



SPÓRT ÉIREANN  
SPORT IRELAND

# Tokyo Games Review



# Tokyo Games Review

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# Foreword and introduction

The Tokyo Games Review is set against a very different backdrop. First and foremost being the fact that the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games took place in 2021, with the build up to the events mired by uncertainty and a continually shifting landscape. Notwithstanding these undoubted challenges, Team Ireland experienced a positive Games, which brought both pride and passion to the wider public, putting the exploits of Ireland's athletes firmly centre stage. Undoubtedly, Team Ireland's success at the Tokyo Games was a much needed distraction for the nation and gave people a necessary lift during a global pandemic.

High performance sport is built on a foundation of thorough preparation and meticulous routine. This is in direct conflict with the challenges the build-up to Tokyo presented. Travel restrictions made access to overseas competitions more difficult and even unfeasible, in certain scenarios. In addition, domestic restrictions and lock downs made training in Ireland difficult at times, further impeding preparations. Competing at a Games with no friends or family in attendance, coupled with COVID-19 protocols at the Games themselves, while important and necessary, also created added pressure and stress. This was not your average Games by any stretch of the imagination. Yet, our athletes and their support teams adapted and pivoted as necessary to make this one of Ireland's most successful Olympic Games to date, with a very strong showing at the Paralympic Games.

In performance terms, Tokyo was an outstanding Olympic Games for Ireland, with four medals – including two gold – being bolstered by 13 top eight finishes from the 116-strong Irish contingent, which was the largest team ever sent to an Olympic Games. The medal return was on par with the expectation set out in the High Performance Strategy and bodes well for both Paris 2024 and Los Angeles 2028. Boxing continued to be a shining light for Ireland's performances at an Olympic Games, while Ireland's rowers continued to establish themselves among the world's elite. On the Paralympic front, Ireland was just shy of the medal target set out in the High Performance Strategy with seven medals, albeit with a more condensed team of 29 athletes (which also included 27 top eight finishes). Medals in para athletics, para cycling, and para swimming continue Ireland's recent global success in these sports. Jason Smyth's performance in the 100m T13 needs a special mention, as Jason has now won that event at the last four Paralympic Games. For Paralympics Ireland, implementing the recommendations identified in the Tokyo Games Review will be key in order to achieve the Paralympic medal targets for both Paris 2024 and Los Angeles 2028.

On the whole, Team Ireland built on the success of recent Games, and notwithstanding the challenges created by the global pandemic, Tokyo was a clear demonstration that Ireland can, and does, compete at the very highest levels of international sport. Sport Ireland is committed to supporting this progression. Through the delivery of an increased investment programme, continuous development of the Sport Ireland Institute, allied with ongoing development of facilities on the world-class Sport Ireland Campus, Ireland is well placed to continue this trend into Paris 2024, Los Angeles 2028 and beyond.

As always, the post-Olympic and Paralympic Games review process is an essential component of the Irish high performance system. The implementation of the recommendations of the review process is now well established as a critical driver of Irish high performance programmes for individual sports and the system as a whole.

The Rio Review clearly demonstrated this. Despite a successful Games overall, the Rio Review set out a large number of recommendations, not only for the individual National Governing Bodies (NGBs), but for the wider high performance system. In some scenarios, these recommendations were tough and challenging, and required a new way of thinking.

Fast forward to the Tokyo Games, and on the back of the Rio Review the high performance landscape has changed considerably, epitomised by greater collaboration and cooperation between all stakeholders. This better, and more integrated, working relationship with both the Olympic Federation of Ireland and Paralympics Ireland was fundamental to Team Ireland performances at the Tokyo Games and is something that can form the cornerstone of Irish performances for Games to come.

For the Tokyo Games Review, two separate independent consultants were tasked with reviewing the Olympic (Portas Consulting) and Paralympic (Grey Matters) Games, culminating in robust and insightful reports for all the individual sports who competed at the Olympic and/or Paralympic Games. The entire process was overseen by an independent Project Lead (Leading Sport), ensuring consistency across all aspects of the review process. The primary areas of focus for the Tokyo Games Review centred around preparations for, and performances at, the Tokyo Olympic Games and the Tokyo Paralympic Games.

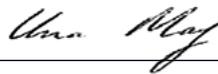
Demonstrating the commitment to an immersive review process, all NGBs who had athletes compete at the Olympic and/or Paralympic Games, were invited to be involved. Views, opinions and experiences from athletes, coaches, support staff, Performance Directors, Performance Leads, CEOs and Board Members were collated, along with those of other relevant stakeholders.

We want to thank everyone who contributed to the review process and making it a strong and valuable contribution to the development of Irish high performance sport.



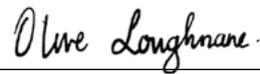
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**Kieran Mulvey**  
Sport Ireland Chair



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**Una May**  
Sport Ireland CEO



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High Performance Committee Chair

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# Executive summary

The Tokyo Games were like no other, impacted as they were by the global pandemic. For Team Ireland, the Tokyo Games were a far more positive experience than the Rio Games, and this was because the high performance landscape in Ireland has changed so much since then. There are a number of contributory factors; we now have the Sport Ireland High Performance Strategy, the Olympic Federation of Ireland is a transformed organisation, the Sport Ireland Campus is much more developed, Paralympics Ireland have done much to put their athletes in the public eye and create parity, there is a performance delivery partnership between the Sport Ireland Institute and the Olympic Federation of Ireland, and there is a greater depth of expertise within the high performance system. For the most part, we achieved our medal and performance targets in Tokyo and the athlete experience appears to be positive. We now have most of the pieces needed to create a world-class high performance system.

Our challenge over the next few Cycles, to Paris and Los Angeles, is to build on these pieces and bring them together to create a truly world-class system that is consistently winning medals and simultaneously delivering the best possible athlete experience. We must continue to build on the positive relationships that have been created over this past Cycle. We must work on talent identification, the talent pathway, and the support of more athletes further down the pathway to move into the higher ranks. We must support the development of coaches who can work with those athletes.

We can be truly competitive if we get all that right and given the positivity and experience around the system now, we believe we will get there.

# The Tokyo Games Review: Process overview

The Tokyo Games Review is primarily a Games Review, assessing the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games, with some observations on overall systems development and provides specific recommendations for future Olympic and Paralympic Cycles.

For this Review, Sport Ireland (High Performance Unit) worked in partnership with the Sport Ireland Institute, the Olympic Federation of Ireland, and Paralympics Ireland in conducting a review of Team Ireland's preparation for, and performance at, the Tokyo Games.

This review document outlines the preparation and performances of the associated National Governing Bodies (NGBs), as well as providing recommendations for NGBs and other key stakeholders, to be addressed in the Paris Cycle and beyond.

To ensure rigor throughout the process, Sport Ireland retained independent expertise to carry out work throughout the review. This independent expertise delivered three distinct elements, as follows:

- 1) Project Lead (delivered by Leading Sport)
- 2) Tokyo Olympic Games Review (delivered by Portas Consulting)
- 3) Tokyo Paralympic Games Review (delivered by Grey Matters)

The process included:

- Developing the framework, methodology and templates for the Tokyo Olympic Games Review and the Tokyo Paralympic Games Review to ensure continuity across all review components.
- Administering a post-Games survey and conducting one-to-one/group interviews with athletes, coaches, support staff, Performance Directors, Performance Leads, CEOs and Board Members, and other key stakeholders.
- Production of individual NGB reports.
- Compilation of a final overall review document.

The key objectives of this Review, as outlined at the beginning of the process, were:

- To review and assess Team Ireland's preparation for, and performance at, the Tokyo Games.
- To provide comparisons between Team Ireland's performances and those of comparative nations at the Tokyo Games.
- To provide individual NGB reports, which include key learnings and specific recommendations for future Olympic and Paralympic Cycles.
- To produce a final review.

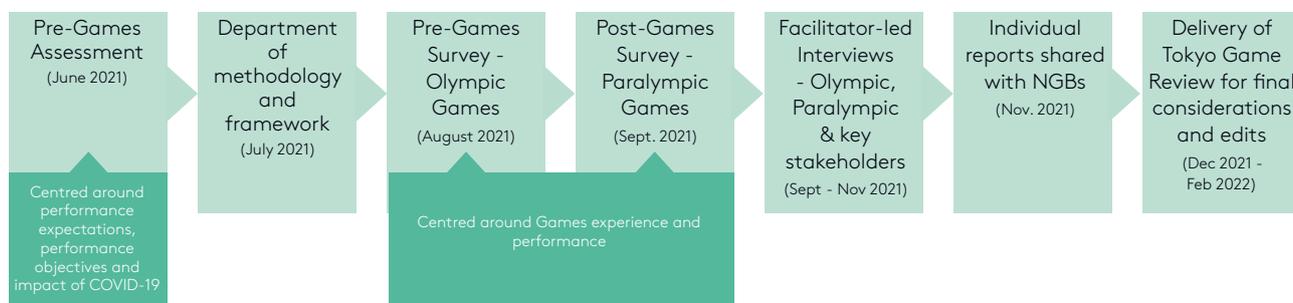
Amongst the themes that were explored included:

- Preparation for the Tokyo Games
- Performances at the Tokyo Games
- Relationships between NGBs and stakeholders
- Relationships between key stakeholders in the high performance system
- Achievement of stakeholder performance objectives
- Comparison with other (suitable) nations
- Impact of COVID-19
- Coaching structure(s) within the NGB high performance programmes
- Relationship between an NGB's Performance Director and their High Performance Committee, or similar (i.e., governance)

The methodology for the review was as follows:

- We undertook a pre-Games assessment which centred on performance expectations, performance objectives and the impact of COVID-19
- This assessment was then be used as the basis for the post-Games survey, and later at interview and review stage to assess performance versus expectation
- A confidential online survey was developed (for both Olympic and Paralympic cohorts), broken out into four separate surveys for:
  1. Athletes
  2. Coaching and Support Staff
  3. Performance Directors/Performance Leads
  4. CEOs and Board Members

### Overview of timeline



### Consultation numbers

Post-Games Survey	Responders (n)
Olympic Games Athletes	88
Olympic Games Coaching and Support Staff	138
Olympic Games Performance Directors/Performance Leads	17
Olympic Games CEOs and Board Members	73
Paralympic Games Athletes	27
Paralympic Games Coaching and Support Staff	50
Paralympic Games Performance Directors/Performance Leads	7
Paralympic Games CEOs and Board Members	26
<b>TOTAL SURVEY RESPONSES</b>	<b>426</b>

Interviews	Interviewees (n)
Olympic Games Athletes	28
Olympic Games Coaching and Support Staff	23
Olympic Games Performance Directors/Performance Leads	17
Olympic Games CEOs	18
Paralympic Games Athletes	13
Paralympic Games Coaching and Support Staff	4
Paralympic Games Performance Directors/Performance Leads	7
Paralympic Games CEOs	3
Key stakeholders	20
<b>TOTAL INTERVIEWS</b>	<b>133</b>

# Key themes

## Games experience

- This was a positive Games from various perspectives; medals were on target, relationships were strong, and there were positive experiences for athletes at the Games themselves and at the holding camp(s).
- Despite COVID-19 complications, the Games went off smoothly with minimal 'issues' and general satisfaction with the arrangements and supports to athletes, coaches, and others. The Olympic Federation of Ireland, Sport Ireland, the Sport Ireland Institute and Paralympics Ireland all deserve credit for their work.
- Sport Ireland reacted well to the COVID-19 situation and were supportive in finding solutions in terms of supporting increased costs and return to training for elite athletes.
- The Paris Games will be a very different experience and will present a different set of challenges in comparison to Tokyo.
- The largest number of athletes ever went to Tokyo and the focus for Paris should narrow down further on those with a competitive chance at the Games, rather than on team size.
- An athlete centred approach was reflected in many ways, including the travel arrangements (business class flights), homecoming event (Mansion House) and a Team Ireland focus.

## Focused investment, performance and review

- There is a feeling within the high performance eco-system that we are laying good foundations to deliver medal opportunities across multiple sports; however, this will need focused investment and stronger performance management over the next Cycle to realise the potential and deliver on medal targets.
- There is a sense that more can be done to challenge the system in terms of performance and ensure we are not going through the motions or 'ticking boxes'. There are non-competitive athletes at the Games, both Olympic and Paralympic, and thought should be given to what is acceptable as minimum standards, as the team size has increased.
- The ongoing review process could become more meaningful with an increased focus on performance programmes and target outcomes annually, levelled against the investment per sport. Constructive tension, transparency and accountability naturally form part of a high performance system and would be welcomed.
- Within NGBs in particular, the follow-up to this Tokyo Games Review itself will be important, as some recommendations from the Rio Review remain outstanding within a number of NGBs.

## Leadership across the system

- There is some sense with the NGBs of not fully understanding the role of the High Performance Committee. The visibility of the High Performance Committee, and its connection to the system can be increased, for example, by including opportunities for NGBs to present (at times) to the High Performance Committee.
- There is a need to make the High Performance Strategy implementation plan more visible to ensure its impact across the next two Cycles. Coaching, and coach development in particular, are still evident as key priorities.
- The community believe that there are mixed standards across Performance Directors, with areas for development identified for some (in both strategy and management).
- Generally, the system is working much better than in previous Cycles in terms of collaboration and a partnership approach, although further refinement can be done to improve alignment (e.g., review process duplication, service level agreements, etc.).

### Support services

- The Sport Ireland Institute's sport science and medicine service provision is deeply valued and well-integrated into many sports, and the service level agreement with the Olympic Federation of Ireland is well regarded as having helped develop the system over the last Cycle.
- It is sometimes perceived as being Dublin-centric or not always a user-friendly service and should continue to invest in being at the leading edge of thinking in its service areas.
- The Sport Ireland Institute support services can be built on further to ensure ongoing integration and continuity of support across the sports to service the individual needs of each sport.
- The Sport Northern Ireland Sports Institute services appear to be working well in synthesis with the Sport Ireland Institute and working on a more national basis with the sports, rather than regionally.

### Coaching

- Coaching continues to be a weak spot across the system, with a requirement next to invest in coaches that can help to capitalise on the strong structures of programmes.

### Talent

- The talent pathway is improving in a number of Olympic sports, and ideally athlete support services would be offered to youth athletes further down the talent pathway. In Paralympic sports, the talent pathway and talent identification have been identified as problem areas.

### Olympic Federation of Ireland

- There has been a huge transformation in the Olympic Federation of Ireland since Rio, which has made for a significant difference in the Olympic Games experience for those involved. The transformation is evident in the planning, preparation and execution for the Games with very positive feedback from the various stakeholders.

### Sport Ireland

- Sport Ireland is commended by NGBs and stakeholders for the significant work it undertook over the last Cycle to develop the system, including the development of the High Performance Strategy, and the significant work to minimise the impact of COVID-19.

### Paralympics Ireland

- Paralympic sport relies largely on a volunteer base and navigated the pandemic well despite this. Overall, in the public eye, the perception and awareness of Paralympic sport and athletes continues to grow, and to achieve parity of awareness with Olympic counterparts. There are tensions within the Paralympic system and a lack of clarity around roles, remit and leadership. Some of these are outstanding since Rio and, together with the talent pathway, must be addressed.

### Communication

- Communications around high performance sport could be improved in general and specifically within certain sports, and this will add to the general public's enjoyment and awareness of Olympic and Paralympic sport.

# Summary recommendations

## Games experience

- The Olympic Federation of Ireland, Sport Ireland, the Sport Ireland Institute, Sport Northern Ireland, Paralympics Ireland and other key partners should continue to work together to ensure the Games experience continues to evolve, and meet the expectations of the athletes, whilst delivering to those athletes the best possible Games experience, and one that echoes the Team Ireland culture.

## Focused investment, performance and review

- Review the allocation of investment across the high performance landscape and target funding according to performance expectations over the Paris and Los Angeles Cycles.
- Conduct regular reviews of performance programmes, with meaningful check and challenge by the system to ensure programmes deliver on target outcomes/potential.
- Offer an opportunity for NGBs to present their high performance programmes to the High Performance Committee (where appropriate and feasible).
- Develop a traffic light system to assess and monitor ongoing performance and progress of each individual NGB's high performance programme.
- In conjunction with the Olympic Federation of Ireland and Paralympics Ireland, set stringent qualification targets to ensure all qualifying athletes are competitive across Olympic and Paralympic teams (even if this results in a smaller team for future Games).
- Adopt a 'people' focused investment strategy to improve capability across Performance Directors, high performance coaching, and service provision.

## Leadership across the system

- Ensure the implementation of the High Performance Strategy is visible across the high performance system and drives performance impact over the next three Cycles.
- Consider the opportunities for increased engagement and visibility between the NGBs and the High Performance Committee.
- Create a development plan for Performance Directors, to build strategic and management capability across the Performance Director community.
- Build the Performance Director community through regular, facilitated sessions for sharing knowledge, best practice, innovation ideas, and other relevant areas.
- Develop accelerated plans to address coaching standards across the high performance eco-system.
- Reinforce the collaborative/partnership approach, which has improved considerably through the Tokyo Cycle, and ensure closer alignment of key stakeholders.
- Ensure future review processes involve a collaborative approach across all interested parties (i.e., no duplicate review processes).

## Support services

- Review how best to embed service providers into key sports to ensure greater continuity, integration, impact, and trust within programmes.
- Consider how to maximise the impact of the Sport Ireland Institute facilities and services, especially for programmes/athletes not based on the Sport Ireland Campus, including looking at regional delivery via regional outposts.
- Refresh, where needed, service provision and arrangements to continually improve impact for high performance programmes.
- Continue to deliver on the Sport Ireland Campus masterplan and provision of facilities/infrastructure to create world class environments across multiple sports.

### **Coaching**

- Increase investment and focus on driving improvements in high performance coaching standards across sports.

### **Talent**

- Allocate increased funding to leverage and grow deeper talent pipelines in priority sports, enabling improved athlete support services to emerging talent.
- Address shallow talent pathways in key sports.
- Identify key drivers in talent conversion rates, ensuring we have an efficient system of converting potential into performance (i.e., junior to senior athlete transitions).
- Conduct a strategic review into Paralympic talent pathways, to rebuild the pipeline for the Los Angeles Cycle.

### **Olympic Federation of Ireland**

- Reinforce the positive progress made by the Olympic Federation of Ireland during the Tokyo Cycle and ensure closer collaboration and coordination of planning, monitoring, and review of high performance systems/programmes.

### **Paralympics Ireland**

- Ensure clarity of roles, remit and leadership across the Paralympic system.
- Address potential issues in talent pathway and rebuild strength of pipeline in advance of the Los Angeles Cycle.
- Paralympics Ireland should seek to integrate their service provision model with the Sport Ireland Institute, using the Sport Ireland Institute/Olympic Federation of Ireland model as the template for greater coordination and support.

### **Communication**

- Develop integrated communication programmes across high performance eco-system involving all key stakeholders.
- Reinforce Team Ireland identity and culture, which has developed during the Tokyo Cycle, throughout the lead-in to the Paris Games.
- Raise the profile of Olympic/Paralympic sports both regionally and nationally.

# Tokyo 2020: How it went

## Olympic and Paralympic Games results

### TEAM IRELAND: OLYMPIC GAMES

- This was the largest ever team sent by Ireland to an Olympic Games.
- 116 athletes across 18 NGBs (20 sports if Diving and Swimming, and Track Cycling and Road Cycling, are separated) eclipsed the previous largest team of 81 athletes at the London 1948 Games.
- The team of 116 consisted of 61 male and 55 female athletes.
- The qualification of team-based sports (i.e., Hockey and Rugby Sevens), along with the relay strategy in Swimming, added to the team size.

116  
ATHLETES

20  
SPORTS

### TEAM IRELAND: PARALYMPIC GAMES

- The team comprised of 29 athletes (14 male and 15 female athletes).
- Nine sports were represented (across eight NGBs).
- This was down on the 48 members of Team Ireland at the Rio 2016 Games.
- Average age was just under 29 (with athletes ranging from 16 to 63 years of age).

29  
ATHLETES

9  
SPORTS

## Olympic Games results

Rank	Nation	 Gold	 Silver	 Bronze	   Total
1	USA	39	41	33	113
2	China	38	32	18	88
3	Japan	27	14	17	58
4	Great Britain	22	21	22	65
13	New Zealand	7	6	7	20
20	Norway	4	2	2	8
25	Denmark	3	4	4	11
29	Belgium	3	1	3	7
<b>39</b>	<b>Ireland</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>

- Ireland finished in the top 40 in the medal table.
- This is the highest ranked finish since Atlanta '96 (28th) and Barcelona '92 (33rd).
- Relevant comparator countries are medalling higher (in the top 30) and winning between 7-20 medals.

Pre-Games Target	Actual Results	
Top 10 (n=10-15)	Top 20	46
	Top 16	35
	Top 10	20
	Top 8	13
Total Podium (n=3-4)	Bronze	2
	Silver	0
	Gold	2
	Total Podium	4
Conversion Rates (%)	Top 10 to Podium	20%
	Top 8 to Podium	31%

- Ireland delivered four medals ,which was on a par with pre-Games targets and expectations.
- The medal count could have been higher with several 'near misses' across a number of sports.
- To meet future targets, these 'near misses' will need to be converted into medals.
- The potential is there for Ireland to become a 7-10 medal country, across several sports.

## Paralympic Games results

Rank	Nation	 Gold	 Silver	 Bronze	   Total
1	China	96	60	51	207
2	Great Britain	41	38	45	124
3	USA	37	36	31	104
4	RPC	36	33	49	118
21	New Zealand	6	3	3	12
31	Belgium	4	3	8	15
<b>32</b>	<b>Ireland</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>
40	Denmark	3	1	1	5
47	Norway	2	0	2	4

- Ireland finished just outside the top 30 in the medal table.
- The seven medals were won by five athletes across three sports.
- Our ranking and medal count have fallen over the last two Cycles.

Pre-Games Target	Actual Results	
Top 8 (n=22-28)	Top 20	52
	Top 16	49
	Top 10	36
	Top 8	27
Total Podium (n=8-10)	Bronze	1
	Silver	2
	Gold	4
	Total Podium	7
Conversion Rates (%)	Top 10 to Podium	19%
	Top 8 to Podium	26%

- Overall results were mixed with regards to pre-Games expectations, with 8-10 medals expected (below target) and 22-28 Top 8 finishes expected (on target).
- The average age of the team was nearly 29 years of age and there is a need to replenish the talent pipeline.

# Olympic & Paralympic Cycle comparators

## Olympic Cycle comparators

### LONDON 2012

Rank	Nation	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
1	USA	47	27	30	104
2	China	38	31	22	91
3	Great Britain	29	18	18	65
4	Russia	20	21	26	67
14	New Zealand	6	2	5	13
30	Denmark	2	4	3	9
34	Norway	2	1	1	4
<b>41</b>	<b>Ireland</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>
64	Belgium	0	1	2	3

### RIO 2016

Rank	Nation	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
1	USA	46	37	38	121
2	Great Britain	27	23	17	67
3	China	25	19	27	71
4	Russia	19	17	20	56
19	New Zealand	4	9	5	18
28	Denmark	2	6	7	15
35	Belgium	2	2	2	6
<b>63</b>	<b>Ireland</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>
74	Norway	0	0	4	4

### TOKYO 2020

Rank	Nation	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
1	USA	39	41	33	113
2	China	38	32	18	88
3	Japan	27	14	17	58
4	Great Britain	22	21	22	65
13	New Zealand	7	6	7	20
20	Norway	4	2	2	8
25	Denmark	3	4	4	11
29	Belgium	3	1	3	7
<b>39</b>	<b>Ireland</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>

- Comparator countries are maintaining or improving on medal output across the Cycles.
- Ireland should be targeting a top 30 ranking.

## Paralympic Cycle comparators

### LONDON 2012

Rank	Nation	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
1	China	95	71	65	231
2	Russia	36	38	28	102
3	Great Britain	34	43	43	120
4	Ukraine	32	24	28	54
<b>19</b>	<b>Ireland</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>16</b>
21	New Zealand	6	7	4	17
35	Norway	3	2	3	8
36	Belgium	3	1	3	7
50	Denmark	1	0	4	5

### RIO 2016

Rank	Nation	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
1	China	107	81	51	239
2	Great Britain	64	39	44	147
3	Ukraine	41	37	39	117
4	USA	40	44	31	115
13	New Zealand	9	5	7	21
25	Belgium	5	3	3	11
<b>28</b>	<b>Ireland</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>11</b>
32	Norway	3	2	3	8
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### TOKYO 2020

Rank	Nation	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
1	China	96	60	51	207
2	Great Britain	41	38	45	124
3	USA	37	36	31	104
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40	Denmark	3	1	1	5
47	Norway	2	0	2	4

- Paralympic performances have fallen across the last three Cycles, from a high of 16 medals (London 2012), to seven medals in Tokyo.
- The ranking has also slipped from 19th to 32nd.

Comparative nations:

- 1) Belgium
- 2) Denmark
- 3) New Zealand
- 4) Norway

# The High Performance Strategy

## Themes

### Our vision

'Ireland consistently achieving podium success on the world stage inspiring the nation and future generations'

- The foundations continue to be laid for the realisation of the High Performance Strategy vision. Tokyo 2020 was on a par with expectations as far as medal count was concerned.
- Multiple sports are now in medal contention and several sports were close to medalling in Tokyo.
- However, to build on the progress made there is a need to drive performance systems in these sports to ensure they convert medal potential to increased medal count in Paris and Los Angeles.
- The Olympic targets are for four or more sports to medal and overall medal count to rise to 8-10 over the next two Cycles.
- The Paralympic targets are to win 12-16 medals in the Paris and Los Angeles Cycles.
- Focused investment in medal potential high performance systems should be reflected in investment decisions across the next two Cycles.

### Our philosophy

'Our athletes and the people who support them are at the heart of everything we do'

- The high performance system has taken a significant step forward in terms of people focus with the athletes in particular placed at the heart of the system.
- There has been a notable shift in philosophy from the Rio Cycle to the Tokyo Cycle. Athlete feedback confirms this shift. This needs to continue and be reinforced across future Cycles.
- Some of the specific elements that have been called out by athletes include:
  - Additional funding by Sport Ireland to reflect increased costs incurred due to COVID-19 issues.
  - Support to get athletes back into high performance training environments whilst COVID-19 restrictions were in place.
  - Travel arrangements with athletes prioritised for business travel and 'administrators' travelling in economy class.
  - Homecoming event celebrating the athletes, coaches and their families post-Games.
  - Improved communication, professionalism of the Olympic Federation of Ireland, and general arrangements in holding camps and the Tokyo Athlete Village.

### Our strategy

'This is Sport Ireland's High Performance Strategy which will be delivered in partnership with the broader high performance community'

- The High Performance Strategy is broadly welcomed by the key stakeholders across the system.
- However, there is a lack of understanding as to the current status of implementation and progress on key areas across the strategy.
- Many stakeholders within the system have expectations that future policies, plans, and decisions will be aligned to the High Performance Strategy including investment of resources and funding models.

- The commitment to increased investment in high performance announced by the government is welcomed, and stakeholders within the system are keen to understand how this will be invested/allocated across the system.
- There is a need for greater communication and alignment across the system to ensure this is visible to those involved within the high performance system.
- There is an opportunity for a realignment of the focus, remit and structure of the High Performance Committee to achieve this and drive implementation of the strategy with greater urgency.

## Pillars



\* Including: Government, Sport Ireland, Sport Northern Ireland, National Governing Bodies, Olympic Federation of Ireland, Paralympics Ireland, higher education institutions

## STRATEGIC PILLAR 1: FOCUSED PERFORMANCE INVESTMENT

### Principles

- Sport Ireland will be ambitious and set clear priorities for investment
- The criteria for evaluating Olympic and Paralympic sports will be defined and used to support our decision-making around a more focused investment model
- Talented, medal potential athletes in non-priority sports will be supported to maximise their potential

### How this impacted the Tokyo Games

- In the lead up to Tokyo Games, funding allocation propositions to sports were largely unchanged
- As per the Portas Consulting report, *'some NGBs do not have a clear and articulated process for investment decisions towards athletes'*
- This is underpinned by not having clarity in a vision that is agreed across a broad range of stakeholders

### Recommendations

- Implement a focused performance investment approach and communicate it (as per the Sports Action Plan, published 29.11.21)
- Sport Ireland will periodically review the prioritisation of sports to reflect progress and changes over time

## STRATEGIC PILLAR 2: ATHLETE PERFORMANCE & HOLISTIC SUPPORT

### Principles

- The high performance system will provide supports throughout the key points of an athletes' career, where their needs include:
  - 1) World class coaching, the International Carding Scheme, scholarship programmes and NGB support
  - 2) Performance support services and transition planning (e.g., junior to senior athlete)
  - 3) Post-athletic career planning and support
  - 4) Dual career options
- The NGBs will enable athletes to self-manage their performance lifestyle and take ownership of their journey, with the support of the Sport Ireland Institute

### How this impacted the Tokyo Games

- As per the Portas Consulting report, *'during the Cycle, the Sport Ireland Institute has been transformational for a number of NGBs and has delivered great resources for allowing high performance training. This is not universal and the NGBs that are based further afield experience a far lesser impact'*
- Across a range of NGBs, there is not clear systematic multi-Cycle support offered to development athletes, and high performance support often begins only once an athlete enters the senior level
- Several of these areas have been worked on since the strategy was written, and although not called out, will have likely had a positive impact, or will do into Paris and beyond, such as the International Carding Scheme, dual career options and scholarship programmes
- Overall, the sense from athletes in Tokyo was one where athletes had more ownership of their lifestyle and journey, but this varied from sport to sport and was considerably less in Paralympic athletes

### Recommendations

- Continue to invest and build on the good work in this area

## STRATEGIC PILLAR 3: WORLD CLASS COACHING & SUPPORT SERVICES

### Principles

- Coaching is the building block of all elite sport
- An athlete-centred approach with open communication and knowledge sharing between coaches and support providers is paramount
- Talented Irish coaches will have opportunities within our system and support will be provided to them in terms of technical, mental, physical and financial resources
- Sport Ireland Coaching has shared responsibility with the NGBs for coaches working with developmental and junior level athletes
- The Sport Ireland Institute has shared responsibility with the NGBs for supporting coaches with senior athletes going to Olympic or Paralympic Games
- Our system will operate to world class standards, drawing on international expertise where appropriate to drive high performance coaching and support services
- The Sport Ireland Institute will be resourced further to enhance performance support services for athletes and enable deeper provision of support to priority sports

### **How this impacted the Tokyo Games**

- As per the Portas Consulting report, *'there is not the depth of performance and coaching staff with high performance knowledge to know how to win medals and create world-class structures and systems'*
- It was evident from surveys and interviews that coaching is not where it needs to be to underpin a world-class system
- It is also noted that some progress has been made in this area, such as the recruitment of a High Performance Coaching Lead, which will likely impact into Paris and beyond

### **Recommendation**

- As per the Sports Action Plan, prioritise this area immediately for further work

## **STRATEGIC PILLAR 4: BUSINESS STRUCTURES & PLANNING**

### **Principles**

- High performance will be defined within each sport to ensure that it is understood by all in leadership and governance roles
- High performance programmes must be led by an expert with oversight from a High Performance Committee, or another delegate authority (e.g., a High Performance Advisory Group) that consists of independent members
- Governance standards will be in place around all high performance programmes and those standards will be based on the stage of development/maturity and structure of the sport
- Multi-annual funding enables longer-term high performance planning over Olympic/Paralympic Cycles
- Funding should be linked to delivery of high performance outcomes
- While sports differ in their ability to raise external funding, high performance programmes should be treated as a business and business plans must reflect this
- Investment from government in high performance sport should be dependent on an element of matched funding from NGBs

### **How this impacted the Tokyo Games**

- Governance of high performance sport has improved over the Tokyo Cycle, with less of the impacts seen as in Rio, and improved standards in general across governing bodies, although with some continuing outliers. The implementation of the Governance Code over the last year, increased diversity in decision making at Board level, as well as better high performance structures and expertise in governing bodies, have all had a positive impact

### **Recommendations**

- Continue to invest and build on the good work in this area
- As per the Sports Action Plan, modelled on the 'Black Gold' programme in New Zealand, introduce a scheme for the attraction of corporate and philanthropic finance to support Ireland's high performance programmes

## STRATEGIC PILLAR 5: PARTNERSHIPS

### Principles

- Collaboration and alignment is a key performance principle of the new strategic plan, and an underpinning value of all the work
- We must create opportunities for higher education institutions to collaborate within the high performance system where there is shared commitment to support athletes and co-invest in the high performance space. Each university/college will have different types of relationships with the high performance sport system, therefore separate contracts or service level agreements should be agreed between higher education institutions and Sport Ireland, with clear recognition on how their business needs are met by these agreements
- We recognise that the learning of fundamental movement skills and skills acquisition at developmental levels, especially through primary and secondary education, greatly impacts the development and potential of our athletes further along the performance pathway

### How this impacted the Tokyo Games

- Greater levels of collaboration across key stakeholders evident throughout the Tokyo Cycle
- There was not a large focus during the Tokyo Cycle on leveraging higher education institutions in support of the high performance eco-system but can be implemented over the coming Cycles

### Recommendations

- Continue to develop and build on the existing service level agreements between stakeholders and explore further how third level institutions can support on sport science and medicine service delivery, dual career athlete development, and other specific areas
- Build on the positive collaboration across key stakeholders to deliver genuine 'peer' working groups
- Longer-term plans are required to deliver impact in schools (primary and post-primary) in core skills development of young people. This is in support of the Sports Action Plan, which seeks to *'develop a physical literacy consensus statement and promote the adoption of physical literacy in sport and Physical Education'*

## STRATEGIC PILLAR 6: WORLD CLASS FACILITIES & EQUIPMENT

### Principles

- Facility plans will be nationally coordinated, multi-sport and linked to higher education institutions
- High performance facilities will be accessible and have options for living facilities for athletes, coaches, support staff, etc.
- Regional high performance centres will be unlocked through collaboration and linked to specific sports
- Multi-annual capital funding is critical for equipment-intensive high performance sports
- The development of facilities is future proofed and includes the views of those who will be using them

### How this impacted the Tokyo Games

- The Sport Ireland Campus and the Sport Ireland Institute facilities had a large impact for those sports based there and/or with significant programme presence on the Campus
- Regional infrastructure was less developed during the Tokyo Cycle

### Recommendations

- Ensure focused investment in facilities to provide world class facilities and infrastructure for key sports, across the country
- The capital investment programme is set to increase over the next two Cycles, which will support this area

## STRATEGIC PILLAR 7: RESEARCH & INNOVATION

### Principles

- Opportunities exist for research and innovation projects to add value to all pillars of this strategy including Athlete Performance, Coaching and Support Services, Business Structures and Planning, Partnerships, and Facilities
- By continually analysing our practice and learning from high performing teams and organisations both inside and outside our system, we will enhance our knowledge of what works for us
- High performance sports will be encouraged to identify performance challenges within their sport in order to generate and develop research questions. A spirit of innovation will be fostered by identifying constraints in the system and experimenting with ways to bridge performance gaps
- We will prioritise projects that are most likely to impact on athlete performance and in medal potential sports

### How this impacted the Tokyo Games

- There was some evidence of research and innovation providing an impact on performances and outcomes at the Tokyo Games. The Sport Ireland Institute having supported and utilised research pertaining to long haul travel, sleep strategies, Games transitions and relative energy deficiency in sport (RED-S) during the Tokyo Cycle. It will be key that future high performance system wide research and innovation is communicated to all relevant NGBs and stakeholders

### Recommendations

- Continually focus on innovation projects/ideas to identify performance gains across high performance programmes

# Sport by sport summary (Olympic Games)

## Athletics (Athletics Ireland)

### Outcome

- 27 athletes qualified (14 male and 13 female)
- One Top 8 (4x400m relay), two Top 16 (9th and 10th) and two Top 24 (20th and 21st)
- Did not meet original performance expectation of three Top 8, three Top 16 and seven Top 24

### Analysis

- Athletes felt well prepared within their individual camps
- Preparation was hindered by COVID-19 and decisions imposed on the NGB around late qualification
- A lack of resource and coaching structures existed in the build up to the Games
- The view on performance varied across stakeholders, with some believing performance was aligned to expectations, and others believing it was a disappointing Games
- Challenges and opportunities exist within the talent pathway and the programme structure

### Recommendations

1. Devise a clear coaching structure and pathway strategy
2. Establish clearer framework for athlete support beyond the Sport Ireland Campus
3. Create clarity in funding decisions which are accountable and transparent

## Badminton (Badminton Ireland)

### Outcome

- One athlete qualified (male)
- Knocked out at the group stages. Overall rank of 15th (only 14 athletes qualified for the last 16, as two athletes received byes)
- Did not meet original performance expectation of reaching the last 16; however, this was the high end goal

### Analysis

- Preparation was high quality and performance focused
- This could have been improved by more intense sparring
- Given the athlete's experience level, the performance was promising, and they performed well in both matches
- Support at the Games met athlete requirements
- Extra funding is required to achieve next level of performance
- The depth of domestic coaching needs addressing

### Recommendations

1. Boost the quality and intensity of training provided to athletes
2. Increase amount of coaching available to athletes
3. Further professionalise by targeting more international competitions and boosting performance analysis

## Boxing (Irish Athletic Boxing Association)

### Outcome

- Seven athletes qualified (four male and three female)
- Won two medals – Gold in the Women's Lightweight and Bronze in the Men's Welterweight
- Also had one Quarter-final finish and two Round of 16 finishes

### **Analysis**

- Preparation went well, despite several changes and governance challenges within the organisation during the Cycle. Driven by good coaching, excellent facilities and well-planned training camps
- Achieving two medals at the Games was a good outcome. Some tough draws potentially prevented more medals being won
- Talent pathway is not connected with high performance system
- Potential to expand coaching development to a greater level

### **Recommendations**

1. Address governance issues that enable a flourishing talent pathway, and one that is connected to the high performance system (as well as the later transition of professional boxers from the system)
2. Develop a clear plan for coach development
3. Continue to develop relationships with Sport Ireland and other stakeholders
4. Continue to build on the success of the high performance programme

## **Canoeing (Canoeing Ireland)**

### **Outcome**

- One athlete qualified (male)
- Reached semi-final stage and finished in 15th place

### **Analysis**

- Preparation went well with the athlete going into the Games in great condition
- Despite the qualification being a success in itself, the athlete's performance did not represent their true ability
- Pre-Games expectation was a Top 8 finish. Result fell short of this
- There is potential to develop the talent pathway

### **Recommendations**

1. Design an effective plan that addresses issues within the sprint discipline
2. Review training structures to ensure regular camps and opportunities for collaboration
3. Build on the NGB's foundations to expand programme

## **Clay Target Shooting (Irish Clay Target Shooting Association)**

### **Outcome**

- One athlete qualified (male)
- 26th placed finish

### **Analysis**

- Late qualification and COVID-19 meant training opportunities were limited
- Performance aligned to the pre-Games expectation of the athlete
- Talent exists but there is a challenge in supporting it
- Olympic disciplines are not prioritised in the NGB

### **Recommendations**

1. Boost high performance capacity of the organisation
2. Improve governance structures
3. Create pathway to ensure talented athletes are fully supported to reach potential

## Cycling – Road and Track (Cycling Ireland)

### Outcome

- Seven athletes qualified (five male and two female)
- Four Top 16 finishes
- Did not meet original performance expectation of three Top 10 finishes

### Analysis

- Athletes did not feel at peak performance going into the Games
- Coaching and governance structures were not of a high performance culture
- There was good support to athletes from the high performance programme and the Sport Ireland Institute, but the programme could go further with vision and planning
- There was a clear consensus of disappointment within the NGB around performance at the Games given athlete potential and the number of athletes competing
- Challenges and opportunities exist within the talent pathway and future facility provision

### Recommendations

1. Establish a clear vision and purpose for investment decisions
2. Review the programme's training and coaching structures
3. Redefine the talent pathway
4. Drive aligned high performance culture with governance structures

## Golf (Golf Ireland)

### Outcome

- Four athletes qualified (two male and two female)
- All finished in Top 24, with two Top 8 (T4th place finish in the Men's Event and 7th place finish in the Women's Event)

### Analysis

- As the athletes have their own performance programmes, the high performance unit were not heavily involved in preparation
- Athletes performed well and were very close to medal success
- Athletes are 'bought into' the Olympic programme
- The talent pathway (both men and women) has strong structures in place

### Recommendations

1. Strive for continued development of the talent pathway
2. Continue to support the transition of athletes from amateur to professional level
3. Further enhance the NGB's already strong relationships with stakeholders

## Gymnastics (Gymnastics Ireland)

### Outcome

- Two athletes qualified (one male and one female)
- One finalist in the Men's Pommel Horse (7th place finish)

### Analysis

- Preparation went very well, underpinned by world-class facilities, a well-structured programme, and good governance
- Performance met expectations but could have been even better
- Desire to boost coaching resource within NGB
- The talent pathway is in a strong position

### Recommendations

1. Invest in people and coaches that can help to capitalise on the strong structures of programme
2. Expand athlete support further across the national programme
3. Continue the rebuild from impact of COVID-19 to return NGB to previous levels

## Hockey (Hockey Ireland)

### Outcome

- Women's Team qualified
- Played five group games, winning one
- Did not qualify out of the groups and finished 10th overall

### Analysis

- The move to a semi-centralised model was beneficial, but preparation was hindered by COVID-19
- The team could not replicate the performances seen in previous events
- The talent pathway is not currently operating at an optimal level

### Recommendations

1. Address talent pathway so that there is alignment between youth and senior levels
2. Establish a clear and transparent long term plan for the programme structure
3. Ensure support around athletes generates high performance

## Equestrian – Eventing, Show Jumping and Dressage (Horse Sport Ireland)

### Outcome

- Nine qualifications – seven individual riders (five male and two female) and two teams
- Five Top 24, four Top 16 and two Top 8

### Analysis

- Limited competition hindered preparation, but high performance structures were in relatively good shape going into the Games
- Did not meet expectations across the disciplines due to a mix of riders and horses not performing on the day and bad luck
- Attracting and retaining world-class horses has been difficult for the programme

### Recommendations

1. Develop solutions that attract top-quality horses to the programme
2. Prioritise competition for riders
3. Embed the Sport Ireland Institute into the programmes
4. Strengthen operational capacity and support

## Judo (Irish Judo Association)

### Outcome

- Two athletes qualified (one male and one female)
- Both were defeated in the Round of 32, and finished in 17th place

### Analysis

- The programme could not have done any more to prepare, despite the misfortune of injury and COVID-19
- Did not achieve what the NGB hoped for, but linked to fine margins and injury (pre-Games)
- The talent pathway exists but it is not operating sustainably, partially because there is not enough depth in coaching

### Recommendations

1. Boost coaching capacity to help coaching structures become more sustainable
2. Work to ensure there is a clear talent pathway in the system
3. Devise clear programme structure that has international competition at its core

## Modern Pentathlon (Pentathlon Ireland)

### Outcome

- Two athletes qualified (one male and one female); one athlete competed (female), with the second athlete having to withdraw in advance of the Games, due to injury
- 24th place finish. Was very unlucky with the Show Jumping event, which impacted their finishing position when in medal contention (was in 4th place, prior to the Show Jumping event)

### Analysis

- Preparation went very well with excellent coaching and planning
- Athlete was 4th going into the Show Jumping event, which then hindered medal chances due to horse issues
- Insights around talent, future coaching structures, and programme changes
- Need to develop next generation of talent

### Recommendations

1. Hire a development coach to help grow talent and increase flexibility
2. Ensure a clear plan is in place for the Performance Director role and how to retain other key coaches
3. Harness the knowledge within the programme to continue generating world class talent

## Rowing (Rowing Ireland)

### Outcome

- Six qualifications – 13 athletes (four male and nine female) across six boats
- Won two medals – Gold in the Men's Lightweight Double Sculls and Bronze in the Women's Four
- Achieved six Top 12 finishes in total

### Analysis

- Preparation went well and athletes went into the Games in good condition
- The training camps were effective but caused some issues with athlete welfare
- The quality of coaches was excellent
- Performance at the Games was pleasing but the NGB was not entirely satisfied
- Support was good but there are areas for improvement looking forward
- Talent pathway is in good condition
- There is no clear consensus on how to interact with the media during Games time

### Recommendations

1. Address issues that hinder a solely performance focus within the programme
2. Improve the relationship with the Sport Ireland Institute
3. Develop strong domestic coaching pathway and system

## Rugby Sevens (Irish Rugby Football Union)

### Outcome

- Men's Team qualified
- Played three group games, winning one
- Did not qualify out of the group stage and finished 10th after the 9th-12th place play offs

### Analysis

- Preparation was hindered by late qualification and the impact of COVID-19 on the World Series
- The programme dealt with these issues well
- The team did not perform to the best of its ability
- The talent pathway is in a strong position
- Uncertainty on the future of qualification process limits ability to plan long-term

### Recommendations

1. Continue to develop strong relationship with Sport Ireland
2. Build on pathway structure to ensure high quality players are being brought into the programme
3. Support the development and training of domestic coaches
4. Assess viability of strengthening international relations to influence competition/qualification decisions

## Sailing (Irish Sailing Association)

### Outcome

- Two qualifications – three athletes (two male and one female) across two boats
- 18th place finish in the Laser Radial and 13th place finish in the 49er

### Analysis

- Preparation was good, underpinned by a high standard of coaching and facilities
- High performance and governance structures held strong
- Mixed performance of the two boats at the Games. The 49er boat showed great promise for the future
- Talent pathway is not complete and is lacking in some areas
- There is not enough coaching depth or development

### Recommendations

1. Develop coaching pathway that helps to create world-class coaches
2. Sustainably recreate the talent pathway
3. Boost alternative revenue streams and capitalise on incoming multi-annual funding

## Swimming and Diving (Swim Ireland)

### Outcome

- Swimming: seven individual qualifiers (four male and three female) and one relay team (male)
- Diving: two individual qualifiers (one male and one female)
- Met the qualification targets for both swimming and diving
- Reached a first swimming final in 25 years (Women's 100m Breaststroke) and had four Top 16 finishes
- Did not achieve the targets on lifetime best performances

### **Analysis**

- Given a few difficult scenarios, preparation went very well
- Coaches and governance structures held strong, and good planning within the programme contributed to good preparation
- Performance at the Games exceeded expectations and was excellent, where swimming reached its first final for 25 years
- Scope to deepen coaching quality beyond National Centres
- Diving needs to implement fundamental structures if strategy is to be successful
- Tokyo Olympic Games was a very different experience
- 1st female diver to qualify for an Olympic Games

### **Recommendations**

1. Build on the strong structures to gain momentum and further professionalise
2. Continue to target and upskill coaches from outside of the National Centres

## **Taekwondo (Taekwondo Ireland)**

### **Outcome**

- One athlete qualified (male)
- 11th place finish
- Felt unlucky to be knocked out in a very tight contest

### **Analysis**

- Preparation was as good as it could have been especially given the lack of resource of the programme
- The performance in the first round was disappointing and not a fair representation of the athlete's ability
- Pre-Games expectation was to be a possible medal contender which did not materialise
- There is potential within the talent pathway, but the programme has a challenge in being able to support all athletes

### **Recommendations**

1. Address the lack of coaching resource to ensure a sustainable programme is created
2. Ensure fundamental high performance structures are in place
3. Create a talent pathway that suitably supports the high potential athletes in the system

## **Triathlon (Triathlon Ireland)**

### **Outcome**

- Two athletes qualified (one male and one female)
- 23rd (female) and 48th (male) place finishes

### **Analysis**

- Preparation was hindered by World Triathlon decisions, resulting in too much competition for one of the athletes
- The NGB did not have full control over preparations for the other athlete
- The two athletes broadly performed to expectations given their preparation levels
- The NGB know how to qualify athletes to the Games
- The talent pathway could be further developed

### **Recommendations**

1. Ensure there is a clear plan for the direction and structure of the programme
2. Create clear high performance structures
3. Create a more cohesive and collaborative team culture
4. Review talent pathway systems

# Sport by sport summary (Paralympic Games)

## Para Archery (Archery Ireland)

### Outcome

- One athlete qualified (female)
- Qualified for 2nd round and ranked 9th at the end of the Games
- Paris prospect & possible podium candidate in 2024 with the right supports

### Analysis

- Preparation was impacted negatively by COVID-19 as the athlete did not have elite athlete status and so competition exposure was limited in lead up to Games
- Archery not regarded as a high performance sport and so funding was very limited, and athlete lacked strength and conditioning (S&C) support
- Holding camp and Games experience was positive, albeit with no outdoor range available at the holding camp
- Greater clarity required around roles within the programme

### Recommendations

1. Establish a Para Archery sub-committee within Archery Ireland
2. Ensure greater clarity on respective roles of NGB, Sport Ireland, and Paralympics Ireland with respect to the programme and review the memorandum of understanding (MOU) between parties
3. Provide clarity on opportunities for accessing services and supports for athletes
4. Establish a talent identification and development programme
5. Consider including a disability archery component in coach education programme
6. Ensure outdoor range facilities are available in holding camp for Paris

## Para Canoeing (Canoeing Ireland)

### Outcome

- One athlete qualified (male)
- Competed in two events KL3 and VL3 200m sprint events
- Pre-Games expectations to reach A final in KL3 and potentially podium in VL3 event
- Final results below par finishing 1st in B Final in KL3 event (9th overall) and 5th in A Final in VL3 event

### Analysis

- Support services available to athlete limited as not Dublin based, although para athletes from other sports not based in Dublin did access support services through the Sport Ireland Institute
- Coach and athlete operate largely independent of the NGB
- Holding camp arrangements were bespoke and worked well
- COVID-19 restrictions limited options in terms of preparation

