

2019 Chairperson Report

Mary O'Connell

May 2021



The world as we knew it changed early in 2020 due to the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic. It has been devastating world-wide, in Ireland and in our orienteering community with significant loss of life. It meant that we had to adapt our daily, working and school lives dramatically. For much of the year there were no events or training activities held. At times we were restricted to 2 km areas around our homes. The orienteering calendar was decimated.

We hope that we are now emerging from the worst of the pandemic but we need to continue to exercise caution in our everyday lives and also as we return to orienteering events. There has been a lot of work done to produce a protocol that allows for a safe return to orienteering training and events. It is imperative that we all abide by the protocol to ensure the safety of competitors, organisers, event officials and the general public. The protocol has been approved by Sport Ireland and the IOA has committed to ensuring that all our training and competitive events comply with it.

Last year started off really well with the inaugural All-Island training event organised by GEN in Glendalough. It was over-subscribed and extremely successful. There were excellent training sessions outdoors, complemented by talks, seminars and strength and conditioning sessions indoors. It was also a great opportunity to meet up with orienteers from all over the island of Ireland in an informal and non-competitive environment to share thoughts and experiences. Our thanks to GEN and in particular to David Healy who was the inspiration and driving force behind the weekend and to Brenda Hynes who managed the team to ensure that all the logistics ran smoothly. It was a great weekend and highly enjoyed by all who attended. Many of elite athletes played a central role in delivering training and talks to the orienteers.

Unfortunately events were largely postponed from the middle of March. This meant that people did not have many chances to build on the skills learned from the training weekend. Aside from a few events during July and August, there were no further events during 2020.

Despite the lack of events held in 2020, there was a lot of work done in a number of areas:

- Governance;
- Ready-to-go courses;
- Child protection and safeguarding policies and training courses;
- Further developing relationships with Local Sports Partnerships to introduce orienteering to new groups; and
- Working with the MapRun app to increase the awareness of orienteering and run orienteering activities when sporting activities were restricted.

The IOA was subjected to a governance audit undertaken by BDO on behalf of Sport Ireland. This was extensive and time consuming. It vindicated the work done by the Governance sub-committee during the previous years. It also provided us with a very useful overview of where we are with regard to the Code of Practice for Good Governance of Sport Organisations that we have adopted. Governance of sporting bodies has come into public focus and become more important in recent years. Poor practices in a minority of NGBs has helped to ensure that good governance will be a key requirement of all sporting bodies particularly those who receive public funding. The requirements continue to evolve and demand resources and attention.

As you will be aware from the treasurer's report, the IOA received €188k in funding from Sport Ireland in 2020. This included funding for the

- Core grant;
- Restart and Renewal of Sport;
- Dormant Accounts Projects; and
- Women in sport.

Much of this funding remains unspent because of the lack of opportunities to invest in a number of areas given the health restrictions that were in place. However, there was significant investment in the MapRun project and in the development of the website to enable pre-entry and pre-payment. The work on the website continues. The IOA has also invested in SIAC technology to support the clubs and enable them to run events using contactless controls which is very timely given the current pandemic.

During the year, zoom became a feature of our working day. It has proved invaluable in allowing us to provide training to different groups. The juniors enjoyed a number of technical sessions delivered by various elite orienteers and organised by Colleen Robinson. These sessions formed the basis of a Navigation Webinar which was delivered to novice orienteers and many who would like to try the sport. Many of the attendees are adventure racers or hill-runners. Hopefully, we will see many of them appearing at our regular events when we are back enjoying events.

Eileen Young and Pat Healy supported by Tony Cotter delivered a MapRun Planning course late last year, which proved to be very popular. Eoin Browne delivered a mapping course online earlier this year, which was oversubscribed. We have also delivered a number of Ready-to-Go courses online to teachers and to sports officers working with the LSPs. These will be complemented by shorter courses which will require people to attend in person. The combination of online and in-person training is likely to remain with us into the future. It allows us to deliver a broad range of training to people who are scattered around the country.

Humphrey Murphy, ILC Consulting, undertook a project for the IOA to identify areas where we could focus to introduce orienteering to more people. The research work consisted of interviewing a number of people within the orienteering community and speaking to other stakeholders as well as reviewing work that has been done in other sports. He produced a working document in September which was followed up with a webinar where all members of the IOA were invited to express their views on what works and what could be improved to promote access to orienteering. This work will be incorporated into the IOA's 3 year strategy which will be completed this year. We will organise another webinar to discuss the proposed strategy.

In the meantime, we continue to work with the LSPs to introduce orienteering to groups who are not familiar with the sport. This work is being done in urban areas along the lines of the work that Andrew Cox is doing in the South East and Eileen Young with Fingal and other Sports Partnerships. Our objective is to encourage everyone to try the sport and we hope that some of them will try the regular club events and take up orienteering on a regular basis.

We also propose to work with various LSPs to promote orienteering during two sporting weeks being promoted by Sport Ireland:

- Women in the Outdoors; and
- European Week of Sport.

I would like to thank all members of the committee for their commitment to the association and for the sterling work that they do, much of which is not visible to the members. There is a great team in place and I am very grateful. We are also grateful to:

- Barbara Foley Fisher who continues to work as the Child Protection Officer;
- Colm Hill, the Data Protection Liaison;
- Rob McEvoy who acts as the Anti-Doping officer; and
- Gavan Doherty who has taken over from Martin Flynn as the IOA webmaster.

I would also like to thank Aine Joyce who makes sure that the IOA continues to operate smoothly and gives us a gentle reminder when necessary. Aine has an in-depth knowledge of the sport and the various challenges and opportunities that need to be addressed. She is always helpful, patient and diplomatic. Thanks Aine.

We would all like to thank Martin Flynn for the tireless work that he has done for the IOA over the past years as webmaster. I'm not sure when Martin took on the role but he has done a terrific job and made a very valuable contribution to the association both in his work as webmaster and also in the software that he has developed.

We are all acutely aware that our season has been totally disrupted due to the current Covid-19 pandemic. We are liaising with Sport Ireland and the clubs in an effort to ensure a speedy but safe return to orienteering. We hope that this is the last time that we will experience a lockdown and no orienteering events. I would like to add a reminder, please ensure that you adhere to the protocols when you are back orienteering and encourage everyone else to do likewise.

Finally, I would like to take a moment to remember Nigel Pim who passed away from Covid-19 during the year. Nigel was quiet but always extremely obliging with assisting at events locally, nationally and even internationally. He played a pivotal role in the support team that accompanied the JWOC team to Switzerland in 2016. I would like to extend our sympathies to Jeni, Robert and Jordan on their loss. Our sympathies also to anyone else who has lost family members or friends during the past year.