

**A REVIEW OF IRELAND'S PARTICIPATION
IN THE SYDNEY 2000 OLYMPIC GAMES
AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ATHENS
2004**

**PREPARED FOR THE IRISH SPORTS
COUNCIL BY THE SYDNEY REVIEW
STEERING GROUP**

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1 CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD

As Chairman of the Steering Review Group I am pleased to submit our report. It outlines a strategic approach which, we believe, can lead to a significant improvement in the performance of our athletes in Athens 2004 and beyond.

There should be no mistake. Prompt and decisive action is necessary if we are to begin a new era, and this report sets out the areas in which it is needed. It must, in all cases, centre on the athlete.

Our strategy takes full account of a number of fundamental statements, including the following:

- The Olympic Charter states that "The National Olympic Committees have exclusive powers for the representation of their countries at the Olympic Games".
- The Charter further states that the National Olympic Committees must work to maintain harmonious and co-operative relations with appropriate Government bodies.
- The Irish Sports Council has been established by statute with the responsibility of encouraging the promotion, development and co-ordination of competitive sport in Ireland.
- The Irish Sports Council Strategy "A New Era for Sport 2000-2002" states that "We do not have the resources to deliver our vision on our own; instead, we will focus our efforts on working in partnership with other agencies where they will be most effective in terms of achieving our vision".

In other words, the leadership of the Irish Sports Council in the delivery of its statutory responsibilities, and the sovereign right of the Olympic Council of Ireland in carrying out the responsibilities clearly spelled out in the Olympic Charter are two of the cornerstones of this Report. These cornerstones must, I believe, underpin the approach of sport – and of the Government – to Olympic performance. Three words are critical in terms of the approach necessary:

INDEPENDENCE, RESPECT, CO-OPERATION

Nobody can do it alone. All of the parties with roles to play in maximising Ireland's performance are vital – they must work as a team, and they must leave behind the difficulties that have bedevilled their efforts in the past. In particular, the role of the NGBs, with the athletes at their core, is of importance as they are responsible for the administration of their sport.

I know that all parties will appreciate that what is involved now is a complete cultural change. It will require considerable planning, careful management, as well as extensive negotiation and co-operation, based on a clear statement of roles and responsibilities.

The Irish sports sector has gone through considerable change in recent years with the appointment of a Government Minister with responsibility for sport, and the establishment of the Irish Sports Council as the statutory body responsible for sport. Funding has increased dramatically as resources have allowed, and there is a huge national commitment to success.

All the ingredients, in short, are there. We need, in a sense, to build a team to support the team.

I would like to thank my fellow review group members for their hard work and dedication in ensuring that we met the tight deadlines set by the Minister. In particular, I would like to commend our independent consultants, Leisure Partners. Without their extensive experience in working within the Olympic framework, the comprehensive analysis undertaken by this group would not have been possible.

We would like to formally acknowledge the full co-operation of the key parties in our review. They were more than generous in their time and input into the group's deliberations.

Finbar Costello
Chairman
31st January, 2001

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Aims of the Report

This report outlines the review of Ireland's participation at the Sydney Olympic Games as carried out by the Review Steering Group. It is ambitious, and sets out clearly a new vision for the most comprehensive 'overhaul' of the systems and structures impacting upon Ireland's preparation for the Olympic Games. The key component of the report is that it is athlete centred. The proposals in the report articulate a move towards supporting Ireland's Olympic athletes, to ensure they are better prepared than ever before to compete at the Athens Olympic Games in 2004.

It contains a comprehensive assessment of Ireland's current system of high performance support – its strengths, and weaknesses, compared to the major competitors around the world. In particular a focus of attention has been those countries that have either improved or performed well at recent Games – Spain (1992), Great Britain (2000), or have consistently performed well over a number of Olympiads - Germany.

It analyses the performance of Ireland at successive Olympic Games, evidenced over the past five Olympiads, and provides a realistic assessment of Ireland's current position in competition.

It has as its core the requirement for the key agencies to communicate and co-operate effectively with each other to support the individual performer. In this respect it demonstrates that the key agencies must embrace the cultural shift that implementing the Steering Group recommendations will require.

Moreover it supports the proposed High Performance Committee, to be established in the near future by the Irish Sports Council as the group responsible for the delivery of key outcomes of this report. This will require a close functional relationship between the agencies identified in the report.

It lists twenty-nine key recommendations - where co-operation and implementation can make a real difference to the athletes preparing for Athens 2004, 2008 and beyond. Some are quite simple; others will require careful planning and thought; but all are recommendations that are structural, attitudinal, will make a world class difference, and are designed to develop Irish Olympic athletes as some of the best prepared in the world. Moreover, they are actions based on benchmarking Ireland's system against those of its competitors, and of their preparation structures and programmes.

Finally, the report has the support of the agency that has the responsibility to deliver High Performance sport in Ireland, the Irish Sports Council.

The Steering Group recognises that making the required overall world class difference cannot be achieved overnight, and certainly recognises the voluntary contribution shouldered by the National Governing Bodies. The Steering Group strongly advises that all agencies involved in the preparation of teams and individuals for the Olympic Games adhere to the conclusions, and the twenty-nine recommendations outlined below within the timeframe set for them. They are phased in over four time periods as follows:

Phase 1	March – April 2001
Phase 2	May – September 2001
Phase 3	October 2001 – March 2002
Phase 4	April 2002 – Athens 2004

It is therefore recommended that in Phase 1: March – April 2001

1. The ISC convenes a meeting with the key agencies as a matter of priority to agree and adopt the vision and recommendations encapsulated in this Sydney Review.

2. The enormous potential of working together is realised by the ISC, OCI, and NCTC, and the NGBs in a co-ordinated programme for the athletes representing Ireland in the Athens Games and beyond.
3. The ISC establish and drive the High Performance Committee with support from the OCI and the NCTC.
4. Networked sports science and medicine services for athletes should be a key focus of the High Performance Committee, particularly linking Dublin and the emerging United Kingdom Sports Institute in Belfast.
5. The NCTC should have a review of its functions and services carried out by the ISC.
6. National Governing Bodies of Sport should undertake, with support from the ISC, to produce athlete focussed Performance Plans for their organisations.

It is therefore recommended that in Phase 2: May – September 2001

7. The OCI undertake a review of all aspects of its role, constitution, and administrative structures to ensure transparency in its operation.
8. The OCI should be provided with partnership funding to assist in developing a more professional approach in their operations.
9. An athlete centred quadrennial plan for the 2004 Athens Olympics is agreed and published by the OCI with the support of the NCTC and the ISC.
10. A 'road map' to Athens is rolled out detailing all key events and services to the NGBs, which is to be revised quarterly.

11. The ISC and NGBs consider the employment of performance coaches as a matter of some urgency focussing on medal potential sports.
12. National Governing Bodies should assist and inform the media to ensure that the 'management of expectation' strategy advocated for each Games is embraced.
13. The International Carding scheme and funding to Olympic sports should be reviewed as a matter of urgency by the ISC.
14. A medical/science-working group is established by the OCI with support from the ISC and NCTC to consider the challenging environmental and climatic conditions for Athens.
15. A feasibility project for a Holding Camp in Athens 2004 should be undertaken as a matter of urgency, led by the OCI with support from the ISC and NCTC.
16. The OCI Athletes Commission with the Athletes Forum should consider a range of 'lifestyle' services for immediate delivery to athletes.
17. Clear lines of communication should be put in place with Irish athletes based abroad (25%), and these should be networked to access services.

It is recommended that in Phase 3: October 2001 – March 2002

18. Performance Plans for selected Irish sports should be developed with clear talent identification and development programmes, to help them achieve Olympic Qualifying Standards.
19. The OCI, supported by the ISC and NCTC, should produce quarterly athlete and governing body newsletters to ensure communication of key information.

20. Olympic Qualifying Standards should be negotiated early in the Olympic cycle and agreed and signed by the OCI with each sport, and communicated to all athletes.
21. The Team parade, training, and competition kit should be managed professionally with input from the athletes, to ensure it maximises performance in competition, and is smart and comfortable and 'fit for purpose'.
22. The Athens Village HQ staff should be selected by the OCI with input from the NGBs based on ability and experience matched against job descriptions, functions and responsibilities. A programme of professional training should underpin this.
23. Team Managers should be nominated by the NGBs and approved by the OCI early in the Olympic cycle. Programmes for Athens should have a more professional focus.
24. Annual multi-sport training camps should be organised by the OCI, NCTC and ISC to prepare athletes for the Olympic Village.

It is recommended that in Phase 4: March 2002 – Athens 2004

25. Realistic levels of expectation are set for the Irish team through a media campaign developed by the OCI with support from the ISC.
26. Support staff should be nominated by sports to attend future Holding Camps to ensure continuity of care for athletes.
27. The allocation of accreditations by the OCI must be fully transparent with the primary focus of ensuring the needs of athletes are met.
28. Regular Team Managers meetings should be held where possible at the Olympic Village to enhance communication.

29. The strategy for the Irish Hospitality Suite for Athens needs to be rethought, focussing on the requirements of the athlete.

3. INTRODUCTION

“The title of the ‘best Games ever’ has now moved to Sydney – with unanimous votes from the athletes, the media, the Australian spectator, the television viewer, and a grateful Olympic family. The success of the Sydney Games became one of the seminal moments in Australian history.”