### Recommendations

1. Clarify who is responsible for supporting Para Canoeing
2. Include Para Canoeing in the NGB high performance plan
3. Develop a multi-agency approach to talent identification and development
4. Leverage knowledge of current athlete and coach to raise awareness of needs of para canoeists

## Para Cycling – Road and Track (Cycling Ireland)

### Outcome

- Seven athletes qualified (four male and three female)
- Won four medals – Golds in the Women’s Tandem B Road Race and Tandem B Road Time Trial, Silver in the Women’s Tandem B Individual Pursuit and Bronze in the Men’s H5 Time Trial
- Performance of team met or exceeded pre-Games expectations

### Analysis

- Athletes were well funded through the Sport Ireland International Carding Scheme
- The Para Cycling programme is operationally managed by Cycling Ireland and benefits from structures, supports, and processes from the NGB
- Quality of support services available to athletes was high, although para athletes are reliant on the availability of Cycling Ireland ad-hoc, day rate support staff
- Training camps were positive and athletes training in a high performance setting and environment
- Equipment supplier issues caused some difficulties

### Recommendations

1. Explore the option of providing dedicated support services to the Para Cycling programme (as opposed to relying on ad-hoc, daily rate contractors)
2. Clarify relationship with Paralympics Ireland leadership structures in support of the programme
3. Resource the talent pathway for Para Cycling

## Para Dressage (Horse Sport Ireland)

### Outcome

- Five qualifications – four individual riders (one male and three female) and one team
- All riders finished in Top 18 (with results ranging from 12th to 18th)
- Performance levels below pre-Game expectations (expectations were for one podium and three Top 8 performances)
- Optimism for the Paris Cycle

### Analysis

- Funding was limited and athletes had to cover training and competition costs from their own resources
- Lack of operational plan in lead up to the Games caused issues in preparation
- Selection process caused some stress and contention for athletes
- Lack of clarity on availability of support services for athletes
- Some tensions experienced within the team during the Games

### Recommendations

1. Put in place a robust athlete agreement setting out clearly the behaviours and standards of a high performance culture
2. Increase visibility of budget to assist medium and long-term planning
3. Consider closer relationship between Olympic and Paralympic programmes to ensure shared learnings
4. Set strategic goals for programme and plan accordingly
5. Ensure greater collaboration between the athletes’ personal trainers and the Performance Director

## Para Powerlifting (Irish Wheelchair Association - Sport)

### Outcome

- One athlete qualified (female)
- Ranked 7th at the Games
- Delivered personal best performance

### Analysis

- Para Powerlifting is not recognised as a high performance sport and this impacts on funding and support services
- NGB took lead on qualification and preparation phase
- Holding camp was positive, although there were some issues regarding provision of specific equipment
- Kit quality and allocation did not meet requirements
- Lack of relationship with support providers in advance of the Games was highlighted as a potential issue
- Overall Games experience was good

### Recommendations

1. Consider transitioning Para Powerlifting into a high performance system
2. Explore further integration of the Irish Wheelchair Association into the Sport Ireland performance system
3. Explore opportunities to transition Paralympians into coaching roles
4. Improve performance planning and support services
5. Identify training opportunities for NGB and Paralympics Ireland core performance and administration staff

## Para Athletics (Paralympics Ireland)

### Outcome

- Eight athletes qualified (four male and four female)
- Won one medal – Gold in the Men’s 100m T13. Remaining athletes finished in positions from 5th to 13th
- Overall team performance was below par. Only three athletes met or exceeded the pre-Games expectations
- Standard of Para Athletics is increasing globally and is becoming more competitive in each Cycle

### Analysis

- Impact of COVID-19 caused difficulties in preparation in the lead up to the Games
- Some planning and communication issues within the programme, with a lack of role clarity at times
- Programme described as ‘individually driven’ by athletes which works for more experienced athletes but may not for younger, less experienced athletes
- Holding camp arrangements were good; however, some concerns expressed about the training, preparation and high performance mindset of athletes during the holding camp
- Support services described as ad-hoc at times

### **Recommendations**

1. Ensure role clarity regarding the Performance Director with respect to Para Athletics
2. Consider transferring responsibility for the programme to Athletics Ireland
3. Implement detailed performance planning and clarity of accountability between Para Athletics and Paralympics Ireland
4. Ensure there is clarity of roles and responsibilities for all staff
5. Consider a formal agreement with the Sport Northern Ireland Sports Institute given the number of athletes based in Northern Ireland

## **Para Swimming (Paralympics Ireland)**

### **Outcome**

- Five athletes qualified (two male and three female)
- Won two medals – Gold in the Women’s 100m Breaststroke SB8 and Silver in the Women’s 50m Butterfly S6
- 11 swims placed in the Top 8
- Overall team performances exceeded pre-Games expectations

### **Analysis**

- Team well prepared and ready to perform with very experienced coaching team in place
- Performance planning across the Cycle was well structured and contributed positively to performances
- Ability for athletes to train at the National Aquatics Centre during COVID-19 restrictions
- Individualised approach taken to optimise preparation for each athlete
- Support services were well regarded with acknowledgment of need for more para sport specific expertise
- Overall Games experience was positive

### **Recommendations**

1. Provide role clarity for all involved in the programme
2. Address vacancies in staffing of programme and in particular review role of Head Coach to have a more hands-on role in the day-to-day operations of the sport
3. Consider transferring high performance responsibilities to Swim Ireland
4. Review organisation fit, knowledge and expertise of support service providers across the programme
5. Strategically target classifications in events that have been identified as long-term medal targets
6. Formalise the talent identification and development pathways
7. Review coaching and coach development in Para Swimming

## Para Target Shooting (Target Shooting Ireland)

### Outcome

- One athlete qualified (male)
- Competed in three events and finished in 14th, 15th and 21st place across the three events
- Performances below pre-Games expectations

### Analysis

- Preparation as good as possible given the COVID-19 restrictions and issues
- Para Target Shooting not recognised as a high performance sport and so funding is limited
- Dispersed nature of individuals (athlete was UK based, coach was US based) meant some disconnection with Paralympics Ireland
- Lack of financial support impacted on training and competition programme severely leading into the Games
- Some confusion over ability to access supports and services
- Kit issues raised in terms of quality and suitability
- Games experience not positive for athlete and coach

### Recommendations

1. Review working relationship between Target Shooting Ireland and Paralympics Ireland
2. Consider how best to support the high performance development of target shooting
3. Recognition of Target Shooting Ireland as an NGB should be considered
4. Develop detailed performance planning and funding plans across the Cycle
5. Provide clarity on eligibility criteria for funding and support
6. Consider improved media training across Paralympics Ireland

# International comparator analysis

## Rankings from the Tokyo Olympic Games

Rank	Ireland	New Zealand	Denmark	Norway	Belgium
Medal Count/Weighting (Official)	39	13	25	20	29
Total Medals	47	13	23	29	33
Gold Medal Count	34	11	22	17	22
Medal per Capita	30	5	13	17	37
Gold Medal per Capita	21	4	18	9	27
Weighted Medal Score per Capita	28	4	14	15	31
Weighted Medal Score by GDP	77	22	41	44	62
Mean rank	39	10	22	22	34
Median rank	34	11	22	17	31

Note: Green = best ranked; red = worst ranked

- Ireland's rankings are lower than the comparator nations
- In most categories Ireland are ranking between 30th and 50th

## Rankings from the Tokyo Paralympic Games

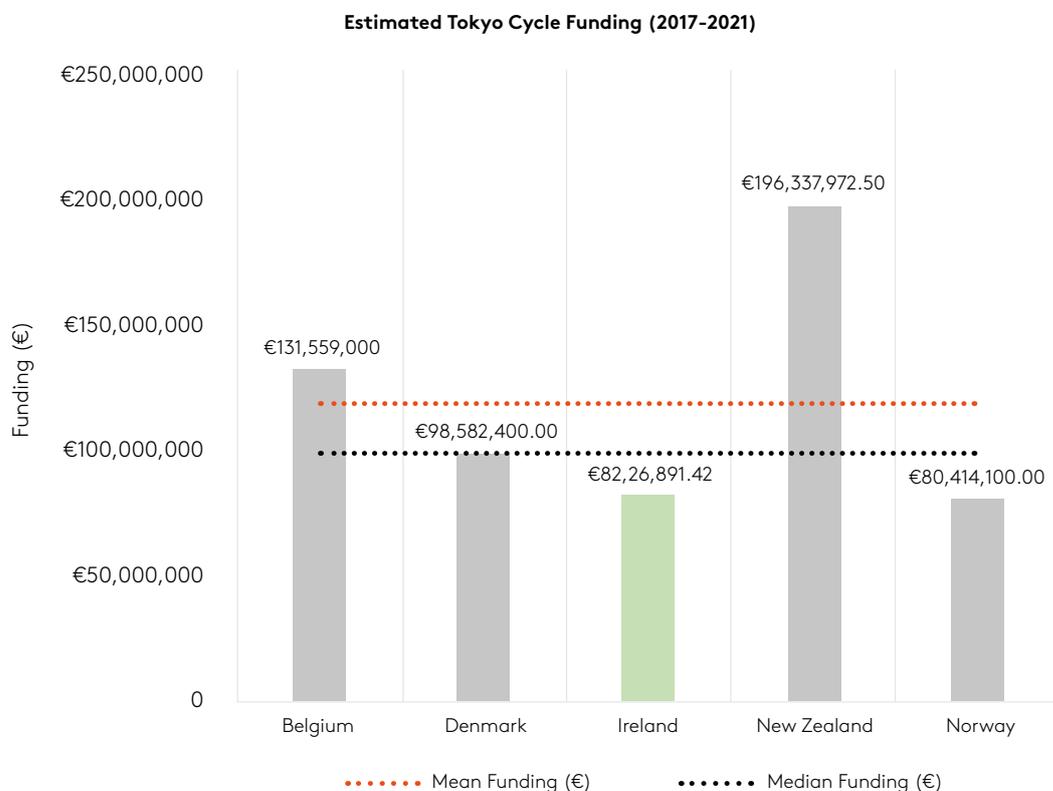
Rank	Ireland	New Zealand	Denmark	Norway	Belgium
Medal Count/Weighting (Official)	32	21	40	47	31
Total Medals	41	28	50	57	25
Gold Medal Count	28	21	37	41	28
Medal per Capita	14	4	25	34	15
Gold Medal per Capita	8	3	14	16	19
Weighted Medal Score per Capita	11	3	15	23	14
Weighted Medal Score by GDP	48	23	50	64	41
Mean rank	26	15	33	40	25
Median rank	28	21	37	41	25

Note: Green = best ranked; red = worst ranked

- Ireland's rankings are the mid-range of comparator nations
- Ireland's rankings have slipped over the last number of Cycles

# Funding during the Tokyo Cycle

## Estimated Tokyo Cycle Funding (2017-2021)



Country	Cycle Funding (€)	Olympic Medals (n)	Paralympic Medals (n)	Total Medals (n)	Funding per Medal (€)
Belgium	€131,559,000.00	7	15	22	€5,979,954.55
Denmark	€98,582,400.00	11	5	16	€6,161,400.00
Ireland	€82,296,891.42	4	7	11	€7,481,535.58
New Zealand	€196,337,972.50	20	12	32	€6,135,561.64
Norway	€80,414,100.00	8	4	12	€6,701,175.00

- Ireland is at the low end of high performance funding relative to the comparator nations (only Norway is lower)
- The commitment to increased investment is welcomed and reflects the ambition to increase our medal count Cycle by Cycle as per the High Performance Strategy
- Achieving parity with comparator nations demands focused/targeted investment in core fundamentals, identified within the High Performance Strategy
- Implementing the tiered investment policy would increase the likelihood of delivering the targets set out in the strategy

## Funding sources and considerations

### Funding

- Ireland – internal data from Sport Ireland and Sport Northern Ireland
- Belgium – data from Sport Vlaanderen’s Action Plans [1](#) [2](#)
- Denmark – data Team Danmark’s Annual Reports [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [6](#)
- New Zealand – data from High Performance Sport New Zealand’s Core Investment Documents [7](#) [8](#) [9](#) [10](#) [11](#) [12](#)
- Norway – data from the Norwegian Ministry of Culture’s Main Distribution Documents [13](#) [14](#) [15](#) [16](#) [17](#)

### Considerations

- All figures have been converted to Euro (€)
- Given the five-year Cycle, the provided figures are estimates, based on available data. For some nations, figures were provided for two four-year Cycles (2017-2020 and 2021-2024), so average figures have been used to get a five-year figure. For others, figures are not yet available for 2021, so an average of the last four years (2017-2020) have been used for the year five figure
- Where not published in English, documents have been translated and the relevant information extracted

Appendix 1:  
**Olympic NGB reports**  
(Portas Consulting)

# Tokyo Olympic Games Review

## Introduction

### Purpose of the review

- Evaluate Team Ireland's preparations for, and performances at, the Tokyo Olympic Games
- Identify pragmatic recommendations for how NGBs can plan and prepare in order to best deliver on Ireland's potential at future Olympic Games

Sport Ireland's recently published High Performance Strategy underpins the recommendations, which has seven key strategic pillars:



\* Including: Government, Sport Ireland, Sport Northern Ireland, National Governing Bodies, Olympic Federation of Ireland, Paralympics Ireland, higher education institutions

### Methodology

Our data collection was derived from two main sources:

- Information provided by Sport Ireland
  - Pre-Games expectations and actual outcomes of the Games
- Stakeholder interviews:
  - CEOs
  - Performance Directors/Performance Leads
  - Coaching and Support Staff
  - Athletes

This information was then analysed to derive specific insights and recommendations for each NGB

## Overarching system findings

Six main themes across the system were identified from conducting stakeholder interviews across the 18 NGBs:

### 1) Depth of high performance capabilities not yet established

Whilst it does exist in parts of the system, there is not the depth of performance and coaching staff with high performance knowledge to know how to win medals and create world-class structures and systems

### 2) Talent pathway exists but is not prioritised

Across a range of NGBs, there is not clear programmatic multi-cycle support offered to development athletes, and high performance support often begins only once an athlete enters the senior level

### 3) A requirement for clarity on vision and investment decisions

Some NGBs do not have a clear and articulated process for investment decisions towards athletes; this is underpinned by not having clarity in a vision that is agreed across a broad range of stakeholders

### 4) Transformational impact from the Sport Ireland Campus and the Sport Ireland Institute

During the Cycle, the Sport Ireland Campus and the Sport Ireland Institute have been transformational for a number of NGBs and have been great resources for allowing high performance training

This is not universal and the NGBs that are based further afield experience a far lesser impact

### 5) Marked improvement within the Olympic Federation of Ireland

There was a significant positive impact in the service provided to NGBs during this Cycle, with an athlete-focus at the core of the Olympic Federations of Ireland's support

There is a need to build on this improvement to ensure a continuous journey with a range of stakeholders (e.g., Sport Ireland, Sport Ireland Institute, NGBs, etc.)

### 6) High performance culture and outcomes yet to be achieved across the system

There is not clear consensus within the system on how to balance the benefits from sending a large and board range of athletes to the Games, with having a system that is set up for medal delivery and consistently challenging at the highest level

Several of these themes were also found within the post-Games survey, along with some additional insights also garnered.

Four of the six themes became apparent within the survey responses:

### 1) Depth of high performance capabilities not yet established

When asked where best to invest additional funding, all stakeholder groups believed coaching support was the best place in order to improve performance

### 2) Transformational impact from the Sport Ireland Campus and the Sport Ireland Institute

65% of Performance Directors/Performance Leads were satisfied or very satisfied with support from the Sport Ireland Institute in the build up to the Games

60% of Coaches & Support Staff felt the programme was effective or very effective in accessing suitable training facilities in the year leading up to the Games

### **3) Marked improvement within the Olympic Federation of Ireland**

76% of Performance Directors/Performance Leads were satisfied or very satisfied with the support provided by the Olympic Federation of Ireland in the year leading up to the Games

53% of athletes were very satisfied with the holding camp(s) prior to the Games

### **4) High performance culture and outcomes yet to be achieved across system**

61% of athletes felt their result was either dissatisfying/very dissatisfying vs. their pre-Games expectations

22% of CEOs and Board Members felt dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with having appropriate and effective policies for the development and support of high performance athletes

Additional insights from the surveys included:

#### **1) Athletes were more physically prepared than mentally**

Just 59% of Performance Directors/Performance Leads strongly agreed or agreed that athletes were mentally ready vs. 76% believing they were physically ready

#### **2) Underprepared for post-Games period**

Only one in every two CEOs and Board Members agreed or strongly agreed they were ready for the post-Games period

#### **3) Limited competition exposure**

Greater access to competition ranked 2nd when asked to athletes where additional funding should be placed to boost performance, whilst 25% of Performance Directors/Performance Leads were dissatisfied at the amount of competition exposure athletes received



# Athletics Ireland Report



## Outcome at the Tokyo Olympic Games

- Did not meet original performance expectation of securing three Top 8 finishes, six Top 16 finishes and 10 Top 24 finishes
- When validated, the 10 Top 24 finishes were no longer expected, as the disrupted competition schedule made the target no longer attainable

## Preparation for the Games

- Athletes felt well prepared within their individual camps
- Preparation was hindered by COVID-19 and decisions imposed on the NGB around late qualification
- A lack of resource and coaching structures existed in the build up to the Games

## Performance at the Games

- The view on performance varied across stakeholders, with some believing performance was aligned to expectations, and others believing it was a disappointing Games

## Wider NGB insights

- Challenges and opportunities exist within the talent pathway and the programme structure

## Recommendations

- 1) Devise a clearer coaching structure and model
- 2) Establish a clearer framework for athlete support beyond the Sport Ireland Campus
- 3) Create clarity in athlete funding decisions which are accountable and transparent

*Whilst the NGB sent more athletes to the Tokyo Games than the previous two Olympic Games, performance did not match pre-Games expectations*

### ATHLETICS IRELAND:

**55,425**  
MEMBERS

**13**  
CARDED ATHLETES  
AND ONE CARDED  
RELAY TEAM

**1,469**  
DAYS OF SPORT  
IRELAND INSTITUTE  
SUPPORT (2017-2020)

**€3,305,000**  
IN HIGH PERFORMANCE  
PROGRAMME FUNDING  
(2017-2020)

## Tokyo Olympic Games performance(s)

Athlete(s)	Discipline	Rank
Sophie Becker/Cillín Greene/Phil Healy/Chris O'Donnell	Mixed 4 x 400m Relay	8
Sarah Lavin	100m Hurdles	32
Louise Shanahan	800m	37
Nadia Power	800m	38
Phil Healy	200m	26
Síofra Cléirigh Büttner	800m	39
Thomas Barr	400m Hurdles	9
Eilish Flanagan	3000m Steeplechase	27
Leon Reid	200m	20
Marcus Lawler	200m	29
Mark English	800m	32
Michelle Finn	3000m Steeplechase	25
David Kenny	20km Walk	29
Alex Wright	50km Walk	29
Brendan Boyce	50km Walk	10
Ciara Mageean	1500m	27
Phil Healy	400m	25
Sarah Healy	1500m	34
Andrew Coscoran	1500m	20
Aoife Cooke	Marathon	DNF
Fionnuala McCormack	Marathon	25
Kevin Seaward	Marathon	58
Paul Pollock	Marathon	71
Stephen Scullion	Marathon	DNF

## Original performance expectation(s)

Three Top 8, six Top 16 and 10 Top 24

## Historical Olympic Games performance(s)

	NUMBER OF ATHLETES	PERFORMANCE
LONDON 2012	22	1 x Top 8 (bronze medal) 7 x Top 16 9 x Top 24
RIO 2016	17	2 x Top 8 2 x Top 16 7 x Top 24
TOKYO 2020	27	1 x Top 8 3 x Top 16 5 x Top 24

## *Athletes felt prepared for the Games but there was a concern around the extent coaches were embedded into the programme*

### Athlete readiness

- Athletes felt well prepared for the Games
  - Many felt their individual camps had gone well and were in good shape going into the Games
- Late qualification and uncertainty around the new World Athletics ranking system hindered preparation
  - Restricted ability for training camps
  - Some athletes went into the Games fatigued by performing so close to the Games
  - COVID-19 further restricted training camps and opportunities, but there was still an ability to train due to decentralised structure

### Coaching

- Had three full time National Event Leads but a bulk of personal athlete coaches worked in a volunteering capacity
  - Individual coaching regimes with athletes, resulting in lack of unity across the system
  - Sentiment that coaches do not receive enough support and subsequently do not feel part of the programme
- System reliant on volunteer/club coaches who do not necessarily have experience at international level
- Mixed levels of collaboration between coaches and the system

### Governance

- High Performance Committee meet at least four times a year with a role of 'check and challenge'
- High Performance Director has autonomy within budget
- Some stakeholders noted the Code of Conduct could have been made more accountable and enforceable

## *Resource constraints hindered the amount of athlete support and interaction available*

### High performance structure/programme

- The NGB had to reduce its staff headcount significantly due to the impact of COVID-19, in the build up to the Games
  - ~25% less headcount, having impacts on high performance capacity
  - Admin/operational overload due to COVID-19 limited ability to focus on high performance
  - Less ability to interact with athletes and performance manage
- Given the amount of athletes and the resource available, it was hard to performance manage every athlete in a decentralised system and resulted in less long-term planning and communication with athletes
- There is a view from some stakeholders within the system that the remit/funding of the high performance unit is very broad, to the extent that it is hindering elite performance

## Sport Ireland Institute

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- An acknowledgement that due to the decentralised system, the Sport Ireland Institute support was not utilised by all athletes
- The athletes who used the Sport Ireland Institute found it hugely valuable and was a positive impact to preparation
  - Heat acclimatisation strategies were well prepared by the physiology team
- For those who do not train close to the Sport Ireland Institute, some found difficulty in being supported if they were not based near the Sport Ireland Campus

## Funding

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- There was a lack of clarity on what support was offered to some athletes and coaches
  - Some stakeholders were not clear on what support was offered, the rationale behind it, and when it would be received
- There was not absolute clarity in the vision underpinning funding decisions for some athletes and coaches

*Despite sending a large number of athletes, few athletes challenged in finals and semi-finals; the wider support was appreciated from athletes*

## Athlete performance

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- Given the NGB has 13 carded athletes and one carded relay team, sending 27 athletes to the Games was deemed a success
- There were mixed reviews surrounding athlete performance
  - Some believed performances broadly aligned with expectations
  - Others were disappointed with performances and felt there had been better performances at previous events
- A combination of injuries to final contenders and fine margins limited the amount of final/semi-final finishes that were achieved

## Athlete support

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- The support for athletes at the Games was excellent
  - Athlete demands were met
  - There was also good management of support across Tokyo and Sapporo (marathon and racewalking events)
- There was some discontentment regarding the length of physiotherapy sessions, but also acknowledgement that the reduced length was part of wider COVID-19 protocols
- The need for greater athlete management between races and disciplines was also mentioned
  - Request for more frequent monitoring and support

## Wider experience

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- The Olympic Federation of Ireland's integration into the system was a huge improvement, and on balance had a very positive relationship with the NGB
- Fukuroi (holding camp) was deemed a huge success
- The amount of space was appreciated with good access to facilities, and allowed for separation from other areas
- The food was fantastic and accommodated a variety of needs
- Sapporo had less of an Olympic Games feel vs. the holding camp, and felt more restricted
- Within the Village, more home comforts would have been appreciated

*The talent pathway is not as strong as stakeholders would like, and whilst the current programme structure is appropriate, it creates challenges*

## Talent pathway

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- More needs to be done to strengthen the pipeline of talent, both in terms of discovery but also how they are supported once within the system
- In some disciplines where robust capacity is required, there is a need to ensure support of athletes, who develop at a later stage of their careers, can be supported
- The pathway is driven by a strong and sustainable club system

## Programme structure

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- A centralised model would not be effective for all athletes due to the variety of disciplines and where athletes are based
- More frequent training camps would be effective, but they require agile/flexible development that accommodate athletes different commitments and be of a high enough intensity to ensure they are worthwhile
- The current decentralised structure makes it difficult to create a team atmosphere within the programme

## LEARNINGS AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS



### 1) Devise a clearer coaching structure and model

- There is a need to embed individual coaches into the system and establish an NGB/coach/athlete dynamic that is effective, helping to generate a more collaborative culture between the NGB and individual programmes, and coaches being a valued aspect of the eco-system
- Develop a plan that involves clear training of coaches, and a framework for the development of coaches
- Assess whether the current partnership with Sport Ireland Coaching can be broadened to increase the professionalisation of coaching

### 2) Establish a clearer framework for athlete support beyond the Sport Ireland Campus

- Current inability to sufficiently support athletes who do not operate near the Sport Ireland Campus
- Clarity is required between the NGB, athletes and coaches on what is provided to athletes, with greater flexibility in provision given different demands
- Partner with the Sport Ireland Institute to ensure support is offered to athletes who are not based in Dublin, where possible
- This support could come through individual programmes, provided there is a clear and collaborative relationship between the coaching structures and the NGB, as discussed in recommendation number one

### 3) Create clarity in athlete funding decisions which are accountable and transparent

- Establish a clear vision on the purpose, ambition and rationale of funding decisions. A clear criteria is needed to deliver high performance outcomes, and this can be used to steer how many athletes receive funding and to what extent they are supported
- Ensure all stakeholders clearly understand funding decisions and have clarity in what support is offered
- Create funding decisions that are measurable and accountable



# BADMINTON IRELAND



# Badminton Ireland Report



## Outcome at the Tokyo Olympic Games

- Did not meet original performance expectation of reaching the last 16
- However, this was a high-end goal dependant on the draw the athlete received, and the performance was strong at the Games

## Preparation for the Games

- Preparation was of high quality and performance focused
- This could have been improved by more intense sparring

## Performance at the Games

- Given the athlete's experience level, the performance was promising, and they performed well in both matches
- Support at the Games met athlete requirements

## Wider NGB insights

- Extra funding is required to achieve next level of performance
- The depth of domestic coaching needs addressing

## Recommendations

- 1) Boost the quality and intensity of training provided to athletes
- 2) Increase amount of coaching available to athletes
- 3) Further professionalise by targeting more international competitions and boosting performance analysis

*Badminton Ireland's performance at the Tokyo Olympic Games showed promise*

### BADMINTON IRELAND:

**13,043**  
MEMBERS

**6**  
CARDED  
ATHLETES

**143**  
DAYS OF SPORT  
IRELAND INSTITUTE  
SUPPORT (2017-2020)

**€580,000**  
IN HIGH PERFORMANCE  
PROGRAMME FUNDING  
(2017-2020)

### Tokyo Olympic Games performance(s)

Athlete(s)	Discipline	Rank
Nhat Nguyen	Singles	15

### Original performance expectation(s)

- Expectation for Nhat to qualify for the last 16 of the event
- This was deemed as a high-end goal given Nhat was ranked 53rd in the world in June 2021

### Historical Olympic Games performance(s)

	NUMBER OF ATHLETES	PERFORMANCE
LONDON 2012	2	Both knocked out at group stage
RIO 2016	2	Advanced to the Round of 16 in Men's Singles and eliminated at group stages in Women's Singles
TOKYO 2020	1	Knocked out at group stage

*Preparation was strong despite being hindered by a lack of world-class sparring partners. The Sport Ireland Institute support was superb*

### Athlete readiness

- The athlete's performance was strong during preparation
  - They beat the 15th ranked player in the world
  - The 8-week camp prior to the Games was very focused and deemed excellent by the athlete
- Preparation was hindered by an inability to provide world-class sparring partners on a consistent basis, due to funding
  - Significantly important aspect of training where athletes need to spar against Top 10/Top 20 ranked players in the world
  - Sparring partners had to be partially athlete-funded

### High performance structure/programme

- Priority of high performance potential athletes
  - The athlete, who is carded, was given focused coaching and support services
  - This was constrained by resources (e.g., coaching capacity did not allow for a travelling coach to international competitions alongside the coaching of other programme athletes)
- Priority towards singles disciplines vs. doubles disciplines
  - Due to availability and performance of athletes
- The programme is very well planned
  - Programme is a disciplined programme that prioritises well
  - Provides the correct support at the right time

## Sport Ireland Institute

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- Support from the Sport Ireland Institute was excellent
  - Strength and conditioning (S&C) helped bridge the gap physically between Irish athletes and international competition
- Proximity to the Institute adds real value to the programme
- Education on performance analysis was very useful

*Facilities were excellent, and coaching quality was high; however, there was not enough depth in its provision*

## Coaching

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- The athlete's coach was of high quality
  - Brought new ideas to the athlete
  - Created a strong athlete-coach relationship
  - The coach has since left the programme, so the NGB are in process of recruiting a new coach
- However, coaching resources were stretched
  - One coach was responsible for training 12 athletes
  - There were no specialist coaches across disciplines
- Performance analysis had been bolstered within the NGB but had no employee in a full time capacity during the build up to the Games

## Governance

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- The NGB has good governance structures in place
  - Supportive of the high performance programme
  - Right policies and structures in place
- NGB has aligned their strategy with Sport Ireland's High Performance Strategy

## Facilities

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- The move to the new facility provided a world-class base to train
  - Replicated tournament environment facilities
  - Proximity to other facilities (e.g., Sport Ireland Institute) helped create training base feel
- Some other bookings took priority over the NGB's sessions, but there is acknowledgement that the NGB only recently relocated, and the process of optimum operations is still being established within the facility

*Given the athlete's experience and group difficulty, their performance was as expected and showed promise for future Olympic Games*

### Athlete performance

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- Given the athlete's age and experience, it was an encouraging and positive performance
  - They were placed in a difficult group with a multiple Olympian and a Top 10 seeded player, but performed well in both games
  - They beat the multiple Olympian convincingly in the first fixture and then took the Top 10 seeded player to a third set in the second game
- The athlete was pleased with their performance but disappointed not to progress out of the group stage
  - Desire to build on the experience for the next Olympic Games

### Athlete support

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- The support at the Games covered all demands
  - S&C and physiotherapy support were provided
  - Psychology support was also available at the Games but was not used
- The Performance Director and coach were on the ground with the athlete during the Games and provided excellent support throughout
- Made the choice of not bringing a sparring partner (due to COVID-19) in the build up

*Challenges around funding and domestic coaching pathways are apparent within the NGB*

### Funding

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- In order to achieve the next level of high performance, there is a consensus that more funding is required to enable the transition (e.g., for coaches, sparring partners, etc.) and reach the ambition of the NGB

### Coaching pathway

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- There are not enough quality coaches available to the NGB given the current level of funding and the limited supply of domestic coaches available
- This has contributed to inconsistency in coaching provision for athletes and a reliance on international coaches
- Programme was a victim of its own success where the broadening horizon of new talent now requires additional coaching

## LEARNINGS AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS



### 1) Boost the quality and intensity of training provided to athletes

- Establish an effective plan that helps to attract world-class players to the programme to spar with athletes on a consistent basis

### 2) Increase amount of coaching available to athletes

- A need to expand coaching staff that allows for support to both priority athletes and wider programme athletes
- Also a requirement to recruit specialist coaches for specific camps and sessions that can focus on the technical aspect of singles and doubles
- Establish ways that can help boost the pipeline of domestic coaches and create a clear coaching pathway

### 3) Further professionalise by targeting more international competitions and boosting performance analysis

- Drive exposure of both priority and development athletes to international competitions, providing opportunity to test skills and benchmark vs. competition
- Ensure support at these competitions is sufficient, which links to greater coaching depth that would allow programme to continue whilst coaches are away
- Strengthen impact of the Sport Ireland Institute expertise in performance analysis and data to provide additional insights for athletes

# CANOEING IRELAND



# Canoeing Ireland Report



## Outcome at the Tokyo Olympic Games

- One athlete in the C1 category, who reached the semi-final and came 15th

## Preparation for the Games

- Preparation went very well, with the athlete going into the Games in great condition

## Performance at the Games

- Despite the qualification being a success in itself, the athlete's performance did not represent their true ability

## Wider NGB insights

- There is potential to develop the talent pathway

## Recommendations

- 1) Design an effective plan that addresses issues within the sprint discipline
- 2) Review training structures to ensure regular camps and opportunities for collaboration
- 3) Build on the NGB's foundations to expand programme

*Although qualifying an athlete given the infancy of the performance programme was a success, the expectation of a Top 8 finish was not achieved*

### CANEOING IRELAND:

**3,219**  
MEMBERS

**5**  
CARDED  
ATHLETES

**68**  
DAYS OF SPORT  
IRELAND INSTITUTE  
SUPPORT (2017-2020)

**€180,000**  
IN HIGH PERFORMANCE  
PROGRAMME FUNDING  
(2017-2020)

### Tokyo Olympic Games performance(s)

Athlete(s)	Discipline	Rank
Liam Jegou	C1	15

### Original performance expectation(s)

- Top 8 finish in the Male C1 category

### Historical Olympic Games performance(s)

	NUMBER OF ATHLETES	PERFORMANCE
LONDON 2012	2	1 x Top 10 2 x Top 15
RIO 2016	0	N/A
TOKYO 2020	1	0 x Top 10 1 x Top 15

*The athlete was very well prepared going into the Games*

### Athlete readiness

- The athlete was showing strong signs of performance going into the Games
  - Performance indicators showed finalist/medal contending form
- 12-month delay to the Games benefitted their readiness by providing more time to improve

### Training camps

- Issues around cancellation of International Canoe Federation training opportunities
- However, the athlete's winter training camp was excellent
  - Satisfied the need to train in warmer conditions
  - Contributed to the athlete's excellent condition

### Coaching

- The athlete's coach was excellent
  - Style/methods helped athlete significantly
- During the Cycle, the NGB worked with coaches more often with hope of bolstering coaching framework and network

## Sport Ireland Institute

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- Programme did not use the services frequently
  - Programme would welcome more integration
  - Programme would like more physiotherapy support at camps and events
- The rehab support the athlete received during the Cycle was very beneficial

## Funding

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- Full time programme not feasible on NGB funds alone, and was significantly supported by philanthropic donor

*The programme has developed significantly during the Cycle, but there is still a reliance on international facilities*

## High performance structure/programme

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- The programme felt hugely supported by Sport Ireland
  - Support was a cornerstone to the programme's success
- Vast improvement of the high performance structures during the Cycle
  - For example, a high quality Performance Director and a performance and operational strategy
  - Athletes have trust in the high performance processes
- Slalom discipline was the main focus for the high performance programme during the Cycle
  - Prioritised due to talent, but a small programme with a limited team atmosphere
  - Based out of France predominately, due to no sufficient facilities in Ireland
- There are issues within the sprint programme that are hindering its ability to be a high performance discipline
  - Cultural and governance issues meaning misalignment between stakeholders, and there are disjointed relationships

## Governance

---

- Improved governance during the Cycle
  - Five people now sit on the high performance unit who were selected for their significant high performance experience
  - Much stronger processes in place (e.g., one of the first sports to comply with governance code)

## Facilities

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- No slalom facilities in Ireland, resulting in the programme residing in France
  - Structure works for the athlete as he is studying in France but requirement to travel is difficult for athletes
  - Very expensive, with NGB unable to fund programme self-sufficiently
  - Having no central place to train, which limits team culture
- Sprint facilities exist but the discipline is not a focus of the programme right now

## *The athlete's performance at the Games did not reflect their ability*

### Athlete performance

- Given the early stage of the performance programme, the NGB were delighted that an athlete had qualified, and potentially it represented an overperformance given the funding
- However, the athlete's performance did not reflect their ability and there was potential to do better
  - One mistake in the semi-final cost the chances of a final place

### Athlete support

- Support was appreciated by the athlete and programme
  - The physiotherapy support was a huge benefit

### Wider experience

- Great relationship between the Olympic Federation of Ireland and the NGB
  - Great support to the programme and coaches
- Due to COVID-19, there was a sentiment that restrictions/logistics were the focus over performance
  - Limited team atmosphere

## *There is potential to develop the talent pathway*

### Talent pathway

- Desire to have a talent pool in both slalom and sprint
  - Currently siloed but want to build the bridge between the disciplines so that there is representation in both disciplines
- Currently, the sprint programme consists of only a few athletes, limiting team atmosphere
  - Desire to bring more athletes into the programme to build team atmosphere moving forward
- Through initiatives and work with club structures, talent identification now exists and there is knowledge of who the talent are
  - The next stage is supporting this talent to maximise potential
- More talent exists within the slalom programme currently, but there is some potential in sprint coming through

## LEARNINGS AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS



### 1) Design an effective plan that addresses issues within the sprint discipline

- Address governance issues so that there are effective structures in place for the discipline to thrive
- Establish ways to better align stakeholders so that a more cohesive culture is built into the discipline

### 2) Review training structures to ensure regular camps and opportunities for collaboration

- Assess viability in holding more regular camps abroad
- Need to build on the successes of previous camps for the athletes, by increasing their frequency
- Camps would also provide the opportunity to create a better team atmosphere within the programme and help to gel athletes together

### 3) Build on the NGB's foundations to expand the programme

- Now the foundations are built within the programme (e.g., Performance Director, improved governance structures, etc.), aim to expand and drive momentum within the programme
- Ensure the talent pathway sufficiently supports the youth talent and there is clear transition between stages of the pathway
- Explore possibility of increasing the relationship with the Sport Ireland Institute to drive professionalism in the programme

# CYCLING IRELAND



# Cycling Ireland Report



## Outcome at the Tokyo Olympic Games

- Did not meet original performance expectation of securing three Top 10 finishes

## Preparation for the Games

- Athletes did not feel at peak performance going into the Games
- Coaching and governance structures were not of a high performance culture
- There was good support to athletes from the high performance programme and the Sport Ireland Institute, but the programme could go further with vision and planning

## Performance at the Games

- There was a clear consensus of disappointment within the NGB around performances at the Games, given athlete potential and the number of athletes competing

## Wider NGB insights

- Challenges and opportunities exist within the talent pathway and future facility provision

## Recommendations

- 1) Establish a clear vision and purpose for investment decisions
- 2) Review the programme's training and coaching structures
- 3) Redefine the talent pathway
- 4) Drive an aligned a high performance culture with governance structures

*Whilst the NGB sent more athletes to the Games than ever before, performances did not match pre-Games expectations*

### CYCLING IRELAND:

**21,800**  
MEMBERS

**22**  
CARDED  
ATHLETES

**530**  
DAYS OF SPORT  
IRELAND INSTITUTE  
SUPPORT (2017-2020)

**€1,595,000**  
IN HIGH PERFORMANCE  
PROGRAMME FUNDING  
(2017-2020)

### Tokyo Olympic Games performance(s)

Athlete(s)	Discipline	Rank
Daniel Martin	Road race	16
Eddie Dunbar	Road race	76
Nicolas Roche	Road race	75
Nicolas Roche	Individual time trial	28
Mark Downey	Omnium	17
Shannon McCurley/Emily Kay	Madison	13
Felix English/Mark Downey	Madison	12
Emily Kay	Omnium	13

### Original performance expectation(s)

- A Top 10 finish in the Road Race and qualification of Men's and Women's Madison and Omnium spots (with a Top 10 finish in each of these events)

### Historical Olympic Games performance(s)

	NUMBER OF ATHLETES	PERFORMANCE
LONDON 2012	4	0 x Top 10 1 x Top 20 2 x Top 30
RIO 2016	3	0 x Top 10 2 x Top 20 3 x Top 30
TOKYO 2020	7	0 x Top 10 5 x Top 20 6 x Top 30

*A lack of competition hampered athlete readiness, and coaching and governance structures were not operating at optimum high performance levels*

### Athlete readiness

- Lack of competition/quality training camps hindered preparation
  - Last major international competition took place 18 months prior to the Games and prevented track athletes reaching optimal condition
  - Road athletes preparation was also significantly disrupted, and logistical challenges pushed focus away from performance
  - No access to an indoor velodrome for almost a year in 2020
  - Mallorca did not provide sufficient environment to train
  - Limited altitude preparation

## Coaching

---

- Track athletes coached predominately by NGB coaches, whereas road athletes received more light touch support (due to their professional status)
  - Sentiment within the programme that there was an under resourcing of coaches
- Resignation of Performance Director in December hindered the capacity within the high performance unit, along with the overseeing and management of coaches
- System operating of quasi-Cycling Ireland staff/contractors
  - Contributed to the view that more could have been done to build up established coaching structures/ training

## Governance

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- Improved alignment between staff and the High Performance Committee, but not operating within a high performance culture environment
- Partially due to there being no permanent Performance Director in place for several months, the High Performance Committee were involved beyond its normal responsibilities
  - However, there is a desire to ensure the Committee's role is one of 'check and challenge' vs. being involved on a day-to-day basis
- No alignment on the High Performance Committee around direction of travel for the NGB

*Support from the high performance structure and the Sport Ireland Institute was good, but more could have been done within the programme around vision and planning*

## High performance structure/programme

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- Good levels of simplicity, accessibility and communication across programme during preparation
  - No bureaucracy, ensuring functionality
  - Quick to respond to issues that arose
  - Road athletes content with communication with the high performance programme but potential for more linkages and clarity throughout
- There was no clear vision around the programme during preparation
  - Lack of clarity in where best to focus resource
- Insufficient individual athlete programming
  - Was not enough focus towards ensuring athletes and NGB understand current performances, goals and ambitions, and what the plan is in order to achieve these
- The resignation of the Performance Director inevitably impacted the high performance structure and its functionality

## Sport Ireland Institute

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- Support has been well received from athletes
  - Good support from a range of services
- The Head of Performance Support (HOPS) role has been a success
  - Helped bring new support and identify periods where the Sport Ireland Institute can support athletes
  - Embedded into the system/programme
- Some stakeholders would have liked more support when training in Mallorca

## Facilities

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- Mallorca is no longer fit for purpose as a training camp
  - Does not facilitate intense training sessions
  - Inability to train at altitude
  - Can feel isolated when based there for significant periods of time

*There was a clear consensus of disappointment within the NGB around performances at the Games*

## Athlete performance

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- This was the largest team sent to an Olympic Games and the first time a team event in track cycling had qualified
- However, despite a couple of good performances, there was overall disappointment around performances in road and track
  - Road was a brutal and challenging race
  - Some misfortune with crashes in events, linked to a lack of competition across the whole field
  - Other athletes did not perform their best on the day

## Athlete support

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- Wider support was sufficient at the Games
  - Enough so that it gave athletes the ability to solely focus on performance
- There was some overreliance on individuals who had several responsibilities

## Wider experience

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- Flying business class significantly helped recovery and conditioning
- Flying straight into the camp and then straight out once the event was complete was ideal for performance but not for the wider Olympic experience
  - Did not get the 'Team Ireland' feel which may have helped performance
  - Not going to closing ceremony did not help to create team atmosphere
- Poor logistics surrounding a long wait at the airport and having to leave very early in morning after completing a long event but acknowledgement this was not under the remit of Cycling Ireland or the Olympic Federation of Ireland

## *The talent pathway is not clear, and opportunities and challenges exist with the potential future velodrome*

### Talent pathway

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- There is recognition that track, and road athletes require different pathways and relationships with the NGB
- There is not a clear enough pathway for an athlete, especially once they have been discovered and become part of the programme. There is not a clear enough bar that measures performance each year which subsequently helps to set certain levels of support
- This is linked to sentiment that there was not enough challenge for spots prior to Tokyo, which may have contributed to performance

### Future velodrome

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- There have been discussions with stakeholders around the future development of a velodrome in Ireland and how best to plan for its development
- There is a desire to have a system in place by the time it is built so it can propel already high performance athletes vs. waiting to build a programme and system once the velodrome is built
- There is also a view that it provides a real opportunity for sustainable success once built, but it cannot be a case of waiting around until it is built, and the programme can still be a success in the meantime

## LEARNINGS AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS



### 1) Establish a clear vision and purpose for investment decisions

- Create a clear criteria that underpins and determines investment and funding decisions for the high performance system
- This criteria would provide guidance and clarity to where the NGB is prioritising and the strategic direction of the high performance unit

### 2) Review the programme's training and coaching structures

- Consider alternatives to using Mallorca as a training camp and establish locations that can be used for intense shorter spells of training
- Devise a clear coaching model, structure and pathway that upskills and trains coaches via sustainable investment to help increase professionalism and high performance coaching



### 3) Redefine the talent pathway

- For both road and track athletes, ensuring there is a clear pathway from youth level all the way to senior level
- Heightened focus to ensure systems are in place so that once talent is discovered, they move through the pathway in order to maximise potential at the right time
- This includes creating clear levels/tiering of support that is made accountable and measurable

### 4) Drive an aligned high performance culture with governance structures

- Align with the High Performance Committee to generate clear roles and responsibilities and ensure the Committee's role is to provide strategic direction and oversight





# Golf Ireland Report



## Outcome at the Tokyo Olympic Games

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- Four athletes competed, with all four finishing inside the Top 24, and two inside the Top 8

## Preparation for the Games

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- As the athletes have their own programmes, the high performance unit was not heavily involved in their preparation

## Performance at the Games

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- Athletes performed well and were very close to medal success

## Wider NGB insights

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- The talent pathway has strong structures in place

## Recommendations

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- 1) Strive for the continued development of the talent pathway
- 2) Continue to support the transition of athletes from amateur to professional level
- 3) Further enhance the NGB's already strong relationships with stakeholders

*Golf Ireland performed very well at the Tokyo Olympic Games, narrowly missing out on a medal*

### GOLF IRELAND:

16

TEAM IRELAND GOLF  
SCHEME SUPPORTED  
ATHLETES

10

DAYS OF SPORT  
IRELAND INSTITUTE  
SUPPORT (2017-2020)

€1,710,000

IN HIGH PERFORMANCE  
PROGRAMME FUNDING  
(2017-2020)

### Tokyo Olympic Games performance(s)

Athlete(s)	Discipline	Rank	Average strokes per round
Rory McIlroy	Men's Individual	4	67.25
Shane Lowry	Men's Individual	22	68.5
Leona Maguire	Women's Individual	23	69.75
Stephanie Meadow	Women's Individual	7	68

### Original performance expectation(s)

- **Field comparison** - to win a medal in either male or female competitions
- **Self-comparison** - three of the four players to beat their 2021 PGA/LPGA tour stroke average over the four competition days (Rory McIlroy target=70.2, Shane Lowry target=70.4, Leona Maguire target=69.9 and Stephanie Meadow target=72.2)

### Historical Olympic Games performance(s)

	NUMBER OF ATHLETES	PERFORMANCE
RIO 2016	4	3 x Top 30 1 x Top 20 0 x Top 10
TOKYO 2020	4	4 x Top 30 2 x Top 20 2 x Top 10

*As athletes are professional and have their own programmes, the high performance unit's involvement in preparation was limited*

### Athlete readiness

- Due to professional nature, the high performance programme and NGB had little involvement in the preparation of athletes
  - Players have their own programmes and training units
- Programme felt more prepared in terms of expectations and requirements due to the experience at the Rio Olympic Games where golf was first introduced
- Team Lead went out in 2019 to analyse the course and logistics which was helpful for preparations

### High performance programme structure

- As the athletes who competed at the Olympic Games were professional, the NGB's role with the Olympic Games is different to other NGBs
  - Main role is ensuring there is suitable talent in the pipeline and the provision of a high performance pathway right up to the professional level
  - Need to also support in the transition of athletes from amateur to professional level (i.e., the Team Ireland Golf Scheme)
  - Once athletes become professional, the NGB has a role to ensure connection with the athlete and provide support when required (e.g., Olympic Games logistics)

- All four players came through the high performance programme and pathway; a sign of the success of the system
- Golf Ireland had a very strong relationship with Sport Ireland during the preparation for the Games
  - NGB were grateful of support from Sport Ireland and appreciate the buy-in to Golf Ireland's vision

## *The new organisation has strong governance structures and excellent facilities*

### Governance

---

- New NGB established in 2020 with the High Performance Committee working well
  - Good range of representation on the Board
  - Role is to oversee policies and programmes in high performance areas
  - Dynamic is working well, especially given the history of separate entities for men and women

### Sport Ireland Institute

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- Sporadic use of services
  - Players have own training units and are on tour for most of the year
  - Gym facilities are available at the high performance academy
- Some athletes use it when dropping back into Ireland
  - For the services that have been used, they have been good
- Relationship between the Sport Ireland Institute and NGB is strong

### Facilities

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- Have a National Centre based in Carton House
  - World-class coaching and facility
  - Helps to bring squad of players together
- Delivered camps in the USA which were useful and helped keep contact with athletes in the programme who participate in the collegiate system

## *Athletes performed very well, and the Olympic Games experience was excellent for all stakeholders involved*

### Athlete performance

---

- All four athletes exceeded performance targets
  - Top 8 finishes in both the Men's and Women's events
  - One athlete, who eventually finished in 23rd place, was 5th during Round 3 so could have been even better for the team
- All four golfers were role models throughout

## Athlete support

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- Some athletes used the provided support
  - Physiotherapy and nutrition support was useful

## Planning and logistics

---

- Very positive experience for all stakeholders
  - Athletes already looking forward to the prospect of the Paris Olympic Games
- Interaction with the Olympic Federation of Ireland was excellent
  - Advice and communications were impressive
- Stayed in a separate hotel outside of the Village, due to it being closer to the course
  - Worked well and helped to replicate other events

*The talent programme has sound structures and continues to produce world-class athletes*

## Talent in the programme

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- The Team Ireland Golf Scheme is significant for the pathway and helps keep hold of talent that otherwise would not be able to successfully transition from amateur to professional
- Lots of thought and resource has been put into the talent pathway
  - Aim for a unified approach but also has a regional dimension
- Transparent pathway for athletes, who know the route and requirements of each stage

