

PRESS RELEASE: IRISH SPORT UNITES TO PROTECT SPORTS FUNDING

All of Ireland's Sports organisations join together to ensure that:

There are no further cuts in Irish Sports Council funding

Sport remains a separate Government Department

The Sport Capital Programme is reinstated

The National Sports Campus is developed

All of Irish sport has joined together in a campaign to highlight the importance of continued government funding of Irish sport. Sport in Ireland spoke with one voice as it delivered its submission to Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism, Mr Martin Cullen, TD, earlier today, Wednesday, 21 October, 2009. Joining forces in the campaign are the Federation of Irish Sports, GAA, FAI, IRFU, the GUI, the Olympic Council of Ireland, the Paralympic Council and Special Olympics Ireland. The Federation represents the governing bodies of 65 sports.

Outlining the reasons for the campaign Ms Sarah O'Connor, chief executive, Federation of Irish Sports, said that "In making this submission on behalf of everyone involved in Irish sport, we wish to emphasise the important role sport plays in Irish life, in improving public health, contributing to economic activity, driving tourism, building communities and projecting a positive image of brand "Ireland" at home and abroad."

"While we fully recognise today's unprecedented economic conditions in Ireland it is our considered belief that Irish sport has already suffered a significant reduction in funding with the suspension of the Sports Capital Programme and a 11% reduction in 2009 of Irish Sports Council funding.

The McCarthy Report now recommends further cuts.”

“We would stress that sport is not looking for additional funding but rather to protect existing and promised investment. This includes capital developments such as the proposed National Sports Campus at Abbotstown which has been granted full planning permission and which was intended to be a cornerstone of Ireland’s programme in relation to the 2012 London Olympics.”

“In order to protect the future funding of Irish sport, we are now calling on the government to ensure that:

There is no further reduction in the budget allocated to sport through  
the Irish Sports Council  
Sport remains as a separate Government Department  
The Sports Capital Programme is reinstated  
The National Sports Campus is developed.

Speaking at the briefing Mr Paraic Duffy, Director General of the GAA, stressed that all of the sports bodies were agreed on what was required and that they would be taking their message to the millions of people who both participated and watched Irish sport every week.

Sport, he said, “has a significant role to play in improving public health, contributing to the economy, building communities, driving tourism and establishing pride in Ireland both at home and abroad. Sport also has a remarkable power to make us feel good and that is hugely important in the current difficult times.

Every day across Ireland, thousands of people are involved in coaching, playing, volunteering and administrating sports. It is part of who we are and has a crucial role to play. We cannot underestimate the huge significance of sport in our lives. One cannot imagine Ireland as a country without sport

In the GAA alone Government funding has been vital to help put 75,000 primary school children through GAA development programmes in Dublin and to also run development programmes throughout our 2,610 clubs.”

Mr John Delaney, CEO of the FAI, said that all present acknowledged the commitment of government to Irish sport over the past decade. “The funding both of capital projects, of sportsmen and women and of developmental programmes has been hugely important to all of our sports. It is not, however, a particularly large budget by comparison to other countries and to cut it back further at this point in time would have disastrous effects. We believe it could set Irish sport back many years.”

“It is recognised worldwide that you cannot simply turn sports funding on and off. If funding dries up programmes disappear and we lose sportsmen and sportswomen with potential who may never come back into sport.”

“We are all agreed that the Irish Sports Council has a made a major difference in the way it has not alone administered the funding but also in the way it has assisted in setting up key programmes countrywide. Indeed, the emphasis of the Irish Sports Council has been on building participation with every €1 spent on high performance sport being matched by a €3 spend

on sports development. Their funds have already been cut. Their budget cannot and should not be cut further.”

Mr Philip Browne, CEO of the Irish Rugby Football Union, said it has been estimated that sport contributes at least a twelvefold return on the funding put in by government. It also contributes 1.7% of Ireland’s GDP. “Major sporting occasions contribute millions to the local economy and sustain many jobs across a range of industries. It has been well researched and documented that an Ireland v England rugby international contributes in excess of €80 million to the local Dublin economy.”

“It is often overlooked that the funding the government puts into the Sports Capital Programme has a huge return. If we take the construction of the new Aviva Stadium, the government has contributed €191 million. During the construction period they will receive almost €150 million of that back in VAT and taxes. The total project, which is also being funded by the FAI and the IRFU, will represent an overall Government investment of just over €400 million.”

“And that is only part of the impact felt in economic terms. Over the three year period since the project was begun, there has been up to 800 jobs created by the construction. When finished, the stadium has the potential to deliver up to 1,000 jobs on match days.”

“Once we start holding other events, the stadium will become an income earner for the local Dublin economy, creating indirect jobs and also generating government revenue. Other indirect benefits come from the exposure that major events generate for Ireland.”

Mr Patrick Hickey, President of the OCI, said he was delighted that sport had united in the campaign. He said it was all too easy to bask in the glory of Irish sporting success without thinking of just what had gone into creating that success.

He said that it was essential that the government continued to give full backing to Irish sport if we want to continue to be successful. He said that if investment in sport was curtailed at this point in time that not alone could Ireland virtually write off any chance of success at the 2012 London Olympics, the closest thing to a “home games” for Ireland but in all likelihood we could also forget about Rio in 2016.

#### The Programme

Sarah O'Connor, CEO of the Federation of Irish Sports, said that the programme was backed by each and every sports governing body and that those NGBs would be asking their members to lobby their local TDs to help the campaign realise its aims.

She also noted that following the briefing, copies of the submission would be sent to every TD in the country along with a fact sheet outlining the potential impact of funding cuts on sport in their local area.

“We have also sought meetings with the Oireachtas Committee on Sport and it is our intention to request further meetings with the officials in the Department of Finance.”

She noted that copies of the complete submission to government could be

accessed @ [www.irishsport.ie](http://www.irishsport.ie).

In conclusion she asked the media to back the campaign. “Every day our sports media devote a huge amount of time and space to sport. They realise just how important a part sport plays in all our lives. We would hope that you will help us in our efforts to remind everyone of the significance of sport to Ireland.”