Craig Reddie – IOC Member

Background

In the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games, Ireland was placed 64th out of a total of 80-medal winning Nations. The Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation, Dr. James McDaid TD, subsequently requested that the Irish Sports Council undertake an in depth review of Ireland’s preparation for, and participation in those Games. Further, that it should have a particular focus on the relationships that exist between the various bodies and agencies involved in the preparation and participation of the team. He asked that all relevant bodies and agencies contribute to the review. He looked forward to the review resulting in “positive and constructive outcomes that will lead to an improvement in the future Olympic performance of our competitors”.

The Irish Sports Council appointed a Steering Group to oversee the review process and a firm of specialist Performance Sports consultants; Leisure Partners limited, to undertake the primary research and analysis. The members of the Steering Group were as follows:

Chairman, Finbar Costello, Chairman of the UCD Sports Development Trust,

John Treacy, Chief Executive of the Irish Sports Council

Ann Tate, Provost of Jordanstown, University of Ulster and Member of the Irish Sports Council

Neville Maxwell, International Rower and participant at the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games

Leisure Partners were commissioned by the Irish Sports Council to undertake the primary research and analysis, which informed the review. Their proposal was based on the Irish Sports Council's invitation to tender dated 1st November 2000. The terms of reference and the review methodology were set out in their proposal dated 8th November 2000.

The purpose of this review has been to provide the Irish Sports Council with the necessary information regarding the Irish Team's preparation for, and participation in, the Sydney Olympics, and of the support programmes and schemes currently in place. This full and detailed report incorporating the key findings, recommendations, (including a strategy to Athens 2004), and conclusions, has been passed in its entirety to the Minister for Tourism, Sport, and Recreation. The Irish Sports Council has co-operated fully in this transparency.

The Review

Following the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, the Irish team returned home to a very public debate, which focussed on the performance of the entire team (including support personnel), and the relationships between the various parties who have a responsibility for elite sport in this country. In particular the Olympic Council of Ireland (OCI), the Irish Sports Council (ISC), the National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs), the National Coaching and Training Centre (NCTC) at Limerick, and the Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation have been a focus for that public attention.

Although the requirements of the brief centred principally around carrying out a comprehensive interview process with key personnel directly involved or affected by the Irish Olympic preparation, Leisure Partners have also undertaken a thorough 'desk study' of existing documentation. We believe this has given us a full and, crucially, an impartial understanding of the various factors impacting on Ireland's Olympic support mechanisms, as well as ensuring that we are in possession of the latest information to support our appraisal findings.

Steering Group Terms of Reference

The terms of reference for the review, as drawn up by the Minister, provide for an examination into the performance of the 'key players and their role in the preparation, support, and selection of Ireland's team in the 2000 Games'. In accordance with Leisure Partners' proposal and confirmed by the Irish Sports Council on 10th December, the specific terms of reference for this review were:

- To examine the performance of the key players and their role in the preparation, support, and selection of Ireland's team in the 2000 Games
- To consider the appropriateness and effectiveness of the procedures, arrangements and schemes which applied to the preparation, support, and selection of the team, the relationships between the many agencies involved in the preparation and participation of the team, assessed against International comparators
- To identify the particular factors which contributed to, or impacted upon, the team's performance in Sydney.
- In the light of the foregoing to recommend a strategy for achieving a significant improvement in the number of national records, finalists and medallists at the 2004 Athens Olympic Games, including any changes which would have to take place in relation to critical issues identified under the review.
- A final report on the review including conclusions and recommendations to be presented to the Minister for Tourism, Sport, and Recreation on 31 January 2001.

The Steering Group has determined that the role of the Irish Sports Council in such matters is encompassed within the terms of reference. Accordingly they have been examined as part of this review.

Finally, we have drawn together our findings and recommended to the Irish Sports

Council and the Minister an assessment of the most positive and appropriate way forward for Ireland's future Olympic preparation and the relationships between the key parties.

Review Tasks

There have been six tasks that we carried out in relation to this review. These were:

- **Strategic analysis:** An analysis of the strategic platform for success focussing on political support, the strategic framework underpinning elite sport in Ireland, the funding requirements and commitments, planning for performance, and a review of targets and expectations.
- **Factors Impacting on Performance:** The internal and external factors affecting performance, particularly those impacting upon the team in the Olympic village and in the pre-Games preparation were assessed with a particular focus on the support services to the Team.
- **International Comparators:** These have been given both in terms of previous performance, and with regard to the systems impacting on elite performance. These include organisational issues pertaining to Irish elite sport.
- **Preparation, support, and selection of the team:** Analysis of the preparation systems including the pre Games preparation, the Newcastle Holding Camp in Australia, the transfer and facilities for the Irish team in Sydney. The effectiveness of the Medical/Science/Physiotherapy teams underpinning the Irish team, and the procedures determining the selection of the team have also been analysed.
- **Effectiveness of systems:** The effectiveness of the systems adopted for each performer at the Games has been analysed and recommendations formulated.

- **Athens 2004:** Recommendations and advice on the most appropriate way forward for Ireland in its preparation for the 2004 Athens Olympic Games have also been provided.

Structure of the Report

This is an athlete centred review. Accordingly this report focuses on an assessment of the structures for and the consequent development of, the performer and their individual needs – it is an examination of the systems in place to support the high performance/elite athlete. Accordingly it is structured on two levels:

- an assessment of the support systems and programmes planned over the four year Olympic cycle, and
- The individual support mechanisms controlled by the Olympic Council of Ireland in both the Holding Camp/Training Centres and the Olympic Village – the final phase of the cycle of preparation.

The final phase is a critical time in the Olympic athletes' training and preparation cycle; the proximity of the Games cannot be emphasised enough. The final phase is not about introducing changes, or working harder, rather it is a time for acclimatisation and fine tuning the training processes, whilst keeping the athlete focussed.

In terms of the structure of this document, the report sets out our approach to Sport in Ireland in respect of future Olympic Games representation by Irish athletes and teams. Whilst Sections 1- 3 have been covered by the Chairman's Foreword, Recommendations, and Introduction, Section 4 details our approach to the review and its relationship to the specific terms of reference. Section 5 analyses the current position regarding the key agencies and the current structures within Ireland. Ireland's track record at successive Olympic Games, set against standard comparators is the focus for section 6. An evaluation of the strategic context for International success at

an Olympic Games follows in Section 7 with an examination of Great Britain, Germany, and Spain.

Sections 8 and 9 provide an objective assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of Ireland's performance system and Olympic preparation and management. This also includes an assessment of the relationships between the key parties/stakeholders and an evaluation of the selection, accreditation and management of the Irish team. This results in the ability to identify the strengths and weaknesses in the current system that Ireland must now address.

The focus of the plan – looking forward to a new World Class vision – sets the context for the remainder of the report and is detailed in Section 10. This also incorporates our conclusions and recommendations to the Minister.

The primary research – the detailed interviews of Team Managers and Sports, and athlete questionnaires - has been analysed and the key findings provided in Appendix 1 to the report. Appendix 1 also incorporates a copy of the Team Manager and Athlete Questionnaires.

4. OUR APPROACH

Our approach has been comprehensive, whilst recognising the tight timeframe imposed by the Terms of Reference in meeting the Minister's deadline. It is the culmination of over two months of focussed preparation incorporating research, consultation, debate, refinement, and formal approval between the Steering Group and Leisure Partners. Leisure Partners were specifically selected for their expertise and specialist skills in performance sport, drawn from a background and experience in the systems and structures impacting upon Olympic success, World Class programmes, the United Kingdom Sports Institute and National Governing Bodies of Sport. As a result they had access to a wealth of documentation on performance and elite sport models and best practice, which assisted greatly in the report's timely submission.

The report principally represents the thoughts of the key stakeholders, and significantly, enjoys unity of purpose within its primary focus – to ensure the best-prepared team represents Ireland at future Olympic Games. The review process and this final report are therefore considered to be accurate in both its findings and conclusions. In this we are grateful for the co-operation, without exception, of all of the key parties – the Department, the Irish Sports Council, the Olympic Council of Ireland, National Governing Bodies of Sport, the National Coaching and Training Centre and the athletes.

The report examines the relationships that currently exist and attempts to integrate the stakeholders in a common purpose. In this regard it takes as its framework the Irish Sports Council's strategic document "A New Era for Sport 2000 – 2002". This in particular provides some of the strategic context within which the ideas set out in this report has been framed.

In terms of its chronology, a preliminary commissioning meeting was held on 27th November in London with the Chairman and Chief Executive of the Irish Sports Council and Leisure Partners. That meeting outlined the scope of the study. A full review meeting took place on 5 December between the Steering Group Chairman, Leisure Partners, and the Irish Sports Council, following which we were provided with relevant reports and information. Further project monitoring meetings took place between Leisure Partners and the Steering Group on

10th and 24th January 2001. A continuous dialogue has ensued between the Steering Group Chairman and Leisure Partners to refine this report into its finished article.

With regard to the 'desk study' we have collated and analysed written documentation, working papers, relevant files, and we have also undertaken a thorough Internet search, as the basis for our study. This has given the report significant credence in its objective assessment of International comparators – a benchmark to which the key stakeholders may wish to aspire.

Furthermore, in order to obtain the various perspectives that exist, we have had separate discussions with key personnel from a comprehensive list of agencies regarding the review. Leisure Partners and/or the Steering Group Chairman carried these out, to ensure the review's independence and transparency.