## LEARNINGS AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS



### 1) Strive for the continued development of the talent pathway

- Further develop the already successful talent pathway by ensuring youth talent is provided the right support that helps maximise potential
- Build on the strong foundations at Carton House and continue to bring athletes together

### 2) Continue to support the transition of athletes from amateur to professional level

- Continue to fund and support recently turned professional players via the Team Ireland Golf Scheme to ensure they are supported during the transition and no athlete falls out of the talent pool

### 3) Further enhance the NGB's already strong relationships with stakeholders

- Maintain and build strong relationships with the Sport Ireland Institute so that when support is required for athletes, it can be facilitated
- Continue to have a trusted partner with Sport Ireland that aligns on vision and policies
- Ensure the NGB is continuing to do all it can to support professional players where it is required, so that they continue to participate in the programme for events such as the Olympic Games



TOKYO 2020

# Gymnastics Ireland Report



## Outcome at the Tokyo Olympic Games

- Two athletes qualified, with a 7th place finish (finalist) being achieved

## Preparation for the Games

- Preparation went very well, underpinned by world-class facilities, a well-structured programme, and good governance

## Performance at the Games

- Performance met expectations but could have been even better

## Wider NGB insights

- Desire to boost coaching resource within NGB
- The talent pathway is in a strong position

## Recommendations

- 1) Invest in people and coaches that can help to capitalise on the strong structures of programme
- 2) Expand athlete support further across the national programme
- 3) Continue the rebuild from impact of COVID-19 to return NGB to previous levels

*Gymnastics Ireland had a successful Tokyo Olympic Games, reaching a final for the first time*

### GYMNASTICS IRELAND:

**~25,000**  
MEMBERS

(NOTE: THIS HAS BEEN SIGNIFICANTLY IMPACTED BY COVID-19, WHERE PRE-PANDEMIC FIGURES WERE OVER 35,000)

**2**  
CARDED  
ATHLETES AND  
SUPPORT FOR A  
WOMEN'S SENIOR  
PANEL

**84**  
DAYS OF SPORT  
IRELAND  
INSTITUTE  
SUPPORT (2017-  
2020)

**€650,000**  
IN HIGH  
PERFORMANCE  
PROGRAMME  
FUNDING  
(2017-2020)

### Tokyo Olympic Games performance(s)

Athlete(s)	Discipline	Rank
Megan Ryan	Individual All-Around	72
Megan Ryan	Uneven Bars	76
Rhys McClenaghan	Pommel Horse	7
Megan Ryan	Floor Exercise	72
Megan Ryan	Beam	88

### Original performance expectation(s)

- Consistent final and podium finishes at major events including European Championships, World Championships and Olympic Games

### Historical Olympic Games performance(s)

	NUMBER OF ATHLETES	PERFORMANCE
LONDON 2012	1	0 x Top 10 0 x Top 20 0 x Top 30 0 x Top 40
RIO 2016	2	0 x Top 10 0 x Top 20 0 x Top 30 2 x Top 40
TOKYO 2020	2	1 x Top 10 1 x Top 20 1 x Top 30 1 x Top 40

*Preparation went very well, with excellent training and support provision for the athletes. This was underpinned by strong governance and finance*

### Athlete readiness

- Both athletes were going into the Games in good form
  - One athlete was deemed to be in the condition of a final/medal contender

### Sport Ireland Institute

- Excellent relationship and service provision was superb
  - Practitioners often went out of their way
  - Provided very good psychology support during COVID-19
  - Manged an athlete injury well, with good collaboration with the NGB
- Fully embedded into the programme
- Useful when outsourcing services beyond Dublin (e.g., Cork)

## Governance

---

- Strong governance structures
  - High Performance Committee very supportive to programme
  - Board are not operational and do not interfere with day-to-day high performance

## Training environment and camps

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- Well planned training camps/environment
  - Went Japan on a training camp in 2019
  - International exposure (e.g., USA club came over for a camp), but not as much as would have liked as COVID-19 prevented attending or hosting international camps
  - Camps and competitions were chosen so that athletes peaked at the right time and practiced routines
- COVID-19 meant training was very individual-focused with few training partners, but training was not badly affected as the programme dealt with it well

## Finance

---

- NGB significantly contribute to finances of the high performance programme
  - NGB generates 60-75% of its revenue commercially
  - However, COVID-19 has hugely impacted revenues and finances and are now less stable as a result

*The move to the Sport Ireland Campus has been transformational for the programme*

## High performance programme/structure

---

- One athlete was very well supported by the programme and had all the support required
- Programme was very successful
  - Quick identification of needs and support
  - Very focused/adaptable with detailed plans and contingencies
  - Took athlete welfare seriously and did not try to overwork the athletes
  - Aimed to normalise Olympic Games and treat it as any other event
  - Funding targeted at specific athletes
- Have clear structures in place
  - For example, there are five pathway programmes which underpin what a successful athlete looks like
- Sport Ireland have been great partners and helped to support NGB

## Coaching

---

- Have fantastic coaches in the programme, but majority are not full time
- Across the country, there is some potential in Ireland but there is a lack of depth in technical coaches
- No full time national women's coach
  - Reliant on club-based coaches/contractors but are in the process of hiring a full time coach

## Facilities and equipment

---

- Programme is based in the National Gymnastics Centre on the Sport Ireland Campus
  - Excellent facility which is fundamental for the success of the programme
  - Desire to create/already began the process of creating a centralised national coaching/talent hub at the centre
- The quality of the facility attracts other international teams to visit for camps
- NGB recognise the support from Sport Ireland for the provision of an excellent facility

*Both athletes performed broadly in alignment with expectations, but the outcomes had potential to be even better had falls not occurred*

## Athlete Performance

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- Both athletes were relatively pleased with their performances
  - One of the athletes finished very well in the event after a fall and gained a lot of experience
  - The other athlete made Gymnastics' first Olympic Games final, which is a sign of the quality of the athlete and the strength of the programme
  - The athlete qualified for the final with the top score, but a fall cost them a chance of a medal
  - They reacted very well to the fall and completed their routine impressively

## Athlete support

---

- The Sport Ireland Institute support was fantastic, and all required services were available
- Coaches made a significant impact during Games time and valuable experience was gained by the coaches

## Planning and logistics

---

- Programme was very independent during planning and logistics of the Games
  - NGB organised own training camp/flights (the Olympic Federation of Ireland's camp did not have facilities in order for programme to suitably train)
- The Olympic Federation of Ireland helped where they could (e.g., kit) and were cooperative in allowing programme to be independent

*There is a strong desire to boost coaching quality within the NGB, whilst the talent pathway is in a good position*

## Coaching

---

- Desire to have technical coaches/national coaches within programme to help educate other coaches and create talent pool of coaches
- Want to create stronger infrastructure of coaches within the National Centre
  - Have identified staff that are required
- Currently recruiting for a full time women's national coach
- Clear pathways for every discipline of coaches that are aligned to the gymnasts pathways that helps to support coaches becoming high performance standard

## Talent pathway

- Clear pathway for every discipline that starts from a very young age in Squads, National Competitions, International Competitions and Support Services
- Evidence of success within pathway
  - World medal/World Finalist/European Finalist/Northern European medals
  - First set of senior girls have just come through new pathway system
  - Good depth of male and female talent who have potential to challenge on world stage
- Talent pathway affected by a two year delay due to COVID-19
  - Youth have missed out but has allowed for fresh start. Pathways have been rechannelled and redeveloped to ensure all pathways are aligned

## LEARNINGS AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS



### 1) Invest in people and coaches that can help to capitalise on the strong structures of programme

- NGB have the facilities and structures in place for high performance but now need the resource to move to the next stage of development
- Need pathway managers to work with club development programmes to ensure that quality talent is circled back into the Centre
- Need coordinators and admin staff to help with support planning and logistics
- Need full time technical staff working within the Centre, without reliance on contractors

### 2) Expand athlete support further across the national programme

- Aim to widen the athlete support services (e.g., Sport Ireland Institute) across the national programme (e.g., youth athletes further down the talent pathway)

### 3) Continue the rebuild from impact of COVID-19 to return NGB to previous levels

- Look to rebuild the NGB during the next Cycle in order to return to previous levels pre-COVID-19
- Work with youth talent which have lost two years within the pathway to ensure that the short-term loss in training does not impact long-term potential
- Aim to restore finances back to the previous levels where the NGB was delivering strong amounts of revenue

# HOCKEY IRELAND



# Hockey Ireland Report



(NOTE: THIS REPORT IS FOCUSED ON THE WOMEN’S HOCKEY TEAM ONLY, AND NOT A REVIEW OF BOTH THE MEN’S AND WOMEN’S PROGRAMMES)

## Outcome at the Tokyo Olympic Games

- Women’s Team qualified, playing five game and winning one
- Did not qualify out of the pools and finished 10th

## Preparation for the Games

- The move to a semi-centralised model was beneficial, but preparation was hindered by COVID-19

## Performance at the Games

- The team could not replicate its performances seen in previous events

## Wider NGB insights

- Whilst there has been improvements, more can still be done to further advance the pathway

## Recommendations

1. Build off the improved pathway by continuing to align youth and senior level
2. Work with stakeholders to establish a clear and transparent long-term plan for the programme structure
3. Ensure support around athletes generates high performance environment

*Hockey Ireland qualified a Women’s Team for the first time, but did not perform to their best at the Games*

### HOCKEY IRELAND:

**33,521**  
MEMBERS

**736**  
DAYS OF SPORT IRELAND  
INSTITUTE SUPPORT  
(2017-2020)

**€2,510,000**  
IN HIGH PERFORMANCE  
PROGRAMME FUNDING  
(2017-2020)

### Tokyo Olympic Games performance(s)

- Played five games, winning one and losing four, to finish 5th in their pool
- Did not qualify out of the pools and finished in 10th place overall

### Original performance expectation(s)

- Qualify from the pools to the knockout stages

### Historical Olympic Games performance(s)

	NUMBER OF ATHLETES	PERFORMANCE
LONDON 2012	No qualification	N/A
RIO 2016	No qualification (NGB did qualify a Men's Team)	N/A
TOKYO 2020	Qualified a Women's Team	10th place finish

*There were competitive levels of game time and training within the programme, but the programme could have gone further with support and facility provision*

### Athlete readiness

- Difficulty in having the European Championships so close
  - Had to peak twice in a short period of time
  - Although, the programme did address development areas from the European Championships, in the preparation for the Games
- On a par with other teams physically going into the Games but technically and tactically were behind

### Sport Ireland Institute

- In addition to the Sport Ireland Institute, support was provided by the Sport Northern Ireland Sports Institute, as well as NGB contracted staff
- Overall, these had a positive impact on the programme, especially from an injury prevention perspective
- Some of those interviewed expressed that they would like more support and highlighted the inherent difficulties of supporting a team sport that is semi-professional in nature
- There is potential to further improve the coordination between coaches and the Sport Ireland Institute

## Facilities and equipment

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- Wider hockey facilities could have been improved at the Sport Ireland Campus
  - For example, a lack of changing rooms, meeting rooms/team areas, and recovery rooms
  - Prevented it being a more inclusive and comfortable facility

## Training environment and camps

---

- COVID-19 provided more time for training as club travel was limited
- Programme wanted to go to Malaysia, but due to safety concerns it was cancelled
  - Understandable that safety came first, but it disrupted the programme, and they wanted a warm weather camp
  - Restricted ability to replicate Tokyo environment, although heat training was well planned
- Got good game time in 2021 (e.g., games vs. GB and Scotland, and the European Championships), but would have liked to play more games vs. higher ranked teams

*The recent move to a semi-centralised model was effective during preparation time*

## High performance programme/structure

---

- Shift to semi-centralised/professional training programme significantly helped preparation
  - Better exposure to international teams
  - Better able to support athletes and train with them
- Some issues still exist with the programme and structure
  - The objective to compete at an Olympic Games helped commitment and focus to the programme and its semi-centralised nature, but no certainty that it is a sustainable model for athletes
  - No absolute clarity in where the programme is moving towards post the Tokyo Olympic Games
  - Support staff (e.g., Sport Ireland Institute) do not have full capacity to keep up with programme needs as full structures are not in place
  - Resource and capacity would not have coped if both the Men's and Women's teams had qualified

## Funding

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- Acknowledgement that funding for a team sport is very different to individual sports
- Aim is to fund both the Men's and Women's programmes, but current resources do not allow the full support of both programmes

## Coaching

---

- Coaching pathway structures are in place, but not in position yet with a clear succession plan for coaches
- Need to support and upskill coaches around programme leadership and technical/tactical support

*Whilst qualifying was a great achievement, the team did not perform to the best of their ability*

### Athlete performance

---

- Did not perform how the team wanted to perform
  - Did not achieve expectations
  - Lost crunch match to India
- However, the team learnt a lot from the performance, and it was a great first experience at an Olympic Games
  - Experience for the younger players
  - Tactical and mental lessons were learnt
- View that in some cases that successful qualification was seen as a bigger deal than the performance at the Games itself

### Athlete support

---

- Sport Ireland Institute support was good at the Games
  - Great physiotherapy and medical support available
- Had strength and conditioning (S&C) support during the pre-camp, but not during the Games
  - Would have liked support beyond the pre-camp (during the Games, the offering was virtual)
  - This was limited due to the number of accreditations

### Planning and logistics

---

- The Olympic Federation of Ireland did a very good job but areas for improvement still exist
  - Holding camp was excellent
  - No team room or gym access at the Games
  - With the official ceremony, wearing training kit when other nations had official kit felt odd
- Programme had not been away for a month before, but was not viewed as an issue at all

*Whilst there has been improvements, more can still be done to further advance the talent pathway*

### Talent pathway

---

- Improvements have been made with the pathway (e.g., U21 Development Women's Squad)
- Potential to further improve to ensure no talent is being lost along the way
  - Gap still exists between national level and junior levels
  - Capitalise on the 'HookedForLife' development plan to upskill youth players
  - U18/U16 level could have a clearer programme and more aligned with senior level
- Need to ensure junior players are competing at the highest level at their respective age groups, so major senior tournaments seem less daunting
- There is an acknowledgement that the age grade programmes are self-funded, which is rare vs. competitor nations

## LEARNINGS AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS



### 1) Build off the improved pathway by continuing to align youth and senior level

- Good work has been done with the U21 and U23 teams. Aim to fully embed teams into the programme and ensure clear cohesion and integration into the senior teams from a junior level
- Devise clear plan for U16 and U18 athletes that aligns with the wider programme
- Ensure the regional bases are linked and integrated into the national programme

### 2) Work with stakeholders to establish a clear and transparent long-term plan for the programme structure

- Collaborate with stakeholders (e.g., Sport Ireland, Sport Northern Ireland, etc.) to create a clear plan, vision and strategy for the programme structure for the following three years building up to the Paris Olympic Games
- Ensure there is clarity with all stakeholders in the eco-system on where the programme is going and what is expected by each stakeholder moving forwards
- Ensure the plan outlines a clear structure for the programme and how athletes interact, where the programme is going, competition planning, and the route from current state of play to future Olympic Games

### 3) Ensure support around athletes that generates high performance environment

- Review current levels of support around teams (e.g., coaches, S&C, etc.) to ensure the right level of support is offered in the right areas and that support is consistently improved (e.g., training support)
- Work with Sport Ireland to assess future facility provision and viability of wider facility offerings (e.g., team room, changing rooms, etc.)
- Continue to further embed the Sport Ireland Institute into the programme



# Horse Sport Ireland Report



## Outcome at the Tokyo Olympic Games

- 7 individual qualifications and 2 team qualifications
  - 5 x Top 24
  - 4 x Top 16
  - 2 x Top 8

## Preparation for the Games

- Limited competition hindered preparation, but the high performance structures were in relatively good shape going into the Games

## Performance at the Games

- Did not meet expectations across the disciplines due to a mixture of riders and horses not performing on the day and some bad luck

## Wider NGB insights

- Attracting and retaining world-class horses has been difficult for the programme

## Recommendations

- 1) Develop solutions that attract top-quality horses to the programme
- 2) Prioritise competition for riders
- 3) Embed Sport Ireland Institute into the programmes
- 4) Strengthen operational capacity and support

(Note: There are additional recommendations for specific disciplines)

*Despite strong athlete numbers, Horse Sport Ireland did not achieve its pre-Games expectations*

### HORSE SPORT IRELAND:

**81**  
DAYS OF SPORT IRELAND INSTITUTE  
SUPPORT (2017-2020)

**€2,440,000**  
IN HIGH PERFORMANCE PROGRAMME  
FUNDING (2017-2020)

### Tokyo Olympic Games performance(s)

Athlete(s)	Discipline	Rank
Heike Holstein	Dressage	37
Sarah Ennis	Eventing	36
Austin O'Connor	Eventing	13
Sam Watson	Eventing	30
Team (the three above athletes)	Eventing	8
Bertram Allen	Jumping	15
Darragh Kenny	Jumping	17
Cian O'Connor	Jumping	7
Team (the three above athletes & Shane Sweetnam)	Jumping	EL

### Original performance expectation(s)

- Eventing – Podium finish
- Dressage – Top 10 finish (when validated this was adjusted to a Top 20 finish)
- Show Jumping - Podium finish

### Historical Olympic Games performance(s)

	NUMBER OF ATHLETES	PERFORMANCE
LONDON 2012	8	3 x Top 8 (1 x Bronze medal) 4 x Top 16 5 x Top 24
RIO 2016	6	1 x Top 8 2 x Top 16 3 x Top 24
TOKYO 2020	8	2 x Top 8 4 x Top 16 5 x Top 24

(Note: The number of athletes counts one athlete, even if they competed in more than one event)

## *Preparation for the Games was hindered by a lack of competition*

(Note: Across the report, insights are split into the three specific disciplines; however, due to unavailability for interviews, Dressage has fewer insights and no discipline specific recommendations)

### Athlete/horse readiness

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#### **All disciplines:**

- Lack of competition time hindered readiness
  - Training was prioritised too much over competition time
  - Restricted ability to benchmark performance vs. other countries
- Had good momentum and qualified early prior to COVID-19

#### **Eventing:**

- Special dispensation given to high performance athletes to train, which helped readiness

#### **Show Jumping:**

- Horses were in good condition going into the Games

#### **Dressage:**

- As prepared as could have been given there was little international travel allowed

### Training camps and environment

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#### **Show Jumping:**

- International nature of programme was hindered due to COVID-19
- Florida was a good event and replicated the conditions for Tokyo, while also helping to get good mileage in the horses
- Not enough team training camps, which impacted team culture

#### **Eventing:**

- Issues travelling and going to camps. The programme required international travel but had no base in Europe

#### **Dressage:**

- Would have liked more trips/camps away

### Finance

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#### **All disciplines:**

- Brexit had significantly increased the cost of training and competing within Europe
- There was not absolute clarity on funding decisions made between spending funds on training or competition

*Overall, the high performance structures of the disciplines were in relatively good shape, but more could have been done around wider support*

## High performance programme/structure

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### Show Jumping:

- Due to riders being on the international circuit, there was difficulty in commitment around what horses were available at events
- Very individualised units which held back team culture

### Eventing:

- Challenge of running programme with athletes based in Ireland and the UK
- Good programme with solid structures that were built up from the London and Rio Olympic Games
- Nature of modern event is the requirement to be experts in all three disciplines
  - Dressage being behind in quality vs. other disciplines

### Dressage:

- Programme on an upward trajectory but more could have been done around planning and management of athletes
- Selection decision of only sending one rider was the right one, despite causing controversy

## Coaching

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### All disciplines:

- More support surrounding the High Performance Directors may have helped preparation
- There is no significant overlap between coaching and support structures across the three disciplines

## Sport Ireland Institute

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### All disciplines:

- Limited engagement, with Eventing having the most connectivity

### Show Jumping:

- On reflection, greater rider buy in with the Sport Ireland Institute support would have helped (e.g., strength and conditioning (S&C), nutrition, etc.)
  - Difficulties arose due to riders not being based in Ireland

*Performance did not match pre-Games expectations*

## Athlete performance

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### Dressage:

- Performed as well as they could have and not far off personal bests

### Eventing:

- Did not perform to their ability as medal hopefuls
  - Due to combination of the riders' technical ability not being at the required level to challenge for a medal on the day, and horses not performing to the required standard

**Show Jumping:**

- Unlucky to some extent, most notably with the horse of a medal hopeful having a nosebleed during the event

**Athlete support****All disciplines:**

- Happy with the support provided at the Games
- Heightened importance given the high temperature and humidity
- There was potential for more collaboration between the support staff for the three disciplines

**Eventing:**

- Several support staff, which pleased the programme

**Dressage:**

- Would have liked more trainer support

**Planning and logistics****All disciplines:**

- Very difficult Olympic Games for travel
  - Especially hard on horses to travel for such a long time

**Show Jumping and Dressage:**

- Staying in the hotel worked well, as it helped to create the 'normal' performance environment

*Programmes find it difficult to attract and retain the best quality horses*

**Athlete and horse pathway****All disciplines:**

- Ireland have the ability to produce world-class talent of horses, but the programmes face difficulty in holding onto the talent and incentivising Olympic Games involvement
- This limits world-class horses being available to the system and creates a lack of depth within the horse pathway

**Show Jumping:**

- Good crop of young riders
- However, there are currently no top level female riders

## LEARNINGS AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS



### 1) Develop solutions that attract top-quality horses to the programme

- Create a clear pathway that outlines the route for world-class horses to reach the programme at the right stage of development
- Develop strong owner relationships that helps link world-class horses to the programme
- Generate incentives for owners to have their horse within the programme

### 2) Prioritise competition for riders

- Develop long-term competition planning to ensure riders gain optimum exposure that priorities competition time
- Utilise increased competition time to benchmark performance against competitors



### 3) Embed the Sport Ireland Institute into the programme

- Work alongside the Sport Ireland Institute to bring increased professionalism into the programme
- Ensure a clear plan that provides support to riders who are not based near the Sport Ireland Campus

### 4) Strengthen operational capacity and support

- Provide wider support around the High Performance Directors
- Establish clear roles and responsibilities of staff within the performance programme
- Discover and identify synergies of operational and support staff



## EVENTING:

### 5) Need a clear plan that addresses the Dressage discipline

- Helps to ensure all three disciplines are of a world-class standard

### 6) Investigate the viability of creating a satellite hub in Europe

- Consider whether a hub is viable, that can be used as a base for European competitions

## **SHOW JUMPING**

### **7) Boost team culture**

- Bring the team together more frequently to harness a team environment

### **8) Discover solutions that ensures the best riders/horses are available**

- Boost commitment to the programme from riders and horses



# Irish Athletic Boxing Association Report



## Outcome at the Tokyo Olympic Games

- Two medals (1 x Gold and 1 x Bronze), one Quarter-final finish and two Round of 16 finishes

## Preparation for the Games

- Preparation went well, despite several changes and governance challenges within the organisation during the Cycle. Driven by good coaching, excellent facilities and well-planned training camps

## Performance at the Games

- Achieving two medals at the Games was very pleasing
- Some tough draws prevented more medals being won

## Wider NGB insights

- Talent pathway is not connected with the high performance system
- Potential to expand coaching development to a greater level
- Need for a clear plan around the transition of professional boxers from the system

## Recommendations

- 1) Continue to develop relationships with Sport Ireland and other stakeholders
- 2) Address governance issues so that a flourishing talent pathway is enabled
- 3) Develop clear plan for coach development
- 4) Continue to build on the success of the high performance programme

*The Irish Athletic Boxing Association had a very successful Tokyo Olympic Games and brought back the levels of success seen during the London Olympic Games*

### IRISH ATHLETIC BOXING ASSOCIATION:

**18,387**  
MEMBERS

**15**  
CARDED  
ATHLETES

**1,124**  
DAYS OF SPORT  
IRELAND INSTITUTE  
SUPPORT (2017-2020)

**€2,940,000**  
IN HIGH PERFORMANCE  
PROGRAMME FUNDING  
(2017-2020)

### Tokyo Olympic Games performance(s)

Athlete(s)	Discipline	Rank
Aidan Walsh	Welterweight	3
Michaela Walsh	Featherweight	9
Emmet Brennan	Light Heavyweight	17
Kurt Walker	Featherweight	5
Brendan Irvine	Flyweight	17
Aoife O'Rourke	Middleweight	9
Kellie Harrington	Lightweight	1

### Original performance expectation(s)

- Did not submit pre-Games performance expectations to Sport Ireland, despite numerous requests to do so

### Historical Olympic Games performance(s)

	NUMBER OF ATHLETES	PERFORMANCE
LONDON 2012	6	2 x Round of 16 2 x Bronze 1 x Silver 1 x Gold
RIO 2016	8	1 x Round of 32 4 x Round of 16 3 x Quarter-final
TOKYO 2020	7	2 x Round of 16 1 x Quarter-final 1 x Bronze 1 x Gold

*Preparation for the Games went well, driven by good coaching, excellent facilities and well-planned training camps*

### Athlete readiness

- Overall, athletes were going into the Games in good shape and with good levels of readiness
  - Well prepared both mentally and physically
- Some athletes were carrying injuries and a lack of sparring hindered readiness

### Coaching

- The structure of having specific coaches for certain athlete groups worked well
  - Allowed for specialisation
  - The athlete/coach combinations being picked alongside the psychology team were well planned
  - Good athlete-coach dynamic

## Facilities

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- Top quality facilities at the Sport Ireland Campus, with strong support levels
- Would have liked more stakeholders together in one facility (e.g., admin staff) and some additional services (e.g., accommodation for athletes)

## Training camps and environment

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- Selection of tournaments and training camps proved successful
  - Choice of tournaments provided right balance between competitions and training and reduced the chance of the spread of COVID-19
  - Successfully brought in sparring partners from other countries
- COVID-19 reduced size of the training group, but helped create tight-knit culture
- Confusion around International Boxing Association's qualification/competitions meant athletes were not sent to tournaments which they would have liked to in hindsight
- No National Championships restricted bringing in new talent
- Strong training squad culture
  - Developed group of boxers that had an opportunity for success, rather than group of individuals
  - Cycle preparation raised a lot of boxers to Olympic Games standard

*Preparation for the Games was occurring amid several governance challenges and changes to the organisation and programme*

## Sport Ireland Institute

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- Excellent support provided from practitioners, which added value to the programme
  - Dealt well with COVID-19
- The proximity of the Sport Ireland Institute to Boxing's programme helped embed practitioners
- Physiotherapy support was fantastic but not enough given programme size. To note, the Irish Athletic Boxing Association directly contracted their own physiotherapist, while the Sport Ireland Institute provided locum support

## Finance

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- Would have liked greater funds for the high performance programme
- Neither the high performance unit nor the NGB are significant revenue generating bodies

## Governance

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- High Performance Advisory Committee established, but has not worked
  - No collaboration between elected officials and staff
  - Members did not have the required expertise
- Consensus that the current relationship between high performance and membership is sub-optimal
  - Some believe a separate high performance unit would solve issues
  - Others would prefer to solve issues as one body and that separating would cause more problems

## High performance programme/structure

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- Significant change has occurred during the Cycle
  - Such as a new High Performance Director, new facility and new selection policies
- Open communication and trust between majority of high performance stakeholders
- Strong cohesion within the team, in the build up to the Games

*Performance was excellent at the Games, achieving two medals*

## Athlete performance

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- Very good performance which achieved one Gold and one Bronze
  - Hit internal targets
- Sentiment that more medals could still have been won
  - Many who did not get podium finishes were beaten by eventual medal winners
  - Tough draws for athletes
- During performance, athletes conducted themselves well
  - Improved integrity vs. previous Games

## Athlete support

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- Great support
  - Psychology helped athletes who had never experienced an Olympic Games before
  - Integrated psychology support into coaching decisions
- Wanted more accreditations, with the amount restricting support
- Structure of coaches support worked well
  - No overload of information or too many coaches aiming to influence

## Planning and logistics

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- The Olympic Federation of Ireland improved support since last Games
  - Everything needed was provided for athletes
  - Strong levels of staff numbers to help athletes
- Pre-Games camp in Miyazaki was very good
  - Sufficient training which helped athletes to acclimatise

## *Challenges around the talent pathway, coaching development, and the transition for professional boxers were raised during stakeholder interviews*

### **Talent pathway**

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- High performance unit has a limited ability to influence and interact in the pathway and with youth athletes, which is a significant issue
  - Restricts long term planning
  - Absence of access or assessment of talent
  - No clear pathway or connection between age groups, limiting the transition and embedding of boxers
- Limits the ability of high performance coaches to improve performance of youth boxers

### **Coaching development**

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- More could be done with coach development and there is a need to upskill current coaches
- Need a clear coaching pathway and a route to develop

### **Professional transition**

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- There is a need to introduce a process that engages with boxers that leave the system to turn professional in order to understand rationale and behaviour

## LEARNINGS AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS



### 1) Continue to develop relationships with Sport Ireland and other stakeholders

- There has been a significant improvement in the relationship between the NGB and Sport Ireland during the Cycle, based on the understanding that the leadership and high performance programme is working
- There is a need to use these foundations to continue to build the relationship and ensure there is alignment and collaboration on governance structures and how the organisation can improve its operations beyond the high performance programme

### 2) Address governance issues so that a flourishing talent pathway is enabled

(Note: There is acknowledgement that a separate governance review is currently on-going, and the recommendations below are separate to that review)

- Gain clarity on the relationship between high performance and membership and how they interact within the organisation moving forward, where clear responsibilities between all stakeholders are established
- Within this, there needs to be a heightened focus on the talent pathway and how to find a medium that allows a clear and successful pathway from grassroots level to high performance
- This requires greater coordination between high performance and membership units



### 3) Develop a clear plan for coach development

- Devise a plan that ensures coaches are provided with the training that allows for clear development and enhancement of skills and expertise
- Create a development plan for coaches with a clear pathway that outlines the coaching pyramid from grassroots to elite level

### 4) Continue to build on the success of the high performance programme

- Continuously develop and deepen the high performance programme to ensure further success
- Harness the already strong relationship with the Sport Ireland Institute and being based on the Sport Ireland Campus to further embed the wider services and systems into the programme
- Aim to become further connected to the wider systems and sport (e.g., regional influence)



# IRISH CLAY TARGET SHOOTING ASSOCIATION



# Irish Clay Target Shooting Association Report



## Outcome at the Tokyo Olympic Games

- Qualified one athlete, who finished in 26th place in the Trap event

## Preparation for the Games

- Late qualification and COVID-19 meant training opportunities were limited

## Performance at the Games

- Performance aligned to the pre-Games expectation of the athlete

## Wider NGB insights

- Talent exists but there is a challenge in supporting it
- Olympic disciplines are not prioritised in the NGB

## Recommendations

- 1) Boost high performance capacity of the organisation
- 2) Improve governance structures
- 3) Create pathway to ensure talented athletes are fully supported to reach potential

*Irish Clay Target Shooting Association sent one athlete to the Games who broadly performed in alignment with expectations*

### IRISH CLAY TARGET SHOOTING ASSOCIATION:

**744**  
MEMBERS

**1**  
CARDED  
ATHLETE

**9**  
DAYS OF SPORT  
IRELAND INSTITUTE  
SUPPORT (2017-2020)

**€110,000**  
IN HIGH PERFORMANCE  
PROGRAMME FUNDING  
(2017-2020)

### Tokyo Olympic Games performance(s)

Athlete(s)	Discipline	Rank
Derek Burnett	Trap	26

### Original performance expectation(s)

- No explicit performance expectation listed but the hope that one female athlete would qualify

### Historical Olympic Games performance(s)

	NUMBER OF ATHLETES	PERFORMANCE
LONDON 2012	1	27th place
RIO 2016	0	N/A
TOKYO 2020	1	26th place

*A lack of training due to COVID-19 and issues around selection hindered preparation for the Games*

### Athlete readiness

- Late selection/qualification hindered readiness of the athlete
  - Athlete had not been travelling and qualification was not fully expected
- Due to COVID-19, international travel was made difficult and resulted in restricted training opportunities
  - This was exacerbated by a lack of domestic competition
- However, the athlete went into the Games in a relatively good state of readiness

### Coaching

- Coaching strategy of qualified athlete was to establish what had gone well in the past and aim to replicate those performances at the Games

## Governance

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- Governance issues hindered the preparation to the Games
- Major selection issues in the build up to the Games
  - Men's wildcard offered, where two athletes believed they should be nominated
  - No wildcard for Women's Trap
  - Issues overshadowed preparation, with no clear structures used to mitigate such issues
- Within governance structures, there is not enough Olympic/high performance expertise and more could be done to integrate the high performance unit/Olympic disciplines with the overall membership

*More could have been done around high performance structures and facility provision*

## High performance programme/structure

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- Organisation and programme acted quickly to support the athlete who had qualified late
- Lack of high performance structures within the programme limited the success of the NGB
  - No high performance lead or genuine expertise within the organisation
  - Limited high performance foundations or structures
  - Very reliant on volunteers
- Given the significant jump from amateur to professional, high performance structures are especially important for success

## Funding

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- Athlete that ended up qualifying had no high performance funding
- Very expensive sport that requires significant funding to athletes in order to be competitive
  - Creates barrier to entry for younger/talented athletes

## Facilities and equipment

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- Facilities and equipment are not world-class
  - The quality is sub-optimal with only one facility providing regular competition
  - Equipment does not replicate international competition standards
- High performance training needs to be based internationally in order to compete with the best in the world on a weekly basis

*Performance was expected given the preparation period*

## Athlete performance

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- Not a disappointing performance but had the potential to be better
  - The athlete got off to a poor start and was chasing competitors from then onwards
  - Much more solid in the latter rounds
- Given the lack of training, performance broadly aligned with expectations

## Athlete support

---

- Had support from coach who was on hand to offer support and advice
  - Strong athlete/coach relationship
- All services (e.g., strength and conditioning (S&C), nutrition, etc.) were available to the athlete, but not required to be used

## Planning and logistics

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- The Olympic Federation of Ireland provided good levels of professionalism during the Games
  - Chef de Mission was particularly impressive

*Top quality talent exists, but the challenge is providing the support to move to a world-class level, whilst Olympic disciplines are not prioritised within the NGB*

## Talent in the programme

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- There is world-class potential talent in the ranks (e.g., one athlete recently finished 7th at the 2021 European Shotgun Championships)
- A bigger challenge is providing the structures and support to those athletes to take them from a world-class potential to consistently challenging on the big stage
- There is also a concern that the talent are either focusing on too many disciplines, or not participating in the ones that are part of the Olympic Games programme
- There is also a significant jump from amateur to professional level, heightening the need for a strong talent pathway

## Olympic disciplines

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- Within the NGB, the Olympic disciplines are not as popular or represented as much as other non-Olympic disciplines
- This is partially because Olympic disciplines have more barriers to entry
- Creates difficulty with the pathway and governance decisions

## LEARNINGS AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS



### 1) Boost high performance capacity of the organisation

- Build the capacity of the high performance unit by hiring a High Performance Director/Manager with expertise and experience in the environment
- Once greater capacity is brought in, develop a clear plan that helps to create a wider high performance system (e.g., world-class coaching, support services, world-class facilities, etc.)

### 2) Improve governance structures

- Ensure governance structures have the extensive knowledge of the Olympic disciplines/environment to provide appropriate strategic direction and oversight to the executive
- Devise a clear plan in how the membership and the high performance units interact to ensure alignment and collaboration moving forwards
- Ensure there is a clear governance code/structure that steers decision making when issues such as selection appeals arise, and is abided by

### 3) Create pathway to ensure talented athletes are fully supported to reach potential

- Build a talent pathway that holistically supports high-potential athletes
- Utilise support from the Sport Ireland Institute to enhance professionalism within athletes
- Ensure that Olympic disciplines are fully supported within the organisation so that there is a large talent pool available



# Irish Judo Association Report



## Outcome at the Tokyo Olympic Games

- Two athletes qualified - one in the Men's 100kg and one in the Women's 70kg
- Both lost in the Round of 32

## Preparation for the Games

- The programme could not have done any more to prepare, despite the misfortune of injury and COVID-19

## Performance at the Games

- Did not achieve what the NGB had hoped for, but linked to fine margins and injury

## Wider NGB insights

- The talent pathway exists but is not operating sustainably, partially because there is not enough depth in coaching

## Recommendations

- 1) Boost coaching capacity to help coaching structures become more sustainable
- 2) Work to ensure that the talent pathway is sustainably resourced and staffed
- 3) Continue to build programme structure that has international competition at its core

*Irish Judo Association qualified the number of athletes it wanted to for the Tokyo Olympic Games, but did not achieve its performance expectations*

### IRISH JUDO ASSOCIATION:

**1,837**  
MEMBERS

**5**  
CARDED  
ATHLETES

**13**  
DAYS OF SPORT  
IRELAND INSTITUTE  
SUPPORT (2017-2020)

**€230,000**  
IN HIGH PERFORMANCE  
PROGRAMME FUNDING  
(2017-2020)

### Tokyo Olympic Games performance(s)

Athlete(s)	Discipline	Rank
Megan Fletcher	70kg	17
Ben Fletcher	100kg	17

### Original performance expectation(s)

- Qualify two athlete, with one Top 16 finish

### Historical Olympic Games performance(s)

	NUMBER OF ATHLETES	PERFORMANCE
LONDON 2012	1	9th place finish - lost in the Quarter-finals
RIO 2016	0	N/A
TOKYO 2020	2	2 x 17th place finishes – both lost in the Round of 32

*Preparation was hindered by COVID-19 and injury, but the programme did all it could to prepare athletes for the Games*

### Athlete readiness

- Varied readiness between the two athletes
  - Due to a recent severe injury, one athlete was not able to compete prior to the Games
  - The other athlete was going into the Games with great preparation
- In both instances, the programme could not have done anymore to support athletes to achieve their maximum levels of preparation

### High performance programme/structure

- Both athletes who qualified were predominately based in England, so the structure worked on a decentralised basis
- Other athletes who were in the programme were mainly based in Northern Ireland
- Would have been valuable to bring athletes together more regularly

## Facilities and equipment

---

- Due to decentralised nature, many of the facilities used by athletes were not in Ireland
- No National Dojo, with the majority of athletes who were based in Ireland and Northern Ireland training in Belfast
  - Facilities were sufficient in Belfast

## Training environment and camps

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- Objective of programme was to be at competitions as much as possible
  - COVID-19 limited programme's ability to operate
  - Rivals gained an edge by having bigger programmes to operate domestically, which Ireland could not do
  - Meant programme could not progress from the successes in 2019 on the World Tour, where it won 10 medals

*The quality of coaches was excellent, despite funding issues*

## Sport Ireland Institute

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- Due to the majority of athletes being based in Belfast and England, the services provided by the Sport Ireland Institute were not used regularly
- For when they were used, the support was fantastic
  - Nutrition services were especially appreciated and had a significant impact on performance

## Funding

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- A major obstacle during preparation time
  - Significant amount of budget spent on staff costs, leaving limited funds for wider performance (e.g., travel for competitions)
  - Resulted in multiple responsibilities for staff (e.g., Performance Director heavily involved in coaching)

## Coaching

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- Excellent coaching of athletes
  - World-class provision, with well-planned and methodical sessions
  - Right level of athlete responsibility offered by coaches

*The athletes did not hit the original targets due to a mixture of fine margins and a lack of preparation due to injury*

### Athlete performance

---

- Despite no success, it was difficult for one athlete given their injury prior to the Games, and getting to the Games was an achievement in itself
- The other athlete could not have done any more and it was a case of fine margins, losing in the final stages of their Round of 32 match
  - Ultimately lost to the Silver medal winner

### Athlete support

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- Superb support to athletes
  - Four support athletes brought to the Games, offering sparring opportunities (both right-hand partners and left-hand partners for each for the qualified athletes)
  - COVID-19 restricted some use of wider support
- Good support from the Sport Ireland Institute
  - Physiotherapy and nutrition support especially useful

### Planning and logistics

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- Outstanding support from the Olympic Federation of Ireland
  - Fukuroi was a fantastic training environment
  - Finer details (e.g., provision of gluten free food) was appreciated
- Prior to, and throughout, the Games, Sport Ireland were fantastic partners and did their best to facilitate NGB requests

*The talent pathway exists but is not operating sustainably, partially because there is not enough depth in coaching*

### Talent pathway

---

- The current pathway and resourcing of the pathway is not sustainable
  - The limited resources are focusing on the present elite athletes
  - Hard to commit to athletes on earlier stages of the pathway
- This is contributing to a wide gap between the senior and junior athletes

### Coaching depth

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- Coaching pathway does not exist
  - Heavily reliant on volunteer work and certain individuals
- Much reliance on the Performance Director for coaching services
- No clear set of development coaches within system

## LEARNINGS AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS



### 1) Boost coaching capacity to help coaching structures become more sustainable

- Requirement to build a more sustainable coaching structure for the system, and the coaches within it
- Involves building coaching capacity that allows for time with both elite and youth athletes
- Need clarity on roles and responsibilities so that coaches are not overloaded
- Establish a plan for developing coaches further down the pyramid who work with youth talent
- Collaborate with Sport Ireland Coaching around the development of coaches

### 2) Work to ensure that the talent pathway is sustainably resourced and staffed

- Once coaching structures are in place, establish a clear and effective talent pathway from youth to senior level that is sustainably resourced moving forwards

### 3) Continue to build programme structure that has international competition at its core

- Continue to focus on international competitions which provide athletes to the best possible talent and consider opportunities to further expose athletes to international competition
- Ensure that the competition calendar and commitments are sustainable for all stakeholders





# Irish Rugby Football Union Report

(NOTE: THIS REPORT IS FOCUSED ON THE MEN'S SEVENS TEAM ONLY, AND NOT A REVIEW OF BOTH THE MEN'S AND WOMEN'S PROGRAMMES. THERE IS A WOMEN'S SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATION LISTED AT THE END OF THE REPORT)

## Outcome at the Tokyo Olympic Games

- Men's Team qualified, playing three games and winning one
- Did not qualify out of the Group Stage and finished in 10th place

## Preparation for the Games

- Preparation was hindered by late qualification and the impact of COVID-19 on the World Series
- The programme dealt with these issues well

## Performance at the Games

- The team did not perform to the best of its ability

## Wider NGB insights

- The talent pathway is in a strong position
- Uncertainty on the future of qualification process limits the ability to plan long-term

## Recommendations

- 1) Continue to develop strong relationships with Sport Ireland
- 2) Build on pathway structures to ensure high quality players are being brought into the programme
- 3) Support the development and training of domestic coaches
- 4) Assess viability of strengthening international relations to influence competition/qualification decisions

*Given the infancy of the programme, qualifying the Men's Team was a major success, but the team did not perform to their best during the Games*

### IRISH RUGBY FOOTBALL UNION:

THE MEN'S SEVENS TEAM IS PART OF A FULLY PROFESSIONAL PROGRAMME BASED AT THE IRISH RUGBY FOOTBALL UNION HQ, AT THE SPORT IRELAND CAMPUS

**€1,040,000**  
IN HIGH PERFORMANCE  
PROGRAMME FUNDING  
(2017-2020)

### Tokyo Olympic Games performance(s)

- Did not qualify out of the Group Stage – finished in 10th place after the 9th-12th place play offs
- Played three games, winning one and losing two

### Original performance expectation(s)

- The Irish Rugby Football Union wanted to qualify both Men's and Women's Teams (Note: A Women's Team did not qualify)

### Historical Olympic Games performance(s)

	NUMBER OF ATHLETES	PERFORMANCE
RIO 2016	0	N/A
TOKYO 2020	<b>1 TEAM</b>	10th place finish - knocked out at Group Stage

*Late qualification and COVID-19 hindered the programme's ability to suitably prepare for the Games. However, the programme was agile and coped well*

### Athlete readiness

- Qualifying one month prior to the Games hindered readiness
  - Mentally and physically drained
  - Some players were carrying injuries
  - Limited time to strategise and plan for the Games
- However, athletes were very well prepared for the repechage tournament itself (i.e., the qualifying tournament)

### Facilities and equipment

- New HQ at the Sport Ireland Campus is a fantastic set up
  - Excellent facilities
  - Very well supported with services (e.g., performance analysis, nutrition, strength and conditioning (S&C), etc.)
- COVID-19 restricted fully utilising new facility (e.g., bringing new players into the complex)

## Funding

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- Has a significant positive impact on the programme
  - Helps fund athletes to partake in programme
  - Contributed to elite development, helping to grow and nurture the next level of high performance athletes and coaches

## Training environment and camps

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- The World Series would usually have been where the preparation for the Games/qualification would have taken place
  - Due to COVID-19, this was not possible
- It meant the programme had to quickly establish an alternative for preparation planning
  - Organised competitive fixtures vs. Team GB and Team USA
  - Also played against the provincial teams
- Not as ideal as competing on the World Series but was a strong alternative given the circumstances

*The programme has created an excellent dynamic with Sport Ireland and the programme has a set of high-quality coaches*

## High performance programme/structure

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- A relatively new programme that was continuously learning during the Cycle
  - Made significant progress in a small amount of time
  - The Sevens programme is a key high performance pillar for the NGB
- The programme's relationship with Sport Ireland works very well
  - Sport Ireland gives the right balance between autonomy and support
  - Sport Ireland understand that the Sevens programme is a different concept to other programmes
  - There is trust between the two organisations

## Coaching

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- Have world-class coaches that can help to compete with the best in the world (e.g., Fiji, New Zealand, etc.)
- With Sevens being a relatively new programme, there is not a significant amount of depth in Sevens coaches with technical experience and expertise
  - Being a Sevens coach not yet seen as a viable career route
  - However, the NGB recently created an online course around a coaching career in Sevens to try boost coaching pathway

## *The team did not perform how they would have liked during the Games*

### Athlete performance

- Team did not perform how they would have liked and were disappointed with their showing
  - Late qualification did not help performance
  - In some respects, the qualification was a bigger event and a greater focus than the Olympic Games and performance peaked during qualifying
- Given the immaturity of the programme, qualifying for the Olympic Games was an achievement in itself
- The team learnt a lot about the Olympic experience as a result of the performance

### Athlete support

- NGB took their own support team (e.g., physiotherapist, doctor, etc.)
  - This was appreciated by the NGB as it helped to accommodate the heightened physical strain of the sport
- Support worked well but would still have liked more support staff

### Planning and logistics

- The Olympic Federation of Ireland were very supportive
  - Logistics were excellent and business-class flights made a big difference for athletes
- Whilst a communal gym was available, it was not used due to COVID-19 issues and some other countries had their own gym
  - Would have been useful to replicate that

## *The talent pathway is in a strong position; however, qualification process uncertainty is hindering the long-term planning of the programme*

### Qualifications/Competitions

- There is uncertainty on what the qualification process is going to be for future Olympic Games
- There is also uncertainty around future competition structures
- This is not only a strategic risk but also prevents long-term planning of the programme
  - Cannot plan for future years when there is not absolute clarity on what tournaments are most important in order to qualify

### Talent pathway

- Ensuring there is sufficient depth in the game to have succession of talent is crucial
- The current pathway is clear and aligned at elite level
- Several players have recently retired so there is heightened need for the strong talent pathway
- Need to ensure those players who are coming into training are raising the standards and challenging existing players

## LEARNINGS AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS



### 1) Continue to develop strong relationships with Sport Ireland

- The balance between support and autonomy provided by Sport Ireland to the Irish Rugby Football Union is working very well
- There is a need to continue and further enhance this strong relationship that ensures the Sevens programme is an integrated partner within Sport Ireland’s High Performance Strategy, alongside the continuation of the programme’s professional journey within the Irish Rugby Football Union

### 2) Build on the pathway structure to ensure high quality players are being brought into the programme

- Deepen and broaden the already strong men’s talent pathway to ensure top quality players are being brought into the system that are challenging the current crop of players
- Heightened importance due to a number of recent retirees from the programme
- Despite not qualifying for the Games, this recommendation also applies to the women’s programme, which needs to ensure there is a clear talent pathway
- This is underpinned by creating the competition structures/domestic game for high performance talent to thrive, along other talent pathway fundamentals (e.g., talent transfer strategy, talent identification, etc.)



