

National Sports Policy Framework

Public Consultation Paper

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Submission from:

Irish Orienteering Association.

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Dublin 9

The Irish Orienteering Association is the NGB responsible for the sport of orienteering in Ireland.

The association is volunteer based and heavily dependent on Government funding and volunteer contributions of time and effort to be successful.

It is an inclusive organisation with its elite athletes drawn from the 32 counties of Ireland. The clubs structure is a mixture of Urban and country based with involvement in schools and college institutions. We also co-operate with Clubs based in Northern Ireland – supporting events, organising competitions and providing teams to represent Ireland at international level. It provides competitive classes equally for men and women across all age categories and abilities.

As a sport it is primarily an individual sport with elements of team competition. It provides challenges both in physical terms and mentally as it requires quick thinking and decision making in a pressurised environment while simultaneously requiring high levels of fitness at all competitive levels.

Although a perceived minority sport in Ireland it is very much the opposite in many other countries particularly Scandinavia where the mass participation appeal of the sport is apparent in the numerous events with participation numbers regularly in the tens of thousands – eg: Jukola relay in Finland with regular participation numbers of 20,000.

The questions posed for this consultation process are generic in nature but our replies will be heavily influenced by our sport of Orienteering and how it should “plug-in” to the overall national strategy.

Contribution of Sport.

All evidence and studies support the argument that sport contributes to both the physical and mental wellbeing of our citizens and lead to longer life expectancy and hopefully less illness over that lifetime.

In the pressurised world we live in Orienteering is one example of how a sport combining physical and mental challenges in a structured fashion can offer an opportunity to individuals who may not necessarily like participating in team sports.

The inclusion of all social strata in this sport and sports in general makes it the perfect vehicle for inclusion and integration of people on a social and competitive level.

The large sporting organisations will always have large participation numbers but it is the smaller NGB's such as the IOA which offer opportunities to those who are not comfortable in large organisations and could slip through the cracks.

This inclusiveness surely contributes to economic growth as it allows for all to contribute.

Participation.

The government should be targeting children of school going age initially and making them familiar with the joy of sport and participation before exposure to competition.

If support is not there for all sports both traditional and emerging we are doing a great dis-service to our youth by not providing an outlet for their energies. Government and sporting organisations should never intentionally put any barrier up that stops someone participating in any sport.

Ideally Sport Ireland should be working with the smaller NGB organisations such as the IOA in providing synergies and opportunities to grow these sports and allow them to prosper.

Sports are for life and as such that is why participation numbers will always be fluid and numbers will fluctuate but with constant and effective Government funding combined with the Volunteer nature of sporting organisations it is important to not measure success purely in terms of medals but also in terms of keeping the NGB's alive and active when people want to return to sport at any time in their lives.

High Performance

Every sport has its elite athletes and to be the best in any sport requires the same levels of dedication and sacrifice.

Due to the nature of the current funding structure only the High profile sports get the major funding while the other High performance athletes in the minority sports are abandoned to make their own way. This is not encouraging for young people to feel their commitment is not valued because they are not participating in mass participation sports. It could be viewed as lacking inclusivity.

Government funding to support High Performance in all sports would be a more inclusive way forward rather than just funding medal winners or potential podium positions.

Correct funding to develop athletes and uncover talent will by its nature lead to more success in medal count and podium positions.

Local and Regional Facilities

In general the Irish Orienteering Association would encourage more spending on open and or combined facilities in as many areas around the country as possible.

This particular subject is less about money and more about access to public and state owned land that could be hugely beneficial to Our sport in general and to other like minded sporting organisations.

For the IOA, Sport Ireland and or Government assistance in providing access to these areas would greatly benefit our sport. These are our arenas and stadiums. Assistance with access to these resources would not be a major financial outlay but would greatly enhance our ability to provide more sport to more people.

National Sports Campus

The position of the Irish Orienteering Association in regard to the National Sports Campus is that it is a superb modern focal point for sport in this country.

If Sport Ireland were in a position to offer office space to smaller NGB's to ensure their position on the National sports campus that would be a positive example of inclusivity.

If generating income means more funding free to support NGB's then it would certainly make sense to generate income in order to provide more financial support for the governing bodies.

Governance

The highest standards and best practices should be standard when spending public money.

Undoubtedly the role of Sport Ireland and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport should be to guide and support the volunteers who are not subject matter experts in this field but are doing their best to ensure compliance.

Clear guidance and an understanding that this is part of running a volunteer organisation is essential to ensure that the administrators required to keep these sporting organisations alive continue their good work and do not get overwhelmed by the procedures and practices required.

The larger organisations with staff to deal with Governance on a daily basis are best placed for compliance but are probably more exposed due possibly to the budgets they deal with. But irrespective of financial value the principle of transparency and the application of highest standards has to apply to all.

Requirements for gender balance in a volunteer organisation is a difficult principle to apply. As an aspiration it is admirable and should be encouraged but if it becomes a rule it may lead to non compliance and then difficulties for the future of the sport. The sport of Orienteering provides gender equal competitive categories and the coaching and administrative officers are openly elected without fear or favour.

Coaching

Coaching is critical in a technical sport such as ours and we invest considerably in providing the best coaches and coaching techniques possible.

We apply the Coaching Ireland principles and seek to ensure best practice is followed.