The contributions of all were invaluable. Of particular note were the interviews with the Olympic Council for Ireland; Sydney 2000 Team Managers and National Governing Bodies of Sport; the National Coaching and Training Centre; the Irish Sports Council (both Members and Officers) and officials from the Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation. The athletes who represented Ireland at the Olympic Games provided us with invaluable comments on their Olympic experience both at the Holding Camp in Newcastle and at the Olympic Village – the critical final phase of preparation. This was detailed through a structured questionnaire. Forty athletes responded, giving this report significant credibility.

Time has prevented us from interviewing those sports that did not qualify for the Olympics, although we recognise that many would have been involved in pre Olympic planning and preparation, as would their athletes.

We have also incorporated the views of a number of personnel who have made representation on Ireland's participation in the Sydney Games following the return of the Irish team. These include senior international athletes (including past Irish Olympians), medical support personnel at the Sydney 2000 Games, and National Governing Bodies of Sport representatives.

We have utilised the notes of the meeting chaired by the Minister held on 26th October 2000. This was attended by the Irish Sports Council, National Governing Bodies of those sports who attended the Sydney 2000 Games, and representatives of the National Coaching and Training Centre. The key issues emerging from that meeting as presented by the National Governing Bodies of Sport were the need for:

- An athlete centred approach
- Substantial funding for high performance sport
- A transparent selection process for the Olympic Games and the need for agreement on selection procedures
- The appointment of world class coaches/performance directors
- Long term planning for Olympic Games
- The Carding Scheme to be reviewed particularly in relation to junior and developmental athletes
- Greater professionalisation of the NGBs
- The pre-Olympic acclimatisation to be researched thoroughly
- A closer working relationship between all the main agencies involved in Ireland's Olympic preparation
- World class sporting facilities for training and competition
- A more informed media reporting of Irish performances
- Continuity of care for the athletes, as many athletes did not have access to their regular coaches, medical personnel and managers

Finally we have incorporated issues arising from the meeting chaired by the Minister and attended by Department officials, the Olympic Council of Ireland, and the Irish Sports

Council. This took place on 8th November 2000, and focussed attention on three interrelated issues:

- Continuity of Care
- Selection Process
- Management of the Irish Team by the OCI at the Olympic Village

Some of those interviewed have subsequently chosen to submit fresh documentation regarding the Review as a result of our consultation. Relevant information from all of these documents has been incorporated within the main body of our report.

The focus of our study whilst being analytical, has also encapsulated the service perspective of supporting Ireland's elite athletes, and this has necessarily included a visit to the National Coaching and Training Centre at Limerick, where the services and facilities provided there were analysed.

A comprehensive list of those interviewed is attached as Appendix 2.

5. BACKGROUND AND CURRENT POSITION

This section describes the structure of organisations impacting on Ireland's participation in the Sydney Olympic Games, and provides a review of key activities that are particularly relevant in this context. This is critical in allowing for assessments of how effective, in particular, the programmes deployed by the key parties are.

Key Organisations

The Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation

The newly created Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation took over responsibility for sport from the Department of Education in June 1997. For the first time sport was given full ministerial status in the Cabinet. In the period June 1997 to June 1999, the Department was responsible for allocating Government funds to the National Governing Bodies of Sport, athletes- through the Carding Scheme, the National Coaching and Training Centre and the Olympic Council of Ireland. The non-statutory Irish Sports Council was in existence during this period under the auspices of the Department. Its role was to advise the Minister on issues relating to sport, including funding. A High Performance Advisory Committee (HPAC) was appointed in 1997 as a sub-committee of the non-statutory Irish Sports Council. The term of office of the advisory Sports Council and the HPAC ceased in June 1999 prior to the establishment of the statutory Irish Sports Council.

The Department is currently responsible for the provision of Government funding to the Irish Sports Council and the administration of the Sports Capital Programme.

The Irish Sports Council

The Irish Sports Council was established on a statutory basis on July 1st 1999 as the body responsible for sport in Ireland. The Council's functions are set out in Section 6 of the Irish Sports Council Act 1999. Of particular note in the context of this Review are the following functions:

- To encourage the promotion, development and co-ordination of competitive sport and the achievement of excellence in competitive sport.
- To take such action, as it considers appropriate, including testing, to combat doping in sport
- Where the Council considers it appropriate to do so, to facilitate research concerning competitive sport

In accordance with the requirements of the Act, the Council has formulated a three year Strategy Statement, 'A New Era for Irish Sport', which covers the period 2000 – 2002. This was published in September 2000.

Whilst the Council's vision is that everyone is welcomed in sport, that individuals can enjoy developing their abilities to the maximum of their potential, they do have a specific remit regarding elite sport through their vision that "Irish sportsmen and women achieve consistent world class performances, fairly". This vision gives rise to three Council strategies including one dealing with "world class". This, in turn, includes a Council priority to "developing a holistic system of support services our leading sportsmen and women need to achieve world class success". Their strategy also commits the Council to "effective, fact based decision making" and to "working in partnership with other agencies where they will be more effective in achieving our vision", and specifically targets the OCI and the NCTC in this framework.

The Olympic Council of Ireland

In Ireland, the Olympic Movement is governed by the National Olympic Committee (NOC), in this case the Olympic Council of Ireland (OCI). It was founded in 1923. It operates in accordance with the Olympic Charter of the International Olympic Committee.

Whilst the mission of all NOCs is to develop and protect the Olympic Movement in accordance with the Olympic Charter it does have a number of other key roles. Crucially the OCI has

‘ ...The exclusive powers for the representation of their respective country at the Olympic Games and at the regional, continental, or world multi-sports competitions patronised by the IOC.’

(IOC Charter)

Moreover, they perform amongst others, the following key tasks:

‘ They constitute and lead their respective delegations at the Olympic Games...They decide upon the entry of athletes proposed by their respective national federations.’

(IOC Charter)

The OCI's current role can therefore be considered in terms of:

- The selection of the Irish Teams for Olympic Games
- The arrangement of travel/accommodation and team details in Olympic years
- Being the conduit for the IOC's strategies and programmes in Ireland
- Provision of a representative role for Olympic sports at national and International level
- Provision of the HQ Village infrastructure for the Irish Team

National Governing Bodies of Sport

The National Governing Bodies of Sport organise and administer most of the organised sport in Ireland; they train and deploy coaches and officials; nominate representatives to National and International Bodies; organise representative level sport; and they provide sporting opportunities and pathways leading from local sport to national and international competition.

The National Governing Bodies of Sport shoulder a considerable responsibility as the delivery arm for much of the development framework for high performance. As such they are central to the development of the emerging high performance strategy outlined in the ISC

document 'A New Era for Sport'. However it is stated that the strengthening of the NGBs is an essential prerequisite to achievement in performance and high performance and should be pursued as a matter of high priority.

Nevertheless, in this period under Review, they have made a good start in developing strategic plans whilst recognising the requirement to have a professional structure in place to deliver key objectives.

The National Coaching and Training Centre

The National Coaching and Training Centre was established by the Government in 1992 to assist in the raising of standards in coaching and education of coaches, and to provide a sports science programme and a range of training facilities for selected sports.

The Centre currently administers the National Coaching Development Programme in partnership with NGBs and co-ordinates the provision of sports science and medical support for our leading sportsmen and women through the International Carding Scheme.

Many of the athletes participating in Sydney utilised the services of the NCTC through funding provided by the Carding Scheme.

The NCTC's strategic direction is currently under review to determine its future role, structure, and working relationship with the Irish Sports Council.

Conclusion

In conclusion to this section the Steering Group recognises that the Irish Sports Council has been given a clear statutory mandate to promote, develop, and co-ordinate sport in Ireland. Equally we recognise the 'exclusive' responsibility of the Olympic Council of Ireland for all matters Olympic in Ireland. Whilst this could give rise to tensions between the two organisations, this situation can only be alleviated by a trusting, mutually respectful approach between the two bodies which recognises that each has a critical role to play in the development and support of Irish Olympic athletes.

6. IRELAND'S PERFORMANCE POSITION AT THE OLYMPIC GAMES

“The celebration in Barcelona was nothing compared to what went on back in Dublin. Carruth was instantly promoted to sergeant. Army helicopters flew over Carruth’s house to salute his victory. And, most incredible of all, on the day of his return to Ireland, local pubs dropped the price of beer to that of 1956. For one day in 1992 a pint of Guinness could be bought for four pence.”

The Complete Book of the Olympics – David Wallechinsky

This section provides a statistical analysis of Ireland’s performance at the Olympic Games assessed against a variety of factors. This is critical, particularly in making an accurate assessment of those performances and to allow for the most appropriate ‘management of expectation’ by all parties at future Games.

The record books show that between the 1960 Olympics in Rome and the 1976 Olympics in Montreal, Ireland won a solitary Olympic Medal - a bronze - at the Tokyo Games of '64. The boycotted Games of 1980 at Moscow saw Ireland pick up a silver and bronze; one silver was returned from the Los Angeles Games of '84, before Ireland reached its Olympic nadir in 1988 in Seoul, when their highest placed competitor came 8th.

It is significant in the context of this review and, particularly in the management of expectation, that the Barcelona and Atlanta Olympics of 1992 and 1996 respectively saw an upsurge in Irish fortunes. Ireland won gold and silver in Barcelona, and three golds and a bronze in Atlanta.