### 3) Support the development and training of domestic coaches

- Build on the successful coaching pathway to deepen the amount of domestic world-class Sevens coaches
- A need to develop coaches with deep Sevens expertise and knowledge, where they are true specialists of the game

### 4) Assess the viability of strengthening international relations to influence competition/qualification decisions

- Continue to deepen the international influence that helps the programme contribute to, and drive, decision-making for the game (e.g., around qualification systems, competition structures, etc.)
- Discuss with Sport Ireland on potential support in gaining positions within European and World Federations to influence high performance decisions

# PENTATHLON IRELAND



# Pentathlon Ireland Report



## Outcome at the Tokyo Olympic Games

- One athlete competed and finished in 24th place (Note: A second athlete qualified, but had to withdraw due to injury, prior to the Games)

## Preparation for the Games

- Preparation went very well, with excellent coaching and planning

## Performance at the Games

- Athlete was 4th going into Show Jumping discipline; however, problems with the horse hindered their medal chances

## Wider NGB insights

- Insights around talent, future coaching structures, and programme changes

## Recommendations

- 1) Hire a development coach to help grow talent and increase flexibility
- 2) Ensure a clear plan is in place for the Performance Director role and how to retain other key coaches
- 3) Harness the knowledge within the programme to continue generating world class talent

*Pentathlon Ireland did not achieve its original performance goals, due to one athlete withdrawing due to injury (prior to the Games) and an unfortunate showing in the Show Jumping discipline*

### PENTATHLON IRELAND:

**57**  
MEMBERS

**3**  
CARDED  
ATHLETES

**635**  
DAYS OF SPORT  
IRELAND INSTITUTE  
SUPPORT (2017-2020)

**€1,080,000**  
IN HIGH PERFORMANCE  
PROGRAMME FUNDING  
(2017-2020)

### Tokyo Olympic Games performance(s)

Athlete(s)	Discipline	Rank
Natalya Coyle	Individual	24

### Original performance expectation(s)

- To qualify two athletes, and Top 10 finishes for both

### Historical Olympic Games performance(s)

	NUMBER OF ATHLETES	PERFORMANCE
LONDON 2012	2	1 x Top 10 1 x Top 20 2 x Top 30
RIO 2016	2	2 x Top 10 2 x Top 20 2 x Top 30
TOKYO 2020	1	0 x Top 10 0 x Top 20 1 x Top 30

*Preparation for the Games went very well for the athlete who competed*

### Athlete readiness

- Preparation could not have gone any better
  - Was in medal contention going in
- Preparation was very successful
  - Early qualification helped ease pressure and meant training did not have to be overloaded
  - Strong performances on the World Tour and at the European Championships
- A second athlete withdrew due to injury after qualifying
- Sport Ireland and the Olympic Federation of Ireland did a great job to ensure athletes were as prepared as possible

### Facilities

- Facilities were fantastic at the Sport Ireland Campus
  - Provided foundation to compete against bigger nations
  - Having everything on site was useful (all disciplines, bar Show Jumping, are covered at the Campus)

### High performance programme/structure

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- Excellent Performance Director that purely focused on high performance, allowing the CEO to focus on other responsibilities
- High performance unit knows the formula for success of an athlete and replicated that formula during preparation
  - Excellent knowledge of what is required to be successful in Modern Pentathlon
  - Evidenced by medals on the world stage
- Modern Pentathlon centred around Europe where NGB had good contacts
  - Allowed for international camps during the Cycle

### Sport Ireland Institute

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- Both athletes who qualified used the support significantly
- Good service
  - Especially with support around one of the athlete's injury

*There were excellent coaches, but not enough depth to facilitate training for both elite and development athletes, whilst COVID-19 hindered training camps*

### Coaching

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- Programme is one that cannot rely on volunteers and requires quality coaches who understand nature of multi-discipline sport
- Have an excellent fencing coach
  - Crucial to the programme and adds huge value
- Not having depth of coaching limited programme's reach
  - During competition time, if the coach were to go with athletes, it meant athletes back in Ireland had no coaches for training
  - Reduced the flexibility of the programme

### Training camps

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- COVID-19 meant preparation was limited to certain disciplines (e.g., no Fencing or Show Jumping for a significant period)
- Very little competition domestically, so programme was reliant on international camps and competitions
- Lack of international camps during COVID-19 period stifled preparations close to the Games

### Funding

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- Programme appreciated the support and funding they received
- Programme needs consistent level of funding in order to be successful (e.g., to commit to coaches)
  - With a transition period on the horizon for athletes, consistent funding is extremely important

*A medal contending outcome was on target until the Show Jumping discipline, where the horse refused fences*

### Athlete performance

---

- The athlete's chance of a medal/Top 5 finish/Top 10 finish were spoiled due to misfortune in the Show Jumping discipline
  - Given a horse that refused fences and picked up faults
- Prior to the Show Jumping event, the athlete was in 4th place, and was in serious contention of a medal after strong performances in Swimming and Fencing

### Athlete support

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- The support in Tokyo was excellent
  - Brought five sparring partners for fencing (a range of different styles)
  - Helped programme have control on sparring

### Planning and logistics

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- Decided to go one month early for training camp
  - Great environment and resulted in excellent athlete readiness
- Fantastic support from the Olympic Federation of Ireland
  - Transition from previous Cycle has been significant, with much improved relationship with Sport Ireland and the Sport Ireland Institute
  - Athlete centred approach
  - Clarity on what the Olympic Federation of Ireland could and could not do
  - Fukuroi was very good

*Wider insights around talent, future coaching structures, and programme changes were discovered during stakeholder interviews*

### Talent in the programme

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- COVID-19 has significantly hindered ability to get international competitive experiences for pipeline athletes
- Cyclical talent and currently at the peak of the Cycle now, with two athletes at latter stages of their careers
- Have some talent in the pipeline, but more likely to be challenging in 2028 vs. 2024
- Talent is hard to come by for Modern Pentathlon, but programme knows who they are looking for/the right athlete
- Modern Pentathlon requires athletes of a later age who have added capacity
- Youth athletes cannot get coaching when coaches go away with priority athletes

## Future of coaching in high performance unit

- With the Performance Director being seconded from the Sport Ireland Institute, a plan needs to be made for the next steps
- There is clear recognition of the value the current Performance Director brings to the programme
- Potential to establish a viable working model moving forwards, only if clear roles and responsibilities are set from the start and clear expectations exist

## High performance programme changes

- There is potential change existing within Modern Pentathlon, especially around the Show Jumping discipline
- By being a smaller programme, there is potential to be agile with this and could react quicker than larger nations

## LEARNINGS AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS



### 1) Hire a development coach to help grow talent and increase staff flexibility

- A need to boost coaching capacity and hire a development coach to work alongside the current high performance unit
- Would create the depth of coaching that allows coaches to go with athletes to international competitions, whilst still continuing to support athletes who have stayed at home
- This would better support the youth athletes and strengthen the pipeline of talent
- The hiring would also help the flexibility and workload of current high performance staff

### 2) Ensure a clear plan is in place for the Performance Director role and how to retain other key coaches

- Ensure the right outcome is achieved in terms of the Performance Director role, where clear roles and responsibilities are set out
- Ensure crucial coaches within the system are retained and supported
- This support should include offering greater management duties

### 3) Harness the knowledge within the programme to continue generating world-class talent

- It is evident that there is the requisite knowledge in the programme to discover and nurture world-class talent
- Continue to utilise and harness this knowledge to help generate talent, where there is a clear plan moving forward for the next Cycle and a clear succession of athletes





# Rowing Ireland Report

## Outcome at the Tokyo Olympic Games

- Achieved six Top 12 finishes and two medals - Gold in the Men's Lightweight Double Sculls and Bronze in the Women's Four

## Preparation for the Games

- Preparation went well and athletes went into the Games in good condition
- The training camps were effective, and the quality of coaches was excellent

## Performance at the Games

- Performance at the Games was pleasing but the NGB was not fully satisfied
- Support was good but there are areas for improvement looking forward

## Wider NGB insights

- Talent pathway is in good condition
- There is no clear consensus on how to interact with the media during Games time

## Recommendations

- 1) Address issues that hinder a solely performance focus within the programme
- 2) Enhance the relationship with the Sport Ireland Institute
- 3) Develop strong domestic coaching pathway and systems

*Rowing Ireland has moved towards a high performance programme in recent years and winning two medals was a significant achievement*

### ROWING IRELAND:

**3,429**  
MEMBERS

**15**  
CARDED  
ATHLETES

**885**  
DAYS OF SPORT  
IRELAND INSTITUTE  
SUPPORT (2017-2020)

**€2,290,000**  
IN HIGH PERFORMANCE  
PROGRAMME FUNDING  
(2017-2020)

## Tokyo Olympic Games performance(s)

Athlete(s)	Discipline	Rank
Ronan Byrne/Philip Doyle	Double Sculls	10
Aifric Keogh/Eimear Lambe/Fiona Murtagh/Emily Hegarty	Four	3
Aoife Casey/Margaret Cremen	Lightweight Double Sculls	8
Monika Dukarska/Aileen Crowley	Pair	11
Paul O'Donovan/Fintan McCarthy	Lightweight Double Sculls	1
Sanita Puspure	Single Sculls	12

## Original performance expectation(s)

- Qualification target of four boats
- 3 x Top 6, 4 x Top 8, 5 x Top 12
- Three medals

	NUMBER OF ATHLETES	PERFORMANCE
LONDON 2012	1	0 x Top 12 0 x Top 8 0 x Top 6
RIO 2016	5	2 x Top 12 2 x Top 8 2 x Top 6 1 x medal (Silver)
TOKYO 2020	13	6 x Top 12 3 x Top 8 2 x Top 6 2 x medals (Gold and Bronze)

*Athletes were in good physical condition going into the Games and preparation went well*

## Athlete readiness

- Athletes were in good physical shape going into the Games
  - Many were close to personal bests
- The training camp strategy helped boost readiness, but was not ideal for wider welfare
  - They provided great training and worked well
  - However, longer camps (due to COVID-19) had psychological impacts (e.g., not being able to see family) and created some fatigue in the team
  - More variety in camp locations may have boosted intensity and helped acclimate to Japanese conditions via being exposed to new climates, but keeping to one place was understandable due to COVID-19
- The programme did its best to ensure sufficient competition exposure for athletes, despite COVID-19
  - The 2021 European Championships were a success

## Coaching

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- The Head Coach left mid-cycle
  - Varied opinion on the severity of impact this caused
- The quality of coaching in the system was excellent
  - Good relationships between athletes and coaches
- However, coaching structures were not optimal
  - Sentiment that coaches are not treated well enough or considered within the wider Irish system
  - Coaches' relationship with the Sport Ireland Institute has room for improvement
  - There was not a depth of domestic coaches in the programme

## Funding

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- Acknowledgement of the importance of multi-year funding and its impact on sustainability and planning
- The criteria for the amount of funding from Sport Ireland given to sports was not clear to stakeholders and some felt that success had not been rewarded enough via extra funding within the system

*The relationship with the Sport Ireland Institute has potential to improve, and despite excellent facilities at Rowing Ireland's HQ, there were operational inefficiencies*

## Sport Ireland Institute

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- Services were valued by athletes and had a significant positive impact
  - Practitioners were happy to go above and beyond for the athletes
- However, the relationship between the NGB and the Sport Ireland Institute has the potential to be improved
  - By being based in different locations, there is difficulty in creating a 'one team' feeling between the Sport Ireland Institute and the NGB
  - Communication could be improved between parties, linked to a need for a clear definition around service provision expectations

## Governance

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- Structures worked well when aiming to achieve special dispensation for athletes to train during COVID-19
- Governance is still relatively young for the high performance programme, but is moving in the right direction
  - Not at the top level of high performance culture, but on the journey there
- A need for a clearer understanding from governing bodies on what NGBs are able to do around commercial agreements
  - A lack of clarity around Rule 40 and the Olympic Federation of Ireland resulted in threats to NGB sponsors

## Facilities

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- The centralised facility is fantastic and drives constant learning
- However, the management of the facility hindered performance
  - Required core funding and staff to run its complex operations, meaning performance received less focus
  - NGB did not have employed technical expertise or budget to solve facility issues
- The facility could be a more comfortable environment
  - Functional, but lacks comfort, which sometimes felt isolated

*Winning two medals was a significant achievement, but the team were not fully satisfied with performance. Support was good, but areas of planning improvements exist*

## Athlete performance

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- Winning two medals, including the first women's team sport medal, was hugely pleasing but the NGB were not fully satisfied
  - Sentiment that more medals could have been won
  - Despite the significant achievement, Women's Four felt their performance in the final was not their best
  - Conditions did not help performance

## Athlete support

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- Support (e.g., strength and conditioning (S&C)) was great and helped athletes solely focus on performance

## Planning and logistics

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- Significant positive change with the Olympic Federation of Ireland
- There are still areas of improvement however
  - Desire for greater integration earlier in the Cycle
  - Some areas of the kit felt rushed and there was not a full provision of kit
  - Lack of clarity on certain costs (e.g., boat transportation)
  - Within the Village, more could have been done to create a 'Team Ireland' feel (e.g., no team room or seating area)

## Facilities

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- Issues surrounding the holding camp
  - With no access to water, training was restricted to rowing machines
  - This hindered performance and technical skills were lost
- The camp provided a good set up nonetheless

*The talent pathway is in a strong position; however, there is a lack of clarity in how the high performance programme should deal with the media*

### Talent pathway

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- The talent pipeline was significantly affected due to COVID-19, where junior events (e.g., Coupe) were cancelled
- Despite this, there is a strong pipeline of talent coming through, with two silver medals won at the 2021 U23 World Championships
- There was also a young age profile of the athletes who competed at the Tokyo Olympic Games
- Winning medals at junior level shows the programme is moving towards a sustainable high performance culture

### Media

---

- Issues arose with media commitments at the Games
- There was a view that some younger athletes could be too exposed to the media and did not have the experience to manage expectations alongside performance. From an athlete welfare point of view, athletes should also be protected
- There is also acknowledgement that the media provides an opportunity to showcase the sport and a balance needs to be found between exposure and protection

## LEARNINGS AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS



### 1) Address issues that hinder a solely performance focus within the programme

- **Facilities** - collaborate with Sport Ireland/Department of Sport to devise a clear plan/solution that addresses how the National Rowing Centre operates, and establish clear roles and responsibilities with facility management that align with individual expertise
- **Media** - establish a clear media plan that harnesses the power of visibility, alongside ensuring performance is the clear focus, especially at larger events

### 2) Enhance the relationship with the Sport Ireland Institute

- There is desire from both parties to improve the relationship
- Define clear expectations on support provision and clarity in how the relationship operates
- Establish clear communication channels between all parties and transparency in planning that determines when and where support can be offered
- Ensure that there is cohesion between the service providers and the NGB's high performance unit around the NGB's vision and methodology

### 3) Develop strong domestic coaching pathways and systems

- Partner with Sport Ireland Coaching to establish and upskill coaches who work with developmental and junior level athletes
- Ensure talented coaches have the right support offered (e.g., technical, mental, physical, financial, etc.) to maximise potential
- Provide sufficient education and training opportunities for coaches to upskill
- Ensure there is a clear pyramid and pathway for coaches moving from grassroots to elite level
- Requirement to make coaches an integral part of the system, and who feel valued





# Irish Sailing Association Report



## Outcome at the Tokyo Olympic Games

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- 18th place in the Laser Radial and 13th in the 49er

## Preparation for the Games

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- Preparation was good, underpinned by a high standard of coaching and facilities
- High performance and governance structures held strong

## Performance at the Games

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- Mixed performance of the two boats at the Games. The 49er boat showed great promise for the future

## Wider NGB insights

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- Talent pathway is not complete and is lacking in some areas
- There is not enough coaching depth or development

## Recommendations

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- 1) Develop coaching pathway that helps to create world-class coaches
- 2) Sustainably recreate the talent pathway
- 3) Boost alternative revenue streams and capitalise on incoming multi-annual funding

*Whilst there was a promising performance from the 49er boat, the Irish Sailing Association did not achieve their performance expectations*

### IRISH SAILING ASSOCIATION:

**20,187**  
MEMBERS

**9**  
CARDED  
ATHLETES

**460**  
DAYS OF SPORT  
IRELAND INSTITUTE  
SUPPORT (2017-2020)

**€3,070,000**  
IN HIGH PERFORMANCE  
PROGRAMME FUNDING  
(2017-2020)

### Tokyo Olympic Games performance(s)

Athlete(s)	Discipline	Rank
Annalise Murphy	Laser Radial	18
Robert Dickson/Sean Waddilove	49er	13

### Original performance expectation(s)

- 2 x Top 12 finishes, with one medal placing (this was with the caveat that certain wind conditions would determine the likelihood of a medal place)

### Historical Olympic Games performance(s)

	NUMBER OF ATHLETES	PERFORMANCE
LONDON 2012	8	4 x Top 24 3 x Top 16 - 2 x Medal Race Finalists 1 x Top 8
RIO 2016	6	3 x Top 24 3 x Top 16 - 2 x Medal Race Finalists 1 x Top 8 - 1 x Silver medal
TOKYO 2020	3	2 x Top 24 1 x Top 16

(Note: Places are listed factually, if they were in the Top 8/16/24 (e.g., a Top 24 finish is any athlete/team who finished in the Top 24, not who finished in the Top 24, but not the Top 16)

*Preparation for the Games went well, underpinned by strong training camps and improved facility provision vs. the previous Cycle*

### Athlete readiness

- Athletes were physically where they needed to be
  - At the right weight levels
  - In the 49er, athletes had to peak twice in a short period of time due to qualifiers in March 2021, but athletes were in peak condition going into the Games
- The one year postponement gave the 49er athletes more time to develop and were better prepared for the Games

## Facilities and equipment

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- The move to the centre in Dun Laoghaire has had significant positive impacts
  - Centralised base meant athletes could drop in and out according to schedule
  - Great for programme culture
  - However, some accommodation issues with the centre
- Quality of equipment was sufficient given stage of development
  - Gave confidence throughout the system
  - However, as the programme progresses and athletes improve, fine margins derived from equipment gains and testing become more important

## Training environment and camps

---

- Good collaboration with Sport Ireland to help athletes train and travel during COVID-19
  - Provided suitable hours for preparation
  - Helped athletes feel valued
- Training strategy of replicating Japanese facilities worked well
  - Programme did its best to replicate climate
  - Helped to evaluate specific weaknesses and strengths for Tokyo climate

## Sport Ireland Institute

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- Mixture of support from the Sport Ireland Institute and private contractors/practitioners. The NGB were happy with the Sport Ireland Institute support
- Better collaboration between Sport Ireland, the Sport Ireland Institute, and the Olympic Federation of Ireland has been beneficial for the NGB

*The quality of coaching was excellent, and high performance and governance structures stood strong. The nature of the sport meant funding needs were different to other sports*

## Coaching

---

- The current set of coaches are excellent
  - Right calibre and high-quality
  - Very technical with lots of experience in their specialist fields
- Athletes would have liked more days with the coaches
  - Especially given some days with coaches were lost if conditions did not suit

## Funding

---

- Targeted philanthropic support during the Cycle
  - Huge success in funding the new Performance HQ
  - Growth in donor pool stalled due to COVID-19 and the inability to run fundraising events
- Capital-intensive sport had financial implications
  - Multi-annual funding was needed but pleased to see it as part of new High Performance Strategy
  - Capital budget allocation would have been useful
- The majority of athlete funding was spent on performance and needed more living costs funding

## High performance structure

---

- Separation exists between the Olympic programme and the rest of the organisation
  - Limited engagement and some misunderstandings
- Structured to target four of the 10 Olympic disciplines. These were the correct ones to target
- Structure held strong during COVID-19
  - Effective contingency plans were put in place

## Governance

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- Strong levels of governance in the NGB, where the Olympic Steering Group played an important role
  - Broad range of individuals chosen, all with a high performance background
  - Had a good structure where decisions are based purely on performance and not interfered with by other units
  - Direct feedback to the Board

*There was mixed performances in the two boats that qualified*

## Athlete performance

---

- One boat did very well and exceeded expectations
  - With a young team, the 49er won the first and last races of the competition
  - An unfortunate disqualification prevented a Top 10 finish
  - Significant learning curve for the athletes and a great outcome given their stage of development
- The conditions at the Laser Radial did not suit the athlete, and subsequently they did not contend for a medal

## Athlete support

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- Tough not to have some support staff (e.g., psychology) on the ground during racing, but understood that these had been agreed in advance of the Games
- Given that sailing took place in Enoshima (~2 hours from Tokyo), remote support was agreed as being the best approach
- Rules advisor was based remotely which added difficulty to the event
  - Disqualification issues arose. If stakeholders knew the true facts about previous disqualifications in other events, they would have reacted differently

## Wider experience

---

- Despite no practice facilities, going to Fukuroi was a good decision by the team
  - Got in as early as possible which helped to acclimatise and build a team atmosphere
- The Olympic Federation of Ireland was much improved
  - Athlete focused and very accommodating; dealt with COVID-19 well
- In the actual hotel prior to the event, it felt very restricted and isolated
  - Not enough facilities which restricted the execution of the performance plan, whilst other teams that stayed at bigger hotels could do so

*The talent pathway is not built to sustain success into the Olympic Games in Los Angeles, and the level of coaching development is not optimal either*

### Talent pathway

---

- Due to funding issues, some pathway stages were cut, especially in the development stage
  - Had to amalgamate some stages of the pathway, which created a large gap from junior to senior level
  - NGB have started to rebuild the junior programme, but not currently enough funding or commitment to funding to allow for the full pathway to be recreated
  - There is a lack of clarity for athletes in what the pathway route is and how to progress through it
- NGB have talent well set for Paris, where everyone at the Games will have been through each stage of development
- The 2028 Los Angeles Olympic Games is of greater concern and pathway cuts could impact performance at these Olympic Games if not rectified immediately

### Coaching development

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- No linkages between club coaching and performance coaches
  - Act as separate programmes, which limits the pipeline of coaching talent
- No career development or progression within Ireland, making a career in coaching unattractive
- No depth in coaches that work with youth athletes, and current coaches do not have the time or resource to focus attention on anyone other than the top athletes
  - Need more coaching resource to propel athletes up the ladder

## LEARNINGS AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS



### 1) Develop coaching pathway that helps to create world-class coaches

- Develop a clear pathway and route for coaches all the way from the club to performance coaching level and ensure coaching pathway is integrated between stages
- Work with Sport Ireland Coaching to establish a high-quality set of development and youth coaches that are embedded into the programme
- Aim to better understand what support coaches need (e.g., technical, mental, physical, financial, etc.), given their stage of development and discuss feasibility of that support provision

### 2) Sustainably recreate the talent pathway

- Continue to rebuild talent pathway to its previous levels where stages were full
- Analyse viability in rebuilding pathway in a more sustainable manner that ensures previous pathway cuts do not happen again
- Devise clear plan for the route for talent to participate in the 2028 Los Angeles Olympic Games
- Ensure athletes fully understand the route from junior to senior level and how it is achieved

### 3) Boost alternative revenue streams and capitalise on incoming multi-annual funding

- Utilise support from Sport Ireland that helps to explore development of alternative funding streams and boost the current philanthropic/commercial revenue streams
- Use the recent introduction of multi-year capital funding as the foundation for sustainable long-term investment over time that boosts facilities and equipment





SWIM IRELAND

# Swim Ireland Report



## Outcome at the Tokyo Olympic Games

- Met the qualification targets for both swimming and diving
- Reached first swimming final in 25 years and had four Top 16 finishes
- Did not achieve the targets on lifetime best performances

## Preparation for the Games

- Given a number of difficult scenarios, preparation went very well
- Coaches and governance structures held strong, and good planning within the programme contributed to good preparation

## Performance at the Games

- Performance at the Games exceeded expectations and was excellent, where swimming reached its first final for 25 years
- Diving achieved it's first ever female semi-finalist

## Wider NGB insights

- Scope to deepen coaching quality beyond the National Centres
- Diving needs to implement fundamental structures if strategy is to be successful
- Tokyo Olympic Games were a very different experience

## Recommendations

- 1) Build on the strong structures to build momentum within a professionalised centralised structure
- 2) Continue to target and upskill coaches both inside and outside the National Centres

*Swim Ireland had an excellent Tokyo Olympic Games, and the programme has shown continuous improvement in the last three Olympic Cycles*

### SWIM IRELAND:

**12,433**  
MEMBERS

**17**  
CARDED  
ATHLETES

**645**  
DAYS OF SPORT  
IRELAND INSTITUTE  
SUPPORT (2017-2020)

**€2,380,000**  
IN HIGH PERFORMANCE  
PROGRAMME FUNDING  
(2017-2020)

## Tokyo Olympic Games performance(s)

Athlete(s)	Discipline	Rank
Mona McSharry	100m Breaststroke	8
Jack McMillan/Finn McGeever/Shane Ryan/Brendan Hyland	4 x 200m Freestyle Relay	14
Daniel Wiffen	800m Freestyle	14
Tanya Watson	10m Platform	15
Ellen Walshe	200m Individual Medley	19
Mona McSharry	200m Breaststroke	20
Daniel Wiffen	1500m Freestyle	20
Brendan Hyland	200m Butterfly	23
Darragh Greene	200m Breaststroke	23
Ellen Walshe	100m Butterfly	24
Danielle Hill	100m Backstroke	25
Oliver Dingley	3m Springboard	25
Darragh Greene	100m Breaststroke	29
Danielle Hill	50m Freestyle	33
Shane Ryan	100m Butterfly	37

## Original performance expectation(s)

### SWIMMING:

- 60% lifetime best performances produced at the Games
- Five or more athletes qualify to the team via FINA A times
- One or more relay qualify for the Games

### DIVING:

- 100% lifetime best FINA performances produced at the Games
- Two or more athletes qualify to the team

## Historical Olympic Games performance(s)

	NUMBER OF ATHLETES	PERFORMANCE
LONDON 2012	4	0 x Top 8 0 x Top 16 1 x Top 24
RIO 2016	4	1 x Top 8 2 x Top 16 4 x Top 24
TOKYO 2020	11	1 x Top 8 4 x Top 16 9 x Top 24

(Note: The Top 8 in 2016 was achieved via Diving and there is acknowledgement that a Swimming final is Top 8 vs. Diving which is Top 12))

*Given difficult circumstances, preparation went well with coaching and governance structures proving strong*

### Athlete readiness

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- Given difficult circumstances, preparation of athletes went very well
  - There were issues with FINA, resulting in selection/qualification issues for two qualification positions
  - There was a lack of competition and racing exposure overseas due to COVID-19
  - Athletes contracted COVID-19
  - Training facilities were closed for significant periods, effectively losing training by approximately 14 weeks
- Despite this, strong programme management ensured sufficient preparation for athletes
  - Whilst not a substitute for competition, internal races were conducted
  - Successful ringfencing of disciplines ensured selection issues did not distract other preparation
  - Flexibility in selection and qualification criteria

### Coaching

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- Stakeholders believed there was a good quality of coaches in the system
  - There was sufficient depth in the three centralised venues
- For athletes based in the US and the UK, coaching support was a lighter touch

### Governance

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- Structures proved effective when issues arose
  - During the selection/qualification issues, governance roles were very clear, and everyone knew what the roles were - these were executed well
  - Despite this, there was disappointment within the system for the athletes who ended up not qualifying

*The high performance system was well planned, and facilities were sufficient. There were mixed views on the extent the Sport Ireland Institute was embedded into the programme*

### High performance structure/programme

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- Effective planning within the programme contributed to the strong preparation of athletes
  - Each individual had clear expectations set with the NGB prior to the Games
  - The three centralised venues helped capture the vast majority of athletes
  - The holding camp was visited in 2019 to ensure facilities and services were sufficient
- The high performance structure had a much better relationship with the Olympic Federation of Ireland
  - Built a relationship throughout the Cycle vs. just at Games time (as in previous Cycles)
  - The Olympic Federation of Ireland clearly understood the requirements of the programme
- Diving's programme was decentralised in the sense that several athletes were based in the UK
  - Programme management ensured this worked as a system

## Sport Ireland Institute

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- The Sport Ireland Institute was an integral part of programme and added real value to the athletes
- View with other stakeholders was that whilst athletes were well supported, they would have liked practitioners to be more embedded into programme (e.g., were only available at specific times)

## Facilities

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- Facilities were high-quality and helped to provide the foundation for a sustainable programme
  - Strong base in Dublin for both Diving and Swimming
  - Quality facilities in Limerick and Bangor for Swimming
- Facility provision works for the system

*Performance was excellent at the Games, despite some issues at the holding camp*

## Athlete performance

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- There was strong representation across the aquatics team
  - Largest Swimming team ever sent to a Games
  - Multiple divers for the first time and the first female diver to represent Ireland at an Olympic Games
- Performance was excellent across the team
  - There was a first swimming final reached for 25 years, five Irish records were broken, and 13 out of 15 swimmers rose in their ranking or held their pre-Games ranking
  - Reached a semi-final in the 10m platform (Diving)

## Athlete support

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- There was a good support team at the Games
- Whilst more accreditations for staff were given, the team would have liked a place for performance analysis support
  - This role had been supported at previous Championship events, and is deemed to be important
- Psychology support was available, but could be used more effectively
  - Given it was the first engagement between some athletes and practitioners, it was hard to build a relationship so close to Games time

## Wider experience

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- The Olympic Federation of Ireland's holding camp was not appropriate for the team's needs, but alternative plans were found collaboratively between the NGB and the Olympic Federation of Ireland
  - No water to train at Fukuroi, so found own holding camp. The holding camp was excellent, apart from issues with rooms that were located within a previous smoking floor

- The Olympic Federation of Ireland were very helpful and supportive
  - Helped navigate a difficult situation (individual injury withdrawal) but there was a smooth process in place and good communication
  - No team environments or facilities within the Olympic Village to mix with other Irish athletes, but this is with acknowledgement that this was to prioritise safety and reduce spread of COVID-19
  - It would be of value for in future Games for Swimming and Diving to be considered as two different sports within the provision of kit

*Insights around coaching depth, diving structures, and future Olympic Games were discovered during stakeholder interviews*

### Coaching depth

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- There is world-class coaching within the National Centres but very few professional coaches exist within the Irish system more broadly

### Diving structure

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- Diving strategy has turned towards focusing on domestic talent and building a programme based in Ireland
- Need to put fundamental performance structures in place in order for the strategy to be successful (e.g., coaching structures, facilities, pathways, etc.)

### Future Olympic Games

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- Tokyo was an Olympic Games with fewer distractions (e.g., fewer crowds) and other unique circumstances (e.g., PCR testing). It consequently did not give athletes the full Olympic Games experience
- There is a need to help athletes prepare for future Games where the experience will be notably different to the Tokyo Olympic Games
- There is a real concern that COVID-19 in particular has impacted massively on the development pathway for some of the younger athletes and may have resulted in lost talent. This is something that needs monitoring with the view of making some specific adjustments/programmes

## LEARNINGS AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS



### 1) Build on the strong structures to build momentum within a professionalised centralised structure

- **Culture** – raise the bar, push barriers, and set higher standards to reinforce a true high performance culture where major events are opportunities for success and not a celebration for qualifying
- **Investment** – focus investment on athletes that are final and medal contenders to ensure staffing and finances have maximum impact and not spread too thinly
- **Support** – deepen the relationship with the Sport Ireland Institute and the Sport Northern Ireland Sports Institute to ensure they are fully embedded into the programme, both for athletes near the Sport Ireland Campus and ones based in Bangor and Limerick

### 2) Continue to target and upskill coaches both inside and outside the National Centres

- Aim to develop the professionalism and quality of coaches outside of the National Centres so that there is a depth of coaching befitting of a high performance culture
- Continue to ensure collaboration between the programme, current professional coaches and development coaches that allow for upskilling and training opportunities
- Consider working alongside Sport Ireland Coaching, who have shared responsibility for the development of coaches across the board



# TAEKWONDO IRELAND



# Taekwondo Ireland Report



## Outcome at the Tokyo Olympic Games

- One athlete in the Men’s Flyweight (58kg) division, finishing in 11th place

## Preparation for the Games

- Preparation was as good as it could have been, especially given the programme’s lack of resources

## Performance at the Games

- The performance was disappointing and was not a fair representation of the athlete’s ability

## Wider NGB insights

- There is potential within the talent pathway, but the programme has a challenge in being able to support all athletes

## Recommendations

- 1) Address the lack of coaching resource to ensure a sustainable programme is created
- 2) Ensure fundamental high performance structures are in place
- 3) Create a talent pathway that suitably supports the high potential athletes in the system

*Despite a modest budget, Taekwondo Ireland was still disappointed not to achieve a better result at the Tokyo Olympic Games*

### TAEKWONDO IRELAND:

**1,090**  
MEMBERS

**1**  
CARDED  
ATHLETE

**72**  
DAYS OF SPORT  
IRELAND INSTITUTE  
SUPPORT (2017-2020)

**€180,000**  
IN HIGH PERFORMANCE  
PROGRAMME FUNDING  
(2017-2020)

### Tokyo Olympic Games performance(s)

Athlete(s)	Discipline	Rank
Jack Woolley	Flyweight – 58kg	11

### Original performance expectation(s)

- A podium finish

### Historical Olympic Games performance(s)

	NUMBER OF ATHLETES	PERFORMANCE
LONDON 2012	0	N/A
RIO 2016	0	N/A
TOKYO 2020	1	11th place finish

*The athlete was going into the Games in good form, despite COVID-19 significantly disrupting the programme*

### Athlete readiness

- The athlete was going into the Games in good form, seeded 6th and was a medal hopeful
  - Was in very good shape physically
- Athlete and programme could not have done anymore to better prepare

### Coaching

- There were no paid (beyond expenses) full time or part time coaches provided to the athlete during preparations
  - Reliant on the Performance Director to significantly commit to the programme

## Training camps

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- The ability to undergo training camps was difficult due to COVID-19
  - Programme did well however in managing to provide camps for the athlete (e.g., trips to Europe)
- COVID-19 also made finding quality sparring partners difficult
  - Very few quality sparring partners in Ireland
  - Programme dealt with it well by finding talent abroad (e.g., Spain)
- In Ireland, the athlete had a quality training camp set up where they were training full time out of their club

## Funding

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- There was not enough funding to run the programme sustainably or without an over-reliance on certain individuals
- Sentiment that given the developments and improvements the programme had made in recent years, a greater increase in funding may have been more appropriate to allow for more sustained success

*The high performance programme was operating in an unsustainable manner during the preparation period*

## High performance structure/programme

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- The high performance programme is not in a position that it can be run sustainably
  - Support around the athlete was mainly one part time coach/Performance Director that went above and beyond for the programme
  - No clear model within the high performance system which was very reliant on certain individuals/clubs
  - Programme requires international travel which is expensive but also requires support staff which the NGB do not have
  - Significant admin work added to workload of unpaid staff

## Governance

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- No clear High Performance Committee in place

## Sport Ireland Institute

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- The athlete had very good support
  - Strength and conditioning (S&C) support was excellent
  - Good physiotherapy and psychology support too

## Facilities

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- Programme operates out of a number of clubs
- The athlete trained full time from their club, which provided excellent support
  - Helped get as much training and support as possible in an environment with quality facilities
  - Programme appreciated support from Sport Ireland helping the athlete train at the club

## *The athlete's performance did not meet pre-Games expectations*

### Athlete performance

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- Disappointing performance from the athlete
  - Felt very hard done by the referee, where the athlete's signature kick was penalised
- Outcome did not represent their true ability or potential

### Athlete support

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- Did not have professional support surrounding the athlete, which hindered performance
- No sparring partner as part of the support staff
  - Did not have the accreditations to be able to bring a sparring partner and fulfil coach requirements
  - Not on par with the sparring support other sports brought
- Would have also liked to bring specialist physiotherapists (i.e., those with specific expertise in the sport of Taekwondo)

### Wider experience

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- The Olympic Federation of Ireland was excellent, but there were issues surrounding the media
  - Provided good support to the programme
  - Fukuroi camp provided sufficient pre-Games environment
  - The publicity attention on the athlete may have been too great
- Programme would have liked media training earlier
  - For example, provision of training on a yearly basis would have been appreciated

## *There is potential within the talent pathway, but the programme has a challenge in being able to support all athletes*

### Talent pathway

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- Programme has good quality youth athletes coming through the system
  - Have multiple European medallist/international ranking athletes
- It is difficult providing support to the youth athletes with the current lack of coaching resource
  - Requirement to send them away internationally to maximise potential
- COVID-19 has prevented training for some youth athletes and disrupted the programme

## LEARNINGS AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS



### 1) Address the lack of coaching resource to ensure a sustainable programme is created

- A need to boost coaching capacity, so the system can operate in a sustainable manner and is not reliant on volunteers
- Given the programme demands, there needs to be a clear coaching and high performance structure in place

### 2) Ensure fundamental high performance structures are in place

- Ensure governance structures are in place and play the correct role within the unit (e.g., High Performance Committee)
- There is a need to boost the high performance admin capacity within the organisation, so that it does not add to the workload of volunteers

### 3) Create a talent pathway that suitably supports the high potential athletes in the system

- Review current support in place for youth athletes and assess its suitability
- Linked to the first recommendation, there is a need to boost coaching resource that allows for youth athletes to get sufficient coaching time

# TRIATHLON IRELAND



# Triathlon Ireland Report



## Outcome at the Tokyo Olympic Games

- 23rd and 48th place finishes

## Preparation for the Games

- Preparation was hindered by World Triathlon decisions, resulting in too much competition for one athlete
- The NGB did not have full control over preparation for the other athlete

## Performance at the Games

- The two athletes broadly performed to expectations given their respective preparation levels

## Wider NGB insights

- The NGB know how to qualify athletes to the Games
- The talent pathway could be further developed

## Recommendations

- 1) Ensure there is a clear plan for the direction and structure of the programme
- 2) Create clear high performance structures
- 3) Create a more cohesive and collaborative team culture
- 4) Review talent pathway systems

*Triathlon Ireland continued its consistent qualification of athletes for Olympic Games, but did not achieve its original target of Top 32 finishes in both the Men's and Women's disciplines*

### TRIATHLON IRELAND:

**14,417**  
MEMBERS

**5**  
CARDED  
ATHLETES

**6**  
DAYS OF SPORT  
IRELAND INSTITUTE  
SUPPORT (2017-2020)

**€940,000**  
IN HIGH PERFORMANCE  
PROGRAMME FUNDING  
(2017-2020)

### Tokyo Olympic Games performance(s)

Athlete(s)	Discipline	Rank
Russell White	Olympic Distance	48
Carolyn Hayes	Olympic Distance	23

### Original performance expectation(s)

- Top 32 in both Men's and Women's disciplines, with a stretch target of Top 16 in the Men's discipline

### Historical Olympic Games performance(s)

	NUMBER OF ATHLETES	PERFORMANCE
LONDON 2012	2	0 x Top 10 0 x Top 20 1 x Top 30 1 x Top 40
RIO 2016	2	0 x Top 10 0 x Top 20 1 x Top 30 2 x Top 40
TOKYO 2020	2	0 x Top 10 0 x Top 20 1 x Top 30 1 x Top 40

*One athlete's preparation was blighted by too much competition due to World Triathlon decisions, whilst the NGB were not directly involved in the preparation of the other athlete*

### Athlete readiness

- Chaotic qualification process for one athlete hindered their readiness
  - Had to participate in events, due to the International Federation's decisions, very close to the Games to gain enough points to qualify. This resulted in fatigue, along with injury concerns
- The NGB and athlete did as much as they could in order to qualify and would not have done anything differently
- The other athlete's preparation was with an external team

### Facilities

- Facilities at the Sport Ireland Campus are excellent, but can be expensive at times for the programme (e.g., swimming pool access/lanes)
  - In some cases, it was cheaper to do a training camp abroad (e.g., go to Spain)
- Desire within programme for athletes to be based on the Campus more frequently

## Funding

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- Multi-annual funding will have a significant impact on the programme and the NGB appreciate the shift

## Training environment and camps

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- Hard for programme to plan training camps and schedule as performance dictated what events were necessary to enter
- Very little group training with few athletes training in similar geographies
- No benchmarking/internal challenging of each other
- Intended to go to an altitude training camp, but timings did not work, and additional travel was difficult due to COVID-19
  - Would have preferred this but had no other option. The alternative camp worked well (had training partners, heat chambers, tried to acclimatise, etc.)

*The NGB's structures were not clear throughout preparation, especially when it came to coaching and athlete support*

## High performance programme/structure

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- Have a small pool of elite athletes which helps to properly fund the top athletes
- No clear performance structures/agreements in place across the unit
  - Lack of structures around athlete support provision, how athletes interact with the programme, athlete expectations and investment criteria
- High performance system is not connected within the unit as much as it could be, or with other aspects/departments within the NGB

## Sport Ireland Institute

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- As few athletes are based in Dublin, few athletes used the service
  - One athlete has their own strength and conditioning (S&C) support and was covered in their own programme
  - The other athlete used the Sport Northern Ireland Sports Institute services

## Coaching

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- Had a high quality National Coach, but also contracted other coaches as part of individual athlete programmes
- Contracting coaches into separate athlete programmes was not the ideal programme design
  - Hard to influence/control training
  - Cannot guarantee quality coaches
  - No clarity of the relationship and expectation between individual programmes and the NGB programme
- Relationship with contracted coaches could have been managed better to avoid disconnect

## Governance

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- Have strong high performance structures in place
  - Appointed a High Performance Committee during this Cycle which was well recruited with the requisite high performance expertise
  - Committee play the role of challenge and support

*One athlete's performance was expected given their preparation, whilst the other athlete broadly performed to expectations*

## Athlete performance

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- One athlete's performance was not at their best, but it was inevitable given their preparation
  - Was very fatigued by the time the Games came around and there were injury issues throughout the Games
  - Nonetheless, it was a great experience for the athlete
- The other athlete's performance had mixed reviews, either viewed as in alignment with expectations, or a slight underperformance

## Athlete support

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- The support was excellent
  - One athlete had an injury, but the Sport Ireland Institute staff at the holding camp and Village were very supportive
- There was no absolute clarity on the roles and responsibilities between coaches and the wider support at the Games

## Planning and logistics

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- The Olympic Federation of Ireland relationship was very positive and much improved
  - Did very well with COVID-19, with good communication
  - Camp was fantastic and gave athletes best chance of success

*The NGB knows how to qualify athletes to Olympic Games, but the talent pathway could be further developed*

## Qualifications/competitions

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- The programme understands how to consistently qualify athletes to an Olympic Games
- Surrounding qualification/challenging relay events, countries that have a real depth may be able to sacrifice individual events to save athletes for the relay
  - Currently unrealistic for the programme due to a lack of depth and may cause bigger issues than the success it could bring

## Talent pathway

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- Have some young talented athletes, but need the structures in place in order to flourish
  - Training data on current crop of youth talent shows they can perform to a high standard
  - Have the Emerging Talent Programme which takes people from regions and assesses whether national squad involvement is appropriate, but this is currently somewhat disjointed
  - Development athletes have struggled to race over the last 18 months
- Both Olympic athletes are staying in the programme, which is promising for the future and also helps to use elite athletes to gain spots for development athletes

## LEARNINGS AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS



### 1) Ensure there is a clear plan for the direction and structure of the programme

- Clearly define the structure of the programme and how stakeholders within the system operate with each other (e.g., decentralised vs. centralised, individual programmes/coaches vs. NGB-led programmes/coaches, etc.)

### 2) Create clear high performance structures

- Once the structure has been defined, review whether the programme and NGB structures are fit for purpose to execute programme design
- There is a need to create clear structures within the programme around athlete support that accommodate for different athlete relationships with the NGB programme
- Ensure stakeholders within the system understand their relationship with the programme by setting out clear expectations around support and service provision
- The shift towards clear and best practice high performance business practices can be driven by the hiring of the future Performance Director, who should be someone who can excite and unite the triathlon community



### 3) Create a more cohesive and collaborative team culture

- Aim to bring athletes and coaches together more frequently to ensure programme has a team-orientated culture
- Ensure when athletes are brought together, it is within a high performance environment and adds real value to individual programmes
- Assess viability of more frequent training camps with athletes
- Within this, there is a need to ensure there is sufficient facility provision that allows for training camps or sessions for multiple athletes
- Linked to this, there is a need to boost collaboration within the organisation so that the high performance unit interacts with other departments (e.g., Marketing)

### 4) Review talent pathway systems

- Review talent development and pathway structures to ensure alignment and integration between different stages so that the pathway is clear and coherent

Appendix 2:  
**Paralympic NGB Reports**  
(Grey Matters)

# Tokyo Paralympic Games Review

## Introduction

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The Tokyo Paralympic Games Review consists of two distinct sections. The first section is a 'cross-sport' picture of the reported perceptions across the Team. This presents an overarching picture which exists across Team Ireland at the Tokyo Paralympic Games, based on the perceptions from individuals from different sports. To summarise, three big issues emerged across the Team. Some of these were differential in that they were raised by certain sports, but not by others:

- 1) Concerns were expressed that recommendations from the Rio Review, whilst accurate and robust, were not actioned. As such, our cross-sport report will stress that reported perceptions must attract detailed consideration and, whether action is or is not taken, this should be clearly communicated to the sports, support staff and athletes.
- 2) The data demonstrate perceptions of a two-tier team. In short, different treatments and levels of support for different sports. Our data will detail a number of concerns expressed, including the distribution and availability of team kit, accommodation issues and levels of support.
- 3) The cross-sport data suggest some clashes of roles for certain individuals. Importantly, interpersonal issues and conflicts of interest were also identified and suggested as underpinning the two-tier team problems.

There were other issues which related to the preparation of athletes ahead of the Games. These included talent identification (currently perceived in some sports as somewhat unplanned and haphazard), together with the collective side of coach/athlete development as a means to generate common expectations and shared mental models. Several also highlighted the potential to bring in retiring athletes as leaders of future development.

The second section offers a 'within sport' picture, resulting in individual reports for each NGB that had athletes compete at the Tokyo Paralympic Games. These reports have been compiled, based on the response from athletes, coaches, support staff, Performance Directors/Performance Leads and Senior Management. To note, there is no individual NGB report for Table Tennis Ireland, due to a lack of engagement in the interview phase of the review process.

Finally, we will faithfully report, and clearly highlight, the perceptions of the interviewed participants without comment on the exact reasons underpinning why they have occurred or even whether they are accurate or not. As one example, several highlighted late changes to staff and key appointments as a cause of the challenges some experienced. Importantly, there will be a need to address the perceptions reported and communicate subsequent actions, even if the issues raised are seen as unfounded.

# Cross-Sport Report

In addition to each of the NGB reports (provided in the second section of this Review), there is an additional overarching picture that exists across Team Ireland at the Tokyo Paralympic Games. This is based on the perceptions from those interviewed across the respective NGBs. Some of these were differential in that they were stressed by certain individuals/NGBs but not by others, while others were common across all those interviewed.

## Recommendations from the Rio Review

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Concerns were expressed that recommendations from the Rio Review, whilst accurate and robust, were not actioned during the Tokyo Cycle. Of course, there may be valid reasons for this; however, it was strongly felt that these reported perceptions must attract detailed consideration and, whether action is or is not taken, this should be clearly communicated to the sports, support staff and athletes. Therefore, the action plan resulting from the Tokyo Games Review should be clearly communicated to the NGBs, support staff and athletes.

## The role of Paralympics Ireland

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There was an acknowledgement that there was a strong knowledge, expertise, understanding and care for Paralympic sport within Paralympics Ireland. However, across Team Ireland, the role of Paralympics Ireland, as both an NGB and the National Paralympic Committee, was raised. Para Swimming and Para Athletics both operate under Paralympics Ireland and while this seemed to be considered the best model for Para Swimming, some tensions were evident for Para Athletics in terms of operations and management. Similar tensions were evident across the smaller NGBs, with a lack of strategic direction, input and control evident, as well as a lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities. The sustainability of Paralympics Ireland in both its primary role as the National Paralympic Committee across all sports and its additional role as the NGB for Para Swimming and Para Athletics needs to be considered. Across sports, the need to examine the organisation and remit of Paralympics Ireland, to ensure best practice is applied to all of the sports representing Team Ireland at future Paralympic Games, was stressed.

The cross-sport data suggests some clashes of roles for certain individuals within Paralympics Ireland and some interpersonal issues and conflicts of interest were also identified. For example, the need for clarity around the role of the Performance Director was stressed across sports, with tensions evident around accountability and responsibility.

Changes to the Paralympics Ireland leadership structure and associated staff changes during the Tokyo Cycle, and in preparation for the Games, were perceived to have had a destabilising effect that impacted on operations. In particular, there was a belief across sports that the appointment of the Chef de Mission was made too late in the Cycle to have made a real impact on Team Ireland. Having said that, across sports the Chef de Mission and Team Leaders were perceived to have done a very good job in Tokyo, with a proactive and solution focused approach to dealing with issues at the Games. Given the turnover in Paralympics Ireland staff across Cycles, it is important that there is clarity across all staff in terms of roles and responsibilities through the Paris Cycle and the need for succession planning was highlighted.

There was a mixed view about the delivery of the operational and logistical elements of the Games. Across Team Ireland, issues about the quality of team kit were highlighted, as well as issues regarding equipment, media, and accommodation. Accreditation is always an issue at the Games and a lack of accreditation for support staff and coaches was perceived to have impacted on the support provided to athletes.

Of course, COVID-19 had an impact on all aspects of the Games preparation. However, across sports the perception was that Team Ireland did a good job in mitigating the risks of COVID-19 for athletes while also prioritising performance.

As another factor, the Team Ireland atmosphere in Tokyo was described as poor, with most sports taking an insular approach, 'keeping to themselves', with no effort to integrate the sports into a 'Team Ireland'. It was felt that more could have been done to make the Games a special experience for the athletes and staff.

## Two-tiered system

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The data across sports demonstrates perceptions of a two-tier team within Paralympics Ireland. In short, different treatments and levels of support for different sports. Some sports (i.e., Para Swimming, Para Cycling and Para Athletics) are clearly operating at a more advanced level, with well-developed high performance structures, while others are at a more embryonic stage. This led to a perceived inequity in how sports and athletes were supported during the Tokyo Cycle, though this perception of inequity appeared to balance out at the Games in terms of the support received from Paralympics Ireland.

It has to be acknowledged that the impact of a two-tiered system was a polarising view across NGBs. There was a perception amongst some sports that a tiered funding and support system for identified podium sports is an appropriate strategic direction for Paralympics Ireland. For example, the three sports of Para Swimming, Para Athletics and Para Cycling were well supported through the Sport Ireland International Carding Scheme and by the Sport Ireland Institute. Athletes in these sports also felt well supported by coaches and support staff. However, athletes from smaller NGBs did not receive individual athlete carding or sport science and medicine support and were largely coached by volunteer coaches. Within the smaller sports, there was a perception that Paralympics Ireland should support all sports equally, based on the medal potential of the athletes within the sport, or support NGBs to take responsibility for para sport programmes. Paralympics Ireland should consider the communication around its high performance strategy to ensure positive engagement and clarity for all parties.

Reflective of this two-tier system, systematic high performance planning and preparation were evident in Para Swimming and Para Cycling, while other sports had a more ad-hoc approach to planning and preparation during the qualification, preparation and competition phases. A more systematic approach to planning and preparation, supported by Paralympics Ireland and the Sport Ireland Institute, would help address these gaps.

