely, racing, regulation, welfare oversight and entertainment operation. The greyhound racing Industry Activity Report 2025 indicates that greyhound racing activity "remained substantial" in operational terms. In 2025:

- racing took place across 15 stadia;
- there were 1,494 race fixtures;
- 14,889 races were held;
- 9,128 greyhounds raced during the year;
- those greyhounds accounted for 88,126 race entries;
- 305 trainers held licences; and
- there were 4,393 active owners. [10]

RCÉ's strategy for 2025–2029 is framed around four pillars:

[7] Houses of the Oireachtas, Parliamentary questions - Greyhound Industry: Questions 132/133 (May 2026).
[8] Indecon, Review of Governance of Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund (December 2025) p.31.
[9] Houses of the Oireachtas, Parliamentary questions - Greyhound Industry: Questions 907 (May 2026).
[10] Greyhound Racing Ireland, Industry Update 2025 (March 2026).

- Animal welfare and transparency,
- Industry sustainability,
- Public engagement, and
- Operational excellence.

This is relevant from a budgetary perspective because Exchequer funding supports a broad range of functions across the greyhound sector. In addition to underpinning racing activity and prize-money schemes, public funding contributes to the delivery of animal welfare measures, traceability systems, regulatory inspections, laboratory testing and rehoming programmes. Funding also supports the maintenance and development of stadium infrastructure which is necessary for the operation of the industry. As a result, Exchequer expenditure extends beyond support for racing activities alone and plays a role in financing the wider regulatory, welfare and operational framework of the sector.[11]

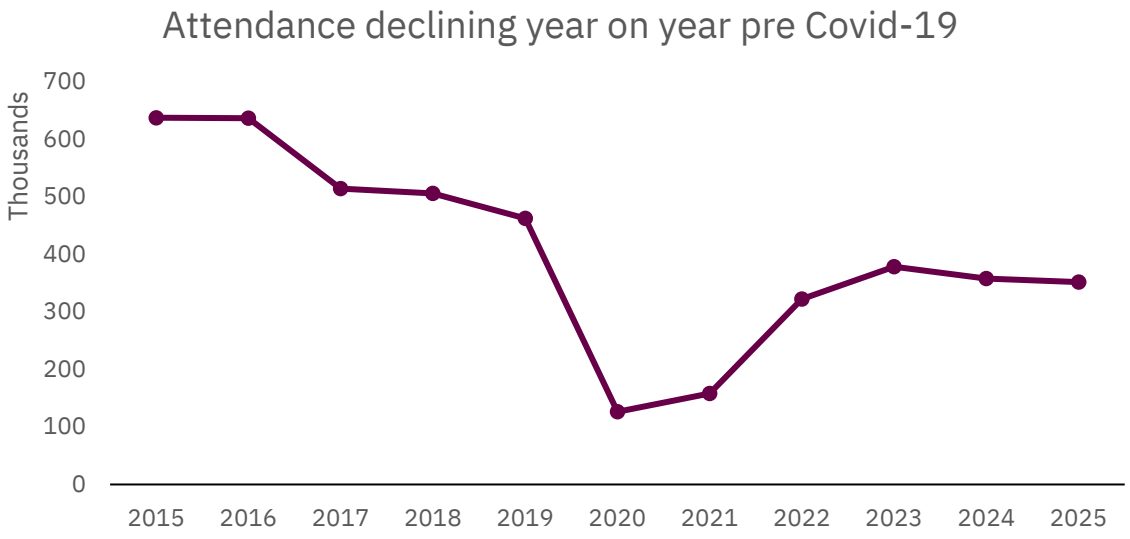
[11] Greyhound News UK, RCÉ Launches Ambitious Strategy to Secure the Future of Irish Greyhound Racing (July 2025).

3. Recent attendance and activity trends

3.1. Published attendance figures

Figure 1 shows total annual attendance at greyhound race meetings over the ten-year period from 2015 to 2025. The attendance figures published in Greyhound Racing Ireland's annual reports paint a stark picture, revealing a significant long-term decline in spectator numbers across the period. It is important to note that attendance was already declining before the Covid-19 pandemic. Total annual attendance fell from 637,535 in 2015 to 462,709 in 2019, representing a decrease of 27.4% over the four-year period. By 2025, annual attendance had fallen further to 351,637, almost 45% lower than the 2015 figure. These trends indicate that the challenges facing race-meeting attendance pre-date the pandemic and reflect a sustained decline in public engagement with greyhound racing over the past decade.

Figure 1: Total Yearly Attendance at Race Meetings (2015–2025)

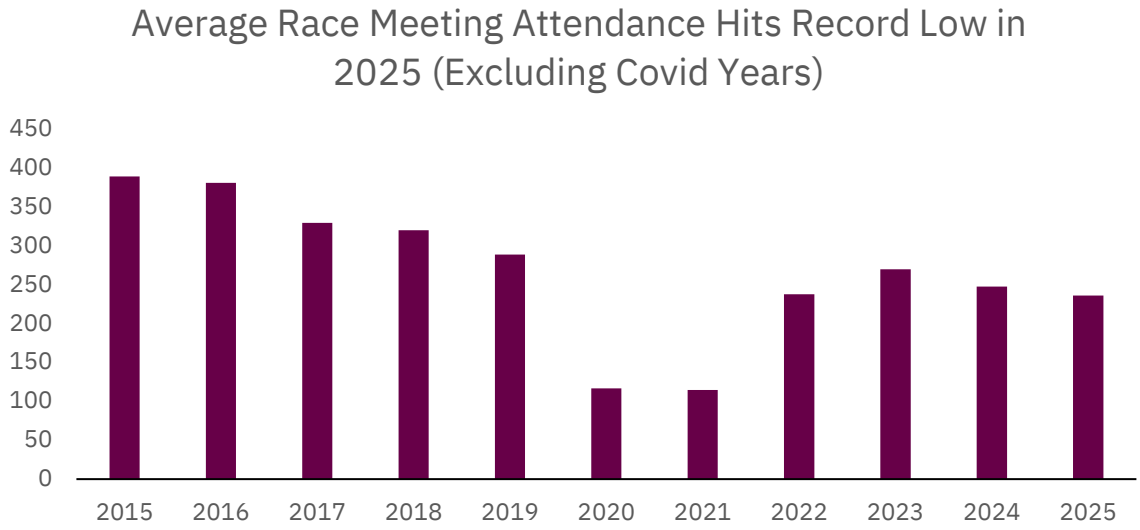


Source: Greyhound Racing Ireland, Annual Reports (Various).