It has been said that Ireland has a great Olympic tradition in boxing. The reality is that until 1992 no boxer representing Ireland had ever won a gold medal. So it was a great day for Irish boxing when on August 8th in Barcelona, two Irish fighters made it to the finals – such a thing had never happened before. Michael Carruth won gold and Wayne McCullough silver.

The Atlanta Olympics of 1996 was even more significant. It saw Michelle Smith bring home 3 golds and a bronze from the pool. No swimmer from Ireland had ever won an Olympic Medal. No woman from Ireland in any sport had ever won an Olympic Medal. No Irish athlete had ever won more than one gold medal at a single Olympics, and Ireland did not have one single 50m swimming pool.

It is against this backdrop of an upsurge in success at the Barcelona and Atlanta Games that media and public expectation in Sydney was based. The quote at the beginning of this section is important because it quite rightly demonstrates the importance of celebrating almost unique success for Ireland at an Olympics.

To evaluate exactly the progress of the Irish Team, we have looked at a number of measures:

- Gold Medal placing
- Per capita International comparators
- Total number of medal winning sports
- Top eight placing

Meaningful Olympic rankings are to some degree still something of a novelty and the only official OCI ranking is the table of National Olympic Committee medallists. In this regard Ireland, with Sonia O'Sullivan's 5000m Silver Medal, were placed 64th of the 80 National Olympic Committees that 'medalled' at Sydney. One hundred and ninety nine countries took part. A full list of Ireland's participants in the 2000 Sydney Games can be found in Appendix 3.

We have assessed Ireland's participation against countries of similar population, to relate a more meaningful assessment to how Ireland has performed.

1980 – 2000 Placings based on Gold Medals Source: David Wallechinsky – The Complete Book of the Olympics, Aurum Press Limited (2000)

	1980 Moscow	1984 Los Angeles	1988 Seoul	1992 Barcelona	1996 Atlanta	2000 Sydney
Norway	No placing	29	21	22	30	22
Denmark	16	27	23	30	19	33
New Zealand	No placing	8	18	28	26	44
Costa Rica	No placing	No placing	37	No placing	50	68
Croatia	No placing	No placing	No placing	No placing	46	50
Moldova	No placing	No placing	No placing	No placing	59	No placing
Ireland	31	35	No placing	32	28	64

More meaningful International comparisons have sometimes been assessed using per capita figures as a baseline.

The following table has been compiled by SOCOG (Sydney Organising Committee of the Olympic Games) which ranks the countries not just by medal won, but by medals per head of population.

Position/ Country	<u>Medals won</u>				2000 population	Population per medal
	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total	'000	'000
7 Norway	4	3	3	10	4,465	447
22 Denmark	2	3	1	6	5,293	882
23 New Zealand	1	0	3	4	3,862	966
34 Costa Rica	0	0	2	2	4,023	2,012
38 Moldova	0	1	1	2	4,380	2,190
41 Croatia	1	0	1	2	4,473	2,237
51 Ireland	0	1	0	1	3,730	3,730

Country	Total TMT*	Population	MpM**	Placing
Norway	10	4,481,162	2.23	7
Denmark	6	5,336,394	1.12	21
New Zealand	4	3,819,762	1.05	23
Costa Rica	2	3,710,558	0.54	33
Croatia	2	4,282,216	0.47	38
Moldova	2	4,430,654	0.45	40
Ireland	1	3,797,257	0.26	50

* Total Medal Tally

** Medals per Million

Whilst many people will always measure Olympic success by the number of medals won, it is important to take cognisance of other important factors to fully understand the overall teams performance. An assessment of 'strength in depth' can be better gauged by an assessment of top eight placing in events over the past three Olympiads. Information supplied to us by

the OCI reveals the following. Again an assessment has been made against those countries with a similar demographic base to Ireland.

Country	1992 Ranking	1996 Ranking	2000 Ranking	1992 Points	1996 Points	2000 Points
Denmark	25	25	28	76.0	104.5	93.5
Norway	24	29	30	86.5	86.0	84.0
New Zealand	21	31	38	129.5	78.0	60.0
Croatia	41	50	59	29.0	31.5	28.5
Moldova	N/a	48	61	N/a	33.0	26.5
Ireland	42	38	65	28.5	48.0	14.0
Costa Rica	78	61	71	2.0	16.0	12.0

Notes.

Points have been allocated in the following way: 9 points for a gold medal. 7 points for a silver, 6 for a bronze, 5 points for a 4th place, 4 for a 5th, 3 for a 6th, 2 for a 7th, and 1 for an 8th.

The chart clearly shows consistent under performance by the Irish team relative to other countries. This situation has been in existence for some considerable time, despite the fortunes of Barcelona and Atlanta, and certainly since Rome 1960. In fact, of those countries that appeared in the top eight in any one single event and thus appeared on the table above (98 in total), Ireland had the third sharpest decline in overall team performance since Barcelona – a drop of 23 ranking places. Only Korea (24), and Estonia (25), had a worse record.

Team performance through top eight placing is an important barometer of progress. For example, whilst Great Britain secured only 1 Gold Medal in the 1996 Atlanta Games finishing 36th in the medal table, it had a significant number of athletes finishing between 4th and 8th which were to provide, amongst other criteria, the platform for Britain's success at the 2000 Games.

The Steering Group acknowledges that to accurately assess the depth of talent would require an analysis of Irelands top 16 placing in the Olympic Games between 1988 (Seoul) and 2000 (Sydney).

Finally in terms of medal winning sports the statistics show the following for the past eleven Olympiads.

1960 Rome	-
1964 Tokyo	1 medal, Boxing (McCourt bronze)
1968 Mexico City	-
1972 Munich	-
1976 Montreal	-
1980 Moscow	2 medals, Sailing (Wilkins, Wilkinson silver); Boxing (Russell bronze)
1984 Los Angeles	1 medal, Athletics (Treacy silver)
1988 Seoul	-
1992 Barcelona	2 medals, Boxing (Carruth gold, McCullough silver)
1996 Atlanta	4 medals, Swimming (Smith 3 gold, 1 bronze)
2000 Sydney	1 medal, Athletics (O'Sullivan silver)

It is evident that over the past 40 years only four sports – Boxing, Swimming, Athletics, and Sailing - have contributed to Irish Olympic medal success. Only nine Irish athletes have stepped on to the medal rostrum during that period. Of the twelve medals won over the past ten Olympiads, almost 40% have accrued through the sport of Boxing. This is significant. Political changes to the former Soviet Union, and the lure of professionalism have caused a drought from this source that will, for a variety of factors, be difficult to reverse.

Drawing conclusions from these statistics can be misleading and caution is urged in their wider use. However overall, in relation to national expectation, and in relation to other countries of similar population, ***Irish Teams at Olympic Games have consistently under-performed***, and Ireland's current position in the official IOC Medal rankings is unsatisfactory.

It is clear that whichever comparator is taken the following holds true:

1. Ireland is currently not in the top 50 medal countries participating in the Olympic Games.
2. The strength in depth analysis would suggest that unless swift, decisive action is taken, there will be a similar tale from Athens in 2004.
3. There are only a few sports that have provided a medal return at an Olympic Games – four over 40 years – athletics, swimming, sailing, and boxing.
4. The winning of a medal for Ireland at an Olympic Games is a very special achievement, and should be recognised as such. Only nine athletes have done so in the past 40 years.

Ireland's Performance in the Sydney 2000 Games

It is important to look at the performances of the individuals and teams at Sydney to determine more closely whether the team performed to the best of their ability or whether 'underperformance' occurred. In this analysis we have utilised information supplied to us by the Olympic Council of Ireland, and the National Coaching and Training Centre.

There has been considerable debate regarding the lack of Irish medals at the Games. It is important to analyse the performance of the team. Whilst some athletes performed below expectations, it is true to say that some athletes achieved peak performance at the Games, and many athletes achieved personal best performances. The equestrian team exceeded expectation, placing 5th in the 3-day eventing. New Irish records were set by the men's 4x100m and women's 4x400m relay teams, and Sonia O'Sullivan set a new Irish 10,000m record.

The Importance of Success

Despite some poor performances, the Olympic Games every four years captures the imagination of the Irish public, demonstrated hugely by the column inches given over to the

performance of the team and the personalities involved since the team returned home from Sydney on October 3rd/4th.

Whilst the three major sports of GAA, Soccer, and Rugby continue to attract many talented athletes at an early age, there is little sign of the interest dissipating amongst the public in the traditionally successful Irish Olympic Sports of Boxing, Swimming and Athletics. Expectation of medal success remains great despite the overwhelming evidence that securing a medal at an Olympics is extremely difficult.

In view of the national impact that the Olympic Games has, all parties are united in their belief that significant investment in the success of future Irish teams is now essential if the national expectation is to be fulfilled in 2004, but more realistically, in 2008 and beyond.

7. BEST PRACTICE - DETERMINING THE KEY INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESS

“The Sydney Games have been one of Britain’s most successful Olympics. This is an outstanding achievement and a fitting tribute to the hard work and dedication of the athletes and all those who have worked so hard behind the scenes.”

Prime Minister – Tony Blair, MP

Our brief asked us to examine best practice from overseas, and critically from a country that improved significantly between Atlanta and Sydney. This section analyses some of the key management issues and systems of Ireland’s competitors and draws out key lessons to be learnt from the best in the world. This includes, crucially, an analysis of Team GB whose ranking was 36th place in Atlanta, and 10th in Sydney.