## Support service provision

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Sport science and medicine services are provided to athletes and coaches from a combination of the Sport Ireland Institute, the Sport Northern Ireland Sports Institute and Paralympics Ireland service providers. There was a broad positive consensus about the quality of the sport science and medicine providers, though inequality in terms of access was noted across sports. The relationship between these service providers and some carded athletes (primarily Para Swimming and Para Cycling) was perceived as very positive, with a well-developed service provision plan in place that supported performance. For other athletes, the picture was more mixed with some smaller sports feeling that they received minimal input from the Sport Ireland Institute, while some carded athletes did not fully engage in, or optimise, Sport Ireland Institute service provision.

The Sport Ireland Institute noted that no request for sport science and medicine support, or access to regular open sessions at the Sport Ireland Institute, was made by Paralympics Ireland on behalf of sports outside of Para Athletics and Para Swimming. In 2018, the Sport Ireland Institute suggested to Paralympics Ireland that a programme, in consultation with athletes from smaller sports, be put in place including workshops, Games preparation programmes, and other supports. This plan did not come to fruition and, as the Sport Ireland Institute support for Paralympics Ireland was Games specific only, Paralympics Ireland were responsible for the sport science and medicine model in the pre-Games phase.

Three key factors emerged across sports regarding Sport Ireland Institute service provision.

Firstly, the importance of organisational fit, para sport specific knowledge and expertise was stressed. In some sports (i.e., Para Cycling and Para Swimming), sport science and medicine support was well integrated into planning and delivery and stressed as a factor that supported athletes' performances. In other sports, there was less evidence of sport science and medicine integration and performance planning with minimal sport science and medicine support. This led to a number of occasions where the sport science and medicine practitioners did not know the athletes they were working with at the Games. Paralympics Ireland adopt a different sport science and medicine support model to the Olympic Federation of Ireland, with a preference to contract their own physiotherapy, psychology and medical officer support, and appoint Sport Ireland Institute providers for Games time only. The importance of a coordinated and established approach to sport science and medicine provision throughout the Paralympic Games Cycle should be considered, with the Sport Ireland Institute working closely with the performance leadership (e.g., Performance Director, Head Coach, CEO, etc.) of each sport, and the leadership of Paralympics Ireland driving support service requests from all para sports to the Sport Ireland Institute.

Secondly, the need for a formal agreement between Paralympics Ireland and the Sport Northern Ireland Sports Institute was also stressed, especially for those sports with athletes in both jurisdictions. A detailed whole Cycle support agreement between Paralympics Ireland and the Sport Ireland Institute, using the Olympic Federation of Ireland/Sport Ireland Institute model as a basis of a successful partnership, would provide athletes with an integrated level of service provision to meet their geographical needs across future Paralympic Games Cycles.

Thirdly, across sports, there was frustration from athletes based outside of Dublin about their inability to regularly access Sport Ireland Institute providers. The Sport Ireland Institute, together with Paralympics Ireland, should consider how to support priority athletes who are located outside Dublin through a flexible support model and to ensure requests for sport science and medicine support are agreed in a timely and planned basis with the performance leadership of the sport and Paralympics Ireland.

As a result of these issues, consideration should be given to clarity around the strategic use of the Sport Ireland Institute's capacity in terms of supporting targeted sports. In particular, the Sport Ireland Institute's role with Paralympics Ireland (outside of carded athletes) was specific to performance support at the Games. It was noted by the Sport Ireland Institute that the support provided to Paralympics Ireland was at the request of Paralympics Ireland's performance leadership and there is both capacity and willingness to provide support for the whole Paralympic Games Cycle. The Sport Ireland Institute strongly emphasised the need for Paralympics Ireland to replicate the Sport Ireland Institute/Olympic Federation of Ireland model of support that was in place for the Tokyo Cycle, for the Paris Cycle. Consideration should be given to how the Sport Ireland Institute could support preparation through the whole Cycle and, as a result, influence the strategic direction of the NGBs.

## Coaching

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Across sports, the role and impact of coaching was acknowledged as a key factor in performance. Given the limited resources within Paralympic sport, most sports, with the exception of Para Cycling, Para Swimming and Para Athletics, were supported by volunteer coaches in a part time capacity. While athletes were broadly satisfied with the level and quality of coaching they received, the lack of quality coaching and coach development through the high performance and pathway systems were highlighted as a concern across sports. Consideration should be given by Paralympics Ireland to establishing a coach development and education programme for para sport in Ireland.

The level of awareness around the needs of para athletes within NGBs was also highlighted as poor across sports. Disability awareness training could be offered by the NGBs to enable club coaches to better support athletes with disabilities in clubs and beyond.

There were concerns across sports that current coaching and development pathways were built around individuals, rather than systems and careful consideration needs to be given to what happens if these individuals leave the programme and the ability of Paralympics Ireland, or the individual NGBs, to maintain or build on the current levels of performance at future Paralympic Games. Across sports, the potential benefits of engaging with retiring athletes as coaches or leaders, was also highlighted as something that should be explored to build capability within both Paralympics Ireland and individual NGBs.

## Future proofing the system

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Across sports, it was suggested that athletes 'emerged' into their sport, rather than through a systematic process of talent identification and development. When this was coupled with the age profile of athletes in some sports, the importance of talent identification, talent development and talent transfer being critical parts of any future strategic plan, was clear. Across sports, there was a recognition that performance standards globally are increasing and the need to strategically target classifications in events and sports that have been identified as long-term medal targets was important. Across sports, and reflecting the limited resources of Paralympics Ireland, there was a perception that individual NGBs need to invest more in their para high performance pathways and programmes in order to drive performance standards. Paralympics Ireland was identified as having the key role in supporting the transition to a high performance structure within NGBs through support services, education, expertise, strategy, and communication.





# Archery Ireland Report

## Executive summary

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Archery Ireland qualified one para archer, Kerrie Leonard, for the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games. She competed in the Compound Open event and Tokyo was her first Games as an athlete, having missed out on qualification for Rio 2016. Kerrie was ranked 20th in the world and went through to the 2nd round in Tokyo, ranking 9th overall at the end of the Games.

Para Archery is governed by Archery Ireland, a volunteer led all Ireland NGB. Archery Ireland collaborate with Archery Northern Ireland, which is an affiliated regional arm of Archery GB. The NGB took over responsibility for Para Archery in 2015 with the governance structure outlined in a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between Archery Ireland, the Irish Wheelchair Association and Paralympics Ireland. The current President has been in post for two years and quickly identified that there was no formal high performance plan in place.

Archery Ireland, by their own admission, were not well prepared to take over responsibility for Para Archery and were honest about the current level of knowledge of para sport within the organisation. This, along with other missteps along the road to Rio 2016, resulted in the sport not wanting to repeat these missed opportunities to qualify an athlete for Tokyo 2020. The NGB is very aware of the actions required to better understand the needs of para archers so that they are better supported during the Paris 2024 Cycle and beyond. That said, much of its funding comes from its relatively small membership base, which supports everything from grassroots archery through to Olympic, Paralympic and all other non-Olympic and non-Paralympic disciplines.

Critical to the future success of Para Archery in Ireland is greater collaboration between the NGB and key strategic partners such as Paralympics Ireland and Sport Ireland.

## Methodology

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Confidential online surveys completed by members of the Para Archery team as part of a wider Tokyo Paralympic Games Review. There were four separate surveys for:

- Athletes
- Coaching and Support Staff
- Performance Directors/Performance Leads
- CEOs and Board Members

A report detailing summary group data, qualitative analysis and indicating outliers was compiled from the survey and made available from Sport Ireland for our further analysis. Based on the surveys, a number of common themes were identified which served as the basis for the interviews which were completed. A sample of athletes, coaching staff and the performance director were interviewed on a one-to-one basis using Zoom in October and November 2021.

The issues, findings and recommendations in this report are based exclusively on the information received during the process through:

- Confidential online survey
- Interviews with key NGB personnel
- Interviews with key stakeholders

Interviews were recorded so that points of value could be reviewed, and accuracy of statements made in the report guaranteed. Notes were also taken during the interviews to capture immediate points of relevance against the key themes being explored.

Interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and all were reassured that their views would be accurately expressed. Time was taken to ensure all participants understood the limitations around confidentiality. It was clear in the interviews that participants were keen to share their perceptions in a proactive, productive, and positive manner.

Once the interviews were completed, the information was analysed to identify the key themes, then exemplar quotations were highlighted that ensured that the voice of the participants could be heard.

Verbatim quotations are not included in this report due to the small number of people interviewed and the fact that any direct quotes would be easily attributable to specific individuals. Instead, we have generated feedback themes to exemplify what they reported.

As our final report will stress, we will faithfully report, and clearly highlight, the perceptions of the interviewed participants without comment on the exact reasons underpinning why they have occurred or even whether they are accurate or not.

Paralympics Ireland note that the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games took place against the backdrop of a global pandemic that created logistical and safety challenges. The Games Delivery Team had to adapt their practices to government mandated COVID-19 countermeasures and restrictions both nationally and internationally. Repeated late changes and an ever changing and evolving environment surrounding athlete travel and preparation, both at Tokyo 2020 and in the lead up to the Games, provided additional challenges to the Games Delivery Team. Unclear qualification pathways for individual sports and late confirmation of qualification slots added to complications for logistics and kit availability.

Requirements around COVID-19 countermeasures at the pre-Games holding camp at Narita City and at the Athlete Village in Tokyo placed additional constraints on the ability of Team Ireland members to circulate freely as would happen in a normal Games period. Despite these challenges the Games Delivery Team led by Paralympics Ireland delivered a successful Paralympic Games free of major incident and provided a safe and secure environment allowing athletes to concentrate on their own performance needs.

## Section 1: Factual review

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Archery Ireland qualified one para archer, Kerrie Leonard, for the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games in the Compound Open event. Having narrowly missed out on Rio 2016, Tokyo was her first Games as an athlete, having attended London 2012 as part of the archery team staff.

Archery Ireland considered the athlete to have podium potential for Tokyo. They were seeded 18th at the Games and went through to the 2nd round, ranking 9th overall. Given their ranking going into the Games, one can argue that they exceeded performance expectations and that they are, with the right support, capable of qualifying for and improving their performance for Paris 2024.

While the impact of COVID-19 on the athlete's performance cannot be known for certain, their World Archery statistics would suggest that it declined slightly from a qualification best of 664 in 2019 to 657 in 2021.

## Section 2: Preparation for the Tokyo Paralympic Games

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Archery Ireland was not well prepared when it took over responsibility for Para Archery from the Irish Wheelchair Association in 2015. The current leadership believe that the MOU between the NGB, Paralympics Ireland and the Irish Wheelchair Association was filed and forgotten about as it did not feature in the handover between the outgoing and incoming Presidents, and there were no high performance plans in place for any of the programmes. Furthermore, there was a lack of Para Archery expertise within the NGB. Having recognised these gaps, there was an intent to form a Para Archery sub-committee to further the interests of para archers, but this was not done. The athlete believes that Archery Ireland were forced to take on Para Archery post London 2012 but did not elaborate on whether any alternatives were put forward.

The lack of knowledge about Para Archery within the NGB, particularly the administrative requirements to classify and qualify an athlete for a Paralympic Games, may have led to there being no representation in Rio (2016). For example, although the athlete did not qualify outright for Rio, it may have been possible to gain a bipartite entry had the requirements been better understood. Importantly, the new President was keen that the sport would not find itself in a similar position going into Tokyo.

In 2019, the NGB met with Paralympics Ireland to put a plan in place and Paralympics Ireland drove the agenda and asked for regular updates from the NGB. However, following the delay to the Games, these roles were reversed, and it was perceived by the NGB that they led the conversations with Paralympics Ireland on how to apply for a bipartite place at the Games. Paralympics Ireland, for their part, provided support and guidance at all times throughout the process, and played a role in the successful bipartite application. One source of frustration during this period was the lack of any clear information from Paralympics Ireland on the Irish Paralympic Team NGB Selection Agreement and deadlines.

The NGB is small, with a turnover of ~€70k per year, €15k of which comes from Sport Ireland. This, along with the fact that Archery is not recognised as a high performance sport by Sport Ireland, means that para archers are required to self-fund. While the NGB have been open and honest with the athlete regarding the scope of support that can be offered, it is a source of tension when there are comparisons between sports by the athletes concerned. The athlete's perspective is that the support offered by the NGB was, overall, poor and the onus was on her and her coach to get things done because the NGB was not up to date with qualification requirements; a point on which the NGB and athlete disagree. The NGB's view is that while it was clear that every aspect of training was the domain of the athlete and coach, it put significant effort into supporting the athlete's progression to Tokyo 2020. Importantly, the athlete reported that the level of NGB support and engagement did improve as the Games approached, particularly in 2021. An aspect of preparation that limited the athlete's exposure to competition was the fact that they were unable to gain an elite athlete exemption to attend overseas competitions during the COVID-19 travel restrictions, other than for Paralympic quota events. This was considered to be a major factor in the athlete's ability to be best prepared for the Tokyo Games.

### Coaching and support services

Given that Archery is not a funded high performance programme, the athlete did not have access to sport science and medicine services prior to the Games; this was a source of frustration for the athlete. On the other hand, the NGB commented that at the association's AGMs in 2019, 2020, and 2021, their resources, or lack thereof, were plainly highlighted. Additionally, considering COVID-19 restrictions, the NGB held a further two additional meetings with their international athletes, one in 2020 and one in 2021, where again

these limitations were highlighted. It is believed that the NGB could be more transparent and communicative about the constraints under which it operates; however, it was stated that there are encouraging signs of what is 'coming down the road'.

The NGB praised the Team Leader who kept good records on the athlete's progress, but they had little contact with the coach. The athlete and their coach decided, 18 months prior to the Games, that the coach would not attend and planned accordingly. The extent to which this decision impacted on the athlete's performance remains unknown, but they reported feeling well prepared for the Games, apart from the lack of competition exposure and lack of access to strength and conditioning (S&C) support. Paralympics Ireland noted that there was no request for S&C support from Archery Ireland.

### Section 3: Experience and performance at the Games

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The athlete was part of the centralised holding camp in Narita, but there was no access to an archery range, so they was unable to practice until the tournament range opened at the start of competition. By contrast, there was an opportunity for S&C and other support services at the holding camp, despite these services not being available to the athlete in Ireland, prior to the Games.

The atmosphere in the Village was described as being positive and there were no issues reported regarding the logistical support. The athlete stated that they had a great Games overall and were happy with their results, because they performed better than their ranking would have suggested. The NGB, understandably, were not represented at the Games so were not able to comment on the athlete's experience.

### Section 4: NGB specific observations

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#### Investment

The NGB does not benefit from any support from the Sport Ireland Institute in their high performance programmes. The Sport Ireland Institute noted that no formal request for sport science and medicine support, or access to regular open sessions at the Sport Ireland Institute, was received. However, it appears as if there was a lack of clarity around the avenues and processes by which non-carded athletes could get support through the Sport Ireland Institute. This is something that will need greater clarity for the Paris Cycle (and beyond), with the primary responsibility resting with Paralympics Ireland to identify athletes in this category (i.e., athletes who are either non-carded, or who come from non-high performance recognised sports, who should receive some level of support). Given that the Sport Ireland Institute support for Paralympics Ireland was Games specific, Paralympics Ireland were responsible for the sport science and medicine model in the pre-Games phase. As such the future representation in a Paralympic Games, by an Irish archer, is uncertain unless the athletes can self-fund and improve their performance without the benefit of access to sport science and medicine services. The athlete cited access to S&C as being the service that, if available, they would most likely access and benefit from.

#### Structures and governance/stakeholder relationships

While it has taken longer than anticipated for the NGB to fully embrace Para Archery, it is clear that there was a willingness to improve stakeholder engagement when the current President came into post. A gradual improvement between 2015, when the NGB assumed responsibility for Para Archery, and the present day was evident, but the relationships with stakeholders are fragile and underdeveloped. That said, the President is keen that when they hand over to the next President, currently scheduled for 2023, the learnings that have taken place are not lost.

**Strategic direction**

It is evident that Archery Ireland, despite limited resources, are supportive of high performance Para Archery and are keen to establish closer relationships with its key strategic partners. However, their ability to do so, whilst maintaining its support to all other archery disciplines from grassroots to high performance, will not be fully realised without further investment in the sport.

**Section 5: Recommendations****1) Governance**

- The NGB should form a Para Archery sub-committee to represent the interests of archers with disabilities, which has been a long-held aspiration, at the earliest opportunity. Greater clarity is required around the role of the NGB, Sport Ireland and Paralympics Ireland. It is suggested, therefore, that the 2015 MOU should be redrafted to reflect how these organisations have developed over the last six years.
- While the coach and athlete work independently of the NGB, it may help if more regular meetings are held with Archery Ireland to monitor progress towards Paris 2024.

**2) Strategy**

- There is a need to consider if it remains a strategic aim that Para Archery is represented at future Paralympic Games. If so, then all partners need to agree what resources can be made available to put a para archer onto the podium in Paris and beyond.
- Consideration should be given to providing access to sport science and medicine support either through the Sport Ireland Institute or an approved provider.
- It was clear from the review that there is not a systematic approach to talent identification and development. In contrast, this is reliant on individuals emerging through archery clubs rather than the system. Paralympics Ireland and Archery Ireland should formalise the talent identification and development pathway in Para Archery.
- It is recommended that the 2015 MOU should be reviewed and updated at the earliest opportunity and amended to reflect the intent of the NGB, Paralympics Ireland and Sport Ireland going forward.

**3) Coaching**

- It was not clear if Archery Ireland have a systematic approach to the development of Para Archery coaches. If not, then it should consider including a disability archery component in its current coach education programme.
- The lack of access to an outdoor range at the holding camp should be examined so that this does not occur at future Games. While the holding camp provided an opportunity for the athlete to acclimatise, the inability to train had performance implications. Paralympics Ireland communicated with Archery Ireland at least two years out from the Games that the holding camp location that had been secured, could not accommodate an outdoor range (and it was suggested that Paralympics Ireland would support Archery Ireland in their efforts to find a suitable option). In Narita, the athlete was able to practice with equipment suited to indoor training

**Non Archery Ireland specific recommendations**

- Paralympics Ireland should create opportunities where it can simulate a Paralympic Games environment in the build-up to the Games to address the issue of athletes not having access to sport science and medicine support during their Games preparations, but then having access at a Games. This will also help core staff to better understand the needs of all athletes prior to the event and would also assist with the development of a stronger team culture for Team Ireland.



# CANOEING IRELAND



# Canoeing Ireland Report



## Executive summary

Canoeing Ireland qualified one para canoeist, Patrick O'Leary, for the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games. He competed in the KL3 and VL3 200m sprint events, coming 1st in the B Final of the KL3 event (and 9th overall), and 5th in the A Final of the VL3 event. This was below expectations with the athlete expected to reach the A Final in the KL3 event and achieve a podium finish in the VL3 event.

Para Canoe is governed by Canoeing Ireland, who are based in the same building as Paralympics Ireland, which ensures that a close relationship can be maintained. The NGB, with support from Paralympics Ireland, is positive about the future and believes that they will carry a high degree of confidence into Paris. That said, if Ireland is to be represented at Paris 2024 and beyond (and unless their current elite para canoeist remains competitive), it will require the sport to identify, develop, classify, and qualify one or more athletes in the next three years. While the sport has been approached by athletes from other sports with an intention to talent transfer, the NGB was honest about not being able to offer a high performance Para Canoe programme given other pressures and priorities faced by the NGB.

Unless the sport can act quickly to identify and classify potential new talent, it is difficult to envisage a para canoeist qualifying to represent Ireland in Paris. If the NGB's aspirations are to be achieved, it will need to become a priority objective and is likely to require considerable support from its key partners. Therefore, representation in Los Angeles 2028 may be a more realistic long-term objective.

Additionally, drawing upon the knowledge, skills and experience of the current athlete and coach could well make a positive contribution in the search for, and development of, potentially talented para canoeists capable of qualifying for Paris 2024 and/or Los Angeles 2028.

## Methodology

Confidential online surveys completed by members of the Para Canoe team as part of a wider Tokyo Paralympic Games Review. There were four separate surveys for:

- Athletes
- Coaching and Support Staff
- Performance Directors/Performance Leads
- CEOs and Board Members

A report detailing summary group data, qualitative analysis and indicating outliers was compiled from the survey and made available from Sport Ireland for our further analysis. Based on the surveys, a number of common themes were identified which served as the basis for the interviews which were completed. A sample of athletes, coaching staff and the performance director were interviewed on a one-to-one basis using Zoom in October and November 2021.

The issues, findings and recommendations in this report are based exclusively on the information received during the process through:

- Confidential online survey
- Interviews with key NGB personnel
- Interviews with key stakeholders

Interviews were recorded so that points of value could be reviewed, and accuracy of statements made in the report guaranteed. Notes were also taken during the interviews to capture immediate points of relevance against the key themes being explored.

Interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and all were reassured that their views would be accurately expressed. Time was taken to ensure all participants understood the limitations around confidentiality. It was clear in the interviews that participants were keen to share their perceptions in a proactive, productive, and positive manner.

Once the interviews were completed, the information was analysed to identify the key themes, then exemplar quotations were highlighted that ensured that the voice of the participants could be heard.

Verbatim quotations are not included in this report due to the small number of people interviewed and the fact that any direct quotes would be easily attributable to specific individuals. Instead, we have generated feedback themes to exemplify what they reported.

As our final report will stress, we will faithfully report, and clearly highlight, the perceptions of the interviewed participants without comment on the exact reasons underpinning why they have occurred or even whether they are accurate or not.

Paralympics Ireland note that the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games took place against the backdrop of a global pandemic that created logistical and safety challenges. The Games Delivery Team had to adapt their practices to government mandated COVID-19 countermeasures and restrictions both nationally and internationally. Repeated late changes and an ever changing and evolving environment surrounding athlete travel and preparation, both at Tokyo 2020 and in the lead up to the Games, provided additional challenges to the Games Delivery Team. Unclear qualification pathways for individual sports and late confirmation of qualification slots added to complications for logistics and kit availability.

Requirements around COVID-19 countermeasures at the pre-Games holding camp at Narita City and at the Athlete Village in Tokyo placed additional constraints on the ability of Team Ireland members to circulate freely as would happen in a normal Games period. Despite these challenges the Games Delivery Team led by Paralympics Ireland delivered a successful Paralympic Games free of major incident and provided a safe and secure environment allowing athletes to concentrate on their own performance needs.

## Section 1: Factual review

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Canoeing Ireland qualified one para canoeist, Patrick O'Leary, for the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games. He competed in the KL3 and VL3 200m sprint events, coming 1st in the B Final (9th overall) of the KL3 event in a time of 42.42 and 5th in the VL3 event in a time of 52.91. This was below expectations, with the athlete expected to reach the A Final in the KL3 event and achieve a time below 41 seconds and a podium finish in the VL3 event, with a time below 48 seconds.

Para Canoe is nested within the sprint discipline of the NGB and there is only one elite Irish para canoeist currently competing internationally. The athlete's view is that the limited support received from the NGB reflects this fact. While the coach and athlete seem to be reconciled to this, they are concerned for the future of Para Canoeing in Ireland once they retire.

## Section 2: Preparation for the Tokyo Paralympic Games

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The athlete received some funding from Sport Ireland and their NGB during the Tokyo Cycle. However, their access to sport science and medicine services was limited, as the athlete lives and works full time in Galway. Paralympics Ireland's sport science and medicine service provision was described as being Dublin-centric. The exception being access to sport psychology support, as this was provided remotely by phone or video conferencing. Canoeing Ireland have reported that they have not received a request to apply to the Sport Ireland Institute for any support or interventions on the athlete's behalf.

The NGB does not appear to be in a good position to support para athletes and this manifests itself in several different ways. For example, the level of knowledge within the National Team support structure was reported to be low, with no real understanding of Para Canoe events, classifications and what qualifying events athletes need to attend to qualify a boat for a Paralympic Games. While the athlete referred to a National Sprints Coach in their interview, Canoeing Ireland have confirmed that they do not employ a National Sprints Coach. It is, therefore, speculated that this could be a misunderstanding on the part of the athlete.

The coach and athlete largely operate independently from the NGB, to a point where the athlete acts as the Para Canoe Team Leader at major championships, despite the Team Manager for the Olympic Sprint Canoeists also being in attendance. In other words, the NGB take a hands-off approach. While this seems to suit both parties, it is unlikely to be a sustainable approach in the long term, especially if new and less experienced athletes enter the pathway. Essentially, the athlete and coach have identified an approach that works for them, but it is acknowledged that the NGB still play an important role in securing funding and have a key role in selection. The Canoeing Ireland view is that the coach and athlete operate independently by choice, which, as stated, seems to suit the athlete and coach, but Canoeing Ireland would prefer if the working relationship was closer.

The athlete believes that a further example of the current lack of knowledge of Para Canoeing within the NGB is that the athlete wrote the selection policy, raising a potential conflict of interests had it not been for the fact that there was only one athlete eligible to compete in Tokyo. While the athlete was consulted on the development of the policy it was, nevertheless, drafted by the Performance Director, with input from Paralympics Ireland. Furthermore, the policy went through a rigorous internal review process before publication.

### Coaching and support services

While the NGB believes that the relationship with Sport Ireland and Paralympics Ireland have moved forward during the Tokyo Cycle, the experience of the coach and athlete is different. Of particular concern to the athlete during their preparation for the Games was the lack of access to the Sport Ireland Institute and the lack of any remote provision; these services were describe as being 'Dublin centric'. This issue does not appear to have been raised with the Canoeing Ireland Performance Director and, although the athlete was entitled to Sport Ireland Institute services as a carded athlete, no request was received for support by the Sport Ireland Institute from Canoeing Ireland. It was noted that the Sport Ireland Institute did provide support services to athletes from other sports outside of Dublin during the Tokyo Cycle, on request from the respective NGBs.

The support from Paralympics Ireland in assisting with the shipment of the athlete's boat to Tokyo was described as good, but both the athlete and coach were vocal about a wide range of logistical services. For example, the team kit was ill-fitting, not suitable for the environment in Tokyo, of poor quality, unsuitable

for the athlete's specific disability and it was not clear what kit was required to be worn for specific events (e.g., ceremonies). There were also inexplicable differences in the kit issued to the athlete, compared to the coach.

To assist with the athlete's preparation, Paralympics Ireland provided funding for a 'self-organised' holding camp, to which able bodied athletes were invited to provide training and racing opportunities, which was deemed to be extremely valuable. It also helped that this camp was close to the athlete's home, which reduced the total amount of separation from family and friends, had the athlete travelled to the main holding camp in Japan.

### Section 3: Experience and performance at the Games

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Despite the challenges faced in the lead up to the Games, the athlete reported feeling 'very ready'. This is consistent with the view of the NGB who were positive about how well the athlete had prepared, which the NGB believed was largely due to the experience of the athlete and coach. However, the NGB believed that access to a training group on a more regular basis may have helped further, but any opportunities were limited by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Of significant concern to the athlete were the arrangements made for flying to and from Tokyo. The flight tickets and flight details were not made available and when information did become available only the dates, and not the times, were provided. This made planning ground transportation impossible, until the full flight details were released. It was the opinion of those interviewed that detailed flight information was only provided when the Chef de Mission was copied into e-mails, who the athlete was keen to point out was entirely blameless for the poor level of logistical support provided. The late release of flight details resulted in increased stress and in the need for the athlete to travel to the airport on public transport, which was a potential, yet avoidable, increased COVID-19 risk. Paralympics Ireland agreed dates of travel up to two months in advance of travel. Due to the challenges of international travel throughout the pandemic, flights were regularly changed or cancelled. Once Paralympics Ireland received confirmation of flights from the Travel Agency, flight details were issued immediately.

Other examples of where things were not well-planned included rain jackets not being issued to Para Canoeing, despite it being an outdoor sport and the baggage allowance being printed on the ticket was only 10kg. While this did not become a problem, it was a further source of stress that could have been avoided. Furthermore, the influenza and COVID-19 vaccinations available prior to travel were only available in Dublin. This required a day off work for travel, with the athlete suggesting that local arrangements would have been preferable.

However, the athlete was satisfied with their performance overall and commented that rooming with a more mature athlete (from a different sport), who had a similar approach to performance, was a significant positive.

#### Coaching and support services

There was access to the full range of support services at the Athlete Village, but the athlete chose not to engage with the majority of them, other than sports psychology. The staff were good at reaching out, but the athlete did not, understandably, wish to work with new practitioners, most of whom the athlete perceived to be generally lacking in Games experience and who did not know the athlete as a person. The athlete's view was that working with practitioners they had not worked with previously, would introduce an element of risk to their preparations that were best avoided. The athlete's view of the support staff at

the Games was consistent with that of the coach, who described the support from Paralympics Ireland as being good overall and they were both complimentary about the sport psychology support provided. While the athlete was in general agreement with their coach, they were critical of the apparent lack of support given by the core staff to the Chef de Mission, who the athlete felt was left isolated. They also observed that the support staff did not appear to function as one team.

### **Team Ireland support**

The lack of a 'Team Ireland' culture was reported based on an observation that the different sports remained rather insular and did not mix in the Athlete Village. Furthermore, based on the opinion of those interviewed, most of the core staff did not appear to support the Chef de Mission (something that was not echoed by the Chef de Mission himself).

The issue of accreditation, specifically around the different levels of access granted to staff in similar roles, was raised. The levels of venue access, in some cases, seemed to be based on the personal needs of staff members, rather than being based on their role at the Games, or the needs of the athletes. Paralympics Ireland worked within the strict constraints of the accreditation allowances, as per the Tokyo 2020 Organising Committee (TOCOG). The level of access to venues was determined by the type of accreditation issued to an individual, based on their role at the Paralympic Games. There were specific limits on the number of support staff per sport and per delegation.

## **Section 4: NGB specific observations**

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### **Investment**

It could be inferred that NGB appear to be investing in an athlete, rather than a high performance programme/strategy. The implication from this being that this could cease when the current athlete retires, potentially as soon as 2022.

Concerns over the absence of a talent identification and development programme were expressed by the NGB, and these are exacerbated due to the impending retirement of the athlete. While the NGB are aware of some athletes who wish to transfer from other sports, they are not currently well positioned to support their development.

### **Structures and governance/stakeholder relationships**

It is believed that the NGB's current high performance plan does not reference Para Canoe, a fact that the CEO is aware of and acknowledges should become an early priority.

### **Strategic direction**

There is much to do if Para Canoe is to be represented in future Games, which is something all strategic partners are aware of, but will need to commit to if it is to be realised. Any joint effort needs to be coordinated, with the responsibilities and accountabilities for each agency clearly laid out.

## Section 5: Recommendations

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### 1) Governance and staffing

- If Para Canoe is the responsibility of the Sprints Team Manager, this should be made clear. For example, they should represent both Olympic and Paralympic canoeists at major events. Alternatively, if a critical mass of potentially talented para canoeists are recruited, then creating a Para Canoe talent manager position should be considered.
- There is evidence of a lack of para specific knowledge within the NGB. This could be addressed by engaging with retired athletes, who may be willing to give something back to ensure the development and longevity of the sport.
- The NGB are aware that their high performance plan does not reference Para Canoe, therefore, its inclusion should become a priority.

### 2) Strategy

- Consideration should be given to developing a multi-agency approach to talent identification and development. If the NGB's aspirations are to be achieved, it will need to become a priority objective and is likely to require considerable support from key partners. Alternatively, the NGB should consider if representation in Los Angeles is a more realistic long-term objective and reflect this in their long-term planning. Either option will require commitment, underpinned by a level of investment that is commensurate with the ambition.

### 3) Coaching and education

- The level of awareness around the needs of Para Canoe appears to be poor. The inclusion of disability awareness training could be offered by the NGB to enable club coaches better support athletes with disabilities in clubs and beyond.
- If the NGB have not already done so, they should give some consideration to using the knowledge, skills and experience of the current coach/athlete pair in the system going forwards.

### Non Canoeing Ireland specific recommendations

- Consideration should be given by Paralympics Ireland on how best to develop the core staff so that they can operate better at an individual and team level at a Games.
- Paralympics Ireland and Sport Ireland should consider how to increase the level of interaction between athletes and core staff in the run up to the Games. This could help athletes and staff to better understand each other as individuals and how sport science and medicine practitioners can contribute to the performance of the athletes.
- How Paralympics Ireland can better support the smaller sports should be examined and consideration should be given to appointing a staff member to manage the development of smaller sports.
- It is suggested that Paralympics Ireland review the staff accreditation process so that a greater degree of consistency and rigour is applied to the levels of access granted to staff with the same responsibilities.
- Remote/outreach services (e.g., strength and conditioning (S&C)) to athletes unable to travel to Dublin, should be requested by the NGB to support athletes living outside of Dublin with clear understanding about which services are provided by Paralympics Ireland and the Sport Ireland Institute.





# Cycling Ireland Report



## Executive summary

Cycling Ireland qualified seven athletes for the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games. The Cycling Ireland Para Cycling programme was the most successful Irish performance at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games, winning four medals (two gold, a silver and a bronze) across two bikes.

Although funded through Paralympics Ireland under a memorandum of understanding (MOU), operationally the Para Cycling programme is managed by Cycling Ireland and also is financially and resource supported by Cycling Ireland. Given their success, Para Cycling seems underfunded, but appears to optimise the resource allocated through a strong, agile and adaptable coaching/ leadership team. The team is led by an experienced Lead Coach, though given the workload involved, this model appears unsustainable. The Para Cycling team were well prepared for the Tokyo Games and was underpinned by a coherent and well planned training programme and well developed performance planning during the Tokyo Cycle.

## Methodology

Confidential online surveys completed by members of the Para Cycling team as part of a wider Tokyo Paralympic Games Review. There were four separate surveys for:

- Athletes
- Coaching and Support Staff
- Performance Directors/Performance Leads
- CEOs and Board Members

A report detailing summary group data, qualitative analysis and indicating outliers was compiled from the survey and made available from Sport Ireland for our further analysis. Based on the surveys, a number of common themes were identified which served as the basis for the interviews which were held. A sample of athletes, coaching staff and the CEO/Performance Lead were interviewed on a one-to-one basis on Zoom in October and November 2021.

The issues, findings and recommendations in this report are based exclusively on the information received during the process through:

- Confidential online survey
- Interviews with key NGB personnel
- Interviews with key stakeholders

Interviews were recorded so that points of value could be re-listened to, and accuracy of statements made in the report guaranteed. Notes were also taken during the interviews to capture immediate points of relevance against the key themes being explored.

The interviews lasted between 35 and 65 minutes and everyone interviewed was reassured that their views would be accurately expressed and that they understood the limitations around confidentiality. It was clear in the interviews that participants were keen to share their perceptions in a proactive, productive, and positive manner.

Once the interviews were completed, the information was analysed to identify the key themes and then exemplar quotations were highlighted that ensured that the voice of the participants could be heard.

Verbatim quotations are not included in this report due to the small number of people interviewed and the fact that any direct quotes would be easily attributable to specific individuals. Instead, we have generated feedback themes to exemplify.

As our final report will stress, we will faithfully report, and clearly highlight, the perceptions of the interviewed participants without comment on the exact reasons underpinning why they have occurred or even whether they are accurate or not.

Paralympics Ireland note that the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games took place against the backdrop of a global pandemic that created logistical and safety challenges. The Games Delivery Team had to adapt their practices to government mandated COVID-19 countermeasures and restrictions both nationally and internationally. Repeated late changes and an ever changing and evolving environment surrounding athlete travel and preparation, both at Tokyo 2020 and in the lead up to the Games, provided additional challenges to the Games Delivery Team. Unclear qualification pathways for individual sports and late confirmation of qualification slots added to complications for logistics and kit availability.

Requirements around COVID-19 countermeasures at the pre-Games holding camp at Narita City and at the Athlete Village in Tokyo placed additional constraints on the ability of Team Ireland members to circulate freely as would happen in a normal Games period. Despite these challenges the Games Delivery Team led by Paralympics Ireland delivered a successful Paralympic Games free of major incident and provided a safe and secure environment allowing athletes to concentrate on their own performance needs.

## Section 1: Factual review

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Cycling Ireland qualified seven athletes for the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games.

The team consisted of riders with a range of experience, with two athletes (Katie-George Dunlevy and Eve McCrystal) competing in their 2nd Paralympic Games following gold and silver medals in Rio 2016. Five athletes (Ronan Grimes, Richael Timothy, Gary O'Reilly, and the tandem pair of Martin Gordon and Eamon Byrne) were making their Paralympic Games debut.

The female tandem pair won gold in two events, the B Road Race and the B Road Time Trial, and silver in the Individual Pursuit. Gary O'Reilly won bronze in the H5 Time Trial. The Para Cycling team met or exceeded their pre-Games performance expectations in terms of medals won (Table 1).

All members of the team were funded through the Sport Ireland International Carding Scheme and supported through the Sport Ireland Institute (Table 1).

Table 1. Funding level, performance expectations and results for Cycling Ireland

Athlete	Funding Level	Performance Expectation	Results
Martin Gordon	World class (€30k)	Top 5-8	5th & DNF
Eamon Byrne (pilot)			
Katie-George Dunlevy	Podium (€60k)	Podium x 2	6th, 2nd, 1st and 1st
Eve McCrystal (pilot)			
Gary O'Reilly	World class (€20k)	Top 5-8	3rd and 4th
Richael Timothy	World class (€20k)	Top 5-8	11th and 14th
Ronan Grimes	Podium (€40k)	Podium	15th, 4th, 6th and 11th

## Section 2: Preparation for the Tokyo Paralympic Games

The delivery of the Cycling Ireland Para Cycling programme is managed by a Lead Coach. Although funded by Paralympics Ireland through a MOU, operationally the Para Cycling programme is managed by Cycling Ireland. In practice, Para Cycling operates under the Cycling Ireland high performance programme and as a result, benefits from expertise, research and development, technology, training environment, and administration support. The individual athletes were all carded and in receipt of Sport Ireland funding. A Para Cycling Commission, charged with the development of the sport, also provides support in preparation for the Games. The general feeling was that the Para Cycling programme over delivers, considering the resource it receives. It was described as 'lean' with the pros and cons of this acknowledged; on the positive side it allowed the programme to leverage additional goodwill and resource through volunteers and relationships with some providers. It was also felt that the Para Cycling team, including the NGB, was adaptable, agile and solution focused. This was a particular strength during the Tokyo Cycle due to changes in personnel and the challenges of COVID-19. The weakness of the funding model resulted in a reliance on volunteers and the quality of volunteers was emphasised as a limitation. It was suggested that this approach is not sustainable for future Cycles.

### Coaching and support services

The relationship between athletes and coaches was described as positive, functional and a key factor in underpinning medal success. It was recognised that the Lead Coach was instrumental to the success of the team at the Games, but there was a concern about the sustainability of the current staffing model in terms of maintaining the volume of work involved, as they were operating under a significant workload.

The relationship with Sport Ireland and Paralympics Ireland was described as positive, though there were some stressors towards the end of the Games Cycle, especially in terms of changes in personnel within Paralympics Ireland. It was stated that the personnel changes brought challenges to the relationships between Cycling Ireland and Paralympics Ireland, though this had yet to play out with any negative repercussions in terms of the resources or funding available to the athletes.

The Para Cycling team has access to an established sport science and medicine support staff network and these relationships were perceived to be very supportive during the team's preparation. However, it was also noted that the Para Cycling team was reliant on the availability of Cycling Ireland ad-hoc, day rate, support staff (e.g., mechanics) during training camps abroad. The quality and expertise of this network of practitioners was noted as a strength of the programme and was perceived to have enhanced the support

structure and processes around the Para Cycling team. However, it was suggested that this was not a sustainable model moving forward.

Sport science and medicine provision from the Sport Ireland Institute was described as effective and although some of the athletes did not live in Dublin, they had access to the services required and flexibility in terms of access.

Preparation for the Games was described as positive and despite the restrictions of COVID-19, the athletes felt prepared for the conditions in Tokyo. The training base in Mallorca, and the training camp in Portugal, were described as effective and provided the athletes, not only with the facilities and resources required, but also a high performance environment in which to train. The camaraderie within the Para Cycling team was described as a key characteristic that supported the performance and development of the riders throughout the Tokyo Cycle. Although the weather was not as hot as expected during the pre-Games holding camp in Portugal, the riders felt prepared for the weather conditions in Tokyo and this was attributed to the quality of the preparation campaign, including the heat strategies and sport science support implemented.

Several factors were cited as potentially having a negative impact on performance. One factor that impacted on preparation was an issue with an equipment supplier, specifically the non-delivery of a tandem frame. This was rectified through personal contacts within Cycling Ireland, but the importance of using a reliable supplier and supply chain was highlighted. Cycling Ireland was also without a High Performance Director for the nine months prior to Tokyo and this caused additional workload, specifically for the Lead Coach and CEO.

The general perception was that the travel logistics, despite the COVID-19 restrictions, were appropriate. The performance kit was designed by Cycling Ireland, with input from the athletes and was appropriate for heat and humidity. However, there were significant issues, and disappointment, in terms of the quality and allocation of the Team Ireland kit. Athletes with multiple Paralympic Games experiences were disappointed that similar kit issues which arose at previous Games, were not addressed.

The athletes and staff were happy with the holding camp in Masuda and the support services, training facilities and environment was conducive to preparation. Notably, the relationship Cycling Ireland formed with the Mayor of Masuda during the preparation phase was identified as central to these arrangements.

### Section 3: Experience and performance at the Games

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The Para Cycling team described having a positive experience in Tokyo, despite it being a 'Games like no other'. The Para Cycling event was held outside the Village and, although this meant that Para Cycling was isolated from Team Ireland, they also described a positive 'team within a team' atmosphere in their camp. However, there was a feeling of disconnect between Para Cycling and Paralympics Ireland and a perception that Paralympics Ireland was only concerned with Para Athletics and Para Swimming. Some of the athletes felt that they did not have a point of contact in Paralympics Ireland, and this made communication difficult.

Cycling Ireland provided a media attaché for the Tokyo Paralympic Games, and this was described as a positive feature of the Games experience, especially the ability to highlight the success of the team.

Interestingly, the athletes noted their frustration with the media provided by Paralympics Ireland which was described as error-ridden and poorly informed.

At the cycling venue, some of the athletes were dissatisfied with the housing arrangements, where they roomed with staff members and felt that this was not conducive to performance and their well-being. When the athletes moved to the Athlete Village, after they had completed their competition programme, they felt that they were not accommodated appropriately. In both cases it was acknowledged that the situation was remedied following an intervention from the athletes and/or support staff.

### **Coaching and support services**

The athletes were very happy with the coaching and support services during the Games. The physiotherapist was an established member of the Para Cycling team, and this was a positive feature of the performance support provided. There was a concern that much of the information, and medical services, from Paralympics Ireland were predominantly focused on COVID-19 issues in the year preceding and then during the Games, rather than general health. Athletes with impairments were particularly concerned with the lack of medical oversight during the Tokyo Cycle from Paralympics Ireland.

### **Team Ireland support**

There was a suggestion that members of the Para Athletics and Para Swimming teams are promoted for media and sponsorship purposes, by Paralympics Ireland, ahead of Para Cycling (and other sports). The athletes were disappointed about the media coverage given to the Para Cycling team, especially given their success, which meant that a great opportunity to promote the sport was missed. Furthermore, the athletes were disappointed with the lack of a Team Ireland atmosphere in the Village.

## **Section 4: NGB specific observations**

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### **Organisational relationships**

The organisational relationships within Para Cycling and Cycling Ireland were described as positive. This was attributed to the quality, resourcefulness and expertise of the Lead Coach and role clarity within the organisation. The Lead Coach is the only full time employee within the Para Cycling programme and, given the workload involved on non-coaching matters, this was described as unsustainable moving forward. The ability, through personal and established networks within Para Cycling, to get access to quality coaches and support staff, on an ad-hoc basis, was an important feature of the support programme, though the sustainability of this approach was also questioned.

### **Investment**

Para Cycling, under the remit of Paralympics Ireland and Cycling Ireland, are supported by the Sport Ireland Institute and receive focused sport science and medicine support services. The uptake of support services, and the relationship between athlete and practitioners, was described as very good. Lack of investment into personnel and a sustainable staffing structure were identified as weaknesses of the system.

### **Strategic direction**

Given the success of the Para Cycling programme, the need to consider the future funding model across the NGB was highlighted. Specifically, consideration of how the Olympic and the Paralympic Cycling teams are funded and resourced, in respect of the outcomes of the respective programmes, was identified as a feature that needs further consideration.

The lack of central guidance and direction on decisions related to how to resource the Paralympic and Olympic programmes from Government, Sport Ireland or Government agencies was highlighted as an issue.

Despite the current success of the Para Cycling team, there is an acknowledgment that more needs to be done to establish a coherent talent development pathway across the sport and across classifications within the sport, in order to sustain the current performance levels.

Given the multiple partners involved in the delivery of the Para Cycling programme, it is important to examine and solidify the structures and systems currently operating in and between Paralympics Ireland and Cycling Ireland. There appears to be a strong shared mental model within Para Cycling. While the governance of Para Cycling sits with Cycling Ireland, it is important to ensure there is a shared vision across both the NGB and the broader Paralympics Ireland organisation.

## Section 5: Recommendations

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- 1) Consideration should be given to the allocation of resources for Para Cycling, specifically the reliance on ad-hoc, daily rate contractors.
- 2) Changes to the Paralympics Ireland leadership staff structure and associated staff movements may have had a destabilising effect on relationships with Para Cycling. It is important that there is clarity and transparency about the impact of this for Para Cycling.
- 3) Consideration should be given to resourcing the talent development pathway within Para Cycling.

### Non Cycling Ireland specific recommendations

- Across Team Ireland, the role of Paralympics Ireland, as the NGB for Para Swimming and Para Athletics and as the National Paralympic Committee, was raised. The organisational structure and remit of Paralympics Ireland should be examined to ensure a consistent approach is applied to all para sports.
- For the future development of Para Cycling, and in anticipation of an all Island athlete pool, consideration should be given to a formal agreement between Paralympics Ireland and the Sport Northern Ireland Sports Institute. This would provide athletes with an integrated level of service provision to meet their geographical needs.





TOKYO 2020

# Horse Sport Ireland Report



## Executive summary

Horse Sport Ireland qualified four riders for the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games, which enabled them to enter athletes in both the Team and Individual events (in the Para Dressage discipline). All riders finished in the Top 20, with their individual placings ranging from 12th to 18th in their respective classifications.

The NGB were honest that Para Equestrian was not a priority focus. However, given that two riders qualified for Tokyo 2020 by entering qualification events, the decision was taken to build a programme around Para Equestrian via an affiliate volunteer-led body. A High Performance Committee was established by Horse Sport Ireland to support the Para Equestrian programme, which included the appointment of a High Performance Director, who then operated in the role of Team Manager in Tokyo.

As a result of the high attrition rate among the Para Equestrian nations (due to the COVID-19 pandemic), additional places became available in May 2021 and a team of four riders were ultimately selected to compete in Tokyo.

It was generally accepted that the Para Equestrian team did not meet performance expectations in Tokyo, although the NGB remain optimistic about Paris 2024.

## Methodology

Confidential online surveys completed by members of the Para Equestrian team as part of a wider Tokyo Paralympic Games Review. There were four separate surveys for:

- Athletes
- Coaching and Support Staff
- Performance Directors/Performance Leads
- CEOs and Board Members

A report detailing summary group data, qualitative analysis and indicating outliers was compiled from the survey and made available from Sport Ireland for our further analysis. Based on the surveys, a number of common themes were identified which served as the basis for the interviews which were completed. A sample of athletes, coaching staff and the performance directors were interviewed on a one-to-one basis using Zoom in October and November 2021.

The issues, findings and recommendations in this report are based exclusively on the information received during the process through:

- Confidential online survey
- Interviews with key NGB personnel
- Interviews with key stakeholders

Interviews were recorded so that points of value could be reviewed, and accuracy of statements made in the report guaranteed. Notes were also taken during the interviews to capture immediate points of relevance against the key themes being explored.

Interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and all were reassured that their views would be accurately expressed. Time was taken to ensure all participants understood the limitations around confidentiality. It was clear in the interviews that participants were keen to share their perceptions in a proactive, productive, and positive manner.

Once the interviews were completed, the information was analysed to identify the key themes, then exemplar quotations were highlighted that ensured that the voice of the participants could be heard.

Verbatim quotations are not included in this report due to the small number of people interviewed and the fact that any direct quotes would be easily attributable to specific individuals. Instead, we have generated feedback themes to exemplify what they reported.

As our final report will stress, we will faithfully report, and clearly highlight, the perceptions of the interviewed participants without comment on the exact reasons underpinning why they have occurred or even whether they are accurate or not.

Paralympics Ireland note that the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games took place against the backdrop of a global pandemic that created logistical and safety challenges. The Games Delivery Team had to adapt their practices to government mandated COVID-19 countermeasures and restrictions both nationally and internationally. Repeated late changes and an ever changing and evolving environment surrounding athlete travel and preparation, both at Tokyo 2020 and in the lead up to the Games, provided additional challenges to the Games Delivery Team. Unclear qualification pathways for individual sports and late confirmation of qualification slots added to complications for logistics and kit availability.

Requirements around COVID-19 countermeasures at the pre-Games holding camp at Narita City and at the Athlete Village in Tokyo placed additional constraints on the ability of Team Ireland members to circulate freely as would happen in a normal Games period. Despite these challenges the Games Delivery Team led by Paralympics Ireland delivered a successful Paralympic Games free of major incident and provided a safe and secure environment allowing athletes to concentrate on their own performance needs.