In 2024, RCÉ reported total attendances of 358,141, down from 378,748 in 2023, representing a decline of approximately 5.4%. RCÉ attributed this reduction in part to the loss of Thursday night racing and restricted weekend capacity at Shelbourne

Park arising from refurbishment works.[12] When the total number of race meetings is taken into account, however, a more concerning picture emerges. Figure 2 presents average attendance per race meeting between 2015 and 2025, providing a measure that takes account of changes in the number of meetings held each year. Excluding the COVID-19-affected years of 2020 and 2021, average attendance was lower in 2025 than in any other year during the period examined, at approximately 235 spectators per meeting.

Figure 2: Average Attendance per Race Meeting (2015–2025)



Source: Greyhound Racing Ireland, Annual Reports (Various).

Table 2 provides a detailed breakdown of attendance and race-meeting activity over the period. In 2024, total attendance declined by approximately 5.4%, from 378,748 in 2023 to 358,141. However, the number of race meetings increased by 43, from 1,406 to 1,449. Average attendance consequently declined from approximately 269 spectators per meeting in 2023 to 247 in 2024, a reduction of approximately 8.3%.

The increase in the number of meetings indicates that the decline in total attendance in 2024 was not due to a reduction in the overall volume of racing. Although the loss of Thursday night racing and restrictions on weekend capacity at Shelbourne Park may have affected attendance, the longer-term trend shown in

[12] Greyhound Racing Ireland, Annual report 2024 (2025) p.9.

Figure 2 indicates that average attendance per meeting was declining before the pandemic and fell further in 2025. This suggests that temporary operational factors do not fully account for the broader decline in attendance over the period examined, suggesting that the reduction in overall attendance was driven by declining public engagement rather than a decrease in the volume of racing conducted.

3.2. Transparency of attendance data

Another concern is that the available attendance data is quite limited and does not allow for detailed analysis. This was highlighted in March 2026 when a Parliamentary Question sought a comprehensive breakdown of attendance figures by racetrack and by attendance type. The information requested was not available to the Minister, who stated that these were operational matters for Rásaíocht Con Éireann (RCÉ) and referred the request directly to the organisation. This suggests that detailed attendance data is not readily accessible through the Department, despite the significant level of public funding provided to the sector. As a result, there is limited opportunity for independent scrutiny of attendance trends, limiting the capacity to independently assess the effectiveness of public investment in supporting public engagement with the sport.

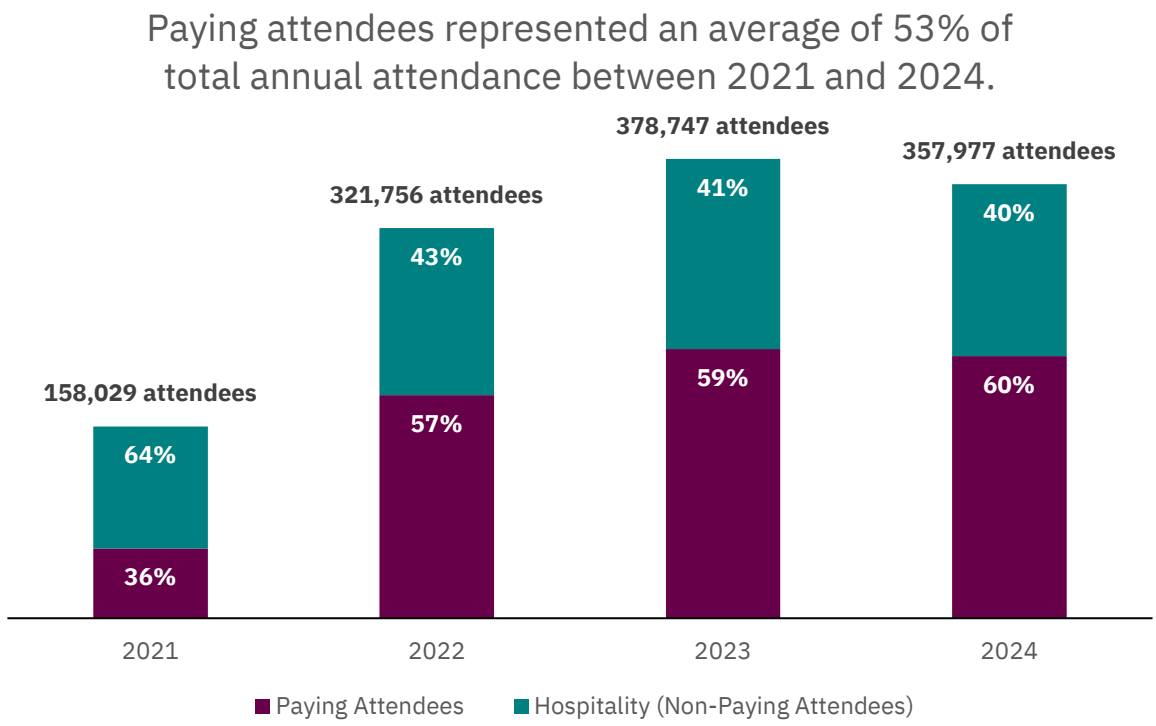
Recent media coverage has highlighted the importance of having access to attendance data at an individual venue level. Reporting by the Irish Examiner in February 2025 noted that Youghal Greyhound Stadium recorded just two paying customers during 2024, despite reporting significantly higher overall attendance figures when owners, trainers, bookmakers, officials and other industry participants were included in attendance counts.