The Irish Orienteering Association has an executive committee officer responsible for coaching. This coaching is aimed at Novices and Seasoned Internationals. It also extends into schools, Scouting groups, Outdoor Education centres and even government organisations such as the Defence Forces.

All of this is achieved by volunteers.

We currently have positive interaction with our near neighbours in Orienteering UK and share coaching information and opportunities.

What would be of considerable assistance to us would be extra funding to develop further our structures and by utilising the volunteer ethos further enhance our capacity to deliver high quality coaching.

Some consideration could also be given to how we might best incorporate prior learning to the current Coaching Ireland structure to ensure we and I am sure other organisations do not lose hard earned expertise.

The figures in the % of total current expenditure in coaching over the past 10 years has seen a steady decline in funding. This is not a positive development for a sport such as ours.

Volunteer engagement

We in The Irish Orienteering Association acknowledge that without Volunteers our sport would not survive.

Volunteerism is at the heart of everything we do. The good will and willing contribution of people is of paramount importance to our organisation.

Retention of volunteers is dependant on their feeling a sense of achievement when contributing. That may be on developing a young athlete to his or her potential. Providing coaching or training that benefits many. Being an administrator that provides the support system for people interested in the sport.

The general trends in participation numbers and by gender has seen a steady increase in numbers for 10 years but now there is a tapering off which could mean that a new injection of impetus is required to generate momentum again.

Sports tourism

Both Sport and Tourism should be able to compliment each other in ensuring growth in both sectors. The more local and international participants at events in Ireland will lead to more visitors and more revenue for the Tourism industry . The promotion of sport on an international level for smaller organizations is an onerous task and could be made easier if knowledge of the supports and structures were made known to these organizations. It might be beneficial to produce an information package with details ,contacts and best practices that might encourage smaller groups to engage more.

Sports such as Orienteering will not be able to compete with the bigger organizations in generating revenue in areas where large stadia are the focal point where the sport takes place. But it is perfectly positioned to bring its sport to other parts of the country where local economies could benefit from events held there. This requires no investment in facilities just support of the organization to run events in these locations.

Orienteering is a sport that is active all year through.

It holds events in areas that otherwise may not have revenue generating sports events.

Examples:

Irish Orienteering championships 2017 – Oughterard , Co. Galway
2016 – Comeragh region – Co. Waterford. Mt Mellary event centre.
2015 – Slieve Croob – Co. Down.
2014 – Lough Firrib – Wicklow mountains

Many of the smaller more niche sports offer opportunities to attract events and or tourists to locations outside of the normal big and well-serviced areas.

If this is in keeping with the Departments strategy of inclusiveness and benefit for all then there may be an opportunity for the DTSS to take a lead in providing opportunities and backing to smaller NGB's to promote sporting events year round in rural less serviced areas of the country. There is a strong desire for outdoor/adventure activities which could be harnessed to the benefit of these rural communities.

Sport should have a role in achieving REGIONALITY and SEASONALITY objectives in tourism. Orienteering and the IOA is an example of a sport that can contribute to this aim as it does not require a major investment in infrastructure rather assistance in funding and promotion of events.

As evidenced in examples above we should be able to attract more sports tourists to destinations outside Dublin and during the shoulder season and even the off season.

The major challenges facing organisations such as the IOA is lack of knowledge of how to develop and promote opportunities with very limited financial resources.

The Tourism Action plan is unknown to us and may offer opportunities neither Tourism or the Orienteering community are aware of.

Financing Irish Sport

In the current climate the challenge for funding is significant.

For the smaller NGB's with little or no alternative funding options the funding by government is critical. The importance of sport to the well-being both physically and mentally to our citizens is widely accepted and must be encouraged.

A fitter and healthier society should lead to less demand on other structures over time. The large number of sporting organizations seeking funding is both diverse in size and participation numbers, but all contribute to the varied sporting activities of our society. The funding mechanism should take cognizance of the impact of sport across all levels of ability and ages. It should be seen as an investment in the future of the country and its population and an acknowledgement of inclusivity by acknowledging the existence of all the NGB's irrespective of size.

For the smaller NGB's a more realistic understanding of the cost of running these organizations and as a result more appropriate funding would enable a better harnessing of the Volunteer ethos to deliver more sport to more people.

For example the IOA can show participation numbers of circa 18,000 participants from school children to pensioners, male and female all year round.

They promote mass participation and develop Elite athletes to compete at all levels to World championships.

This is achieved with a funding of approx 45,000euros.

In simple terms this is an investment of circa 2.50 / athlete.

Just think what a simple doubling of funding could help the IOA and other small organizations achieve.

Major events and large Sporting organizations will always garner the majority of funding, sponsorship and coverage. This should not be diminished or compromised, but to encourage inclusiveness and diversity a more realistic funding structure should benefit all organizations.

Remember we are a not for profit organization but one of many that wants to encourage participation in a healthier lifestyle. The goal of funding should not be just to ensure survival but to encourage growth and development.

Measuring the Impact of Sport

As with all projects that spend public funds Value for Money is important.

Measuring the impact of sport must be a combination of hard and fast statistics and implied positive outcomes.

Facts such as participation numbers, revenue generated, medals won, podium places can be used to justify expenditure on sport.

Implied positive outcomes such as Health and wellbeing, physical and mental health are results that can be measured by studies but over a longer period of time.

All of the above, if taken in an environment where sport and participation is a positive ideal, then the justification for funding and measuring of success should be achievable.

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