# Sport Policy in Ireland – current issues, future prospects!

Dr. Ann Bourke  
Institute of Banking,  
College of Professional Finance, Dublin  
[Anne.Bourke@ucd.ie](mailto:Anne.Bourke@ucd.ie)

**Birkbeck Sport Business Centre Seminar - November 24 2014**

## Seminar agenda

1. Ireland’s sporting landscape & sport structure  
2. Sports policy  
   - Origin  
   - Principles & practice  
3. Irish Sports Council / other national bodies  
4. Functions of NGBs  
5. Funding – Government & non-government  
7. Elite Athlete Development in Ireland  
8. Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs)  
9. Concluding comments / future prospects
Sporting landscape in Ireland – brief overview

- **Competitive sport** - played on amateur or semi professional basis:
  - Exceptions: Rugby Union & Golf
- **Small Country** - Population 4.58m (CSO, 2013)
- **Most sports are played on an All-Ireland basis**
  - Exceptions - Association Football & Netball
- **65 Sport National Government bodies (NGBs)**
  - Community based clubs & schools
  - Education institutions – HEIs, Second and First level schools
- **Other sports bodies**
  - Olympic Council of Ireland
  - Paralympics Ireland
  - Special Olympics Ireland
  - Student Sport Ireland
  - Federation of Irish Sport

---

**Fig. 1: Framework of Ireland’s Sport Structure**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Governmental Structures</th>
<th>Intermediary Structures</th>
<th>Non-governmental Structure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dept. of Transport, Tourism &amp; Sport</td>
<td>National Sports Campus Development Authority</td>
<td>Olympic Council of Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depts. of Education, Health, Community &amp; Youth Affairs, Environment etc.</td>
<td>Irish Sports Council</td>
<td>Paralympics Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coaching Ireland</td>
<td>Special Olympics Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Irish Institute of Sport</td>
<td>National Governing Bodies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local Authorities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local sports partnerships</td>
<td>NGB Provincial Councils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Higher education institutions (HEIs)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Schools – Primary, Secondary</td>
<td>NGB County Boards</td>
<td>Community-based clubs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Private Schools Primary, Secondary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hierarchical relationships: 
- AB Sport Policy in Ireland Nov. 24 2014
- Partnership / cooperative relationships
Origins of sport policy in Ireland

- **Pre 1999:**
  - Little attention - financial conservatism within political parties
  - Sophistication and geographic coverage by the GAA - Irish Government encouraged GAA and NACA to organize Ireland’s sporting life
  - Success at World Cup 1990; Olympics 1992 – pressure on government to focus on sport

- **1997:** 1st strategy plan for sport
  - Irish Sports Council established in 1999 – role to implement Gov. policy, ensuring value for money
  - Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation (2011: Dept. of Transport, Tourism and Sport: DTTAS)
  - Hierarchical – top down, or central policy development

- **2006:** National Sport Campus Development Authority (NSCDA) established

---

Principles & practice underpinning Gov. Sport Policy

- **Government**
  - Sport for all, promote health and personal well-being; improve performance standards, provide facilities to meet needs of key stakeholders
  - Explicated by the Irish Sports Council (ISC)

- **DTTAS – Roles**
  - **a)** Sports Capital Division - oversees funding /administration – capital grants programme
  - **b)** Sport Policy & Campus - implements gov. policy in conjunction with various bodies

  1) Encourage, promote, develop & coordinate competitive sports - + excellence
  2) Develop strategies to increase participation in recreational sport; coordinate their implementation by all bodies – including public authorities
  3) Facilitate standards of good conduct and fair play in competitive and recreational sport
  4) To take action considered appropriate including testing to combat doping in sport
  5) To initiate and encourage (as appropriate) research concerning competitive/recreational sport
ISC + Gov./Non Gov. bodies