In looking forward to the 2004 Athens Games it is critical that Ireland benchmarks against the best in the world to ensure that it aspires to the Irish Sports Council’s laudable aim of sending the best prepared Irish team to future Games. This review has therefore analysed the systems of support and technical organisation of the team, including the selection and accreditation issues raised by the Minister. It is only by understanding the various International systems that exist, can Ireland become more competitive.

Whilst information on some countries has been limited, and again is worthy of further analysis, it has been useful to look at some of the factors impacting upon the British, German and Spanish performances. These countries employ differing systems yet are held up as examples of strong performance planning; healthy supportive relationships between the relevant National Olympic Committee (NOC), National Sports Bodies and Government organisations – their respective Sports Councils; positive funding policies; and a unity of purpose.

International Focus - Great Britain

What was behind the transformation of “Team Great Britain” from 36th place in Atlanta with one gold medal to 10th in the 2000 Sydney Games with eleven golds? What are the lessons from which Ireland can learn?

Many athletes referred to the difference Lottery money has made to their ability to prepare for those Games, prompting the inference that money can buy medals. However, there is a lot more to it than that. The money has to be used to buy the right things.

Firstly, the World-Class Performance programme, launched by the GB Sports Council in 1996, set the planning framework for the build-up to the 2000 Games. It asked the National Governing Bodies of sport to:

- Establish clearly where their sports were positioned in the world rankings
- Explain which nations were leading in terms of high performance, and why
- Predict their ability to win medals in future major championships, such as the Olympic Games
- Explain how they planned to achieve those medal-winning performances
- Identify the athletes, now and in the future, with the ability to win medals in major championships
- Recruit someone as overall performance director, to take full responsibility for the selection, preparation and performance of the national teams.

Investment – on a scale never possible before the National Lottery – followed the planning stages, and was distributed to a mixture of homegrown talent and foreign coaches (as performance directors). Grants were then paid directly to the athletes nominated by their sports' governing bodies, according to criteria laid down by the Home Country Sports Councils.

Finally, the British Olympic Association set up what has been acknowledged as their best ever Holding Camp on Queensland's Gold Coast. Crucially it allowed both governing bodies and the BOA to fine tune arrangements for the Games. The results, and supportive positive comments, particularly in Cycling, Rowing and Modern Pentathlon, are testament to this.

In the Olympic village the BOA worked hard to secure arguably the best placed location, with many athletes bedrooms enjoying unobstructive views of the impressive facilities in Sydney

Olympic Park. The transportation mall and the main Dining Room were located conveniently close to the Team GB HQ and accommodation.

In terms of the Hospitality Lodge, whilst other countries focus this area of their work on their sponsors and guests, the BOA continues to invest in a facility exclusively for the team, their family, and friends.

In order to achieve further success, the English Institute of Sport, on similar lines as the Australian Institute of Sport at Canberra, was established. But instead of just one centre, athletes and coaches helped design a network of locally available services and facilities.

The concept of an UK Sports Institute emerged, comprising a UKSI Central Services team and a network of facilities and services via Institutes in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Eventually, the network will support around 4,000 athletes in world-class programmes. These comprise: Start, the identification of young people; Potential, supporting these young people to develop their skills; and Performance, when they compete in senior competition.

A total of £120 million from the Sport England Lottery Fund has been earmarked to develop over 80 new facilities up to 2002. For world-class athletes there will be free access to some services – paid for by the Sport England Lottery Fund, for which a budget of £7.5 million per annum will be available. Steve Cram has been appointed Chair of the English Institute of Sport Board, helping to provide strategic management and long-term planning for the English Institute of Sport.

International Focus – Germany

Although German sporting success has been well documented, they are also acknowledged as one of the best prepared NOCs at an Olympic Village, hence the importance of their inclusion in this analysis. The Atlanta Olympics proved particularly successful for the Germans where they accrued 65 Medals.

The NOC, in co-operation with the Olympic Sports Federations prepares and sends the German Team to the Olympic Games. The NOC uses the advice and assistance of the Department of Elite Sport of the German Sports Confederations, a Department, which also acts as technical advisor to the NOC.

It is the Federal Government that promotes high performance sport in Germany. The Federal Government's contribution amounts to approximately £80 million per year. Much of this is distributed directly to sports organisations with support also going to facilities, major events, and international issues.

The Federal Government is a partner in the maintenance of the 20 Olympic Centres. The financial maintenance and service provision is through the Federal and Local Government. If sports are successful in international competition, Government support is increased accordingly. It is a relatively simple measure of medal success.

International Focus – Spain

Spain's success in the Barcelona Games was exceptional. As such we have incorporated some of the key issues impacting on their Olympic preparation leading up to the 1992 Games.

Their Olympic Sports preparation programme is a close partnership between the Sports Council, the Spanish Olympic Committee and Radio Television Espanola. As a result of this imaginative partnership, and the guaranteed television coverage, the commercial sector invested £68.5 m (sterling) between 1988 and 1992 to the Olympic programme.

Planning for the Olympic programme between the Sports Council, the Sports Federations and their NOC is extensive. A very tight strategy is agreed between the Sports Council with the Federations focussing on medal success.

Constant evaluation of the athlete's progress is an important part of the programme with personal evaluation being carried out every three months. In terms of support services,

medical tests are carried out regularly to monitor the development and health of athletes. Where possible field tests are preferred to ensure more realistic results.

One of the most important parts of their Olympic programme is work undertaken in the final four weeks before the Olympic Games themselves, to create the right kind of atmosphere so that athletes compete in the right frame of mind. Issues deliberated on include:

- When to move into the Village
- Which personal coaches should be accommodated in the Village
- Where to accommodate endurance or team sports to ensure athletes become familiar with their surroundings
- Which support services are required by each sport
- How to turn negative factors into positive ones through an analysis of potential stress inducing situations
- Where to locate personal coaches during competition

Spain identified 28 potential medallists and the information gained in the period up to the Games was used to turn this potential into medal winners. Of the 22 medals won by the Spanish Team at Barcelona, only one was not predicted. However the winning of medals was not perceived to be the crucial factor, rather overall performance. In all circa 50% of Spanish athletes finished in the top eight of their event.

It is clear from this analysis that many countries have a significant head start over Ireland, with quadrennial planning focussing on individual progression, communication, and advancement through an Institute/Academy structure standing out as the key differences. In addition a concerted effort into talent identification and development is also beginning to have positive impacts in those countries. In short they have all adopted an athlete focussed, coach led programme to develop talent to its full Olympic potential.

As a first step in redressing this imbalance we have summarised this International audit into a number of emerging themes which the Steering Group consider to be major structural changes required now within the field of performance sport and Olympic preparation in this country. Grouped together they provide the relevant stakeholders with a template, which, if acted upon, will provide a robust strategic framework within which they can move forward with unity of purpose. Grouped together, they have been used in the following sections as the template against which Irelands current position can be properly evaluated.

The Emerging Themes: Strategic Issues

Emerging Theme	Description
Investment	The importance of continually generating funds to invest in individuals throughout each stage of their development pathway
Cyclical Planning	The importance of detailed long term planning and goal setting, targeted on performance improvement at Olympic Games
Academy Structures	Dedicated structure of Institute services and facilities which are athlete led and coach driven
Sports Science	The increasing importance of sports science and technical innovation in player/athlete development
Sports Medicine	Appropriate access to the best medical support which is co-ordinated
Performance Directors/Coaches	A willingness to buy world class coaches, if required, to support home grown talent
Appropriate funding of Individuals	The importance of funding individuals for tailored programmes based on a strengths and weakness analysis of performers
Professional NOCs/NGBs	The professionalisation of NOCs and NGBs with appropriately qualified and dedicated staff.
Talent Development	Performance tracking systems that focus on

	investing in the right individuals
Appropriate Facilities	The need for high quality facilities to ensure year round training – indoor tracks
Transparent Selection Criteria	Clearly defined, negotiated, and agreed selection criteria for the Olympics between the OCI and each NGB
Quality Holding Camp	Professionally researched, resourced, staffed, and operated Holding Camp
Effective Village Management	Professional operation which has the athlete at the forefront of every decision making process
Accreditation	Utilising the accreditation system correctly to support the athlete at the Games
Continuity of Care	Ensuring the individual support mechanisms for performers are available for as long as possible

8. EVALUATION OF IRELAND'S CURRENT POSITION – PERFORMANCE SYSTEMS

“The development and achievement of performers is largely determined by the quality and relevance of the coaching, competition, officiating, and administration that surround them, and, critically the condition of the environment in which they participate.”

Geoff Cooke – Formerly Chief Executive, National Coaching Foundation (UK)

It is critical that a comprehensive evaluation takes place from the information gleaned in sections 6 and 7 and from the primary research from the Team Managers and Athletes. In this way the Minister and the Irish Sports Council can pinpoint the development changes that are now required to take Irish elite sport forward in producing World-Class individuals. The following two sections provide that evaluation, with particular regard to those emerging themes referred to at the end of section 7.

Overview of issues relating to the Olympic Games

The following is an overview of the key issues, which the Steering Group believes have impacted adversely on Ireland's performance at the Sydney Olympic Games. They are in many cases not confined to the last Olympiad, and have to some degree been endemic in the performance planning of Irish athletes and Olympic teams for some considerable time.