While this example should not be taken as representative of the entire greyhound racing sector, it demonstrates the limitations of relying solely on aggregate attendance figures when assessing public engagement. Overall attendance totals can mask significant variations between venues and may not distinguish between

paying spectators and those attending in a professional or industry capacity. As a result, headline attendance figures may provide only a partial picture of the level of public interest in the sport. The Youghal example illustrates why greater transparency and more detailed attendance reporting would be beneficial.[13]

The PBO engaged with the Department to obtain attendance figures from the relevant venues. Figure 3 shows paying and non-paying attendance from 2021 to 2024. Over this period, paying attendees accounted for an average of 53% of total annual attendance. This indicates that almost half of recorded attendance was made up of non-paying categories. Table 3 provides a detailed breakdown of attendance by category across the period.

Figure 3: Annual Paying and Non-Paying Attendance at RCE and Private Tracks (2021–2024)



Source: Correspondence from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (July 2026).

[13] Irish Examiner, Greyhound Racing Ireland advised to stay silent on New Zealand dog racing ban (February 2025).

4. Financial position and reliance on the State

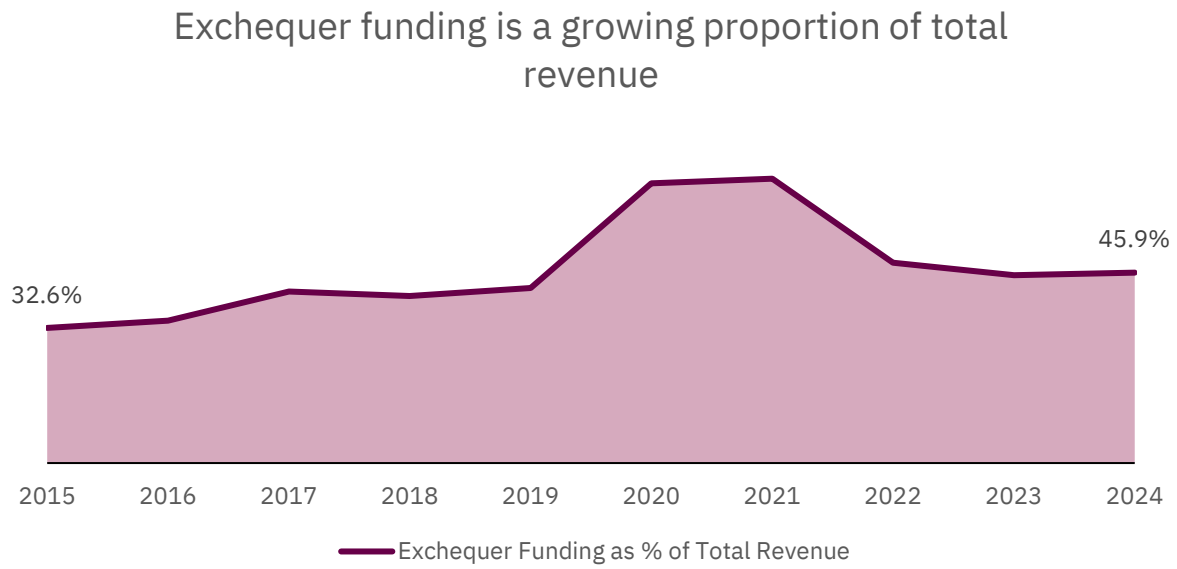
4.1. What the published accounts show

The available financial evidence indicates that RCÉ remains materially reliant on Exchequer support. RTÉ's reporting on the 2023 annual report stated that RCÉ received a state grant of €18.2 million in that year, alongside €21.99 million in racing-related revenues, while pre-tax profit fell to €243,143.[14] Using those figures, the state grant in 2023 was equivalent to approximately 82.8% of commercial racing revenue, and around 45.3% of the combined total of the grant plus racing-related revenues.

Figure 4 shows the extent to which RCÉ's revenue has been supported by Exchequer funding over the past decade. Exchequer funding accounted for 32.6% of total revenue in 2015 and increased considerably over the following years, reaching an all-time high of 68.5% in 2021, when the sector was significantly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Although this proportion declined as racing activity and commercial revenues recovered, Exchequer funding still represented 45.9% of total revenue in 2024. The overall trend indicates that public funding has become a more significant component of RCÉ's revenue base over time, highlighting the sector's continuing reliance on State support to sustain its operations and activities. A detailed breakdown of Exchequer funding relative to total revenue can be found in Table 4.