Irish Sports Council – 8 major divisions

1. Local Authorities (N = 31) – provide/develop community sport facilities – coordinate efforts i.e. planning and development recreational facilities
2. Local Sports Partnerships (N=31) – promote the development of sport at local level & provide supports - club development; volunteer training
3. Irish Institute of Sport – works with NGBs + elite athletes
4. Coaching Ireland – works with NGBs to deliver coach development model (LISPA)
5. NSCDA – developing national sports campus at Abbotstown/ Ireland’s main sport facilities
6. Olympic Council of Ireland – coordinates & manages TEAM IRELAND at Olympiad
7. Paralympics Ireland – co-ordinates & manages TEAM IRELAND at Paralympics
8. Special Olympics – provides opportunities for individuals with learning disabilities – participation & competition

Sport National Governing Bodies (NGBs)

I. Promote active participation in their sport; strive to raise the profile of their organization and sport/s.
   - Community-based clubs, HEIs, Second and Primary Schools

II. NGBs key delivery agents for Irish Sports Council (ISC) strategic priorities
   a) Organize and administer most of the organized sport in Ireland
      - League & cup competitions – national, regional, county levels
      - Local league & cup competitions - embraces primary school level to adult
   b) Train and deploy coaches
      - Partnering with Coaching Ireland – implementing international standards
      - Devising standards and qualifications
   c) Organize representative level sport
      - NGBs facilitate hosting in Ireland various international competitions – 6 Nations, Rabo Direct Pro 12; European /World Cup qualifiers;
   d) Provide sporting opportunities and pathways
      - Pathways for elite athletes to national and international competition
      - Assists in identifying young sporting talent – supported by ISC & HEIs
Funding sport - Government (DTTAS) Role

- **Direct** – Sports Capital Programme
- **Indirect** – Irish Sports Council / Local authorities

### A. Sports Capital funding – 2014: €34,129,280
- Aims to foster integrated approach to developing sports facilities
- Provides grants to NGBs, Local authorities, & schools to develop high quality safe, well-designed, sustainable facilities
- The Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme – gets grant aid from the Exchequer to provide new /maintain or refurbish existing facilities

### B. Current funding
- **High performance programme** – elite athletes; carding system used – performance targets to be met
- **Core funding for NGBs** – admin costs, coach development, hosting events, implementing strategic plans,
- **Women in Sport (WIS) programmes** – raise physical activity among women – grants to 22 NGBs
- **Disadvantage areas** - field sports : GAA, IRFU, FAI funded to promote participation (€7.6m in 2013)

---

Funding sport - NGBs role

- a) Elite player development
- b) Event organization
- c) Player welfare & wages
- d) Administration, normal business expenses

**Table 1: NGB Revenue & Expenditure 2008** (Indecon Report, 2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Revenue</th>
<th>Expenditure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entry fees/gate receipts</td>
<td>81.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports Council Grants</td>
<td>32.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Competition</td>
<td>30.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsorship / Adv.</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaching courses / seminar fees</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2: Annual Reports – FAI, GAA, IRFU 2013 (selected details)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FAI</th>
<th>GAA</th>
<th>IRFU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>€m</td>
<td>Income</td>
<td>€m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exp.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Exp.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>Gross</td>
<td>54.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>Match</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>Day</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gate R</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>Comp Costs</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comm Y</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>Team Costs</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Funds</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>County</td>
<td>9.2m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>Games</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPERATING SURPLUS</td>
<td>9.2m</td>
<td>Player W’fare</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPERATING SURPLUS</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Adm. Costs</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sport participation in Ireland

• Sport participation among adults – 47.2% (Irish Sport Monitor, 2013)
  – Participation increased in individual sports – running, swimming, personal exercise
  – Exists across sports e.g. 40% of adults engage in other sports

• Participation in team sports – primarily in:
  – Soccer (Association Football), Gaelic Football, Rugby Union & Field Hockey

Table 3: Participation – Gender (ISM 2011)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Males</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Exercise</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Swimming</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Running</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Dancing</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swimming</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Running</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycling</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Cycling</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• Attendance – many enthusiastic spectators!!
Elite Athlete Development

- **Role of Irish Education system**
  - Schools involved in promotion/participation & talent identification in particular sports
    - GAA, Rugby, Athletics, Hockey, Badminton, Netball, Soccer, Tennis

- **Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)**
  - Elite athlete programmes/sports scholarships – Universities/Institutes of Technology
  - Competitive arena – Student Sport Ireland (SSI)