Quadrennial planning

There was limited effective quadrennial planning by the Olympic Council of Ireland, Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation, Irish Sports Council or the National Coaching and Training Centre. Whilst the NCTC worked with many of the squads, the OCI programmed Team Managers meetings, and the ISC put in place a funding programme for Olympic performers, there was no focussed Olympic preparation programme involving all parties. For example the National Governing Bodies are only now beginning to put together their strategic direction, which outlines their high performance objectives and plans.

Absence of teamwork

There has been little evidence of real teamwork throughout the system and in particular between the Olympic Council of Ireland and other agencies. Whilst the period under review started well with the OCI on the Board of the NCTC and also on the Advisory Board of the ISC until 1999, this situation has deteriorated significantly. The OCI have not chosen to work effectively with the NCTC, nor did they take up the invitation to sit on the High Performance Committee Advisory Committee, in existence from 1997 - 1999. Moreover there is no representation by some key sports on the Executive of the OCI. As such there has been little attempt to build team spirit and cohesion over the four-year cycle.

Expectations

The overall expectations in relation to the performances of the team by the public and media were too high, given the profile of the team and limited support programmes that were put in place. It would appear that no attempt was made to manage public and athlete expectation.

Structural change – Role of the Irish Sports Council

The Irish sports system went through considerable change following the publication of *Targeting Sporting Change* in 1997. The appointment of a Cabinet Minister with responsibility for sport, the creation of the Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation and the establishment of the Irish Sports Council were significant advancements. Overall Government investment in sport, both current and capital increased from £13.5 million in 1997 to an all time high of £50 million in 2000. However, the increase in funding was mainly on capital investment and, not critically, on current funding that was necessary to support the NGBs' high performance programmes. Since 1997 greater emphasis was placed on strengthening the National Governing Bodies of Sport in the areas of administration, strategic planning, international training and competition programmes and coach education. The International Carding Scheme for players and athletes was introduced in 1998.

International Carding scheme

The International Carding Scheme, while successful to a degree, and certainly generous for a core group of athletes, failed to address the issue of support for NGB squads and developmental structures. Nor have the issues of broadening the base/talent identification been addressed in any concerted way. The Review Steering Group has determined the following strengths and weaknesses of the current system, and holds the view that the Irish Sports Council reviews the Carding scheme as a matter of priority.

Strengths

- Qualification for funding/support is based on athletes achieving objective sports specific criteria
- Levels of funding compare very favourably with international comparators
- Scheme provides a structured pathway of support for athletes from junior and developmental through to international and world class
- Scheme provides access, free of charge, to a sports science and medical network
- Athletes have assurance of at least two year funding once they qualify for the Scheme
- Athletes at international and world class level can split their funding between 'out of pocket' and general living expenses

Weaknesses

- The criteria may be too broad in some cases leading to athletes qualifying for the Scheme who will not perform at the required standard for international competition. There is a view that the Scheme should cater for a smaller number of elite athletes.
- Qualification for the scheme based on performance criteria alone does not allow for exceptional circumstances and other factors to be considered
- Scheme does not concentrate on future targets of athletes in terms of top level competition
- No provision in the Scheme for objective assessment of performances and future potential

- Athletes do not make full use of the sports science and medical services and in some cases may not be fully aware of the support services
- Administration of the Scheme involves heavy workload for NGBs, NCTC and the ISC

A full list of the carded athletes who attended the Sydney Olympic Games and their funding over the past four years can be seen in Appendix 4

Specific resource issues

A criticism in the 4-year cycle has revolved around the perceived reduction in the levels of funding to the OCI, to Olympic Sports and to the key support mechanisms such as those supplied by the NCTC. The OCI has also criticised the Irish Sports Council as the conduit for grant aid to sports, and would point to this as a key factor in the performance of the Irish Team in 2000 in comparison with the previous three Olympiads. However, the Steering Groups analysis of the actual financial position provided by the Department and the Irish Sports Council during the period 1997 - 2000 reveals that funding for sport has increased substantially since 1997. Appendix 5 provides details of the funding of Olympic NGBs in that period. Specifically:

- Over the four-year cycle, a total of £17.5 million was allocated to all National Governing Bodies of sport.
- Olympic sports received a total of £10.7 million during this period
- Athletes received over £3.6 million in direct grants under the Carding Scheme
- Athletes also had free access, under the Carding Scheme, to sports science and medical support through the National Coaching and Training Centre in Limerick
- Open and transparent criteria are applied to the allocation of Sports Council funding to National Governing Bodies of Sport and athletes

Whilst funding has increased, there is a need (as evidenced by the NGBs in their meetings with the Minister) to invest in the NGB coaching and High Performance structures. A criticism of the ISC within the Sydney Olympic cycle is that funding was awarded to athletes, but not to the coaches which were needed to support the performances of the athletes.

The ISC should be the lead agency in reviewing all aspects of the workings of Governing Bodies, with support from the OCI and the NCTC. This should lead to enhanced targeted funding for sports, with those capable of producing medals being rewarded accordingly. This has been acknowledged in “A New Era for Sport” with regard to delivering world class success.

The whole area of funding Olympic sports needs to be reviewed in the light of the Sydney experience. The ISC and the OCI should not operate separate funding programmes or schemes. Whilst the ISC have clear funding criteria, we were not made aware of those deployed by the OCI. The Carding System (established by the ISC with clear input from the NCTC and NGBs) needs to be revisited and requires input from the OCI, the ISC, and the NCTC in its structuring, athlete classification and distribution process.

The Role of the NCTC

Whilst there was evidence of some quality work, and the commitment of the leadership could not be faulted, there is a requirement for the NCTC to refocus on its key role. Presently it appears to have too wide a brief for the resources and expertise available. Consequently the sport science support programme failed to provide in a holistic manner the sport specificity and networked field-testing. It is understood that the ISC is shortly to publish a revised terms of reference for the NCTC and the Steering Group welcome this.

Moreover there was no evidence of any collaboration between the OCI and the NCTC. This should have happened despite the OCI's reservations regarding the expertise available. The OCI did not use the resources and expertise of the NCTC in producing the athletes' 'Acclimatisation Guidelines', choosing to use its own internally produced strategy. Whilst not questioning the quality of the advice given, it illustrates the lack of co-operation between the two bodies and any such duplication of effort is a waste of resources.

The Steering Group found the OCI to be highly critical of the NCTC in all aspects of service delivery. Its' geographical location and absence of any effective network to provide athletes

with local access to key services has been criticised by athletes. The ISC and the OCI both now believe the time is right for the NCTC to be reviewed and the Steering Group support this view.

Role of the OCI

The sovereign right of the OCI in the context of all matters relating to the Olympic Games is clearly stated in the Olympic Charter. "The mission statement of the NOCs is to develop and protect the Olympic Movement in their respective countries, in accordance with the Olympic Charter." The Charter further states that "The NOCs have the exclusive powers for the representation of their countries at the Olympic Games."

Despite this, the OCI appear to have a concern about its role being taken over by outside agencies, which the Steering Group has determined is not the case. This view has been confirmed by both the Department and the Irish Sports Council and can be demonstrated by the public statement by Mr. Pat O'Neill, Chairman of the Irish Sports Council, of 25th January 2001, which stated "In the course of a recent interview with Pat Kenny on RTE, the President of the OCI Mr. Pat Hickey stated that it is the intention of the Irish Sports Council to subsume the OCI into our structure. The Act under which the Irish Sports Council was established disallows any such development. In legal terms it simply cannot happen. The Act was fully debated in both Houses of the Oireachtas and no member of the Dail or Seanad referred in any way to the possibility of combining the OCI with the Irish Sports Council or of the Irish Sports Council subsuming the OCI."

The Olympic Charter further states that "The NOCs must work to maintain harmonious and co-operative relations with appropriate governmental bodies". Clearly this has not been fulfilled. The amount of negative exposure in the media, during and since the Games, has not helped the cause of the Olympic Movement in Ireland in the eyes of the athletes, general public, and probably potential sponsors.

NGB involvement in the OCI

There would appear to be issues regarding the representational structures of the OCI. It seems that some of the larger NGBs are not involved in any significant way in policy decisions which effect them at Olympic level. There is a view amongst some NGBs that they are disenfranchised from the decision making process and executive of the OCI, primarily as a direct consequence of what they feel to be the confusing voting structure of the OCI.

It is not surprising therefore that questions have been raised by the NGBs concerning the voting nature and composition of the Executive of the OCI. In light of all the public criticism, there is an urgent need for the OCI to undertake a fundamental review of its constitution in order for all agencies to have confidence in a democratic and transparently fair system.

That review needs to consider the process of election of candidates to the Executive of the OCI to ensure that this key body has members that are more representative of those sports that represent Ireland at the Olympic Games. In this way the Executive would have more of an awareness of the issues which underpin Olympic athletes. This view has been put forward in discussion by some NGBs.

Review/de-briefing process

Following each Olympic Games there needs to be a robust debrief with each sport and support service, led by the OCI with input from the ISC and NCTC. Only then can the lessons learnt from the current cycle be fed into the planning framework for the next Games. It is clear that the vast majority of Governing Bodies of Olympic sports do not have the sophistication of administration infrastructure or technical know-how to provide world class athletes with the services they need.