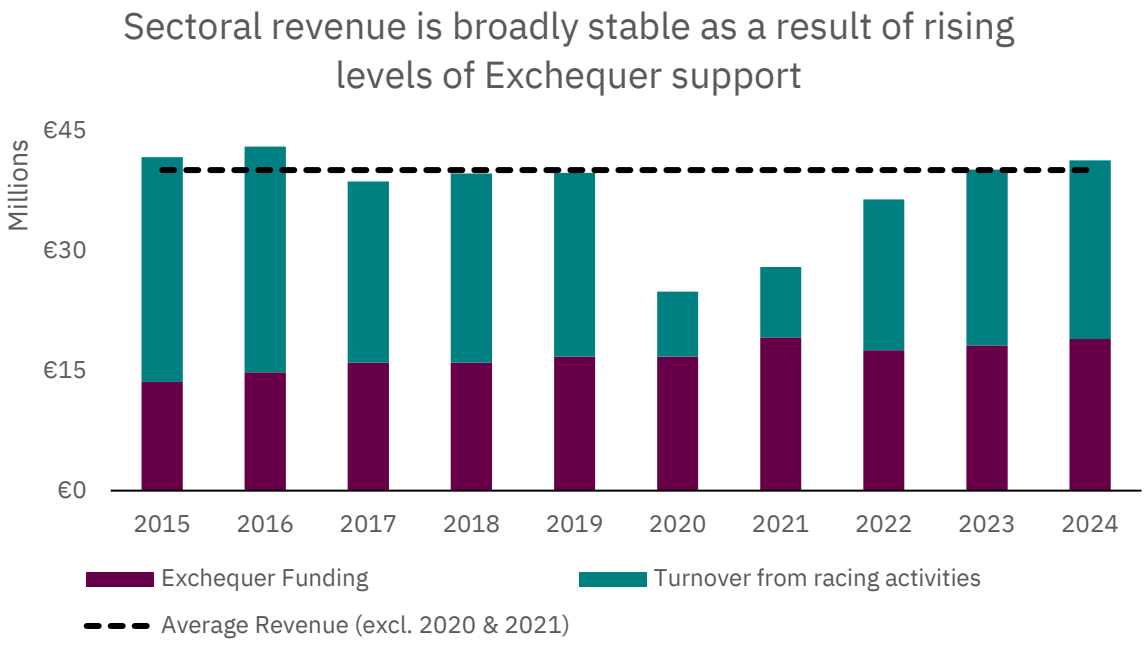
[14] RTE, Profits at Greyhound Racing Ireland fell 77% last year (July 2024).

Figure 4: Exchequer Funding as a Percentage of Total Revenue (2015-2024)



Source: Greyhound Racing Ireland, Annual Reports (Various).

Figure 5: Total Revenue & Average Revenue (excluding 2020 & 2021)



Source: Greyhound Racing Ireland, Annual Reports (Various).

Figure 5 shows that even as the total revenue of the sector has been relatively stable since 2015, averaging about €40 million per year (when 2020 and 2021 are excluded). However, as shown in Figure 4, this stability is a result of rising levels of

Exchequer support as turnover from racing activities have declined by more than 20% over the period illustrated.

The figures are not an exact measure of how dependent RCÉ is on State funding, but they do suggest that public funding plays a very important role in supporting the organisation's operations. The operating surplus is also presented as an additional indicator of RCÉ's capacity to meet its expenditure from its combined public and commercial income.

The picture in the annual reports is similar. RCÉ's operating surplus was reported at €0.7 million in 2023 and €0.6 million in 2024, while the Greyhound Racing Fund allocation was €18.2 million in 2023 and €19.0 million in 2024. The small operating surplus, when considered alongside the level of State funding received, indicate that Exchequer support formed an important part of the funding available to sustain RCÉ's operations in those years. However, the operating surplus should not be interpreted as the amount that would have remained in the absence of State funding as both income and expenditure could differ under such a scenario.

This wasn't always the case, the 2015 annual report shows RCÉ received €13.6 million from the Exchequer but ran an operating surplus of €2.5 million. By comparison, RCÉ received a higher level of Exchequer support in 2024 at €19.0 million, while recording a lower operating surplus of €0.6 million. While this comparison does not establish what RCÉ's financial position would have been without State funding, it provides further context on changes in its revenue mix and financial result over the period examined. A full breakdown is provided in Table 5.[15]

[15] Operating surplus as defined in the annual reports is profits before interest, taxation, depreciation, amortisation and defined benefit pension costs.

4.2. Commercial income streams

RCÉ has non-Exchequer income streams, but the published material also illustrates their limitations. In 2023, RCÉ reported €15.2 million in tote turnover, €5.9 million in food and beverage sales and €2.2 million in media-rights fees from specified tracks. In 2024, it reported €15.7 million in tote turnover,[16] €5.6 million in food and beverage sales and €2.9 million in media-rights fees.[17]

These numbers show a functioning commercial operation; however, tote turnover is not the same as net income, as winnings must be paid out, and food and beverage turnover does not equate to operating surplus. RCÉ's own reporting also shows that €5.7 million was spent on capital acquisitions in 2024, largely associated with infrastructure investment including Shelbourne Park.

While the greyhound racing industry generates significant income from its commercial activities RCÉ continues to rely heavily on State funding to maintain race meetings, animal welfare programmes, regulation, and investment in facilities. Without this public funding, it would be difficult to sustain the current level of activity.

4.3. Prize money and subsidy

Prize money remains a major use of State-supported resources. RCÉ reported total prize money of €9.0 million in 2023 and €9.6 million in 2024, with RCÉ contributing 83% of the total in both years.[18] RCÉ further stated that its prize-money contribution accounted for 41% of its fund allocation in 2023 and 42% in 2024. RTÉ reported in April 2026 that of the €19.82 million allocated to the sector, approximately €8.1 million was allocated to prize money, €3.79 million to welfare and €1.8 million to regulation. In the same report, RCÉ's chief executive stated that the sector would find it "very challenging" if Government funding were reduced.[19]

[16] Tote turnover is the total amount of money gambled through the tote betting system.
[17] Greyhound Racing Ireland, Annual report 2024 (2025) p.9.
[18] Ibid.
[19] RTE, UK bans reignite debate over greyhound racing in Ireland (April 2026).