- **Role of community-based clubs**
  - Community-based clubs operate on a voluntary basis - parents, friends involved
  - Supports available from NGBs - Improved community facilities (partial gov. funding)

- **Sporting Academies**
  - Tennis Ireland National Academy (2005) - located in Dublin City University
  - National Soccer Academy – on hold

- **Irish Sports Council – Carding system**
  - Operates in conjunction with NGBs
  - 2013: Awards made to athletes across 15 sports

Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs) (2004)

- **Aims**: to increase participation in sport; improve use and coordination of facilities/resources
- **LSPs offer services not already available**
  a. Information to facilitate local planning
  b. Education and training opportunities – targeting volunteers,
- **Membership** – broad based
  - Statutory bodies, Organizations/groups operating in a local area, Educational institutions, commercial companies, sports clubs, NGBs.
- **Funding** – partly (50%) by ISC, must match it
  - 2013: LSPs awarded €5.1m
- **LSPs – are they successful?**
  - Reviews point to better quality information available on local sports services
  - Increased participation in sports
  - More engagement in training and organizational development programmes
Concluding comments/future prospects

- **Irish Sports Policy** - centralized, hierarchical, fragmented
  - Input from many departments
  - ISC mainly an advisory body, with strategic role in identifying and targeting specific sports for international success (carding scheme)
  - Involved in doping control

- **Sport Ireland Bill 2014** –
  - Dissolves Irish Sports Council and NSCDA
  - New body - **Sport Ireland** – proposed functions (S.7)

- Last 10 years, **sports facilities** enhanced: Gov. & NGB efforts
- Input by **Volunteers** – crucial, challenge for Organizations
- **Governance / strategy matters** matters, many unresolved
- **Future prospects**: leadership patchy
  - No clear, co-ordinated, comprehensive strategy statement.....

---

**Table 4: Sports NGBs in Ireland (N=64)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>American Football</th>
<th>Angling</th>
<th>Archery</th>
<th>Athletics</th>
<th>Badminton</th>
<th>Baseball</th>
<th>Basketball</th>
<th>Baton Twirling</th>
<th>Vision Sport</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boxing / Lawnball</td>
<td>Boxing</td>
<td>Camogie</td>
<td>Canoeing</td>
<td>Canoeing</td>
<td>Clay Pigeon Shooting</td>
<td>Clay Polo</td>
<td>Clay Pigeon Shooting</td>
<td>Clay Polo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croquet</td>
<td>Cycling</td>
<td>Deaf Sports</td>
<td>Fencing</td>
<td>Gaelic Games</td>
<td>Golf</td>
<td>Gymnastics</td>
<td>Handball</td>
<td>Hockey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horse Racing / Bareback Riding</td>
<td>Judo</td>
<td>Karate</td>
<td>Ladies Bullying</td>
<td>Ladies Gaelic</td>
<td>Ladies Golf</td>
<td>Martial Arts</td>
<td>Motor Cycling</td>
<td>Motor Sport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orienteering</td>
<td>Olympic Handball</td>
<td>Paralympics Ireland</td>
<td>Pentathlon</td>
<td>Pitch &amp; Putt</td>
<td>Racquetball</td>
<td>Rowing</td>
<td>Rugby</td>
<td>Sailing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shooting Sports</td>
<td>Snooker</td>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td>Special Olympics</td>
<td>Squash</td>
<td>Surfing</td>
<td>Swimming</td>
<td>Table Tennis</td>
<td>Taekwondo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennis</td>
<td>Triathlon</td>
<td>Tug of War</td>
<td>Underwater Sport</td>
<td>Volleyball</td>
<td>Water Ski</td>
<td>Weightlifting</td>
<td>Wheelchair</td>
<td>Wrestling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: www.irishsportscouncil.ie
References

• Bourke, A. 2013, Ireland, in K. Hallmann and K. Petry (Eds.) Comparative Sport Development, Systems, Participation and Public Policy, New York: Springer
• Central Statistics Office (CSO) 2013. www.cso.ie
• Cronin, M, 1999, Sport and Nationalism in Ireland: Gaelic games, soccer and Irish identity since 1884, Dublin/Portland: Four Courts Press

Thank you for your attention

Any questions?