## Section 1: Factual review

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Ireland achieved a bronze medal in the Team event in London 2012, finishing behind Germany and Great Britain. In the Individual event, riders achieved a further silver and bronze medal, resulting in Ireland finishing in 6th place overall in the Para Equestrian medal table. The programme lost momentum after London and qualified just one rider for Rio 2016 but did not achieve any podium finishes.

In 2019, Horse Sport Ireland built a programme and governance structure around Para Equestrian and appointed a High Performance Director, who took up their position in October 2019 and who was tasked with putting a high performance structure in place, including training, for the small pool of para athletes. While COVID-19 had a significant impact on Tokyo planning, funding was cited as the most significant factor that impacted performance and development. Many of the Para Equestrian athletes are located overseas and, reflecting this, Horse Sport Ireland provided funding for the Paralympic Trials, which were held virtually. This enabled the High Performance Director and selection panel to select from the widest possible field, based on who was in the best form immediately prior to the Games.

The NGB made €40k available to the Para Equestrian programme for the 12-18 months leading up to the Games, and Sport Ireland provided some 'hardship funding' when the qualification of a team was confirmed in May 2021. This covered the costs associated with flying the horses to Tokyo, following a mandatory quarantine period in Aachen.

The following table shows the performance expectations for each team member in their respective classifications (Table 1).

**Table 1. Performance expectations and results for Horse Sport Ireland**

Athlete	Performance Expectation	Results
Michael Murphy	Podium	18th
Tamsin Addison	Top 8	12th
Kate Kerr Horan	Top 8	18th
Rosemary Gaffney	Top 8	15th

In the Team even, Ireland finished in 12th position overall, a long way below their bronze medal finish in London in 2012.

## Section 2: Preparation for the Tokyo Paralympic Games

All interviewees agreed that the lack of funding was probably the most significant limiting factor on their preparations. Horse Sport Ireland and Sport Ireland provided some financial support for some aspects of the team's preparation for Tokyo. For example, the costs associated with selection and the transportation of horses to Tokyo. The Para Equestrian athletes were required to cover most of their training and competition expenses, outside of this resource. The NGB also made the following points regarding funding the Para Equestrian programme:

- The NGB has tried to secure sponsorship, but this was unsuccessful as Para Equestrian is perceived as not being attractive to sponsors.
- Sport Ireland operate a co-funding model, but because Para Equestrian has a small membership base it does not have an income stream against which the NGB can draw down Sport Ireland funding.
- The NGB believes that there is a degree of resentment between the para athletes and the able bodied athletes on other programmes. The NGB hope to address this disparity when they submit their funding application for the Paris Cycle.

Despite the backdrop where there was little appetite within the NGB to support a high performance Para Equestrian programme, once two athletes qualified for the Games, the NGB and other agencies did lean in. This is evidenced by the NGB establishing a high performance committee and appointing a High Performance Director, who was tasked with the building of a high performance programme and governance structure around the Para Equestrian programme.

The High Performance Director/Team Manager expressed a concern over a lack of any clear operational plan for the Games, including clarity about lines of communication. The lack of an operational plan for Tokyo 2020 was further complicated by the presence of a horse herpes virus, which required quarantine, as well as the COVID-19 restrictions. The High Performance Director requested an operational plan from the Olympic Team Lead, but this was not made available.

## **Selection**

Selection for the Tokyo Paralympic Games was highlighted as contentious. The approach to selection was perceived to have changed, to the disadvantage of those athletes who had qualified by entering selection events. The NGB's view is that the selection policy was robust and was not solely based on qualification via major events but was based on performances at a 'simulated competition'. Therefore, following the late notification from the International Paralympic Committee in May 2021, that Ireland could send a full Para Equestrian Team to Tokyo, thereby increasing the number of athletes from two to four, the NGB held its selection event so that all potential team members could be considered for selection based on their current, rather than historical, form.

While the NGB and High Performance Director considered the selection event to be a success, this view was not shared by one athlete who was interviewed. They believed that their place should have been guaranteed and that (a) the venue and process were unsafe which (b) led to their best horse being injured and (c) had they known more, they would not have gone overseas to qualify as this incurred a large personal financial cost. Horse Sport Ireland acknowledge that a horse was injured, and this was very unfortunate; however, they do not believe that the event was unsafe because (a) the event was held at a professional yard (b) the athlete in question changed their routine by not bringing their usual support staff and this may have increased the stress, potentially increasing the risk of injury and (c) no other athlete who participated in the trial at this venue complained of it being unsafe.

It is the athlete's belief that any rider wishing to be considered for selection needed to 'make an effort' to attend a qualification event and that some riders chose not to do so but were still selected. This is disputed by the High Performance Director, who has confirmed that all riders attended a qualification event. The fact that not all athletes competed under the same conditions (e.g., indoors vs. outdoors) was also a point of concern that was raised. This is countered by the NGB asserting that the rider who rode indoors is in a different Grade/Classification and was an appropriate accommodation to make. In contrast, the athlete was grateful for the assistance the NGB provided so that they could compete overseas, particularly the support with competition entries, allied paperwork, and transportation of the athlete's horse. Furthermore, the lessons learned by the athlete from traveling overseas were transferable to the Tokyo experience, so competing internationally, under COVID-19 restrictions, was beneficial in terms of them being better prepared for Tokyo 2020.

The NGB commented that there is a positive, but at times tense, relationship between the NGB, athletes and trainers. This tension was driven by selection issues and a lack of clarity between athletes and the NGB. The tension was addressed by the NGB having a clear selection policy and full and frank meetings (consultations) on multiple occasions.

In summary, Horse Sport Ireland recognised that the selection process was a significant source of stress for the athletes that required careful management.

## **Coaching and support services**

Para Equestrian athletes are not carded, so do not have direct access to sport science and medicine services. This was highlighted as a weakness of their preparation, when compared to carded athletes in other sports. However, when athletes needed the advice from the team doctor, they felt well supported and found it to be a positive experience during what was a stressful period.

Despite being based in the Netherlands, the High Performance Director commented that they felt well supported by the NGB and Paralympics Ireland, in both their High Performance Director and Team Manager roles. However, they suggested that more frequent high performance conversations with Horse Sport Ireland and the athletes would be beneficial during the preparation and qualifying period. In this regard, the Paralympics Ireland workshops were noted as being important and useful. However, the High Performance Director described how they would like more clarity around the budget for the current Cycle (Paris), so they can plan more effectively. Additionally, both the High Performance Director and athletes were unclear about what support services are/are not available to them from Paralympics Ireland and/or the Sport Ireland Institute.

The athletes valued the advice given by the team doctor and support staff on how to acclimatise for the conditions they would experience in Tokyo. The team veterinarian also provided advice on how to prepare the horses for the anticipated level of heat and humidity they would experience during competition.

### **Holding camp and logistics**

While there was no access to Paralympics Ireland core staff at the holding camp in Aachen, the riders did have access to the Chef de Mission, by phone, who kept the team apprised of the entry requirements and arrival process in Tokyo, which was valuable as it removed several unknowns.

Before flying to Tokyo, the athletes were advised to use public transport (e.g., train and bus) to travel to the airport. The athletes felt this was inappropriate as it was (a) a potential COVID-19 risk and (b) challenging given the riders' impairments and amount of personal baggage, particularly for the wheelchair users on the team. To overcome these logistical issues, the High Performance Director decided that a vehicle with the team was needed and contacted a company. One of the riders offered to assist and helped with finding the best rates and finalising the booking. Horse Sport Ireland directly paid for the vehicle. However, it was felt that team transport was something that should have been appropriately arranged by Paralympics Ireland and the logistics manager/team manager. However, Paralympics Ireland were not made aware of this arrangement and would have supported the logistics, had they have been informed.

There were several other issues reported regarding travel that were potentially avoidable and that a better understanding of Para Equestrian and the needs of the team members was required. For example, on arrival at the airport, a groom did not have a return ticket, so was at risk of not being allowed to travel. A workaround was found, but it resulted in stress for those involved.

The late notification of flight details also made booking PCR tests, within the allowable test window, challenging. This process was further complicated as testing was not centrally organised. It was not clear to the athletes and NGB what aspect of logistics were the responsibility of the NGB or Paralympics Ireland, with a lack of role clarity apparent.

The team kit was issued late, and the team members were not provided with a list of what would be provided to them by Paralympics Ireland. This resulted in riders taking more clothing and equipment than was needed. Not all athletes received the same items (e.g., they had different rugs for the horses), so there were occasions when they did not look like a team. However, athletes were satisfied with the quality of the kit provided.

Horse Sport Ireland requested accreditation for an Assistant Team Manager to provide additional logistic support. Paralympics Ireland were unable to grant the extra accreditation required so some additional tasks fell to the Team Manager, taking them away from their primary role (i.e., High Performance Director).

Several disciplinary issues were reported, which required the Chef de Mission to spend a great deal of time in the Equestrian Park. This also required the Team Manager to become involved in conflict resolution, which took them away from their primary role. Arguably, this could have been avoided by accrediting one more staff member; however, Paralympics Ireland worked within the strict constraints of the accreditation allowances as per the Tokyo 2020 Organising Committee (TOCOG). There were specific limits on the number of support staff per sport and per delegation.

### Section 3: Experience and performance at the Games

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The athlete who was interviewed reported feeling physically and technically ready for Tokyo but remained bitter about not being able to take their best horse because of the injury it acquired during selection. They were complimentary about the support provided by the team doctor and the physiotherapy staff during the Games. The core staff were described as being very good at organising COVID-19 testing around the individual athletes' programmes and they were satisfied with how the COVID-19 restrictions were managed. The reflections of the Team Manager/High Performance Director are as follows:

- They did not believe that three of the four riders enjoyed the Games as much as they could have.
- All riders were debutants, and this lack of experience may have influenced both performance and behaviours at the Games.
- Not all riders accepted the help on offer and one rider looked towards a parent, who did not have access to the Village, for support. The rider in question was not allowed a carer based on their classification and this caused issues within the team.
- The athletes grew into the competition (eventually), but it was hard for some.
- The Team Manager reported feeling very energised by the Tokyo experience and learned lots of lessons that can be carried forward (e.g., how to manage private trainers) towards Paris 2024.

The tensions within the team almost certainly impacted on the performance of the riders, but the extent of this cannot be known for certain. That said, it is hard to imagine that it was beneficial to their performance and will need to be addressed if the riders are to deliver their best performances at future Games.

### Section 4: NGB specific observations

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The Team Manager/High Performance Director reported feeling very energised by their Tokyo experience and has learned many lessons that can be carried forward (how to manage private trainers, for example) into Paris in 2024.

Horse Sport Ireland were surprised by the drop in form between London and Rio but are confident that there is an exciting future ahead for Para Equestrian, with the possibility of achieving podium positions and would welcome better links with the Sport Ireland Institute to support the NGB's efforts in developing a high performance culture.

## **Investment**

The costs associated with maintaining a high performance Para Equestrian programme are considerable and raising the funds required to field a team at a Paralympic Games are a challenge. The mixed economy approach is working because of the collaboration between strategic partners and the support of the athletes themselves. However, this approach is fragile and may not be sustainable in the longer term with only those riders with the means to self-fund being selectable, rather than the most talented.

## **Structures and governance/stakeholder relationships**

The NGB were very honest about an initial lack of appetite for a high performance Para Equestrian programme but took several steps to address this including the appointment of a strong leader in the High Performance Director position. There is evidence of collaborations between the NGB and its strategic partners, particularly when they were allocated four athlete slots, so that Ireland could field a full team in Tokyo. However, the challenging behaviours displayed by some individuals must be addressed as a matter of urgency.

## **Strategic direction**

It is believed that the development of Para Equestrian in Ireland is at a critical point and the future development of the sport is at a tipping point. That said, the current leadership have demonstrated a commitment to, and optimism, about the sport's future that bodes well for Paris 2024, providing those agencies responsible for the development of the high performance system get fully behind the NGB.

## **Section 5: Recommendations**

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### **1) Governance and staffing**

- Consideration should be given to putting a robust athlete agreement in place, to be shared across the team and signed by all athletes and NGB staff. Importantly, it should clearly outline the behaviours and standards required of everyone representing Team Ireland at a Paralympic Games. Any agreement must include the sanctions that could be imposed should a team member fail to maintain the standards of behaviour expected. The NGB is encouraged to discuss this with Paralympics Ireland and agree who will lead on this if it is agreed that this recommendation will be implemented.
- Greater visibility of the budget should be provided to the High Performance Director to aid medium to long term planning.
- Consideration should be given to the development of a closer relationship between the Olympic and Paralympic programmes of Horse Sport Ireland, when it comes Games planning, so that any learning can be shared.

### **2) Strategy**

- The decision to field a full team of four riders in Tokyo 2020, notwithstanding the late notification from the International Paralympic Committee, was not without challenge. While these challenges were to a greater or lesser extent overcome, with the combined efforts of all partners, it is suggested that the NGB makes an early planning assumption on if qualifying a team, or a lesser number of athletes, is the strategic goal, so that they can plan accordingly.

### **3) Coaching**

- Greater coordination between the athletes' personal trainers and the High Performance Director, which is acknowledged, is required. Therefore, all parties should examine how best to achieve this by creating more opportunities for collaboration.

**Non Horse Sport Ireland specific recommendations**

- The main concerns expressed from an athlete perspective were those regarding the quality of team kit and the logistics around travel. While it is understood that some aspects of the operational plan are a shared responsibility between the NGB and Paralympics Ireland, it is suggested that both parties review the operational plan to prevent any recurrence of the issues faced in Tokyo, happening in Paris.



# IWA (SPORT) - POWERLIFTING



# Irish Wheelchair Association (Sport) - Powerlifting Report



## Executive summary

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Irish Wheelchair Association (Sport) - Powerlifting qualified one athlete, Brittney Arendse, for the Tokyo Paralympic Games in the 73kg category. Brittney finished in 7th position with a personal best of 107kg.

Powerlifting is not a formally recognised sport within the Sport Ireland high performance system, and this impacted on preparation during the Tokyo Cycle. As an emerging sport, an established support and funding network in the sport and the lack of funding and sport science and medicine support from Paralympics Ireland during the qualification period, was perceived to have impacted performance and development. Late qualification impacted preparation for the Games, but a broadly positive experience was reported. Moving forward, there is a need to consider the development of the high performance strategy within the Irish Wheelchair Association (Sport) - Powerlifting and alignment with Paralympics Ireland.

## Methodology

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Confidential online surveys completed by members of the Para Powerlifting team as part of a wider Tokyo Paralympic Games Review. There were four separate surveys for:

- Athletes
- Coaching and Support Staff
- Performance Directors/Performance Leads
- CEOs and Board Members

A report detailing summary group data, qualitative analysis and indicating outliers was compiled from the survey and made available from Sport Ireland for our further analysis. Based on the surveys, a number of common themes were identified which served as the basis for the interviews which were held. A sample of athletes, coaching staff and the Performance Director/Performance Lead were interviewed on a one-to-one basis on Zoom in October and November 2021.

The issues, findings and recommendations in this report are based exclusively on the information received during the process through:

- Confidential online survey
- Interviews with key NGB personnel

Interviews were recorded so that points of value could be re-listened to, and accuracy of statements made in the report guaranteed. Notes were also taken during the interviews to capture immediate points of relevance against the key themes being explored.

The interviews lasted approximately 70 minutes and everyone interviewed was reassured that their views would be accurately expressed and that they understood the limitations around confidentiality. It was clear in the interviews that participants were keen to share their perceptions in a proactive, productive, and positive manner.

Once the interviews were completed, the information was analysed to identify the key themes and then exemplar quotations were highlighted that ensured that the voice of the participants could be heard.

Verbatim quotations are not included in this report due to the small number of people interviewed and the fact that any direct quotes would be easily attributable to specific individuals. Instead, we have generated feedback themes to exemplify.

As our final report will stress, we will faithfully report, and clearly highlight, the perceptions of the interviewed participants without comment on the exact reasons underpinning why they have occurred or even whether they are accurate or not.

Paralympics Ireland note that the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games took place against the backdrop of a global pandemic that created logistical and safety challenges. The Games Delivery Team had to adapt their practices to government mandated COVID-19 countermeasures and restrictions both nationally and internationally. Repeated late changes and an ever changing and evolving environment surrounding athlete travel and preparation, both at Tokyo 2020 and in the lead up to the Games, provided additional challenges to the Games Delivery Team. Unclear qualification pathways for individual sports and late confirmation of qualification slots added to complications for logistics and kit availability.

Requirements around COVID-19 countermeasures at the pre-Games holding camp at Narita City and at the Athlete Village in Tokyo placed additional constraints on the ability of Team Ireland members to circulate freely as would happen in a normal Games period. Despite these challenges the Games Delivery Team led by Paralympics Ireland delivered a successful Paralympic Games free of major incident and provided a safe and secure environment allowing athletes to concentrate on their own performance needs.

## Section 1: Factual review

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Irish Wheelchair Association (Sport) - Powerlifting qualified one para powerlifter, Brittney Arendse, for the Tokyo Paralympic Games, in the 73kg category. Brittney finished in 7th position with a personal best of 107kg.

The athlete did not receive financial support through the Sport Ireland International Carding Scheme for the Tokyo Paralympic Cycle, though the NGB did receive ad-hoc funding in each year of the Cycle.

## Section 2: Preparation for the Tokyo Paralympic Games

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Powerlifting is not a formally recognised sport within the Sport Ireland High Performance system and, therefore, funding and support services were not provided to the athlete during the Tokyo Cycle.

As an emerging sport, there was not an established support and funding network in the sport and the lack of funding and sport science and medicine support during the qualification period was perceived to impact performance and development. The ad-hoc nature of seeking support services was described as particularly frustrating, without a clear process articulated to the NGB. A structured support services plan was submitted to Paralympics Ireland yearly, and while it was acknowledged that there are finite resources available, the lack of clarity about access to resources and funding allocation early in the Cycle in order to plan effectively was emphasised.

It was felt that there was not support from Paralympics Ireland during the qualification and preparation phase of the Tokyo Cycle. As a result, the NGB took logistical and performance responsibility for preparation and qualification strategies. In this regard, the NGB was described as proactive and supportive, but limited in resource and isolated from Paralympics Ireland. As one example, Irish Wheelchair Association (Sport) - Powerlifting described how they were actively discouraged from attending international competition in the year preceding Tokyo 2020, due to COVID-19. It was noted that other sports were travelling during the same period, and it was unclear why they were being discouraged and potentially jeopardising qualification. Over the duration of the pandemic restrictions in Ireland, Paralympics Ireland supported sports with the planning and risk assessments required by the Irish Government for international travel abroad to competitions. Paralympics Ireland advised sports to be considerate of the implications of quarantine after travel to countries that were red-listed or had the potential to be.

There was broad satisfaction with the logistical aspects of travel to Japan and the holding camp in Narita. The holding camp was described as positive with appropriate accommodation, food and training facilities. However, it was the specific opinion of those interviewed that certain aspects of the camp did not reflect a high performance environment. An example given was that during the holding camp the athlete was not provided with appropriate equipment (i.e., calibrated powerlifting bars and plates). Paralympics Ireland noted that as part of the pre-Games preparation planning with the sport, Paralympics Ireland worked closely with the Narita holding camp organising committee to ensure that all the powerlifting equipment requested by the sport was available at the holding camp. Paralympics Ireland also supported the transport of a powerlifting bar from Ireland to support the training needs of the athlete. The NGB also noted that the athlete had to train in her own training gear as no official training gear was provided.

Spotters are a fundamental part of the backroom support team in Para Powerlifting, and it was the opinion of the coach that appropriate provision was not made pre-arrival at the holding camp (it should be noted that a number of pre-Games planning meetings between Paralympics Ireland and the Irish Wheelchair Association took place, where this was discussed, and it was agreed that the strength and conditioning (S&C) coach would act as a spotter). The support from Paralympics Ireland support staff (i.e., the sport psychologist) to step in at short notice as a spotter was valued but it was stated by the coach that this occurred because of a lack of pre-Games planning and without this goodwill, pre-Games preparations would have been significantly disrupted (Paralympics Ireland noted that the arrangement for the team psychologist to step in and act as a spotter was agreed by all, in advance of it taking place). It was felt that the onus for preparation and performance at the Games was left to the NGB and Paralympics Ireland did not take responsibility or ownership over the preparations.

There were significant issues in terms of kit quality and allocation. The kit was described as poor quality, and in particular, the lack of performance kit appropriate for heat and humidity and a lack of training gear were major issues. In addition, kit allocation did not account for the specific needs of athletes, athletes' disabilities, or sport specific requirements.

### Section 3: Experience and performance at the Games

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#### Team Ireland support

COVID-19 was described as having a significant impact on the Team Ireland climate. Despite this, operations in the Village were generally described as good. The Chef de Mission was described as proactive and solution-focused.

The accommodation in the Village was described as basic, but appropriate. The lack of a Team Ireland atmosphere was noted, and although COVID-19 restrictions were acknowledged, it was felt that more could have been done to create a team climate.

### **Coaching and support services**

The access to sport science and medicine support during the Games was described as adequate. Access to physiotherapy and medicine was described as appropriate, albeit limited by COVID-19 protocols. Both the athlete and the coach availed of sport psychology, and this was described as good with the sport psychologist acting as a spotter in addition to their normal duties. Paralympics Ireland's support model and request for support from the Sport Ireland Institute was for the Games period and, although the sport science and medicine team were appointed in 2019, a lack of coordination meant that there was not an established relationship with support providers prior to the Games and this was perceived as having had an impact on the effectiveness of the support services.

## **Section 4: NGB specific observations**

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### **Organisational relationships**

From an NGB perspective, the Irish Wheelchair Association (Sport) - Powerlifting felt that they were not supported enough by Paralympics Ireland, and they needed more support from them to transition to a high performance programme. It was recognised that there was a need to clarify roles and expectations between the NGB and Paralympics Ireland.

Paralympics Ireland worked within the strict constraints of the accreditation allowances as per the Tokyo 2020 Organising Committee (TOCOG). There were specific limits on the number of support staff per sport and per delegation. Paralympics Ireland worked with the Irish Wheelchair Association (and the International Federation) to ensure there was coaching support at both the holding camp in Narita and at the competition venue. The coach, an ex-Paralympic athlete, suggested that the constraints relating to accreditation made him feel unwelcome and without the necessary supports to allow him to coach the athlete. It was the opinion of those interviewed that gaps exist within the Paralympics Ireland administration team regarding disability sport and high performance disability sport in particular.

The communication between the Irish Wheelchair Association (Sport) - Powerlifting and Paralympics Ireland was problematic. The coach and athlete did not have confirmation about selection from the International Federation until three weeks before the Games and this had a significant impact on preparation, especially given the volunteer nature of the coaching role.

### **Investment**

The lack of recognition of the Irish Wheelchair Association (Sport) - Powerlifting as an official NGB was described as a limitation to high performance planning and development. As a result of this lack of recognition, the NGB had limited direct support in terms of financial support, access to sport science and medicine support and other support services.

### **Strategic direction**

The importance of supporting the development of a performance system in Para Powerlifting was highlighted. This was highlighted as especially important to ensure a sustainable and robust performance pathway.

## Section 5: Recommendations

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- 1) Consideration should be given to supporting Para Powerlifting's (Irish Wheelchair Association (Sport)) transition into a high performance system and gain alignment with Sport Ireland and Paralympics Ireland. Further integration of the Irish Wheelchair Association (Sport) into the Sport Ireland high performance system should be emphasised. Given the short Cycle pre-Paris 2024, it is suggested that this issue should be addressed as soon as possible.
- 2) Consideration should be given to supporting coaches with disabilities within the performance system. In particular, a focus on supporting Paralympians' transition to coaching is worthy of attention.
- 3) Attention needs to be given to detailed performance planning, access to sport science and medicine support, and particularly how this is funded across the Cycle.
- 4) Consideration should also be given to staff training across the NGB and Paralympics Ireland. In particular, attention should be paid to raising levels of disability awareness and major championship experience amongst core performance and administration staff.

### **Non Irish Wheelchair Association (Sport) - Powerlifting specific recommendations**

- Across Team Ireland, the role of Paralympics Ireland as the National Paralympic Committee was raised. The organisation and remit should be examined to ensure best practice is applied to all of the sports representing Team Ireland at future Paralympic Games.
- Changes to the Paralympics Ireland leadership staff structure and associated staff may have had a destabilising effect that impacted on operations and the overall performance. Given the turnover in Paralympics Ireland staff across Cycles, it is important that there is clarity across all staff in terms of roles and responsibilities.





# Paralympics Ireland (Athletics) Report

## Executive summary

Paralympics Ireland (Athletics) qualified eight athletes for the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games. Jason Smyth won gold in the T13 100m. While the increasing standards of Para Athletics worldwide has to be acknowledged, the general feeling was that the Paralympics Ireland (Athletics) team underperformed in Tokyo. Only three members of the team met or exceeded their pre-Games performance expectations.

Paralympics Ireland (Athletics) is governed and managed by Paralympics Ireland. This results in a number of dual roles and a lack of (perceived) role clarity between the NGB and the National Paralympic Committee functions within Paralympics Ireland.

Reflecting the nature of the sport, it was clear that the performance planning for the Para Athletics team was underpinned by an individualised approach and there was not a collective framework for training, Games planning and operations during the Tokyo Cycle or at the Games. The team was led by an experienced Head of Paralympic Athletics and the relationships between the Para Athletics staff and athletes was reported as generally positive. From a Paralympics Ireland perspective, it was felt that the Para Athletics team had not fully engaged with the sport science and medicine supports offered and this had a negative impact on performance. There is a need to continue to plan a long term strategy for Para Athletics, with a focus on coaching, coach development and talent development.

## Methodology

Confidential online surveys completed by members of the Para Athletics team as part of a wider Tokyo Paralympic Games Review. There were four separate surveys for:

- Athletes
- Coaching and Support Staff
- Performance Directors/Performance Leads
- CEOs and Board Members

A report detailing summary group data, qualitative analysis and indicating outliers was compiled from the survey and made available from Sport Ireland for our further analysis. Based on the surveys, a number of common themes were identified which served as the basis for the interviews which were held. A sample of athletes, coaching staff and the Performance Director/Performance Lead were interviewed on a one-to-one basis on Zoom in October and November 2021.

The issues, findings and recommendations in this report are based exclusively on the information received during the process through:

- Confidential online survey
- Interviews with key NGB personnel
- Interviews with key stakeholders

Interviews were recorded so that points of value could be re-listened to, and accuracy of statements made in the report guaranteed. Notes were also taken during the interviews to capture immediate points of relevance against the key themes being explored.

The interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and everyone interviewed was reassured that their views would be accurately expressed and that they understood the limitations around confidentiality. It was clear in the interviews that participants were keen to share their perceptions in a proactive, productive, and positive manner.

Once the interviews were completed, the information was analysed to identify the key themes and then exemplar quotations were highlighted that ensured that the voice of the participants could be heard.

Verbatim quotations are not included in this report due to the small number of people interviewed and the fact that any direct quotes would be easily attributable to specific individuals. Instead, we have generated feedback themes to exemplify.

As our final report will stress, we will faithfully report, and clearly highlight, the perceptions of the interviewed participants without comment on the exact reasons underpinning why they have occurred or even whether they are accurate or not.

Paralympics Ireland note that the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games took place against the backdrop of a global pandemic that created logistical and safety challenges. The Games Delivery Team had to adapt their practices to government mandated COVID-19 countermeasures and restrictions both nationally and internationally. Repeated late changes and an ever changing and evolving environment surrounding athlete travel and preparation, both at Tokyo 2020 and in the lead up to the Games, provided additional challenges to the Games Delivery Team. Unclear qualification pathways for individual sports and late confirmation of qualification slots added to complications for logistics and kit availability.

Requirements around COVID-19 countermeasures at the pre-Games holding camp at Narita City and at the Athlete Village in Tokyo placed additional constraints on the ability of Team Ireland members to circulate freely as would happen in a normal Games period. Despite these challenges the Games Delivery Team led by Paralympics Ireland delivered a successful Paralympic Games free of major incident and provided a safe and secure environment allowing athletes to concentrate on their own performance needs.

## Section 1: Factual review

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Paralympics Ireland (Athletics) qualified eight athletes for the Tokyo Paralympic Games. The team comprised a range of experience with two athletes making their Paralympic debut (Jordan Lee and Mary Fitzpatrick), four athletes competing at their 2nd Games (Niamh McCarthy, Patrick Monaghan, Greta Streimikyte and Orla Comerford), while Michael McKillop and Jason Smyth were competing in their 4th and 5th Games, respectively.

Jason Smyth won gold in the T13 100m. While the increasing standards of Para Athletics worldwide has to be acknowledged, the general feeling was that the team underperformed in Tokyo. Only three members of the team met or exceeded their pre-Games performance expectations (Table 1).

**Table 1. Performance expectations and results for Paralympics Ireland (Athletics)**

Athlete	Performance Expectation	Result
Greta Streimikyte	Top 4	5th
Jason Smyth	Podium	Gold
Jordan Lee	Final	9th
Mary Fitzgerald	Final	6th
Michael McKillop	Top 4	8th
Niamh McCarthy	Podium	5th
Orla Comerford	Final	13th
Patrick Monaghan	Top 12	12th

All members of the team were funded through the Sport Ireland International Carding Scheme and supported through the Sport Ireland Institute (Table 2).

**Table 2. Funding level for Paralympics Ireland (Athletics)**

Athlete	Funding Level
Greta Streimikyte	World class (€20k)
Jason Smyth	Podium (€40k)
Jordan Lee	World class (€20k)
Mary Fitzgerald	International (€12k)
Michael McKillop	Podium (€40k)
Niamh McCarthy	Podium (€40k)
Orla Comerford	International (€12k)
Patrick Monahan	World class (€20k)

## Section 2: Preparation for the Tokyo Paralympic Games

Firstly, it is important to note the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on preparation for the Tokyo Paralympic Games. Since February 2020, Paralympics Ireland have had to factor in the implications of COVID-19 countermeasures on roles, responsibilities and the time and resources consumed by implementation. As a result, it should be noted that the remit of individual roles had to change and adapt to emerging situations such as coaching, impact of COVID-19 restrictions, exemptions, and the departure of key staff.

The delivery of the Paralympics Ireland (Athletics) programme is managed by a Head of Paralympic Athletics, operating under a Performance Director. The athletes described a very positive relationship with the Head of Paralympic Athletics, noting that they played an important role as a conduit between them and the Paralympics Ireland (Athletics) NGB and the Paralympics Ireland National Paralympic Committee more broadly. The relationship between the Performance Director and the Head of Paralympic Athletics was described as sub-optimal, leading to difficulties in terms of planning, preparation and communication during the Tokyo Cycle. Most athletes, and this was supported by the Head of Paralympic Athletics, and Performance Director's perspectives, had minimal interaction and input from Paralympics Ireland directly

in the team's preparation for the Games. It was apparent that the Paralympics Ireland (Athletics) team operated independently of the broader NGB and there is a perceived lack of clarity about the positioning of Paralympics Ireland (Athletics) from all parties (i.e., Performance Director, Head of Paralympic Athletics and athletes).

It is important to note that preparation was described as 'individually driven' by all members of the Paralympics Ireland (Athletics) team and while they acknowledged the roles of the Head of Paralympic Athletics and Performance Director, it was clear that athletes and their personal coaches adopted an insular approach to preparation for the Games. Although this arrangement appears to work for most of the athletes due to their established personal network, the sustainability of this for younger athletes and those not already in, or just entering a high performance environment, was emphasised. It was also stressed that this individual approach was not necessarily a negative feature of preparation, particularly where there were strong coach/athlete relationships, but the lack of robust channels of communication and oversight between Paralympics Ireland (Athletics) and the Performance Director and some of the sport science and medicine practitioners was highlighted as an issue that needs to be addressed.

Individual athletes and some Paralympics Ireland (Athletics) staff felt that the team was well prepared and ready to perform at the Games, despite the inevitable disruptions caused by COVID-19. There were several concerns expressed by interviewees about some aspects of the services they received. Whilst these have been noted, we have not explored these in detail within the report so as to protect the anonymity of all concerned. For example, there was a mixed picture in terms of performance planning. A number of athletes are based in Northern Ireland and the lack of formal agreement with the Sport Northern Ireland Sports Institute for the Tokyo Cycle was described as a serious limitation for preparation due to ad-hoc reporting, lack of alignment and difficulties in engagement. As a reflection on this, there appeared to be a lack of continuity of support for some athletes in relation to sport science and medicine services (physiotherapy, for example), while the uptake and engagement with other support services such as sport psychology varied across individuals. The athletes felt that the Head of Paralympic Athletics did a good job of coordinating sport science and medicine services in cooperation with the Head of Performance Support (HOPS) from the Sport Ireland Institute. Notably, two of the senior athletes on the team receive sport science and medicine support through the Sport Northern Ireland Sports Institute and while Paralympics Ireland do not have a significant impact on their programmes, the Head of Paralympic Athletics was their point of contact and perceived as having a very positive relationship.

The Paralympics Ireland (Athletics) athletes described how they would have liked to have greater autonomy over their preparation for the Games, notably decisions about travelling and access to warm weather training. The challenges of COVID-19 were acknowledged and particularly the ability for athletes to train and compete abroad through lockdowns due to both Government regulations and the Sport Ireland tiering system. However, a number of athletes felt that the lines of communication about travel protocols and procedures were unclear and suggested that some decisions were taken without a 'high performance outcome' in mind. It was clear that these issues caused difficulties between the Performance Director and other members of the Paralympics Ireland (Athletics) team, including breakdown in communications, logistical and administrative issues and disruptions to training, when regulations about travel during COVID-19 were enforced. Whilst acknowledging this tension, it was noted by the Performance Director and CEO that Paralympics Ireland did facilitate travel where possible during the COVID-19 pandemic and complied with government restrictions and worked proactively with Sport Ireland around travel risk assessments and recommendations.

Some athletes felt their specific and individual needs were not supported and a generic approach was taken to aspects such as travel and dietary requirements that did not meet athletes' needs. A disparity between how some sports were allowed travel and conditions of travel was reported. The holding camp in Narita was positively described by the athletes, providing them with the opportunity to acclimatise and adjust to the changes in time zone. Some athletes noted that they would have preferred to have delayed their travel to both the holding camp and into the Village, suggesting that individual preferences were not accounted for in the decision-making process. However, it was stressed by Paralympics Ireland (Athletics) that the decisions were driven by sport science and medicine considerations.

Although the athletes described a positive experience at the holding camp, there were concerns from Paralympics Ireland that the athletes did not optimise the acclimatisation period appropriately. Paralympics Ireland, in addition to the directly contracted service providers that were in situ in preparation for Tokyo (i.e., Chief Medical Officer, lead physiotherapist and sports psychologist), worked with Sport Ireland to engage additional support including an additional physiotherapist specifically for the Para Athletics team, a nutritionist and a strength and conditioning (S&C) coach, who travelled to the pre-Games holding camp in Narita. The Performance Director suggested that some athletes were underprepared for the Games and, in their opinion, did not engage in sufficient training or preparation during the holding camp with a lack of high performance mindset and behaviours (for some athletes) described. It was noted that this resulted in some tensions between Paralympics Ireland, Paralympics Ireland (Athletics) coaching staff and athletes, which may have resulted in an under performance from some athletes.

### **Coaching and support services**

A mixed picture in terms of coaching support was evident across the athletics team that reflected the continuum of experience in the team. The athletes (in conjunction with the Head of Paralympic Athletics) felt that they were well prepared and availed of appropriate services during preparations for the Games. All the athletes had their own personal coaches, and a performance plan was developed in preparation for the Games. However, the engagement of athletes with sport science and medicine support services was described as poor and inconsistent. In this regard, it was suggested that some of the team were underprepared in terms of coaching support, performance planning, acclimatisation strategies, heat preparation and travel strategies due to an ad-hoc engagement through the Cycle. It is worth noting that this view was not supported by all athletes or the Head of Paralympic Athletics, who felt that adequate heat, travel, and environmental preparation was engaged in by the athletes, supported by staff from the Sport Ireland Institute.

There were some issues around the relationships between personal coaches and the Paralympics Ireland (Athletics) programme. The Performance Director and Head of Paralympic Athletics noted that they did not have oversight of the training and preparation for individual athletes, with most athletes working independently. This, coupled with some gaps in a systematic performance planning, was noted as a feature that may have impacted on the performances of some athletes. In many cases, due to accreditation processes, many personal coaches were not able to travel to the Games or holding camp with their athletes, although event specific coaches were accredited. In this regard, some athletes suggested that consideration should be given to providing suitable accreditation to support athletes with medal expectations. While it was acknowledged that a centralised model is not appropriate for Para Athletics, the benefits of a coherent approach to preparation and training were acknowledged as being important. For example, although the sport science and medicine services and practitioners were held in high regard, access to support services was described as ad-hoc in nature with the suggestion that a coordinated and managed approach from Paralympics Ireland (Athletics) would be beneficial. It was stressed, however that further expertise in para sport are required across coaching and sport science and medicine provision within the broader NGB/National Paralympic Committee support system.

### Section 3: Experience and performance at the Games

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The Paralympics Ireland (Athletics) team described a positive experience in the Athlete Village, despite COVID-19 regulations. The accommodation was described as basic, though athletes appreciated that appropriate decisions about rooming supported their performances. A number of athletes noted that more could have been done to decorate the apartments and buildings to improve a 'Team Ireland' feel. Significant issues in terms of kit quality and allocation were described. In particular, the lack of performance kit appropriate for heat and humidity was a major issue. Athletes with multiple Paralympic Games experience were disappointed that similar issues that arose at previous Games, were not addressed.

The Team Ireland operations in the Village were generally described as good, and all members acknowledged the role of the Chef de Mission in cultivating this, especially in terms of a solution focused approach. However, there appeared to be less satisfaction with other members of the Paralympics Ireland staff and notably a lack of Paralympic Games experience was cited as a reason for some shortcomings. In particular, Paralympics Ireland (Athletics) athletes and staff noted issues with media and operations, including travel and logistical issues. It was suggested that there was a lack of accountability and professionalism of some Paralympics Ireland staff, and the lack of a high performance mindset impacted some decision making.

#### Coaching and support services

Most of the athletes were very happy with the coaching and support services during the Games. Paralympics Ireland (Athletics) athletes noted that access to physiotherapy and medical support was appropriate. However, in most cases, there was not an established relationship with support providers and therefore the lack of consistency of support was considered to have a negative impact. It was also acknowledged that due to limited accreditation and funding, access to support services was spread across Team Ireland and therefore timely access was not always available.

However, the working relationships with some sport science and medicine staff was sub-optimal. In one instance, behaviour from one Paralympics Ireland contracted service provider was described as poor, lacking in role clarity and accountability. The Head of Paralympic Athletics noted that they should have direct input into the make-up of the team of support service providers appointed by Paralympics Ireland.

#### Team Ireland support

All the interviewees were satisfied with the input and support from the Paralympics Ireland team in the Village. Although the Chef de Mission was described as approachable, there were some concerns about their level of experience and ability to intervene effectively and proactively. Their ability to impact preparation for, and operations during the Tokyo Games, was confounded by their appointment late in the Cycle (April 2021). In an effort to overcome these perceived limitations, it was clear that both individual athletes and the Head of Paralympic Athletics took responsibility for many decisions, without input from Paralympics Ireland and the Chef de Mission. The coaching and management staff were experienced, having worked through numerous Paralympic Cycles and this was cited as a reason why potential challenges and obstacles during the Games were avoided. It was noted by Paralympics Ireland that, given the level of expertise and experience within the Para Athletics team and the Head of Paralympics Athletics, that they were empowered to work with autonomy whilst still reporting to the Games leadership team.

## Section 4: NGB specific observations

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### Organisational relationships

Paralympics Ireland acts as both the National Paralympic Committee and as the NGB for Para Athletics. As a result, some staff have responsibilities across multiple sports in the coordination of Team Ireland for a Paralympic Games (the National Paralympic Committee function) while other roles are more sport specific. A lack of clarity about this role structure was highlighted by many of the athletes.

The relationship between key stakeholders (e.g., athletes/Head of Paralympic Athletics and Paralympics Ireland) appear not to be effective. From an athlete perspective, a fractured relationship was described by a number of senior athletes between them and Paralympics Ireland (as the National Paralympic Committee), underpinned by a lack of trust, accountability and responsibility. Outside the Head of Paralympic Athletics, athletes suggested that they are not listened to and there is no motivation on the part of Paralympics Ireland to support their development or learn from their experiences across multiple Cycles. At an operational level, a similar breakdown in relationships was reported between the Performance Director and the Head of Paralympic Athletics. This was reported to result in a less than optimal relationship, suggesting the need to recalibrate in order to optimise support for athletes for the Paris 2024 Cycle.

### Investment

Paralympics Ireland (Athletics), under the remit of Paralympics Ireland, are supported by Sport Ireland and receive focused sport science and medicine support services from the Sport Ireland Institute practitioners, the Sport Northern Ireland Sports Institute practitioners and Paralympics Ireland contracted practitioners. The need to coordinate these services across multiple providers and support athletes to consistently engage with the services was highlighted. There was a strong recommendation from the Sport Ireland Institute that Paralympics Ireland moves their performance support relationship and requests with the Sport Ireland Institute closer to the Olympic Federation of Ireland/Sport Ireland Institute model for the Paris Cycle, with the suggestion that that Games time support model in isolation is sub-optimal.

Although Paralympics Ireland (Athletics) sits under the remit of Paralympics Ireland, the sense from the interviews was that there was a tension, both operationally and strategically, between Paralympics Ireland (Athletics) and Paralympics Ireland. A number of senior athletes felt that there was not a shared mental model about high performance sport across individuals or sections of the organisation. There did not appear to be audits or 'check and challenge' opportunities between Paralympics Ireland and Paralympics Ireland (Athletics) during the Tokyo Cycle.

A number of participants discussed the role of the Performance Director across two sports (Para Athletics and Para Swimming) and questioned whether there is sufficient resource to support both sports on an equal basis. It was noted that the Performance Director is also the personal coach of a number of the para swimmers and a number of participants questioned whether this represented a conflict of interest. While it was acknowledged that some staff have both National Paralympic Committee and sport specific responsibilities, defining role clarity should be considered within the broader Paralympics Ireland context.

It was very clear that there were strong and established relationships between high performance staff and Paralympics Ireland (Athletics) with a climate of trust and rapport. The Head of Paralympic Athletics operated as a facilitator in supporting the athletes on best to negotiate the system and this meant that sometimes official channels were bypassed.

### Strategic direction

Paralympics Ireland (Athletics) have had success across multiple Games. However, there is an acknowledgement that it is an aging team. This, in parallel with rising standards in Para Athletics worldwide, is likely to compromise the continued success of Team Ireland at future Games. There was an acknowledgement that more depth and breadth in the talent pool is needed if Paralympics Ireland (Athletics) is going to maintain their position. A number of talent identification initiatives are underway and Paralympics Ireland need to consider ways to increase the talent identification and development programmes in order to populate the talent pipeline. The performance standards globally are increasing in Para Athletics in particular, and para sport in general, and the need to strategically consider, and then target, different classifications with potential for medals and finals at Paralympic Games and World Championships was noted.

Given some of the stated issues around relationships, role clarity and responsibilities, at an operational level, it is important to examine the structures within Paralympics Ireland (Athletics), its place within Paralympics Ireland, clarity of roles within and across the National Paralympic Committee and NGB programme, and its relationship with service providers. The lack of a shared mental model across Paralympics Ireland (Athletics) and Paralympics Ireland was evident in the contradictory accounts offered by stakeholders across the organisation.

### Section 5: Recommendations

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- 1) Given that the Performance Director operates across two sports, it is important that there is a clear understanding of this role in Paralympics Ireland. Consideration should be given to role clarity at all levels of the organisation to address the perceived or actual conflicts of interest.
- 2) Consideration should be given to whether the high performance responsibilities for Para Athletics should remain under Paralympics Ireland or be transferred to Athletics Ireland. If the latter is adopted, given the short Cycle pre-Paris 2024, it is suggested that while planning should commence as soon as possible, the transfer to the NGB would be post 2024.
- 3) Paralympics Ireland (Athletics) interviewees described an insular approach to preparation and performance with athletes happy to work independently, supported by the Head of Paralympic Athletics. Notably, the Head of Paralympic Athletics and individual athletes reported satisfaction with this arrangement. However, the relationship between Paralympics Ireland (Athletics) and Paralympics Ireland needs to be examined to optimise the resources and expertise available and, at an operational level, to ensure accountability for all parties. Particular attention needs to be given to detailed performance planning across the sport and the Performance Director's role in setting expectations and driving accountability needs to be strengthened.
- 4) Changes to the Paralympics Ireland leadership staff structure and associated staff during the Tokyo Cycle may have had a destabilising effect that impacted on operations and the overall performance. Given the turnover in Paralympics Ireland staff across Cycles, it is important that there is clarity across all staff in terms of roles and responsibilities.
- 5) Given the geographical location of members of Paralympics Ireland (Athletics), consideration should be given to a formal agreement between Paralympics Ireland and the Sport Northern Ireland Sports Institute. This would provide athletes with a more integrated service provision.

**Non Paralympics Ireland (Athletics) specific recommendations**

- Across Team Ireland, the role of Paralympics Ireland as the NGB for Para Swimming and Para Athletics, and as the National Paralympic Committee, was raised. The organisation structure and remit should be examined to ensure this is best practice for the sports involved.

PARALYMPICS IRELAND (SWIMMING)



# Paralympics Ireland (Swimming) Report



## Executive summary

Paralympics Ireland (Swimming) qualified five swimmers for the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games. Ellen Keane won gold in the SB8 100m breaststroke and Nicole Turner won silver in the S6 50m Butterfly. Both swimmers exceeded pre-Games performance expectations. All other members of the Para Swimming team exceeded pre-Games performance expectations with six Irish events ranked in the Top 8 and 11 swims placed in the Top 8.

Para Swimming is governed and managed by Paralympics Ireland. This results in a number of dual roles and a lack of (perceived) role clarity between the National Governing Body (NGB) and the National Paralympic Committee.

It was clear that the success of the Paralympics Ireland (Swimming) programme was underpinned by detailed planning, knowledge and experience of key staff and coaches, as well as the continuity of approach and learnings across multiple Paralympic Cycles. The experience of the Para Swimming coaching, sport science and medical, and performance staff had a stabilising effect that positively impacted performance and ensured that potential challenges during the Games were overcome.

## Methodology

Confidential online surveys completed by members of the Para Swimming team as part of a wider Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games Review. There were four separate surveys for:

- Athletes
- Coaching and Support Staff
- Performance Directors/Performance Leads
- CEOs and Board Members

A report detailing summary group data, qualitative analysis and indicating outliers was compiled from the survey and made available from Sport Ireland for our further analysis. Based on the surveys, a number of common themes were identified which served as the basis for the interviews which were completed. A sample of athletes, coaching staff and the Performance Director were interviewed on a one-to-one basis using Zoom in October and November 2021.

The issues, findings and recommendations in this report are based exclusively on the information received during the process through:

- Confidential online survey
- Interviews with key NGB personnel
- Interviews with key stakeholders

Interviews were recorded so that points of value could be reviewed, and accuracy of statements made in the report guaranteed. Notes were also taken during the interviews to capture immediate points of relevance against the key themes being explored.

Interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and all were reassured that their views would be accurately expressed. Time was taken to ensure all participants understood the limitations around confidentiality. It was clear in the interviews that participants were keen to share their perceptions in a proactive, productive, and positive manner.

Once the interviews were completed, the information was analysed to identify the key themes, then exemplar quotations were highlighted that ensured that the voice of the participants could be heard.

Verbatim quotations are not included in this report due to the small number of people interviewed and the fact that any direct quotes would be easily attributable to specific individuals. Instead, we have generated feedback themes to exemplify what they reported.

As our final report will stress, we will faithfully report, and clearly highlight, the perceptions of the interviewed participants without comment on the exact reasons underpinning why they have occurred or even whether they are accurate or not.

Paralympics Ireland note that the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games took place against the backdrop of a global pandemic that created logistical and safety challenges. The Games Delivery Team had to adapt their practices to government mandated COVID-19 countermeasures and restrictions both nationally and internationally. Repeated late changes and an ever changing and evolving environment surrounding athlete travel and preparation, both at Tokyo 2020 and in the lead up to the Games, provided additional challenges to the Games Delivery Team. Unclear qualification pathways for individual sports and late confirmation of qualification slots added to complications for logistics and kit availability.

Requirements around COVID-19 countermeasures at the pre-Games holding camp at Narita City and at the Athlete Village in Tokyo placed additional constraints on the ability of Team Ireland members to circulate freely as would happen in a normal Games period. Despite these challenges the Games Delivery Team led by Paralympics Ireland delivered a successful Paralympic Games free of major incident and provided a safe and secure environment allowing athletes to concentrate on their own performance needs.

## Section 1: Factual review

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Firstly, Paralympics Ireland wished the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on preparation for the Tokyo Paralympic Games to be noted. Specifically, since February 2020, Paralympics Ireland have had to factor in the implications of COVID-19 countermeasures on roles, responsibilities and the time and resources consumed by implementation. As a result, it should be noted that the remit of individual roles had to change and adapt to emerging situations such as coaching, impact of COVID-19 restrictions, exemptions and the departure of key staff.

Paralympics Ireland (Swimming) qualified five athletes for the Tokyo Paralympic Games. Three athletes were competing at their first Games, while two had completed at previous Games.