5. Welfare, traceability and post-racing outcomes

Greyhounds born in Ireland are recorded and tracked while they remain within the Irish system. Some greyhounds are subsequently exported and are no longer tracked in Ireland. Information on their status following export, including whether they are still alive, is not available. Greyhounds remaining in Ireland are recorded as either active or inactive. Active greyhounds are those participating in racing while the inactive category includes greyhounds that are no longer racing, such as those used for breeding, rehomed or kept as pets.

Dogs generally have an expected lifespan of approximately 10 to 15 years, although this varies according to breed, size and health. Greyhounds typically have an expected lifespan of approximately 10 to 14 years. [20] This provides important context when considering the recorded deaths and post-racing outcomes of greyhounds born in recent years.

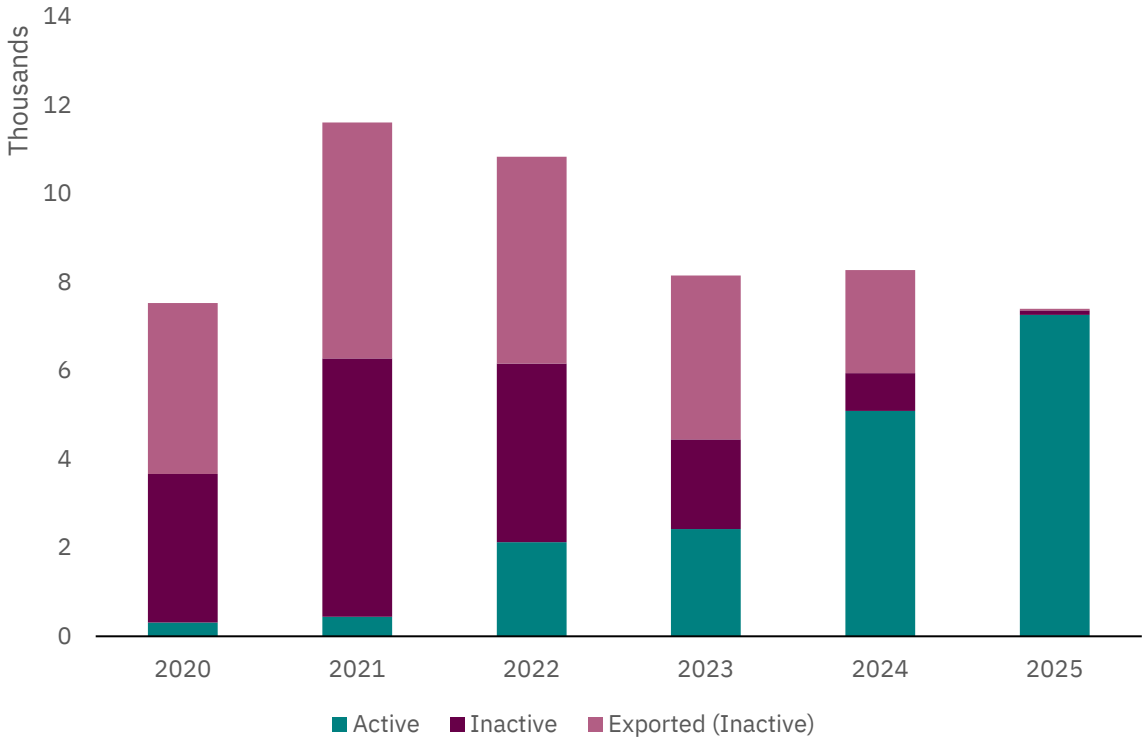
The PBO examined the welfare, traceability and post-racing outcomes of greyhounds because these form a core part of RCÉ's responsibilities and are supported by State funding. Their policy significance is further illustrated by developments in New Zealand and Wales, where concerns regarding injuries, fatalities and post-racing outcomes were central to decisions to prohibit greyhound racing.[21] Injury and mortality rates are therefore important indicators for assessing the industry's welfare performance and the effectiveness of State-supported oversight.

In parliamentary replies on 14 May 2026, the Minister provided information on the status of greyhounds born in recent years. Figure 6 presents the status of tracked greyhounds by birth cohort from 2020 to 2025. The more recent cohorts contain a greater number of active greyhounds, while earlier cohorts contain a greater number recorded as inactive, exported or deceased. The 2025 cohort had the

[20] The Journal, Nearly 6,000 former racing greyhounds born in 2021 and 2022 in Ireland are dead (June 2026).
[21] Irish Examiner, Greyhound Racing Ireland advised to stay silent on New Zealand dog racing ban (February 2025).

highest number of active greyhounds, at 7,263. Of the greyhounds born in 2020, 310 remained recorded as active, while 7,221 were classified as inactive. Of those inactive greyhounds, 3,861 had been exported. For the 2021 cohort, 442 remained active and 11,176 were classified as inactive, including 5,333 that had been exported. In addition, the Irish Retired Greyhound Trust (IRGT) reported that 468 greyhounds were on its rehoming waiting list as of 2 May 2026.[22]

Figure 6: Status of Tracked Greyhounds by Year of Birth (2020 to 2025)



Source: Correspondence from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (July 2026).

The Minister also stated that the RCÉ Traceability System recorded 64,486 greyhounds at the end of the first quarter of 2026, and that the system is being expanded to capture additional information including microchip scanning, health checks, vaccination records, medical histories and offences under the 2019 Act.[23]

[22] Houses of the Oireachtas, Parliamentary questions - Greyhound Industry: Questions 132 & 133 (May 2026).
[23] Houses of the Oireachtas, Parliamentary questions - Greyhound Industry: Questions 907 (May 2026).

Recent media reports have placed particular focus on mortality after retirement from racing.[24] To develop a more comprehensive picture of recorded outcomes, the PBO sought additional data from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine covering greyhounds born between 2020 and 2025. The departmental data provides a common source for examining active status, export, rehoming, retention and recorded deaths across the six cohorts.