Lack of coaching and performance management

Despite the best efforts of the NCTC and NGBs, the production of home-grown world class coaches is some way off. It follows that the importation of foreign coaches to work in selected Olympic sports is the way ahead for Athens, though 2008 is a more realistic time-frame to see any significant change in the performance of the Irish Team.

9. THE MANAGEMENT OF THE TEAM

“When you go to the Games you must create a climate for achievement. Eliminate as many problems as possible before you arrive in the Olympic Village. This will leave you free to deal with the crises. The Olympics are all about crisis management. Leave your athletes free of problems so they can concentrate on the fight to win. Make sure all the athletes have to do is get on the bus, turn up, and compete.”

Frank Dick, Olympic Head Coach GB Athletics – Barcelona Olympics 1992

Selection procedures

The OCI is the only body that is authorised by the IOC to deliver the Olympic Charter in Ireland. This includes the selection of the team to represent Ireland at the Olympic Games. However, there would appear to be evidence of problems in relation to the way the OCI carried out its operational procedures effectively with regard to selection issues.

In terms of considered best practice, the selection process should be based on setting Olympic Qualifying Standards with each sport based upon the published IOC - International Federations Olympic Qualifying Standard. Once negotiated and agreed with each sport as early as possible in the Olympic cycle, an agreement should be signed by both the sport and the OCI, with specific deadlines to be adhered to by both parties. This OCI responsibility extends to include approval of the selection process of the individual sports.

This did not happen with the sport of Athletics, which numbered 36 of the 68 strong total Irish Team. Prior to the Sydney Games Athletics Ireland was not affiliated to the OCI, and there was no agreement with the two parties on the selection procedures. This impacted upon the final selection of the team, leading to confusion of the women’s 5,000 metres selection, and a relay team. This situation could have been avoided by having addressed the issues before departing for the Games, and agreeing on an athlete focused mission statement, with a requirement to meet deadlines as negotiated.

Negotiations on the Olympic Qualifying Standard with the sport of Swimming appear to have produced a situation where the swimmers nominated by the governing body failed to meet the endorsement of the OCI. Flexibility had been rightly shown by the OCI in the light of Irish swimmers not having achieved FINA's Olympic Qualifying Standards. But the Steering Group were confused by contradictory statements as to how the OCI arrived at their decision not to accept the priority order for the swimmers named by the governing body. Whilst the fair decision may have been made in this instance, the Steering Group questions the technical knowledge of the OCI in making such sports specific judgements.

The Sydney Village Accreditation Process

In order for the Irish Team to participate in the Olympic Games, the OCI must accurately register Team Members through an integrated 'Accreditation and Entries for Sport Competition' process.

Rule 42 of the Olympic Charter and the IOC's 'Accreditation and Entries at the Olympic Games User's Guide' clearly defines the formula that determines the number of officials allocated to each NOC. The formula takes into account the diversity of the composition of the athletes entered by the OCI on 25th August 2000 (in the case of Sydney).

It should be noted that another NOC entering precisely the same number of athletes is highly likely to attract a different number of supporting officials as a result of having a different athlete composition. Caution must therefore be urged in dealing with accreditation issues. Every NOC received a mixture of 'Ao', 'As', and 'Am' category accreditations for Officials. These need to be allocated taking into account the culture and needs of each sport within the restrictions of the numbers allocated.

However, the OCI stated to the Steering Group that no sport had any application for Games accreditation of support personnel turned down. This appears to be at odds with some of the athletes' comments in their questionnaire returns and surprising in the light of the Consultants experience that there is always a greater demand for accreditations than Rule

42 of the Olympic Charter provides. It was felt that the accreditations could have been used in a more beneficial way by the OCI to support the athletes.

The Newcastle Holding Camp

The Holding Camp in Newcastle was funded entirely by the ISC and generally was perceived to be a success by NGBs and athletes.

However there was little co-operation between the OCI and the NCTC in ensuring continuity of care and support for athletes into the pre-Games camps and the Games themselves.

Whilst the Holding Camp was well received by the majority of the Irish Team members, the Steering Group however question the OCI's decision not to invite support personnel above those who were accredited for the Games. It is the view and experience of the Steering Group that the presence of a suitably qualified and experienced exercise physiologist, nutritionist and psychologist, would have been an asset, both in dealing with some of the issues encountered and adding to the services on offer to the athletes. The value of giving an Olympic insight and recognition to these sciences should not be overlooked, in terms of developing a more informed next generation of sports scientists.

With regard to personal coaches, they should have been allowed to work with their athletes in the Holding Camp, as this relationship is critical in the final phase of the pre Games training cycle.

Village Operations – Management

There is a need for a highly professional approach to the structure and running of the support systems a team needs in an Olympic Village. This does not appear to have been the case with the Irish Team where the athletes' questionnaire returns clearly showed that the OCI lacked leadership and management. Problems were encountered with the OCI appointed HQ Team, which were not resolved. These would have had a negative impact on the performance and morale of the Irish Team.

Clarification of Key Roles

There appeared to have been no terms of reference as to each person's precise function in the Olympic Village, nor evidence of any training programme of preparation. Perhaps the key issue was when the bad publicity began to appear in the Irish press during the Games themselves. There was no provision for providing Irish newspapers in the Village, and it was therefore left up to the athletes to glean, through phonecalls home, what was being said in the press about the performance of the Irish Team.

Structured access to the papers would have ensured that the factual picture was known, with the athletes being formally counselled on how to deal with the consequent negative impact on individual athlete's confidence and team morale. The fact that few, if any, Team Manager meetings took place would have exacerbated the situation considerably and account for the numerous negative comments by the athletes in the submitted questionnaires.

The question of how well the athletes were prepared for press and media interviews subsequently became more acute. The whole area of athlete support in terms of media training is part of a much wider strategy and it would be unfair to lay this at the door of the Village HQ Team. What happened in the Training Camp and Village settings merely exposed a fundamental weakness in preparing athletes for the Olympic Games environment and appropriate lifestyle needs. Evidence was given by the OCI of athletes dramatically raising levels of expectations for success at the Holding and Training Camps.

The ineffectiveness of the systems of communication between the key parties is endemic to all aspects of this Report. The Village Operations is no exception. The confusion over transport issues would have been prevented had clear instructions been put in place and the allocation system been made more transparent. A similar situation arose with the allocation of Village Day Passes. Whilst an increase in the number of passes was negotiated, it was inevitable that demand would exceed supply. Again this could have been addressed at a Team Managers Meeting.

Clothing/Kit

The pride an athlete feels in wearing the Team uniform and competition clothing is an essential part of the Olympic experience. The OCI's role in this is to ensure that, in the period between Games, it liaises closely with NGBs to ensure that the fabrics and fit are the best possible to enhance performance, and significantly that each sport is provided with the required level and quality of clothing.

The fact that athletes experienced serious problems with regard to the quality and size of their garments did not help. This was a source of discontent in the athlete and Team Managers questionnaire returns and focussed on both the Parade and Sports Specific clothing.

Accommodation/Housing

With regard to the allotment of Housing/Accommodation for the athletes, misjudgements appear to have been made by the OCI. In Sydney the organising committee (SOCOG) were responsible for allocating accommodation to each NOC. It is good practice to allocate accommodation by taking into account factors such as time of competition, so that those teams/individuals competing later in the day are further away from those competing at the beginning of the Games, gender split, athlete/coach split and so on.

The Irish team was separated by gender, and there was evidence of a clash of programming between Cyclists and Swimmers who had totally different competition schedules.

Hospitality Suite

The Irish Hospitality Suite, located at Bondi Junction, appeared to have lost its focus. From being a facility for the athletes and support staff to meet their friends and family, it apparently became more of a focal point for tourists. Whilst much of this does not appear to be the fault of the OCI, they must take responsibility as it is part of their facility provision at the Games. It should have retained its influence over the Organising Group which ran the Hospitality

programme and catered for the Irish Team members in a more exclusive style, rather than only giving them access to the general public area. There was widespread dismissal of this facility by the Team Managers and the Athletes.

Athlete Communication

Ireland has an excellent record in having top athletes base themselves abroad, especially in the United States. Twenty-five percent of the current Irish Team trains abroad. It is likely that this direction will remain for some years. The Sydney experience clearly showed loopholes in the contact and communication system with some athletes based abroad. A structure needs to be put in place, which meets these athletes' specific needs and ensures that they are, and feel part of, the Irish Team, with a communication system providing clear levels of expectations.

10. WORLD CLASS DIFFERENCE, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

“If we do what we did for the last Games we will be nowhere. If we follow the best practice Internationally, we may be just competitive. But if we fill each day with initiative, we will win medals.”

Rob de Castella – Former Director of the Australian Institute of Sport

This section brings together the opposition audit and evaluation of Ireland’s current position to conclude what ‘world class difference’ is now required within the preparation of Ireland’s elite performers.

The information gathered in the previous sections has been fully analysed by Leisure Partners to identify the underlying changes the Steering Group believe will be required to make a World Class Difference to Ireland’s participation in the Olympic Games over the next two Olympiads – 2004 and 2008.

All parties will appreciate that executing cultural change demands considerable planning, careful management, and not least in this context, extensive negotiation and co-operation between the differing parties with clear clarification of roles and responsibilities set out for future working relationships.