Paralympics Ireland (Swimming) met or exceeded its Tokyo performance targets, winning one gold and one silver medal and meeting all other performance expectations (Table 1). Notably there were a number of first time Paralympians who have benefitted from the Paralympic experience and are well positioned for Paris 2024 and Los Angeles 2028.

The rescheduling of the Paralympic Games from 2020 to 2021 was perceived as supporting the development and preparation of athletes. In particular, the performances at the World Para Swimming European Championships in May 2021 (five podium finishes, with two silver and three bronze medals) were identified as an indication of how well the team was prepared for Tokyo.

**Table 1. Performance expectations and results for Paralympics Ireland (Swimming)**

Performance Expectation	Result
1 x Silver Medal (Ellen Keane)	Gold
1 x Bronze (Nicole Turner)	Silver
6 x Top 8	11 x Top 8
2 x within 3% off bronze medal performance	4 x 5th or 6th
6 x within 2% of 8th place finisher	3 x 9th or 10th

All athletes on the Para Swimming team were carded and eligible for support through the Sport Ireland Institute (Table 2).

**Table 2. Finding level and results for Paralympics Ireland (Swimming)**

Athlete	Funding Level	Results
Barry McClements	International (€12k)	9th, 7th, 10th and 10th
Ellen Keane	Podium (€40k)	1st and 5th
Nicole Turner	Podium (€40k)	2nd, 8th and 7th
Patrick Flanagan	International (€12k)	12th and 17th
Róisín Ní Ríain	International (€12k)	8th, 6th, 5th, 15th, 6th and 7th

## Section 2: Preparation for the Tokyo Paralympic Games

There was a consensus among athletes and staff that the Paralympics Ireland (Swimming) team was well prepared and ready to perform at the Games. The coaching team was very experienced, having worked through at least three Paralympic Cycles in professional roles, and this experience and expertise was perceived as critical given the complexities of a delayed Games and COVID-19. It was also noted, by both athletes and staff, that the Paralympics Ireland (Swimming) team took ownership and responsibility for their preparation and were happy to work in a 'bubble'. It was noted by Paralympics Ireland that, given the level of expertise and experience within the Para Swimming team and management, that this approach was endorsed by Paralympics Ireland who empowered Para Swimming to work with autonomy, whilst still reporting to the Games leadership team.

The delivery of the Paralympics Ireland (Swimming) programme is managed by a Para Swimming Manager and the continuity and expertise of personnel in the organisation was highlighted as a strength. However, it was also noted that the current structures were unsustainable with a danger that significant intellectual property and knowledge would vanish if, or when, there is a change in personnel. It should be noted that the Para Swimming Manager has since resigned from this role following Tokyo, though remains in the programme in a coaching capacity.

Performance planning during the Tokyo Cycle was perceived as having a positive influence on the success of the team. Prior to travelling to Narita for the pre-Games holding camp, the team travelled to Fuerteventura for a two-week training camp. This location was chosen as the Paralympics Ireland (Swimming) team is very familiar with the facilities and had trained there before on a number of occasions. This was described as an excellent camp that prepared the athletes for the weather and other conditions expected at the Games. As another example, a training camp was arranged in Narita, Japan (the identified holding camp venue) in 2019. Almost all of the 2020 athletes, coaches and support staff attended this camp, in anticipation of selection. It was perceived as a successful opportunity to test travel strategies, acclimation strategies and to learn about the holding camp and training venues. It was clear from the interviews that the coaching and support staff meticulously planned these preparation camps in order to practice logistics, test plans and spend time as a team.

Overall, there was an agreement that the team was well prepared and ready to perform at Tokyo. The team's travel from Fuerteventura to Narita and then into the Village was well planned. Athletes felt that the travel and acclimatisation strategies were well executed, allowing them to peak for the start of competition. Coaches and support staff described excellent athlete compliance with this preparation and suggested that the coordinated and centrally driven approach to preparation underpinned this. It meant that, at the Games, things felt simple and well-practiced, both logistically and operationally.

### **Coaching and support services**

All the athletes reported that they were very happy with the coaching and support services they received in preparation for the Paralympic Games across three training venues: 1) the National Aquatics Centre (Dublin); 2) the University of Limerick Sport Arena (Limerick); and 3) Bangor Aurora (Bangor), supported by staff from Paralympics Ireland, Swim Ireland and Swim Ulster. From the perspective of the Performance Director and the Para Swimming Manager, there were some concerns around relationships with 'home' coaches, where swimmers were located away from the National Aquatics Centre. In this respect, it was noted that the regulations instigated during the COVID-19 pandemic, which allowed elite athletes train collectively at the National Aquatics Centre, had a positive impact on performance and preparation for these athletes by allowing a more streamlined and consistent approach to training and preparation. These conditions meant that athletes were able to train, access support services and meet with coaches in one location. While it was acknowledged that a centralised model may not be appropriate for the sport moving forward, the benefits of a coherent approach to preparation and training were stressed.

There was a Head Coach in position during the Tokyo Cycle; however, it was noted that they had no in-person contact with swimmers during the 18 months prior to Tokyo, either on deck, in competition or during preparation camps. As such, Paralympics Ireland (Swimming) in person coaching responsibilities at competitions and in preparation camps were undertaken by the Para Swimming Manager and the Performance Director and, while all interviewees described this as very positive, it should be noted that these individuals also held senior management roles (Performance Director and Para Swimming Manager, respectively) in the organisation. Both noted that this arrangement is potentially unsustainable due to both workload and the demands of the positions.

In preparation for the Tokyo Games, it was clear that an individualised approach was taken to optimise the preparation for each athlete. This was acknowledged by the athletes as a strength of the programme. There were some challenges reported such as adequate pool time, scheduling and access to competitions. However, it was felt by all that everything was done to minimise these factors so that they did not impact on preparation and, ultimately, performance.

The support services provided by Paralympics Ireland and the Sport Ireland Institute were identified as a strength of the programme and these were managed by the Para Swimming Manager, with the support of the Performance Director. There was good evidence provided of how this was working well and in a proactive manner, supported by effective and knowledgeable practitioners. It was stressed however that further expertise in para sport are required across coaching and sport science/medicine provision, within the broader system.

### Section 3: Experience and performance at the Games

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The Paralympics Ireland (Swimming) team described a positive experience in the Athlete Village, despite COVID-19 regulations. The accommodation was described as basic, and a number of athletes noted that more could have been done to decorate the apartments and buildings to improve a 'Team Ireland' feel. In regard to mandatory Team Ireland events, both athletes and staff noted that some of the scheduled events conflicted with their training schedule, and they would have liked to have had more autonomy over their involvement in some of these events.

Some of the athletes were dissatisfied with the housing arrangements, where they were roomed with athletes from other sports. In these cases, the swimmers suggested that the athletes from other sports did not have the same 'high performance' mindset, and this, as well as clashes in schedules and a COVID-19 close contact scare, had the potential to negatively impact performance. In this case there was no adverse effect, but staff suggested that they would have liked to have had input into the logistical arrangements in the Village. It was acknowledged that there was no ideal solution, but staff suggested that they would have appreciated input into the logistics decision making.

The Team Ireland environment in the Village was generally described as good, although the swimmers noted that they were happy to keep to their own bubble rather than mix with the broader Team Ireland. The climate in the Paralympics Ireland (Swimming) team was generally described as task focused and operational; a number of interviewees suggested that this was not consistent across the broader Team Ireland, leading to some conflicts.

#### **Coaching and support services**

The athletes were very happy with the coaching and support services during the Games. During the preparation phase, all the swimmers noted that coaches were able to support their training sessions and access to physiotherapy and medical support was excellent, timely and appropriate. Importantly, in most cases, there was already an established relationship with support providers that meant the athletes were confident to avail of these services. It was also acknowledged that, due to limited accreditation and funding, access to support services was spread across Team Ireland. In this regard, it was strongly noted that priority should be given to athletes and teams with medal prospects and there was a frustration from what was perceived as a striving for parity across sports.

The ability to accredit other support staff with expertise in Para Swimming at the Games was identified as a positive feature. The effectiveness of staffing was noted to be as a result of the established nature of relationships, rather than an 'appointed for the Games' approach. However, the working relationships with some Paralympics Ireland contracted sport science and medicine staff was sub-optimal, underpinned by a perceived lack of Games experience, understanding of the sport, and integration in the team. In one instance, an interviewee described how they shielded athletes from some support services as they felt it would have a detrimental impact on performance. The relationship with this service provider was described as poor.

### **Team Ireland support**

All the interviewees were satisfied with the input and support from the Paralympics Ireland team in the Village, albeit that the Paralympics Ireland (Swimming) team appeared to purposefully create their own bubble separate to Team Ireland. Although the Chef de Mission was described as approachable, there were some concerns about their level of experience and ability to intervene effectively and proactively. Their ability to impact preparation for, and operations during, the Tokyo Games was confounded by their appointment late in the Cycle. In an effort to overcome these perceived limitations, Paralympics Ireland (Swimming) staff described how they took responsibility for many decisions without input from Paralympics Ireland and/or the Chef de Mission. The coaching and management staff were experienced having worked through numerous Paralympic Cycles and this was cited as a reason why potential challenges and obstacles during the Games were avoided. It was noted that without this experience, there could have been significant implications for performance.

There were issues with Paralympics Ireland's kit allocation and design. Swimmers described how they did not receive sufficient kit and that it was badly designed for performance athletes and in some instances, ill-fitting. Swimmers also questioned the (perceived) disparity between kit allocation for the Olympic Federation of Ireland teams and Paralympics Ireland teams.

## **Section 4: NGB specific observations**

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### **Investment**

Paralympics Ireland (Swimming), under the remit of Paralympics Ireland, are supported by the Sport Ireland Institute and receive focused sport science and support services. These services were noted as having a positive impact on performance at the Games. In particular, swimmers and staff noted that the established relationships during the Tokyo Cycle, and into the Games, were a strength, as was the specific para sport knowledge of the support staff.

### **Structures and governance/stakeholder relationships**

Paralympics Ireland acts as both the National Paralympic Committee, and the NGB for Para Swimming. As a result, some staff have responsibilities across multiple sports in the coordination of Team Ireland for a Paralympic Games (the National Paralympic Committee function), while other roles are more sport specific, for example the Para Swimming Manager role. Although this was not highlighted by the athletes as an issue, clarification about role structure was identified.

Although Paralympics Ireland (Swimming) sits under the remit of Paralympics Ireland, the sense from the interviews was that the swimmers, coaches and performance staff were happy to operate independently of the broader NGB and National Paralympic Committee. There was a clear shared understanding between the Performance Director and coaching staff with a climate of 'check and challenge' that allowed them work towards high performance. While this was identified as a strength of the programme, there were concerns about the sustainability of the programme if systemic development of coaching and talent were not addressed. The Performance Director is also the personal coach of a number of the swimmers and consideration of role clarity both in swimming, and across Paralympics Ireland, is important. It was acknowledged that, due to funding and resource constraints, there is a need for some to wear many hats. Although this did not appear to have a negative impact on swimming performance, defining role clarity should be considered within the broader Paralympics Ireland context.

A key issue highlighted was the role of the Head Coach, who did not have an in-person presence in Tokyo or involvement in competition or training camps in the 18 months before the Paralympic Games. This was perceived to have negatively impacted on the resources available across the team and the role clarity of staff and coaches. It was also noted that the Head Coach had limited impact on the broader coaching and performance environment, suggesting a need to move from an oversight role to a more 'hands-on' engagement in the broader programme.

It was very clear that there were strong and established relationships between high performance staff and swimmers. A strong shared mental model was evident, supported by robust relationships.

### **Strategic direction**

Although the high performance programme in Paralympics Ireland (Swimming) is strong, there was an acknowledgement that more depth in the talent pool is needed. It was highlighted that Paralympics Ireland needs to consider ways to increase the talent identification and development programmes in order to populate the talent pipeline. Reflecting para sport, it was noted that a parallel coach education programme is required to ensure the development of coaches, with both swimming and para sport expertise. This was highlighted as particularly important given the volunteer nature of coaches outside the NGB.

Paralympics Ireland (Swimming) is a consistently high performing programme, medalling at consecutive Games and international competitions. Despite this success, at an operational level it is important to examine the structures within Paralympics Ireland (Swimming), its place within Paralympics Ireland, clarity of roles within the programme and its relationship with service providers. As such, there needs to be a sense of collective responsibility between Paralympics Ireland (Swimming) and Paralympics Ireland to deliver strategic issues or very clear role definition and responsibility delegation.

Performance standards globally are increasing in Para Swimming and there is a need to strategically consider, and then target, high impairment classifications with potential for medals and finals at Paralympic level. At the moment, it is perceived that athletes 'emerge' from the sport, rather than through a strategic approach to systematically plan development. There was also a recognition from the Performance Director and coaching staff of the need to strategically consider lower-level classifications as a means of targeting investment in certain events and classes. With this in mind, there was an acknowledgement of the importance of retaining and obtaining additional coaching expertise across the broad continuum of impairments and disabilities in Para Swimming.

## **Section 5: Recommendations**

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### **1) Governance and staffing**

- Given that the Performance Director operates across two sports, it is important that there is a clear understanding of this role in the Paralympics Ireland (Swimming) programme. Consideration should be given to role clarity at all levels of the organisation.
- Consideration should be given to the staffing of the Paralympics Ireland (Swimming) programme. In particular, attention should be given to the roles of Head Coach (which was filled, but non-operational during the 18 months prior to Tokyo) and the recently vacant Para Swimming Manager role. Given the timescales of the Paris 2024 Cycle, it is important this is addressed immediately. The scope and nature of the Head Coach role needs to be examined with consideration of whether a contractor or part time position is the best solution. In either case, there appears to be a strong case for the Head Coach to have a more hands-on role in the day-to-day operations of the sport.

- Paralympics Ireland (Swimming) described how they were happy to work independently in regard to coaching and operational foci. However, the relationship between Paralympics Ireland (Swimming) and Paralympics Ireland as the National Paralympic Committee needs to be examined to optimise the resources and expertise available and, at an operational level, to ensure accountability for all parties. Consideration should be given to whether the high performance responsibilities for Para Swimming should remain under Paralympics Ireland or be transferred to Swim Ireland. If the latter is adopted, given the short Cycle pre-Paris 2024, it is suggested that while planning should commence as soon as possible, transfer to the NGB would be post 2024.
- There is a significant amount of experience in the Paralympics Ireland (Swimming) coaching and management team. However, careful consideration needs to be given to what happens if these individuals leave the programme and the ability of Para Swimming to maintain or build on the current levels of success at future Paralympic Games.
- Sport science and medicine service providers working with para swimmers should have clearly defined role descriptions and accountabilities. Consideration to organisational fit, knowledge and expertise should be given to the appointment of sport science and medicine service providers.

## **2) Strategy**

- Support should be given to the strategic targeting of classifications in events that have been identified as long-term medal targets.
- It was clear from the review that there is not a systematic approach to talent identification and development. In contrast, this is reliant on individuals emerging from swimming clubs rather than the system. Paralympics Ireland should formalise the talent pathway in Para Swimming.

## **3) Coaching**

- A review of coaching and coach development within Para Swimming in Ireland is required at all levels of the pathway and performance domains. This could include, but should not be limited to, formal, informal and mentorship programmes in clubs and the high performance pathway. Para Swimming coaching in clubs was highlighted as an area of concern and the demand for coaching capacity and expertise is already apparent.
- Paralympics Ireland should consider the development of a specific coach development and education programme for Para Swimming.

## **Non Paralympics Ireland (Swimming) specific recommendations**

- Across Team Ireland, the role of Paralympics Ireland as the NGB for both Para Swimming and Para Athletics, and as the National Paralympic Committee, was raised. The organisation and remit of Paralympics Ireland should be examined to ensure this is best practice for all sports involved.



# TARGET SHOOTING IRELAND



# Target Shooting Ireland Report



TARGET SHOOTING IRELAND  
Sprioc Lámhach na hÉireann

## Executive summary

Target Shooting Ireland qualified one athlete, Phil Eaglesham, for the Tokyo Paralympic Games in the SH2 class. Phil competed in three events (R4 10m, R5 10m and R9 50m), finishing 14th, 21st and 15th, respectively, and did not meet his pre-Games performance expectations.

Target Shooting Ireland is not a recognised NGB for high performance funding purposes. Phil won bronze in the 2019 World Championships but was not in receipt of funding from the Sport Ireland International Carding Scheme or sport science and medicine support during the Tokyo Cycle. This was perceived as being the key factor that impacted his performances in Tokyo.

Without support from Paralympics Ireland, Phil's performance programme was self-driven and self-funded, supported by the NGB. Relationships with Paralympics Ireland were described as dysfunctional, with a lack of support, coherence, role clarity, and sport specific understanding perceived to have had a destabilising effect on his preparation and planning.

## Methodology

Confidential online surveys completed by members of the Para Target Shooting team as part of a wider Tokyo Paralympic Games Review. There were four separate surveys for:

- Athletes
- Coaching and Support Staff
- Performance Directors/Performance Leads
- CEOs and Board Members

A report detailing summary group data, qualitative analysis and indicating outliers was compiled from the survey and made available from Sport Ireland for our further analysis. Based on the surveys, a number of common themes were identified which served as the basis for the interviews which were held. A sample of athletes, coaching staff and the Performance Director/Performance Lead were interviewed on a one-to-one basis on Zoom in October and November 2021.

The issues, findings and recommendations in this report are based exclusively on the information received during the process through:

- Confidential online survey
- Interviews with key NGB personnel

Interviews were recorded so that points of value could be re-listened to, and accuracy of statements made in the report guaranteed. Notes were also taken during the interviews to capture immediate points of relevance against the key themes being explored.

The interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and everyone interviewed was reassured that their views would be accurately expressed and that they understood the limitations around confidentiality. It was clear in the interviews that participants were keen to share their perceptions in a proactive, productive, and positive manner.

Once the interviews were completed, the information was analysed to identify the key themes and then exemplar quotations were highlighted that ensured that the voice of the participants could be heard.

Verbatim quotations are not included in this report due to the small number of people interviewed and the fact that any direct quotes would be easily attributable to specific individuals. Instead, we have generated feedback themes to exemplify.

As our final report will stress, we will faithfully report, and clearly highlight, the perceptions of the interviewed participants without comment on the exact reasons underpinning why they have occurred or even whether they are accurate or not.

Paralympics Ireland note that the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games took place against the backdrop of a global pandemic that created logistical and safety challenges. The Games Delivery Team had to adapt their practices to government mandated COVID-19 countermeasures and restrictions both nationally and internationally. Repeated late changes and an ever changing and evolving environment surrounding athlete travel and preparation, both at Tokyo 2020 and in the lead up to the Games, provided additional challenges to the Games Delivery Team. Unclear qualification pathways for individual sports and late confirmation of qualification slots added to complications for logistics and kit availability.

Requirements around COVID-19 countermeasures at the pre-Games holding camp at Narita City and at the Athlete Village in Tokyo placed additional constraints on the ability of Team Ireland members to circulate freely as would happen in a normal Games period. Despite these challenges the Games Delivery Team led by Paralympics Ireland delivered a successful Paralympic Games free of major incident and provided a safe and secure environment allowing athletes to concentrate on their own performance needs.

## Section 1: Factual review

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Target Shooting Ireland qualified one athlete, Phil Eaglesham, for the Tokyo Paralympic Games in the SH2 class. Phil competed in three events (R4 10m, R5 10m, and R9 50m), finishing 14th, 21st and 15th, respectively. This was below his pre-Games performance expectations of one final and one podium finish.

Phil Eaglesham did not receive funding from the Sport Ireland International Carding Scheme for the Tokyo Paralympic Cycle. The NGB received €30k of funding to support their Olympic and Paralympic programmes.

## Section 2: Preparation for the Tokyo Paralympic Games

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Preparation for the Tokyo Paralympic Games was described as 'as good as possible' given the COVID-19 restrictions (e.g., range closures, travel restrictions, etc.) and the dispersed geographical locations of the athlete (UK), the NGB (Ireland) and the coach (New York). Preparation was complicated by the volunteer-led nature of the NGB and further confounded by the fact that Target Shooting Ireland is not recognised by Sport Ireland or Paralympics Ireland as a high performance programme. As a result, the bulk of logistical and financial organisation fell on the individual athlete and the support received from Paralympics Ireland and Sport Ireland was described as negligible and confined in the main to online information meetings.

In summary, Target Shooting Ireland felt unsupported by Paralympics Ireland during the Tokyo Cycle and as a result they operated autonomously to support the athlete's preparation. One example was the organisation of the athlete's holding camp in Gibraltar, though deemed as very successful, was costly in terms of personal financial resource. Another example was the need to independently organise COVID-19 testing for the athlete, as they are based in the UK. Notably, this all came at considerable personal expense and time to the athlete.

The interviewees described a perceived lack of support from Paralympics Ireland in preparation for the Games. Logistically, there were significant issues with travel arrangements, transportation of sport equipment, documentation, information sharing, and COVID-19 testing. It was felt by the interviewees that they did not receive support or timely information from Paralympics Ireland about these issues and were left to sort it out themselves. It was noted (by Paralympics Ireland) that in conjunction and consultation with all sports, Paralympics Ireland organised and led on all logistical/operational requirements for Tokyo 2020. Paralympics Ireland were working to the information and insight they received from the Tokyo 2020 Organising Committee (TOCOG). Given the ever-changing nature of the pandemic restrictions in Japan, and in Ireland, pertinent information was relayed to the sports as soon as practical.

The financial issues for the athlete were considerable. Prior to Tokyo, the athlete's last competition was the World Championships in 2019, but they were not able to compete, or access a 50m range, after that due to a lack of financial support. It was the opinion of those interviewed that there was no personal or welfare support reported during the COVID-19 pandemic, in preparation for or following the Games. It should be noted that there were significant preparation supports available for athletes and Team Leads pre, during and post the Tokyo Games, whereby Paralympics Ireland worked in conjunction with the Sport Ireland Institute's Transition Programme to provide life skills support pre and post Tokyo, as well as running athlete information sessions which were led by the Chief Medical Officer. In addition, there were also regular Team Lead sessions, which shared the latest information around Games preparations.

The athlete did not receive funding from Sport Ireland's International Carding Scheme and therefore was not eligible for sport science and medicine support during the Tokyo Cycle. The Sport Ireland Institute noted that no request for sport science and medicine support, or access to regular open sessions at the Sport Ireland Institute, was made by the NGB or Paralympics Ireland. However, it appears as if there was a lack of clarity around the avenues and processes by which non-carded athletes could get support through the Sport Ireland Institute. This is something that will need greater clarity for the Paris Cycle (and beyond), with the primary responsibility resting with Paralympics Ireland to identify athletes in this category (i.e., athletes who are either non-carded, or who come from non-high performance recognised sports, who should receive some level of support). The Sport Ireland Institute support for Paralympics Ireland was Games specific, while Paralympics Ireland were responsible for the sport science and medicine model in the pre-Games phase. A lack of clarity about funding eligibility was described and this impacted on the athlete's preparation and planning. In the absence of central funding, the athlete's programme was self-funded, which had a significant personal impact, as well as potentially impacting their ability to continue preparation towards Paris 2024. While it was acknowledged that there are finite resources available in Paralympics Ireland, the athlete and coach would have liked clarity about access to resources, funding and carding early in the Cycle, in order to plan effectively. As a result, preparation was self-driven and self-funded, and a major issue was the lack of sustainability of that type of programme. The NGB was described as proactive and supportive but limited in resource and isolated from Paralympics Ireland.

During their preparation for Tokyo, the athlete availed of some sport psychology support and while this was welcomed and positive, it was felt that it was ad-hoc. In Tokyo, there was a reported sentiment that sport science and medicine practitioners were told to 'stay away' from the smaller sports. This led to what the interviewees described as a feeling of being 'second class citizens'. It should be noted that, upon arrival, all sports were given an induction and met with the Chief Medical Officer and practitioners and were advised how to register for appointments. Access to practitioners was on a needs basis, and not a sport basis.

Significant issues in terms of kit quality and allocation were described. The kit was described as poor quality, and in particular, the lack of performance kit appropriate for heat and humidity was a major issue. In addition, kit allocation did not account for the specific needs of athletes, athletes' disabilities, or sport specific requirements. It was noted that the effort and time spent on logistical issues before travelling to Tokyo had a negative impact on preparation. It was also noted that there was a lack of understanding from Paralympics Ireland about sport specific issues (e.g., travelling with firearms) or the need for upgraded travel due to medical and COVID-19 issues. As a result, the athlete and the NGB took logistical and financial responsibility for these arrangements. It should be noted that in conjunction and consultation with all sports, Paralympics Ireland organised and led on all logistical/operational requirements for Tokyo 2020. All travel and COVID-19 countermeasure expenses associated with the Tokyo 2020 Games were covered by Paralympics Ireland.

### Section 3: Experience and performance at the Games

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#### Team Ireland support

The Team Ireland operations in the Village were generally described as adequate, and all acknowledged the role of the Chef de Mission and recognised that they had a solution focused approach. However, it was the opinion of the interviewees that the Chef de Mission was operating in isolation without the apparent support of the wider Paralympics Ireland core staff. Those interviewed were of the opinion that the Paralympics Ireland administration team was fractious, not conducive to high performance and without an obvious command structure. The late appointment of the Chef de Mission was perceived to have impacted on this. These statements were not shared by the Chef de Mission.

There were significant issues reported in terms of media reporting at the Games including factual errors, and a perceived imbalance of how sports were reported. It was also noted that there was a lack of understanding about the individual athlete's background and disability from the media team. The lack of media training for athletes was noted as a gap in preparation that negatively impacted the athlete.

The accommodation in the Village was described as basic, though the Para Target Shooting team appreciated the rooming arrangements that placed them with members of the Para Canoeing team. There was a perceived lack of Team Ireland atmosphere and support in the Village, with no sense of being part of a team reported. The athlete and coaches described how they did not feel comfortable or welcome in the Team Ireland environment. As a result, Para Target Shooting and Para Canoeing created their own bubble and remained insular to the broader Team Ireland.

It was also noted that there was only one member of the Paralympics Ireland administration team with a disability and therefore there was a lack of appreciation of disability in general, and high performance disability sport in particular.

### **Coaching and support services**

There was not an established relationship with support providers and therefore a reluctance to avail of services (even if they were available). There was a perception that the NGB and athlete had to push and fight for support and resources from Paralympics Ireland, and this is unsustainable in high performance terms.

### **Post-Games experience**

Following the Tokyo Games, the athlete described feelings of dejection, discrimination and frustration. They have availed of psychology services from the Sport Ireland Institute post-Tokyo, and this was described as positive. However, it was clear from the interviews that the coach and athlete feel hurt and disenfranchised after the Games experience, which was described as toxic.

## **Section 4: NGB specific observations**

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### **Organisational relationships**

The relationship between Target Shooting Ireland and Paralympics Ireland was problematic. It was felt that Paralympics Ireland does not operate as a National Paralympic Committee, but instead is focused on its NGB responsibilities to Para Swimming and Para Athletics (and Para Cycling, to a lesser extent), and this contributes to a two-tier approach with Para Swimming, Para Athletics and Para Cycling on one side and all the smaller (emerging) sports on the other.

The role of the Performance Director across two sports and the National Paralympic Committee was questioned, especially in regard to the support of minority sports. It was noted that the Performance Director is also the personal coach of a number of the swimmers and a number of participants questioned whether this represented a conflict of interest. It was acknowledged that defining role clarity should be considered within the broader Paralympics Ireland context.

There was a lack of confidence reported in the services provided by Paralympics Ireland, specifically in terms of organisation and administration.

### **Investment**

The lack of recognition of Target Shooting Ireland, as the NGB for Para Shooting, was described as a limitation to high performance planning and development.

### **Strategic direction**

It was clear from the review process that Target Shooting Ireland could potentially lose an athlete and coach from the high performance structure due to their negative experiences during the Tokyo Cycle. A structured talent identification, talent development or talent transfer pathway is not apparent in the sport and the future of Paralympic participation is questionable.

It was perceived that the quality of staffing of Paralympics Ireland, specifically in areas such as media and operations, was poor, with a lack of continuity of staff from Cycle to Cycle and a lack of Paralympics Games experience.

## Section 5: Recommendations

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- 1) Consideration should be given to the quality of working relationships between Target Shooting Ireland and Paralympics Ireland.
- 2) Consideration should be given to how best to support the high performance development of Para Target Shooting and the role of Paralympics Ireland. Given the short Cycle pre-Paris 2024, it is suggested that this issue should be addressed as soon as possible if the NGB and Paralympics Ireland wish to continue to field a diverse range of sports in Paris 2024, and beyond.
- 3) Recognition of Target Shooting Ireland as a high performance NGB should be considered.
- 4) Attention needs to be given to detailed performance planning and particularly how this is funded across the Cycle.
- 5) Lack of clarity about how to fulfil the eligibility criteria for funding should be addressed.
- 6) Consideration should be given to improved media training across Paralympics Ireland.

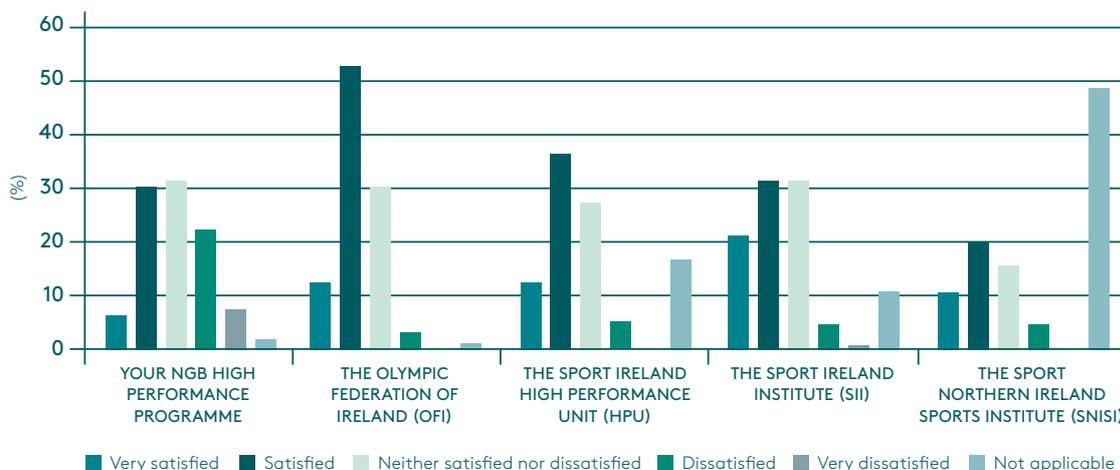
### **Non Target Shooting Ireland specific recommendations**

- Across Team Ireland, the role of Paralympics Ireland as the NGB for Para Swimming and Para Athletics and as the National Paralympic Committee, was raised. The organisation and remit should be examined to ensure that a common and consistent approach is applied to all sports representing Team Ireland at a Paralympic Games.
- Changes to the Paralympics Ireland staff structure and associated staff may have had a destabilising effect, that impacted on operations and the overall performance. Given the turnover in Paralympics Ireland staff across Cycles, it is important that there is clarity across all staff in terms of roles and responsibilities.
- Paralympics Ireland may wish to develop a staff development and retention strategy that includes, amongst other things, greater exposure to Paralympic athletes in a training environment and at major competitions.

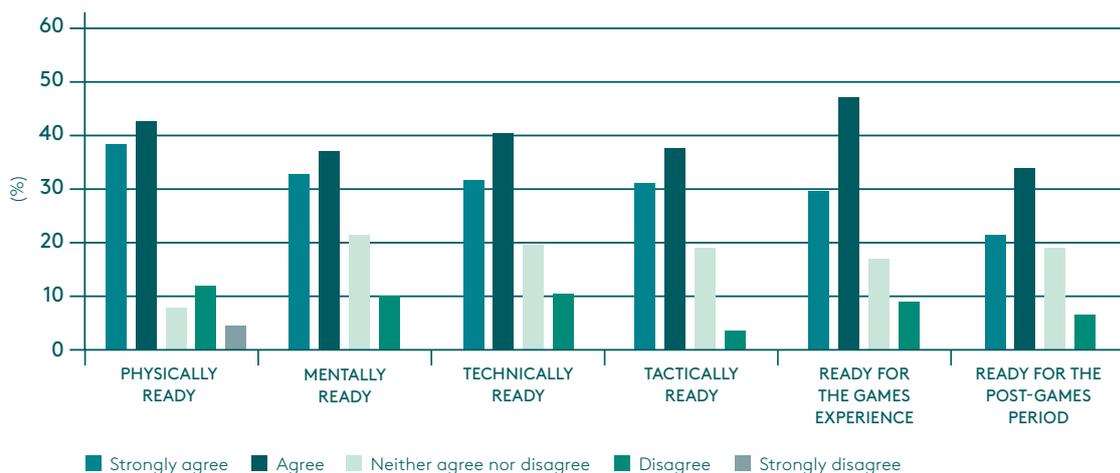
# Appendix 3: **Post-Games survey responses**

# Olympic Athletes

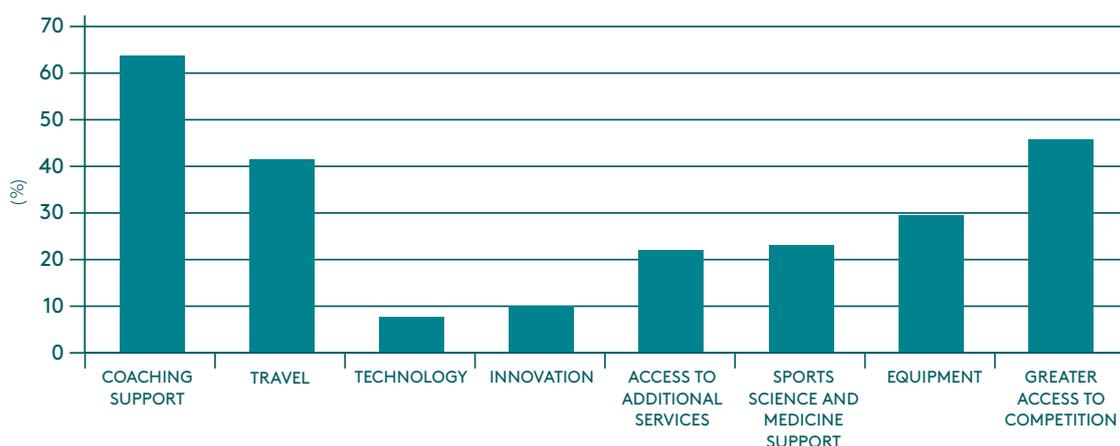
In the year leading up to the Games, please rate the support from the following organisations.



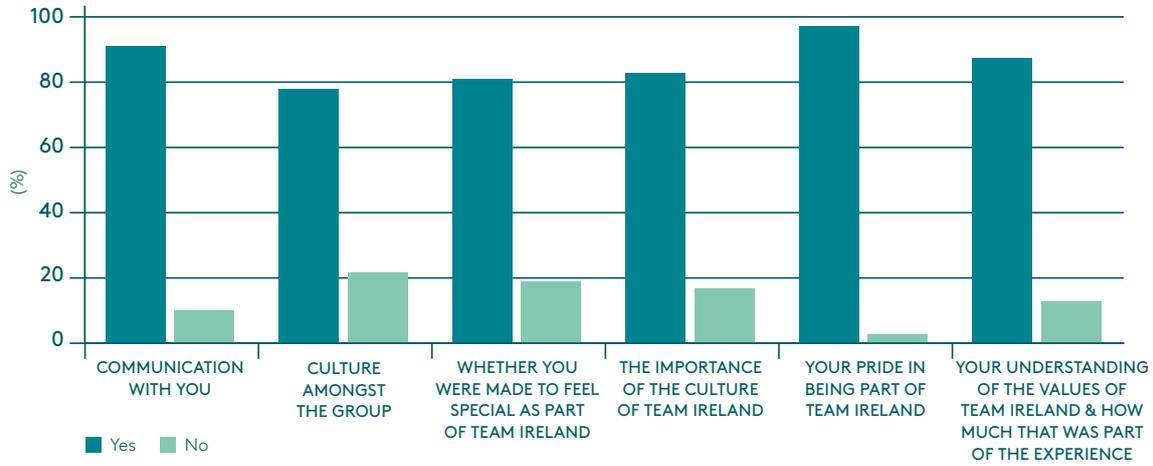
In terms of your readiness for the Tokyo Games, how would you rate each of the following?



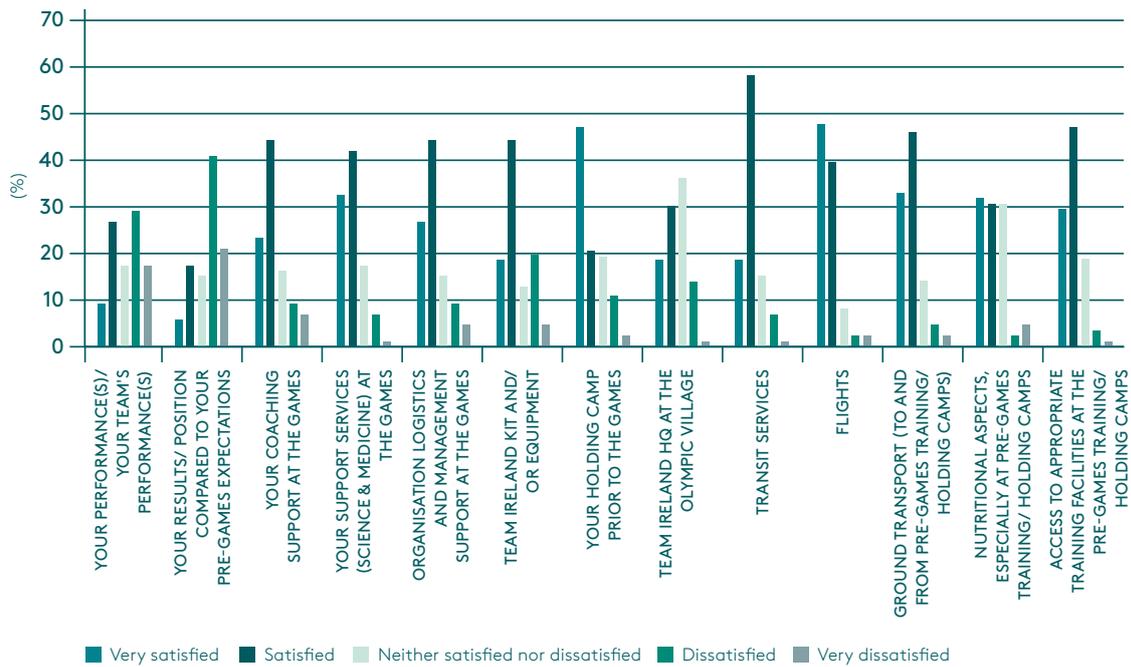
If additional funding were available to improve performance, where would be the best place to spend it?



**Do you believe the team values of Team Ireland were evident at the Games, and in your experience of the Games, in terms of**

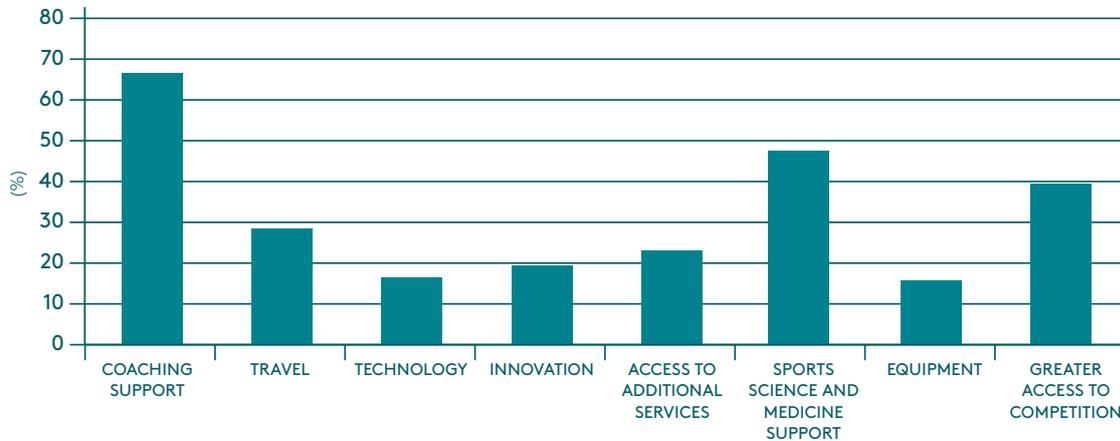


**At the Games, how satisfied were you with the following?**

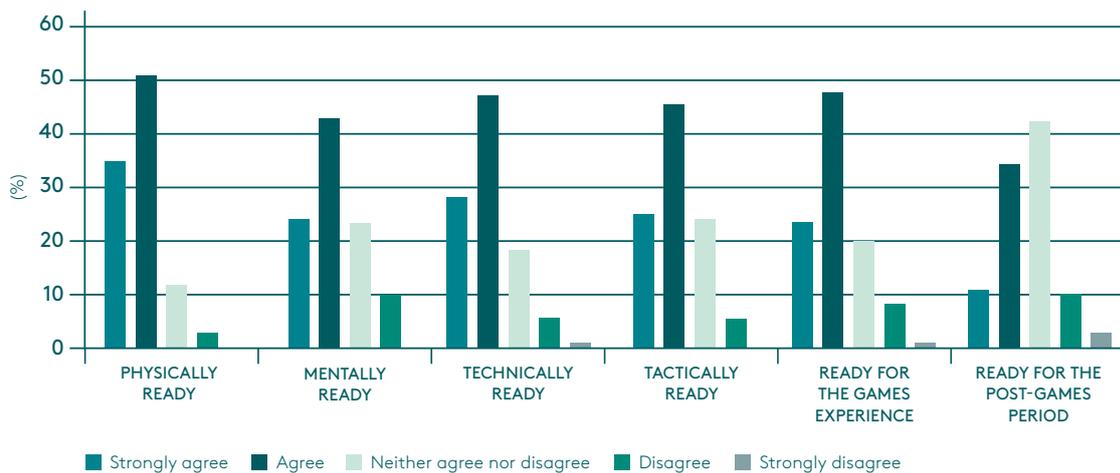


# Olympic Coaching and Support Staff

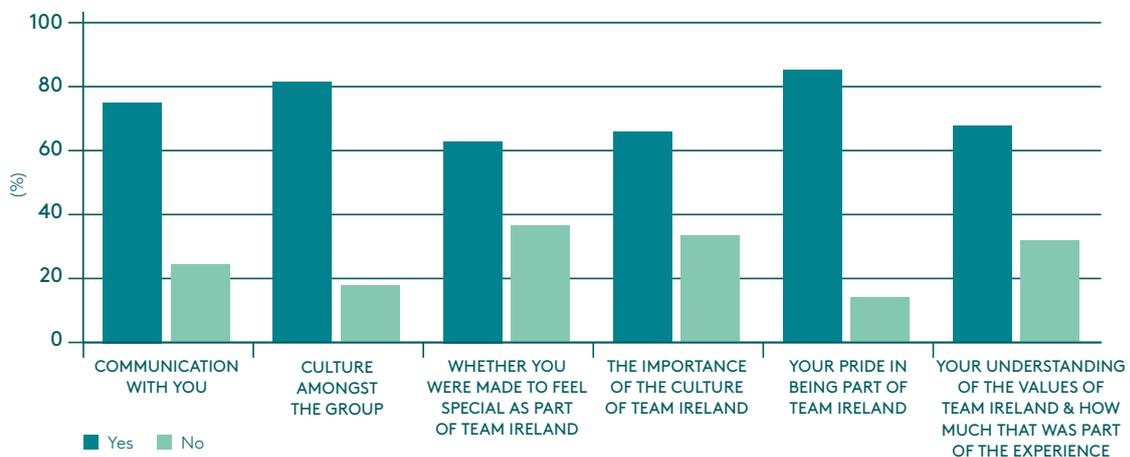
If additional funding were available to improve performance, where would be the best place to spend it?



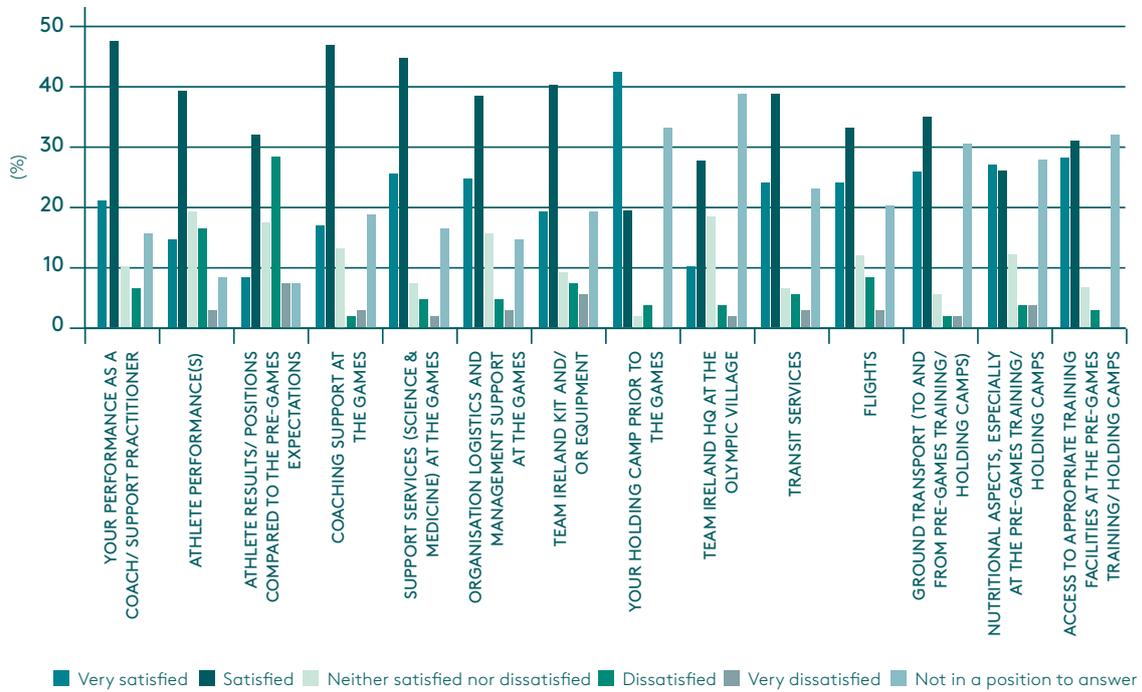
How would you rate the readiness for the Tokyo Games of the athletes you worked with?



Do you believe the team values of Team Ireland were evident at the Games and in your experience of the Games, in terms of

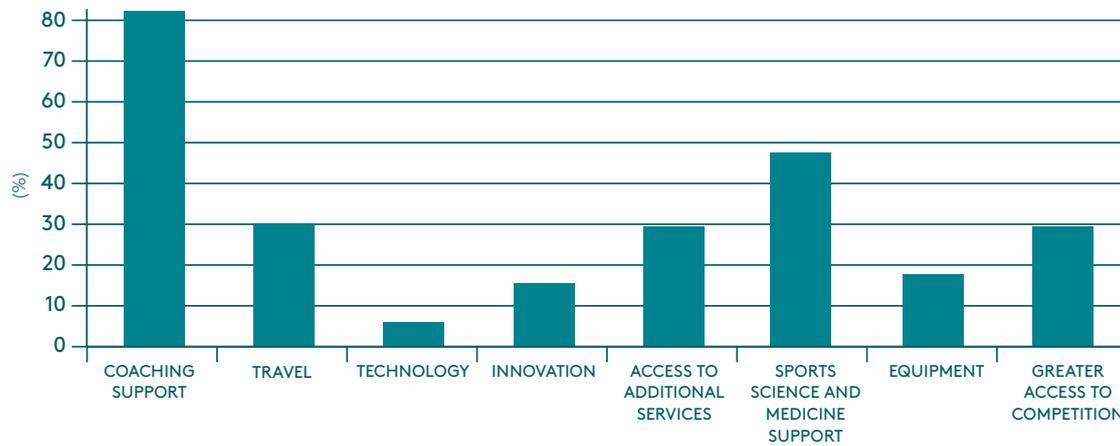


## At the Games, how satisfied were you with the following?

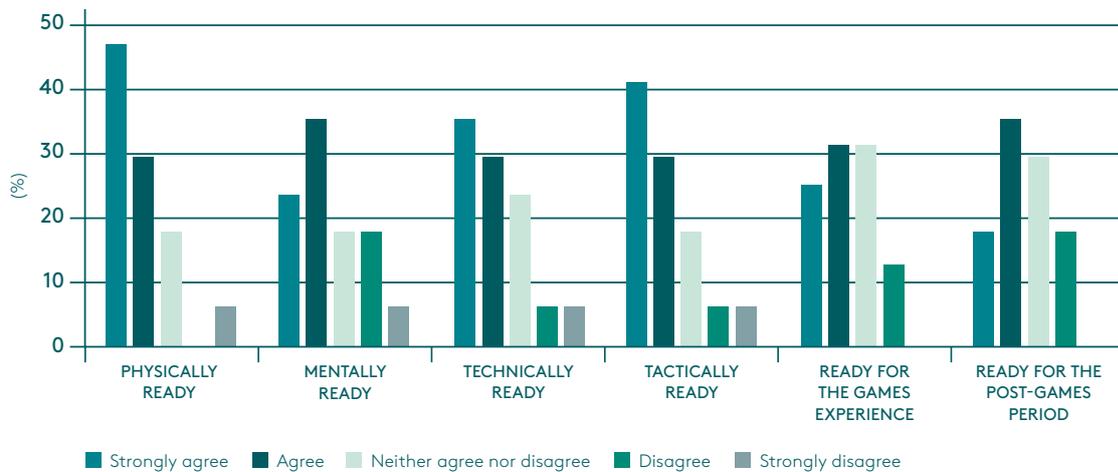


# Olympic Performance Directors/ Performance Leads

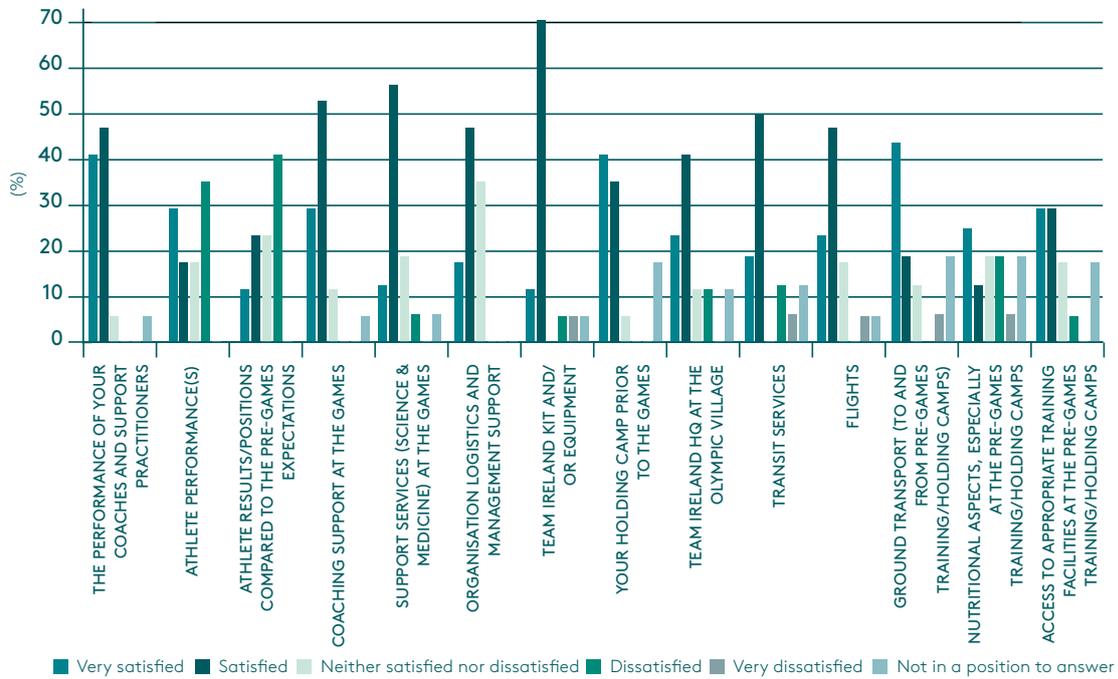
If additional funding were available to improve performance, where would be the best place to spend it?