Analysis of the 2021 and 2022 greyhound cohorts shows that 10,010 greyhounds were no longer racing and had not been exported overseas.[25] Of this inactive group, 6,153 greyhounds (63%) were recorded as deceased. These animals were aged between approximately three-and-a-half and five-and-a-half years, despite the generally accepted lifespan of a greyhound being in the region of 10 to 14 years.[26]

Across the six cohorts, 10,135 greyhounds were recorded as deceased. The mortality rate was particularly high among the 2022 cohort. Of the 4,037 greyhounds born in 2022 that remained in Ireland and were no longer active in racing, 2,842 had died by 1 January 2026, representing a mortality rate of 70% for the inactive non-exported group. For greyhounds born in 2021, 3,311 deaths were recorded among 5,843 inactive non exported greyhounds resident in Ireland as of 1 April 2026, equating to a mortality rate of 57% for the group.[27]

The data also illustrates both the scale of breeding within the industry and the recorded outcomes of greyhounds across successive birth cohorts. Table 1 summarises the outcomes of the 53,831 greyhounds born between 2020 and 2025. The number tracked in each cohort ranged from 7,402 in 2025 to 7,531 in 2020.

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[24] Media reports include articles from the Irish Examiner, The Journal and Greyhound Action Ireland.
[25] It should be noted that some greyhounds recorded as having been exported may since have died, data on their status is not available.
[26] The Journal, Nearly 6,000 former racing greyhounds born in 2021 and 2022 in Ireland are dead (June 2026).
[27] Note: The figures do not represent whole-cohort mortality rates for all greyhounds born in 2021 and 2022. They relate only to greyhounds that had already left active racing, remained in Ireland and had not been exported. They are also point-in-time figures rather than mortality rates measured at the same number of years after birth. The 2021 and 2022 figures relate to different birth cohorts at different points in time.

Table 1: Outcomes for 2020 - 2025 Greyhound Cohorts

Outcome	2020 Cohort	2021 Cohort	2022 Cohort	2023 Cohort	2024 Cohort	2025 Cohort
Active	310	442	2,128	2,422	5,098	7,263
Exported Overseas	3,861	5,333	4,677	3,702	2,330	35
Retained for Breeding	388	530	206	40	11	-
Retained as a Pets	234	439	143	52	24	-
Retained for Coursing	21	27	22	16	0	-
Retained for Schooling	4	4	10	2	0	-
Rehomed Via Charity	1,085	1,522	811	374	104	6
Inactive for Other Reason: Lost/Stolen etc.	5	10	3	1	1	-
Reported Deceased	1,623	3,311	2,842	1,547	714	98
Mortality rate of inactive dogs remaining in Ireland	48%	57%	70%	76%	84%	94%
Total cohort tracked	**7,531**	**11,618**	**10,842**	**8,156**	**8,282**	**7,402**

Source: PBO based on correspondence from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (July 2026). Note: These figures may include adjustments for puppy mortality and greyhounds that were not microchipped.

The figures demonstrate that export remains a significant pathway for greyhounds leaving racing. In total, 19,938 greyhounds across the six cohorts were recorded as having been exported overseas, including 5,333 from the 2021 cohort which was the cohort with the highest number.[28] As exported greyhounds are no longer tracked within the Irish system, their subsequent status is unknown. A total of 3,902 greyhounds were recorded as having been rehomed through charities, 2021 cohort having the highest figure with 1,515 dogs being rehomed. This figure though

[28] While the bans on greyhound racing in Scotland and Wales may have implications for Irish greyhound exports, the scale and direction of these effects remain uncertain at present.

has decreased year on year dropping as low as 6 for the 2025 cohort. By comparison, 892 greyhounds were recorded as having been retained as pets. These figures should be interpreted in the context of cohort age, as many greyhounds in the more recent cohorts remained active and had not yet entered a post-racing pathway.

Race-day welfare outcomes form a further part of the assessment. A report by Donegal daily stated that 197 greyhounds died during or after races in 2025, compared with 202 deaths in 2024, a figure that had previously been described as a record high.[29] In response RCÉ emphasised that the overwhelming majority of greyhound race entries complete races without injury and highlighted ongoing investment in welfare, veterinary oversight and track safety measures.[30] This raises a broader question as to whether the policy rationale for State funding is primarily to support the industry or to provide the regulatory oversight and welfare safeguards intended to mitigate the risks associated with it. It also raises the question of whether welfare outcomes might be poorer in the absence of such State funding and oversight.

While on-track fatalities remain an important welfare indicator, the policy and funding considerations associated with greyhound welfare extend beyond race-day outcomes alone. The broader welfare framework includes the full lifecycle of the animal, including breeding practices, traceability arrangements, injury management, retirement pathways, export destinations, rehoming opportunities and end-of-life outcomes.

As a result, assessment of the industry's welfare performance cannot be based solely on race-related injury or mortality statistics. Instead, it requires consideration of the wider population of greyhounds entering and exiting the industry each year and the effectiveness of the systems in place to track and safeguard those animals throughout their lives. This information highlights the importance of robust welfare, traceability and rehoming arrangements within the

[29] Donegal Daily, Sixteen dogs killed at Lifford greyhound races in 2025 (February 2026).
[30] RTE, UK bans reignite debate over greyhound racing in Ireland (April 2026).

greyhound racing industry. Especially given that welfare and aftercare are key objectives of State support for the sector.