Accordingly the content of this section demonstrates the proposed approach towards making Ireland’s Olympic preparation World Class. The conclusions of our deliberations have been identified altogether and are outlined in the following paragraphs.

While some are by necessity structural, and some attitudinal, they are all driven by what is required to produce and support World-Class athletes. In their entirety they form the heart of our conclusions and demonstrate that the Irish Sports Council, The Olympic Council of Ireland, the National Governing Bodies, and the National Coaching and Training Centre must embrace the cultural shift that implementing the Plan will require.

Strategic Direction

Immediate attention should be given by the ISC to the establishment of the High Performance Committee in the light of the issues identified in this Sydney Review Report, with the ISC taking on the lead role in this field with support from the OCI and NCTC.

Following publication of this Steering Group Report, an ISC convened meeting should take place with the key agencies to agree on their respective roles and terms of reference, leading to the adoption of a vision for the future of Irish Olympic sports.

As a matter of urgency the key parties agree to publish a Quadrennial Plan for the Athens 2004 Olympic Games; with agreed roles and modus operandi for implementation against a specified time-frame.

The Athens 2004 Plan to have an agreed mission statement, based on an Athlete centred philosophy, with the ISC, OCI, NCTC and Olympic National Governing Bodies establishing a framework of communication and co-operation.

A 'road map' to Athens is rolled out, detailing all key events and services delivered by the key agencies to athletes and Governing Bodies as part of a new communications structure, with revised updates on a quarterly basis.

The OCI links with the ISC in a media campaign, which continues through the Olympic cycle, aimed at setting realistic levels of expectations for the Irish Team's success in Athens and beyond.

The ISC should review their funding of Olympic sports, support services and athletes, to ensure that appropriate levels of targeted funding and resources are allocated against one set of criteria. The Steering Group considers that the ISC is the appropriate lead body in this area to co-ordinate resources.

The Steering Group strongly supports the view by some NGBs that it is vital for the OCI to undertake a review of its role, constitution and administrative structures in order for all agencies to have confidence in a democratic and transparently fair system. The review should also consider the voting rights and election process for the Executive Board.

The Steering Group recognises that the OCI requires an increase in its professional structure in order to meet the level of quality service identified throughout this Report. Whilst one respects the sovereignty of the OCI in all matters relating to the Olympic Charter, the OCI must accept the need for full accountability for any funding provided by the ISC. It is obvious to the Steering Group that without a significant increase in resource, the OCI will be unable to fulfil its primary role to Olympic sports. It ought to be possible for the OCI to make a contribution to this from existing financial resources and may lever ISC support if partnership commitment were to be given by the OCI.

Selection, Preparation and Support Systems

Olympic Qualifying Standards (OQS) should be negotiated by the OCI with each sport as early as possible in the Olympic cycle, with the agreed OQS being published and communicated to all athletes. An agreement should be formally signed with the Governing Body, giving precise IOC and ATHOG (Athens Olympic Games) deadlines, which are included in the Athens road map. All Olympic NGBs are to be required to adhere to these deadlines without exception.

It is recommended that the OCI, with support and input from the ISC and the NCTC, produce quarterly athlete and Governing Body newsletters, which would communicate key information, deadlines and key events, and explores the opportunity to develop a web site for the OCI to assist in the communication strategy.

The role, responsibilities and terms of reference of the NCTC are presently being reviewed by the ISC. The Steering Group considered that this was clearly needed, as there was evidence of the NCTC covering too many areas of work, given the resources at their disposal.

It was considered that the whole area of training facilities and networked sport science and medicine support services provision needed separate consideration. No doubt this will be central to the High Performance Committee and the future development of Campus Ireland, and United Kingdom Sports Institute project in Northern Ireland.

Whilst it was accepted that the Carding Scheme had been well received by the athletes in their preparations for Sydney, it was felt that a review was needed of its funding criteria and structure. Consideration should be given to funding developing athletes targeted at beyond 2004, with also perhaps a more flexible and imaginative approach to the services and resources accessed.

Ownership of the Carding Scheme should lie with the ISC, but the support of the OCI and NGBs in all issues relating to athlete nomination and monitoring is vital.

Co-ordinated efforts need to be made in the provision of sports medicine and sports science support on a networked basis. The availability of a fast-track medical service at identified specialist centres of excellence is a critical back-up resource, especially during the final phase of training.

The range of services available needs to be widened to ensure that as far as possible local access is available to all leading Irish athletes, delivered by qualified practitioners with the appropriate skills, understanding of the needs of elite athletes and sport specific knowledge. Work is needed in increasing the number of appropriate personnel to deliver the quality services needed.

The environmental and climatic considerations for Athens require urgent consideration. It is recommended that the OCI, ISC and NCTC consider the establishment of a Medical/Sports Science working group to implement appropriate research with a view to putting in place athlete acclimatisation for Athens. This body, in collaboration with the universities and centres of higher education could consider selected longer-term research projects.

The feasibility of a site for any pre Athens Training Camp requires urgent attention. It is recommended that a small, appropriately qualified and experienced group led by the OCI but with support from the ISC and NCTC needs to undertake a 'recce' to Athens to evaluate possible locations. The views of medal potential sports should be fed into the decision-making process.

The Steering Group recommends that a policy should be put firmly in place which allows sports to nominate additional support staff, personal coaches and sparring partners, to attend the pre Games Camp. These support personnel would be able to deliver their services at the Training Camp only. Clear levels of expectations would need to be put in place in this regard, with perhaps partnership commitment from the ISC in a bid to co-ordinate resources.

Whilst some progress has been made in the delivery of services to athletes, it was felt that acceleration was needed in delivering a whole range of services directly to athletes by the key parties, and would include media workshops, career advice, and lifestyle related topics. To this end, the establishment of an Athletes` Commission by the OCI was acknowledged as a positive step forward, as is the representative on the OCI Executive of an athlete with full voting rights.

Management and Performance

The programme of preparation for Team Managers needs to be more professionally structured and focussed on training elements, which are critical to their roles. It is considered that the time restraints arising from holding evening meetings is inappropriate and consideration is given to running perhaps two residential weekends per year. It is also recommended that the programme include NGB nominated coaches at some sessions, in order to ensure that the benefits are extended to this group. They can therefore contribute to key discussions, and the concept of "team management" preparation is moved towards.

It was the view of the Steering Group that the appointment of the Irish Team Headquarters staff should be based on the roles and functions to be undertaken, which should include consideration of persons outside the OCI Executive Board. The job descriptions, function and

responsibilities of all HQ positions should be clearly put in place and made known to all team members. A professional programme of training and preparation needs to be in place to prepare the HQ for the services and roles they occupy. All posts should be appointed as early as possible in the Olympic cycle.

It was considered that the allocation of accreditations by the IOC must be as transparent as possible. Maximum use should be made of the accreditations distributed to ensure that as far as possible, the needs of the athlete are met. This also goes for the use of Village Day Passes. They can be used to ensure that contact is facilitated with appropriate support personnel, as long as the operational procedure for allocation is fair and accepted by the Team Managers.

In the experience of the Steering Group, the holding of Team Manager meetings in the Village is vital in addressing current issues and enhancing formal communication links.

It is of fundamental importance to team morale and the athlete's self-esteem to ensure that the team uniform fits and the team clothing is both smart and comfortable to wear. The Steering Group considers that all matters relating to the team clothing should be done professionally, and the choice of the kit to include the opinion of the athletes.

The Steering Group recognised the difficulties arising from having Irish Team members based abroad. It follows that what is needed are clear lines of communication in place networked to service access. The athletes involved should receive copies of all athlete information newsletters and be required to participate in appropriate preparation events when requested.

All matters relating to the Hospitality Suite strategy need to be reviewed by the OCI, with a view of ensuring that it fulfils its essential role in Athens. This review should take on board the need to provide a meeting place for the athletes with their families, with restricted access where appropriate.

Further Conclusions

The strategy underpinning the production of world class coaches, their development and education needs to be addressed. The Steering Group recognises that the short-term solution is perhaps the employment of foreign coaches in targeted sports, which have both medal potential and the professional administrative structure to provide the support needed.

Talent Identification and Development programmes are crucial for the success of future Irish Olympic teams. The Steering Group recommends that these strategies need to be addressed as soon as possible and linked into appropriate areas covered earlier in this Report.

Consideration should be given to organising an annual multi-sport Olympic Training Camp, organised by the OCI with support from the ISC and NCTC, to prepare developing athletes for the Olympic Village, as well as enabling support staff gather the experience as part of their professional development programme.

The Steering Group recognises the enormous potential of the ISC working with the OCI and NCTC in a co-ordinated programme which would be of excellent value to non Olympic sports as well Olympic. Topics such as Drugs Education and Fairplay are generic to sports.

It is the opinion of the Steering Group that the body best placed to oversee the delivery of the strategies and outcomes from this Report against an agreed time-frame is the ISC, as the body charged with the responsibility for the development of sport. Following the publication of its Strategy document "A New Era for Sport 2000 – 2002", the Council proposed the setting up of a High Performance Committee. The Steering Group recommends that this committee should be appointed by the Council as a matter of urgency and should comprise a representative of all the key parties involved in High Performance Sport. This should include the Olympic Council of Ireland, the Paralympic Council of Ireland, the National Coaching and Training Centre, the National Governing Bodies, the athletes and technical support staff.

This Committee should be chaired by an independent chairperson and should convene as a matter of urgency to consider the findings of this report.