How would you rate the readiness for the Tokyo Games of the athletes you worked with?

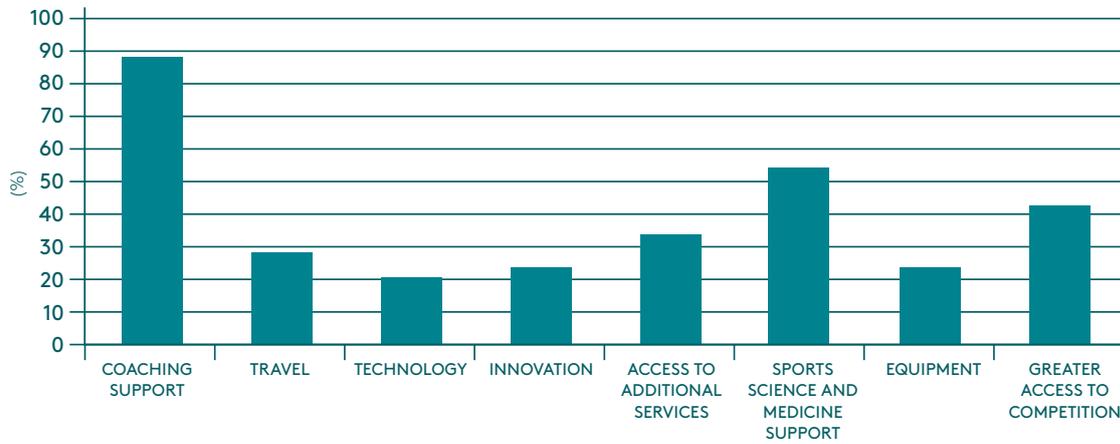


## At the Games, how satisfied were you with the following?

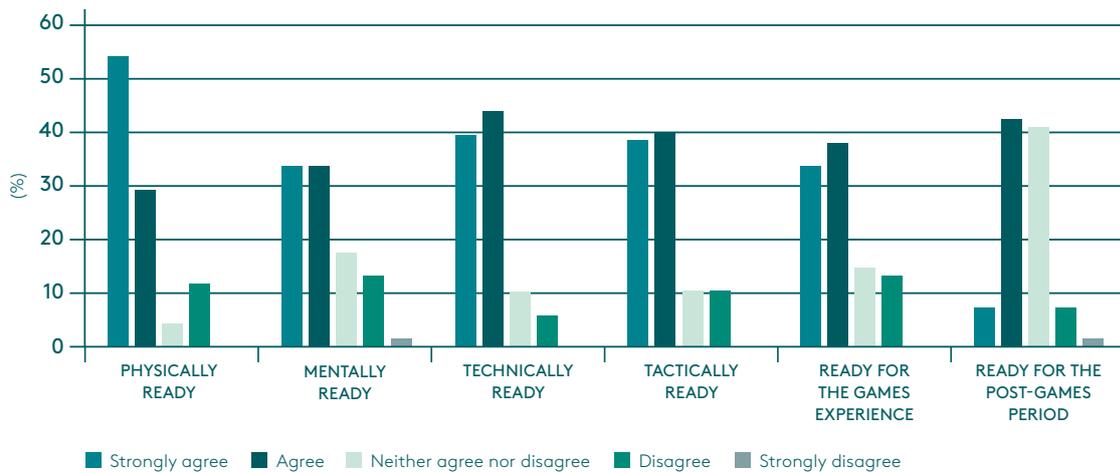


# Olympic CEOs and Board Members

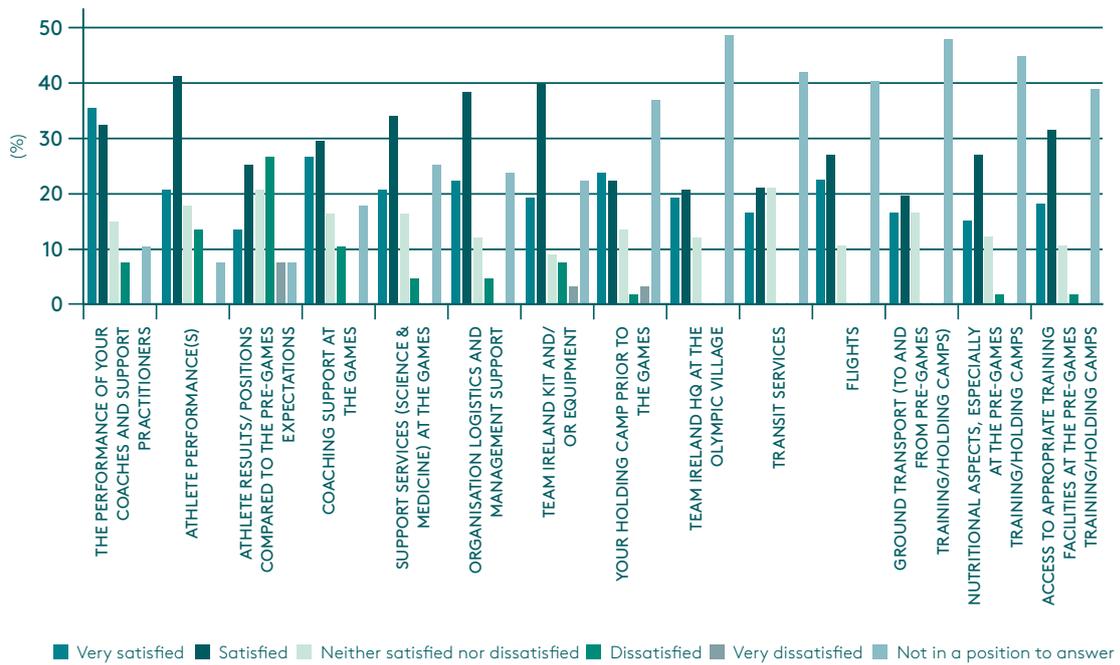
If additional funding were available to improve performance, where would be the best place to spend it?



How would you rate the readiness for the Tokyo Games of the athletes in your NGB?

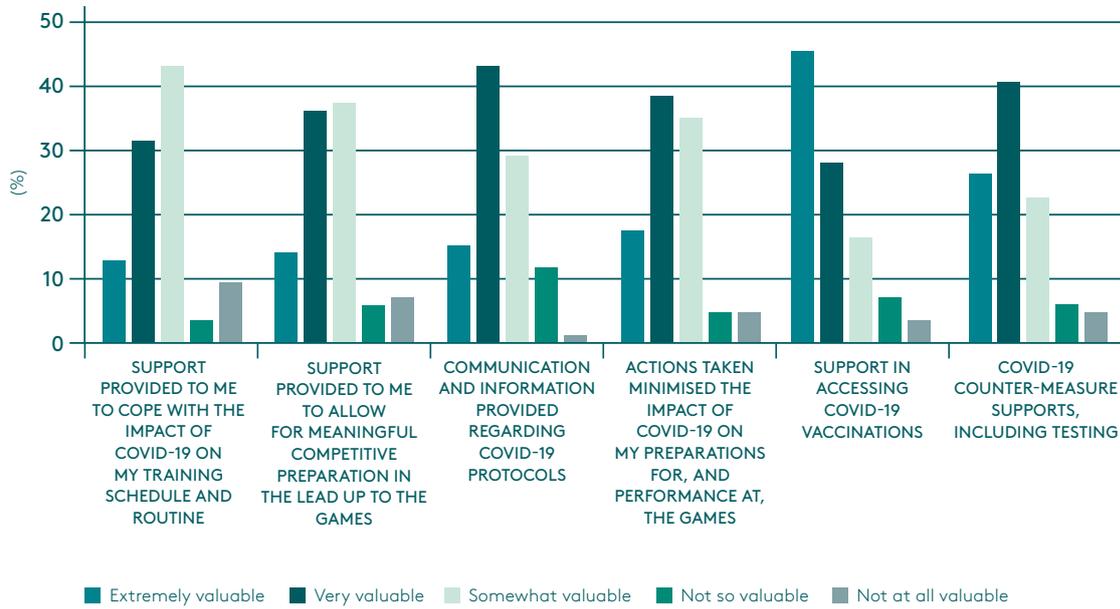


### At the Games, how satisfied were you with the following?

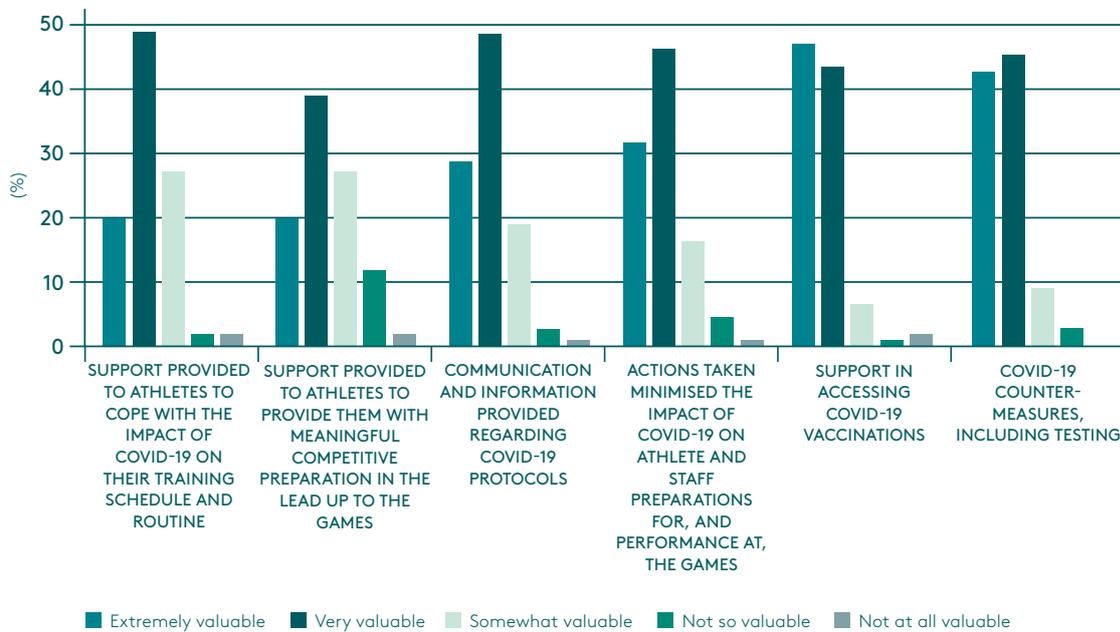


# Olympic COVID-19 Questions

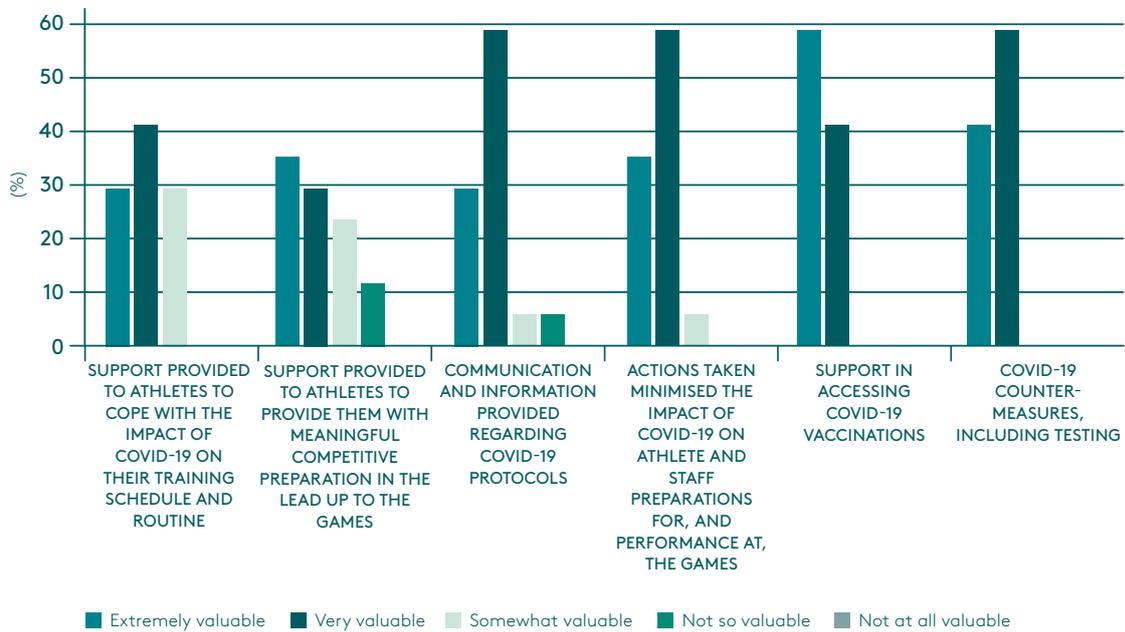
Given the circumstances regarding COVID-19 in the lead-up to and during the Games, how would you rate each of the following? (Athletes)



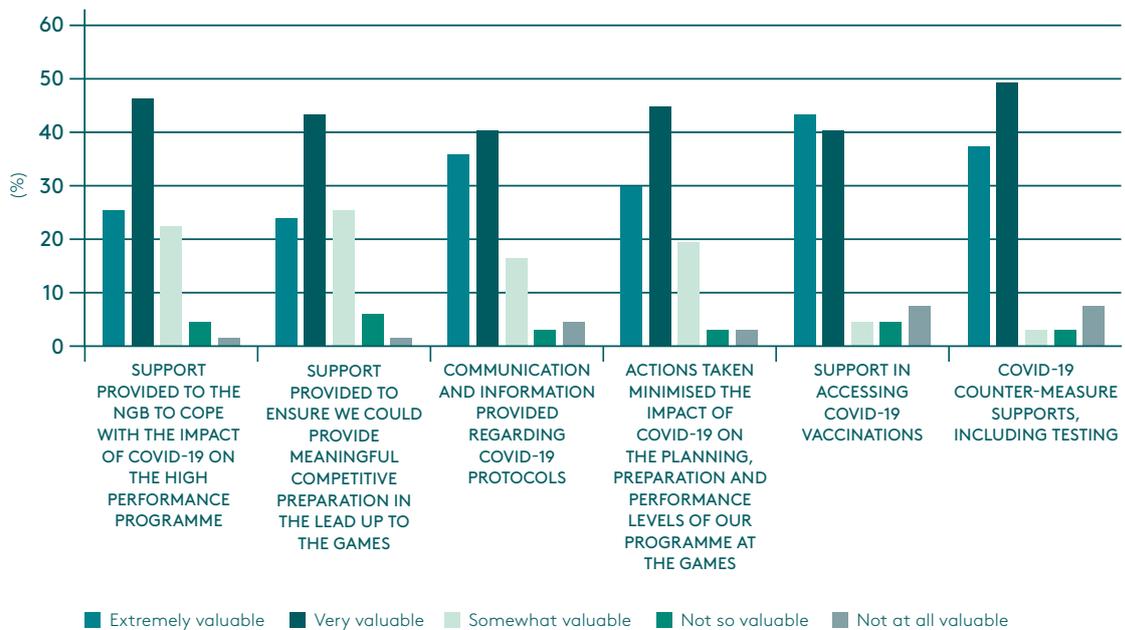
Given the circumstances regarding COVID-19 in the lead-up to and during the Games, how would you rate each of the following? (Coaching & Support Staff)



**Given the circumstances regarding COVID-19 in the lead-up to and during the Games, how would you rate each of the following? (Performance Directors/Performance Leads)**

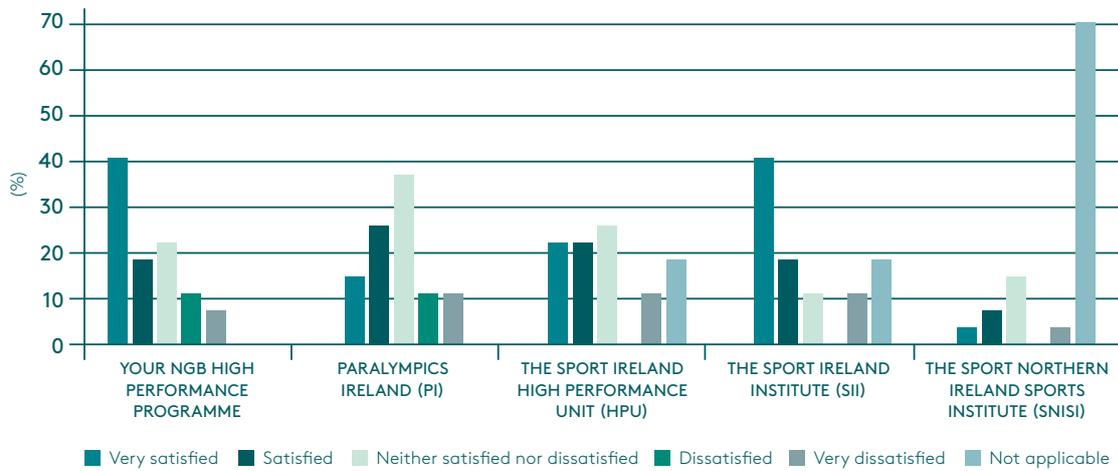


**Given the circumstances regarding COVID-19 in the lead-up to and during the Games, how would you rate each of the following? (CEOs & Board Members)**

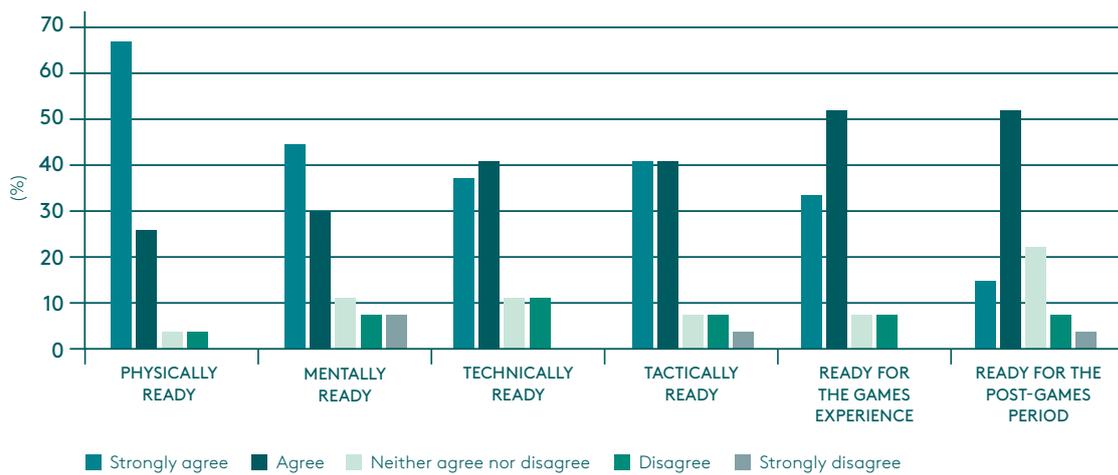


# Paralympic Athletes

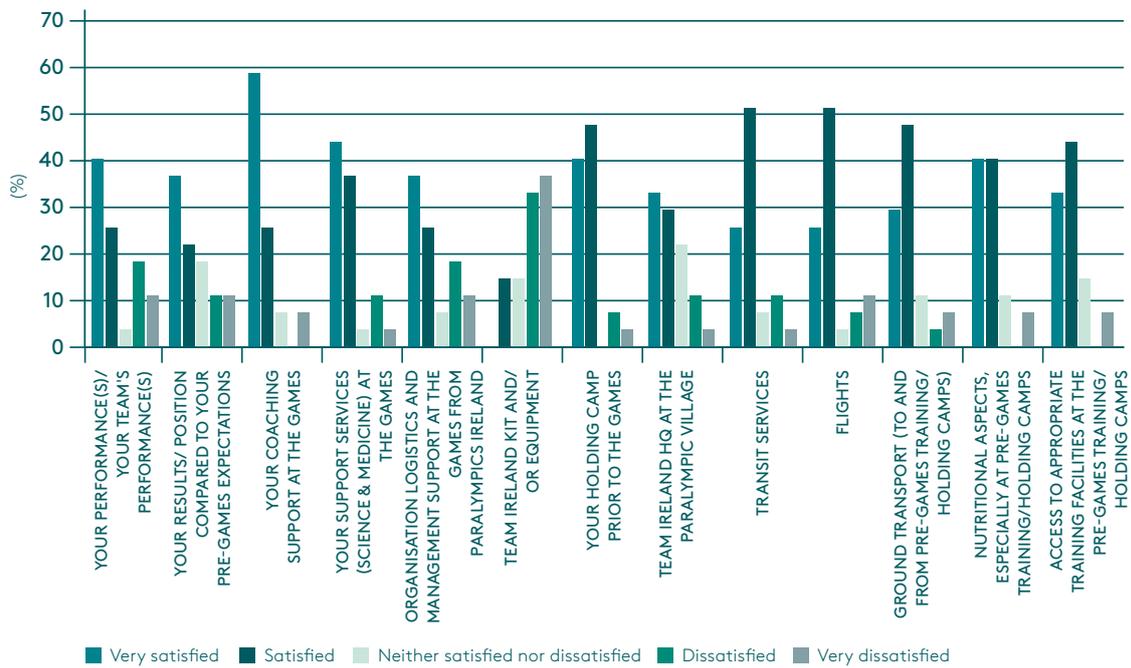
In the year leading up to the Games, please rate the support from the following organisations?



In terms of your readiness for the Tokyo Games, how would you rate each of the following?

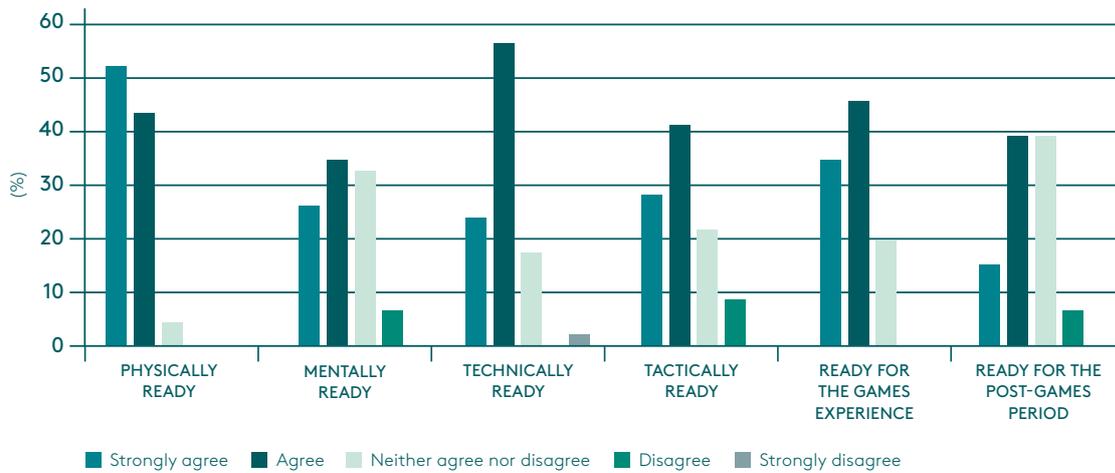


**At the Games, how satisfied were you with the following:**

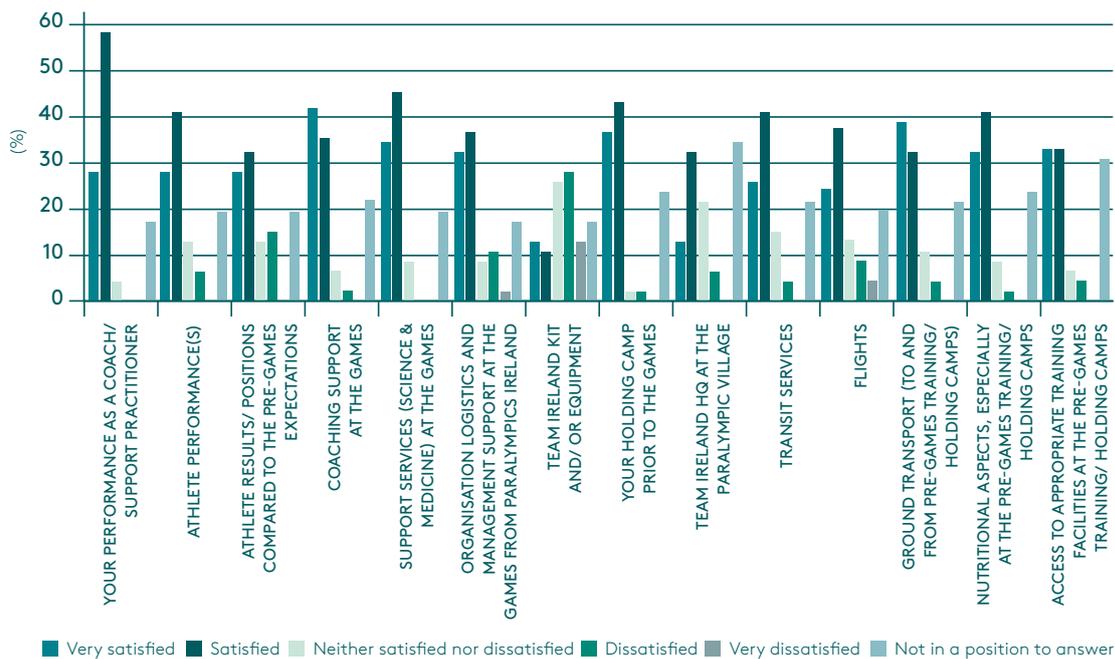


# Paralympic Coaching and Support Staff

How would you rate the readiness for the Tokyo Games of the athletes you worked with?

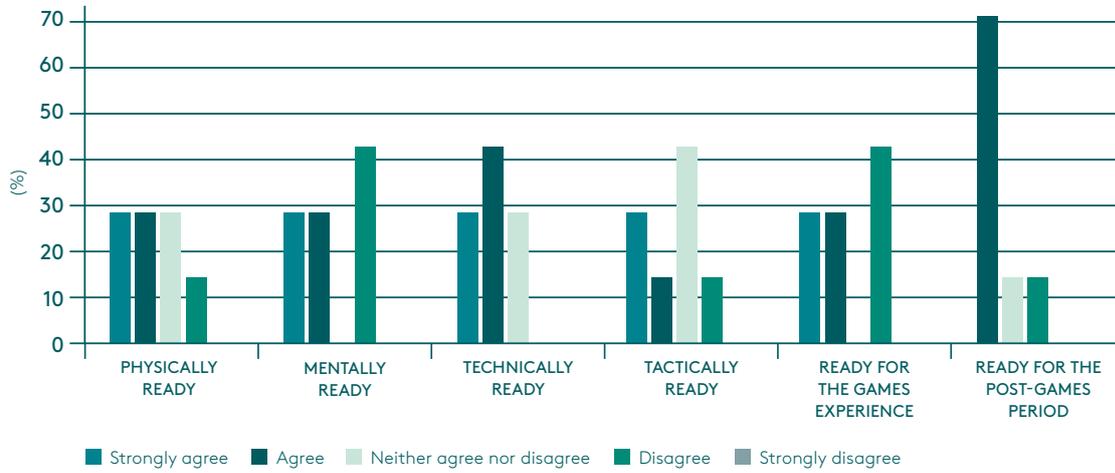


At the Games, how satisfied were you with the following?

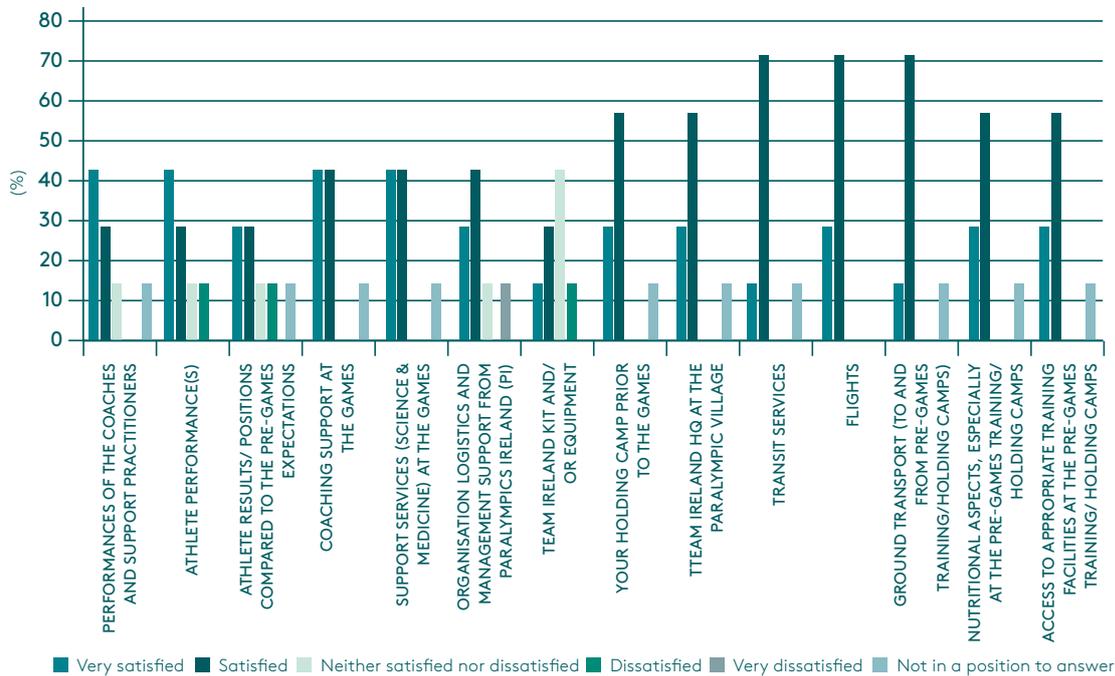


# Paralympic Performance Directors/ Performance Leads

How would you rate the readiness for the Tokyo Games of the athletes you worked with?

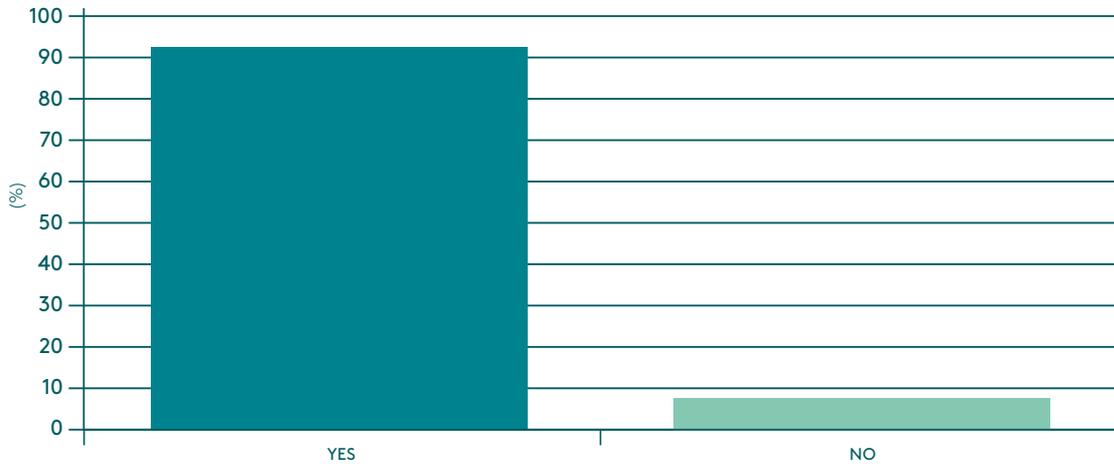


At the Games, how satisfied were you with the following?

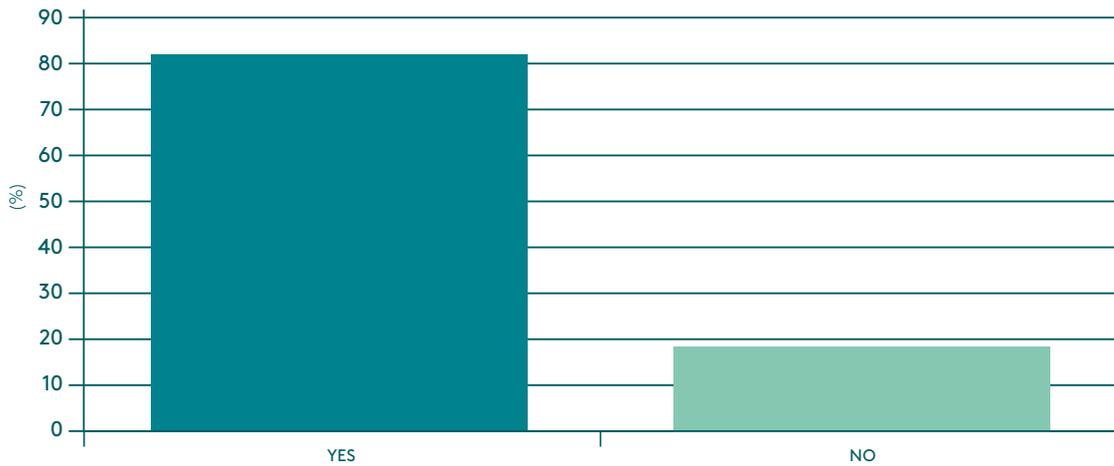


# Paralympic CEOs and Board Members

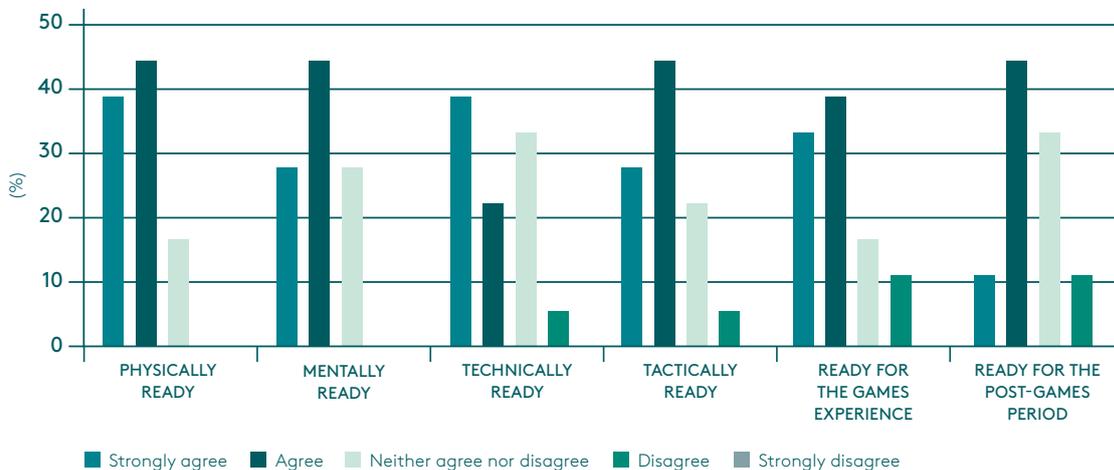
Were the NGB's Games' objectives and targets clearly defined in advance of the Tokyo Paralympic Games?



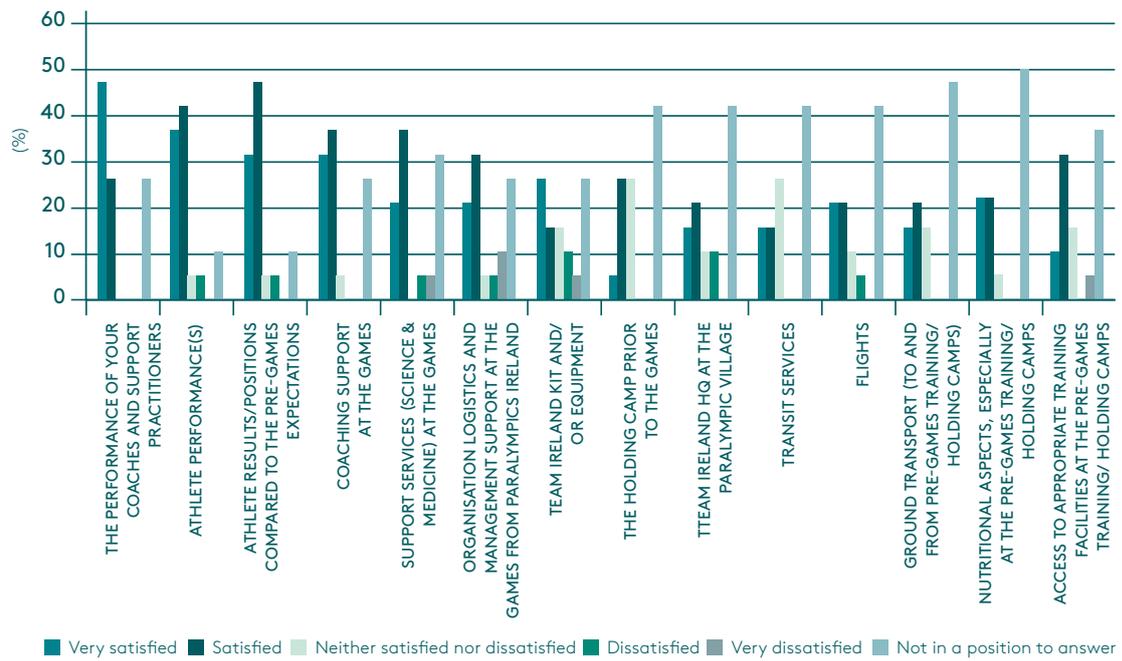
If yes, were these objectives and targets met?



How would you rate the readiness for the Tokyo Games of the athletes in your NGB?

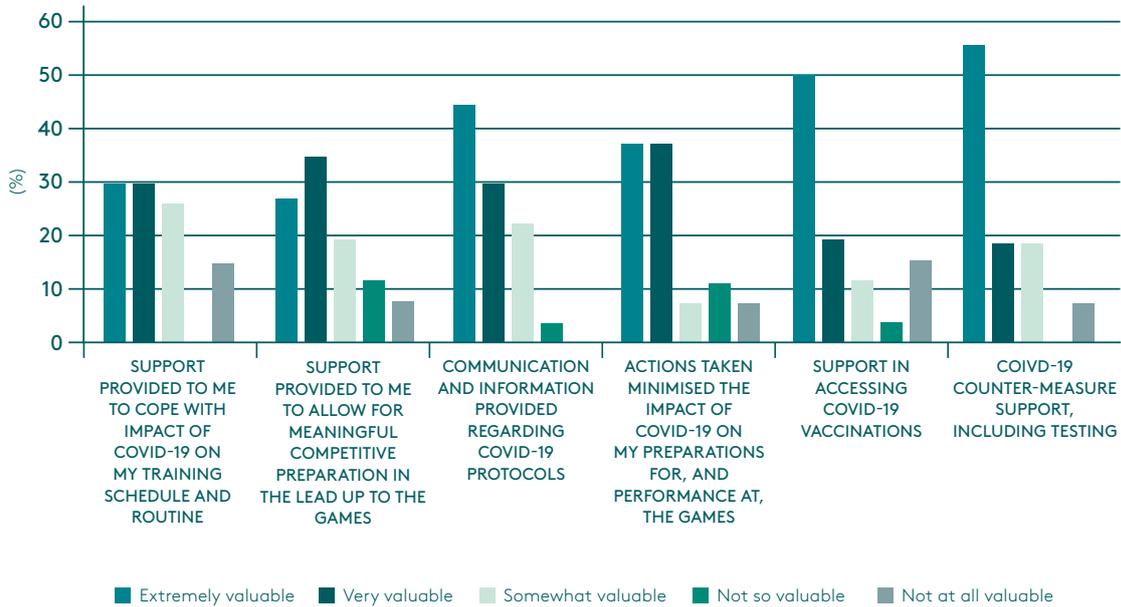


### At the Games, how satisfied were you with the following?

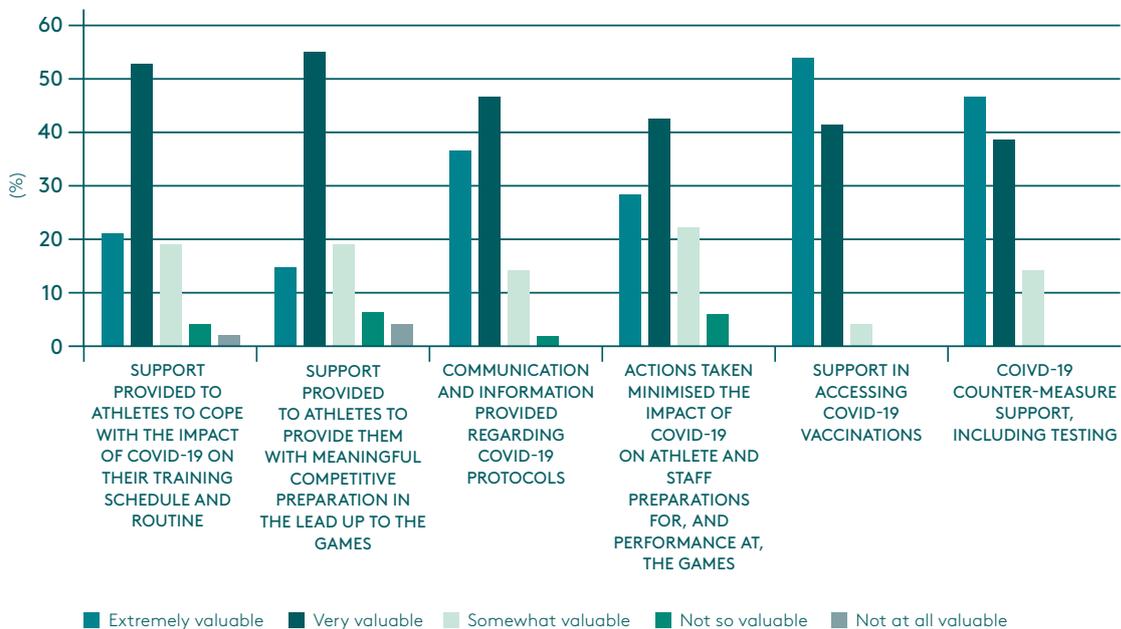


# Paralympic COVID-19 Questions

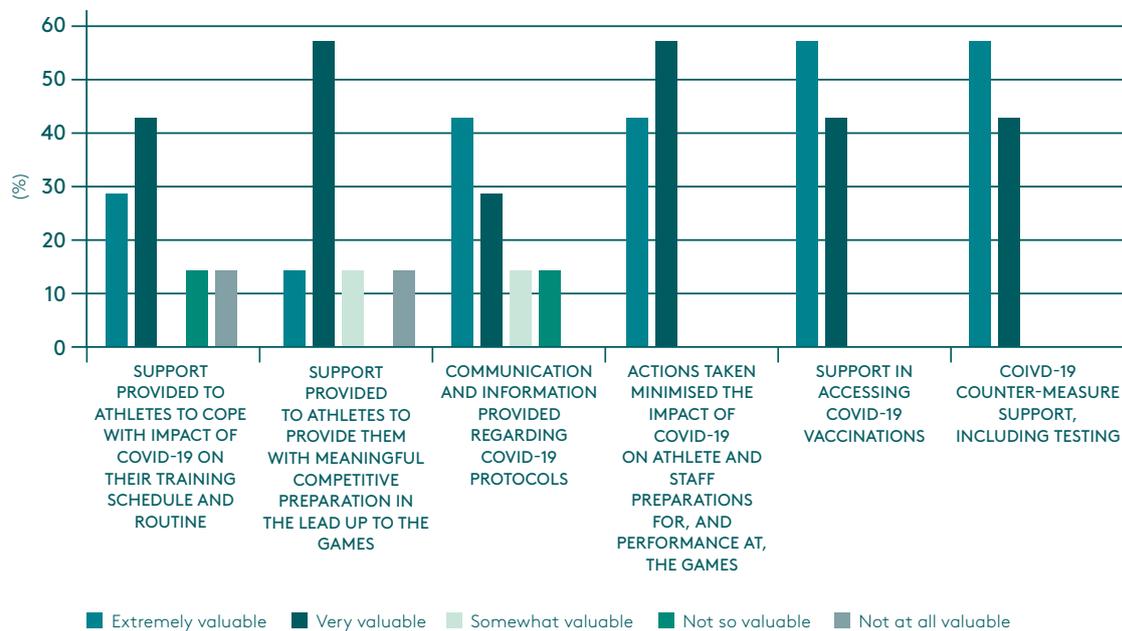
Given the circumstances regarding COVID-19 in the lead-up to and during the Games, how would you rate each of the following? (Athletes)



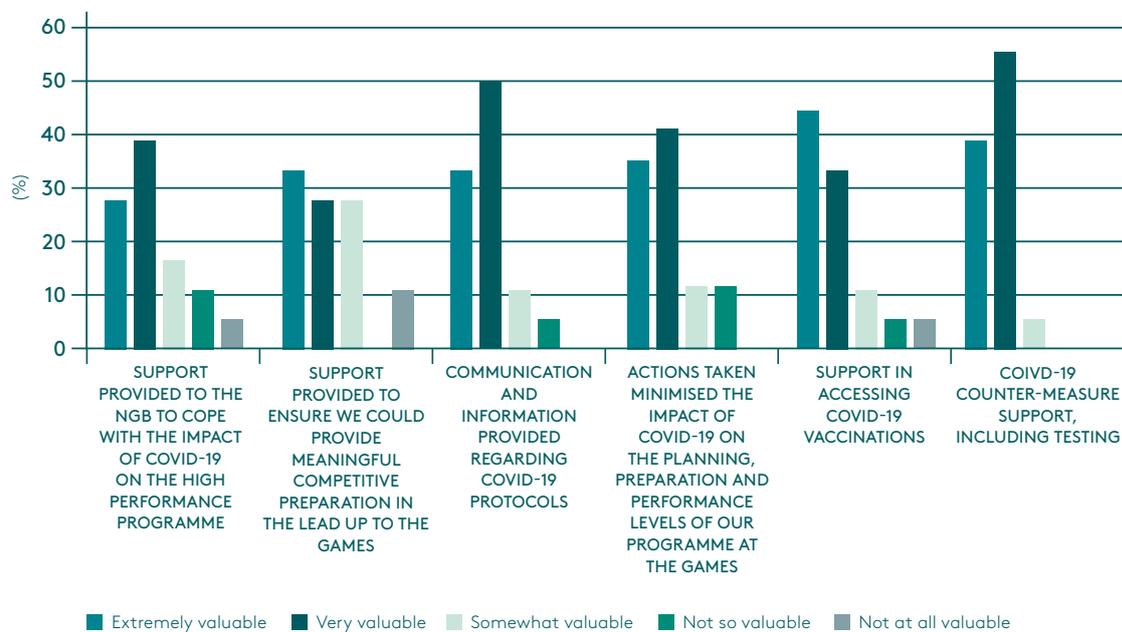
Given the circumstances regarding COVID-19 in the lead-up to and during the Games, how would you rate each of the following? (Coaching & Support Staff)



**Given the circumstances regarding COVID-19 in the lead-up to and during the Games, how would you rate each of the following? (Performance Directors/Performance Leads)**



**Given the circumstances regarding COVID-19 in the lead-up to and during the Games, how would you rate each of the following? (CEOs & Board Members)**







SPÓRT ÉIREANN  
SPORT IRELAND