6. Economic value and current evidence base

Government has justified continued support for the greyhound fund not solely on the basis of supporting racing activities, but because of the industry's perceived wider social and economic contribution.[31] Government statements present the fund as support for rural employment, local economic activity and a long-standing cultural industry.[32] The Department has cited estimates that the sector supports more than 4,000 full-time and part-time jobs, involves more than 6,000 active greyhound owners, and provides economic benefit to more than 10,000 people. These figures are based on the 2021 Jim Power report, which remains the main evidence base used in parliamentary material.[33] That report used 2019 data due to Covid-19. At that time, almost 20% of those listed jobs were in RCÉ, almost 18% were in betting and wagering activities, 14% were providing catering or food/beverages to the facilities and 25% of the jobs were in dog food manufacturing or ancillary products like veterinary services or medicines. It is important to note that some of these areas would not be exclusively dependent on greyhound racing and would continue to supply services even without the economic impact of greyhound racing.

Based on this data, the number of private and public trainers has fallen (from 400 in 2019 to 305 in 2025), and the number of active greyhound owners has fallen from 6211 in 2019 to 4,393 in 2025.[34]

The Minister confirmed there are no plans to commission an independent updated study, and that he was not aware of any such updated analysis being carried out by RCÉ.[35]

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[31] Houses of the Oireachtas, Parliamentary questions - Greyhound Industry: Questions 183 (May 2026).
[32] Houses of the Oireachtas, Parliamentary questions - Greyhound Industry: Questions 13 (July 2026).
[33] Jim Power Economics, The Economic & Financial Significance Of The Irish Greyhound Industry (2021).
[34] Greyhound Racing Ireland, Industry Update 2025 (March 2026).
[35] Houses of the Oireachtas, Parliamentary questions - Greyhound Industry: Questions 465 (May 2026).

The Government continues to cite older estimates of the economic and financial importance of the industry as the basis for continued support of the sector. However, that evidence base is now 5 years old and has not been independently refreshed to reflect more recent attendance, welfare-cost and public-policy developments.[36]

It should be noted - the 2021 analysis showed the economic and financial contribution of the greyhound industry. Such analysis is not the most helpful in this case, as it does not try to consider which of these activities would be occurring without state funding, aka the deadweight. If there is not sufficient public interest or demand to support this industry without state support, then it may be asked if this is sustainable, and for what purpose.

The current funding model supports the greyhound industry as a whole, rather than targeting specific policy objectives directly. As a result, it is difficult to determine how much public expenditure contributes to rural employment, local economic activity or welfare improvements, as opposed to sustaining the industry's commercial operations. If the primary objective is to improve greyhound welfare then a more targeted funding approach could allocate resources directly to welfare, traceability and regulatory functions. It is also important to consider whether the use of the greyhound industry as a means of delivering employment and economic benefits gives rise to wider policy concerns. These concerns include animal welfare and the promotion of gambling, which would not necessarily arise under other forms of regional development support.

Government statements increasingly justify funding by reference to employment, economic activity and welfare considerations rather than industry development itself. This raises the question of whether the current funding mechanism represents the most effective and efficient means of achieving these policy objectives.

[36] Houses of the Oireachtas, Parliamentary questions - Greyhound Industry: Questions 120 (May 2025).

Ideally, before continuing with this funding, a cost-benefit analysis should be conducted, which would consider all costs of the greyhound racing sector, and all benefits. Any such analysis would consider both tangible and intangible benefits and costs, and should take on board the economic appraisal parameters as per the Public Spending Code.[37] This kind of analysis would consider issues like the shadow price of public funds which aims to consider the opportunity cost of this funding, and displacement (i.e. other economic activity which was affected). Without properly considering these elements, any economic analysis conducted will overvalue the benefits as it will not take into account the costs incurred.

The available evidence raises questions regarding the effectiveness and continued policy rationale of State support for the sector. Exchequer funding remains a significant component of RCÉ's income, while operating surpluses remain relatively modest and attendance has continued to decline despite an increase in the number of race meetings. This may indicate that public funding is helping to sustain the existing level of racing activity without a corresponding increase in public engagement.

At the same time, a growing proportion of RCÉ's allocation is directed towards traceability, care and welfare. This expenditure supports regulatory oversight and seeks to address risks arising throughout the lifecycle of racing greyhounds, including injuries, race-day fatalities, exports, rehoming and post-racing outcomes. State funding therefore supports not only the operation of the sport (if it can be called that), [38] but also the welfare and regulatory framework intended to mitigate the risks associated with it.

The international context has also changed where New Zealand has legislated to end commercial greyhound racing, with racing to cease in 2026 following concerns

[37] The Public Spending Code

[38] Irish Examiner, the then Minister of Sport (Thomas Byrne) commented "It's not a sport. It's not a sport under Sport Ireland, it's not in competition with our sports" & " It's an industry, effectively, and it's a traditional industry that, quite frankly, isn't as popular as it once was." (October 2024).

about animal welfare and the loss of social licence.[39,40] Scotland's Greyhound Racing (Offences) Act became law in May 2026.[41] Wales has also moved to prohibit greyhound racing, with animal welfare concerns, injury risks, fatalities and poor post-racing outcomes cited in the policy material.[42]

A further consideration is the extent to which greyhound racing functions as a tourism product. In September 2019, Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland informed the then Irish Greyhound Board that greyhound racing would no longer feature in domestic or overseas tourism marketing campaigns. Tourism Ireland also confirmed that it would not promote greyhound racing through its marketing activity. This indicates that greyhound racing is not currently positioned by the State's tourism bodies as an attraction for the general tourism market. Its customer base is therefore reliant on domestic patrons and existing followers.[43]

Taken together, the available information shows a sector with continued and increasing public funding, falling operating surpluses, declining attendances, persistent welfare concerns and the lack of clear policy rationale.

[39] A social licence is the ongoing acceptance and approval of a company, project, or industry's activities by local communities, stakeholders, and the general public.
[40] Irish Examiner, Greyhound Racing Ireland advised to stay silent on New Zealand dog racing ban (February 2025).
[41] Greyhound Racing (Offences)(Scotland) Act 2026.
[42] RTE, UK bans reignite debate over greyhound racing in Ireland (April 2026).
[43] Irish Examiner, Board shocked and disappointed at Tourism Ireland decision to stop promoting greyhound racing (September 2019).

7. Conclusion

In the absence of a counter factual (no Exchequer support) it is difficult to unequivocally state whether value for money is (or is not) being achieved. If Members of Dáil Éireann are expected to support the ongoing funding of the sector, at a cost of approximately €20 million each year, a number of issues could be addressed to inform their decisions with the best possible evidence. These include:

- The commissioning of an updated cost-benefit analysis of the economic and financial impacts of the sector by an independent body that has no direct interest in the sector (for example DAFM rather than RCÉ), and
- The collection of improved attendance data to determine the true level of attendance by members of the public at race events.

Given that two of the four pillars of RCÉ's 2025-2029 strategy relate to:

- Industry sustainability, and
- Public engagement

The current evidence base suggests an industry/sector in slow and sustained decline. This is reinforced by statements from within the sector that it would face significant challenges if Government funding were reduced. Such dependence on public funding raises further questions about the long-term sustainability of the industry and whether State support is preserving an activity that may otherwise continue to contract. [44] Given the not insubstantial investment of the Exchequer in the sector, €168 million between 2015 and 2024, it begs the question:

Is state intervention simply arresting the inevitable collapse of the sector?

The decision as to whether to provide ongoing support to this sector is ultimately a political one, it should be informed by the best possible evidence-base. Even if the overall resourcing question is political, there remains the issue of whether the funding as provided is being used as efficiently and effectively as possible.

[44] RTE, UK bans reignite debate over greyhound racing in Ireland (April 2026).

While this paper cannot answer those questions, certain indicators suggest significant challenges within the sector ranging from premature morbidity of racing greyhounds to a prolonged exodus of attendees (and associated weaknesses in attendance data). That being said, current Exchequer supports may be positively contributing to enhancing aspects of animal welfare within the sector and may produce other benefits.

As already highlighted, there is a need to improve the quality of data (attendance composition for example), its frequency (how up to date it is), to enable Parliamentarians to make informed decisions. It remains unclear whether there is a sufficiently strong policy rationale for continued State funding of an industry that derives a significant proportion of its income from gambling-related activity, particularly given the wider social and economic harms associated with problem gambling.

8. Appendix

Table 2: Attendance Trends at Greyhound Race Meetings (2015–2025)

Year	Attendance	Race Meetings	Average Attendance
2015	637,535	1,642	388
2016	636,914	1,675	380
2017	514,546	1,566	329
2018	506,142	1,586	319
2019	462,709	1,606	288
2020	126,376	1,085	116
2021	158,029	1,384	114
2022	322,124	1,358	237
2023	378,748	1,406	269
2024	358,141	1,449	247
2025	351,637	1,494	235

Source: Greyhound Racing Ireland, Annual Reports (Various).

Table 3: Attendance Category at RCE and Private Tracks (2021–2024)

Admission Category	2021	2022	2023	2024
Adult	36609	102311	102712	94502
OAP	11677	24787	29233	27907
Student	1653	12619	16981	6066
Child	2490	10408	20235	17352
Family	41	369	3643	4564
Promotional	2593	10401	11200	8848
Benefit Tickets	0	8468	17441	23319
Packages	824	13298	19598	32569
Programmes	1745	1199	902	889
Owners/Trainers	87139	76748	82369	87565
Bookmakers	2462	4298	5259	4145
Press	565	529	412	372
Restaurant	10231	56321	68762	49879
Total	**158029**	**321756**	**378747**	**357977**

Source: Correspondence from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (July 2026).

Table 4: Exchequer Funding as a Share of Total Revenue (2015–2024)

Year	Exchequer Funding	Turnover from racing activities	Total revenue	Exchequer Funding as % of Total Revenue
2015	€13,600,000	€28,155,589	€41,755,589	32.6%
2016	€14,800,000	€28,278,120	€43,078,120	34.4%
2017	€16,000,000	€22,710,463	€38,710,463	41.3%
2018	€16,000,000	€23,719,369	€39,719,369	40.3%
2019	€16,800,000	€22,998,315	€39,798,315	42.2%
2020	€16,800,000	€8,131,132	€24,931,132	67.4%
2021	€19,200,000	€8,813,462	€28,013,462	68.5%
2022	€17,600,000	€18,858,391	€36,458,391	48.3%
2023	€18,200,000	€21,996,662	€40,196,662	45.3%
2024	€19,000,000	€22,363,838	€41,363,838	45.9%

Source: Greyhound Racing Ireland, Annual Reports (Various).

Table 5: Operating Surplus Relative to Exchequer Funding (2015–2024)

Year	Exchequer Funding	Operating Surplus	Operating Surplus as % of Exchequer Funding
2015	€13,600,000	€2,305,720	17.0%
2016	€14,800,000	€3,209,929	21.7%
2017	€16,000,000	€1,671,511	10.4%
2018	€16,000,000	€1,855,644	11.6%
2019	€16,800,000	€1,465,164	8.7%
2020	€16,800,000	€2,234,718	13.3%
2021	€19,200,000	€3,833,224	20.0%
2022	€17,600,000	€1,688,451	9.6%
2023	€18,200,000	€746,861	4.1%
2024	€19,000,000	€614,700	3.2%

Source: Greyhound Racing Ireland, Annual Reports (Various).

Contact: pbo@oireachtas.ie

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Houses of the Oireachtas
Leinster House
Kildare Street
Dublin 2
D02 XR20

www.oireachtas.ie
Tel: +353 (0)1 6183000 or 076 1001700
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