

**OFFALY  
SPORTS  
PARTNERSHIP**

An Irish Sports Council Initiative

<b>Offaly Sports Partnership</b> <i>Evaluation of delivery of Strategic plan 2008-2010</i>
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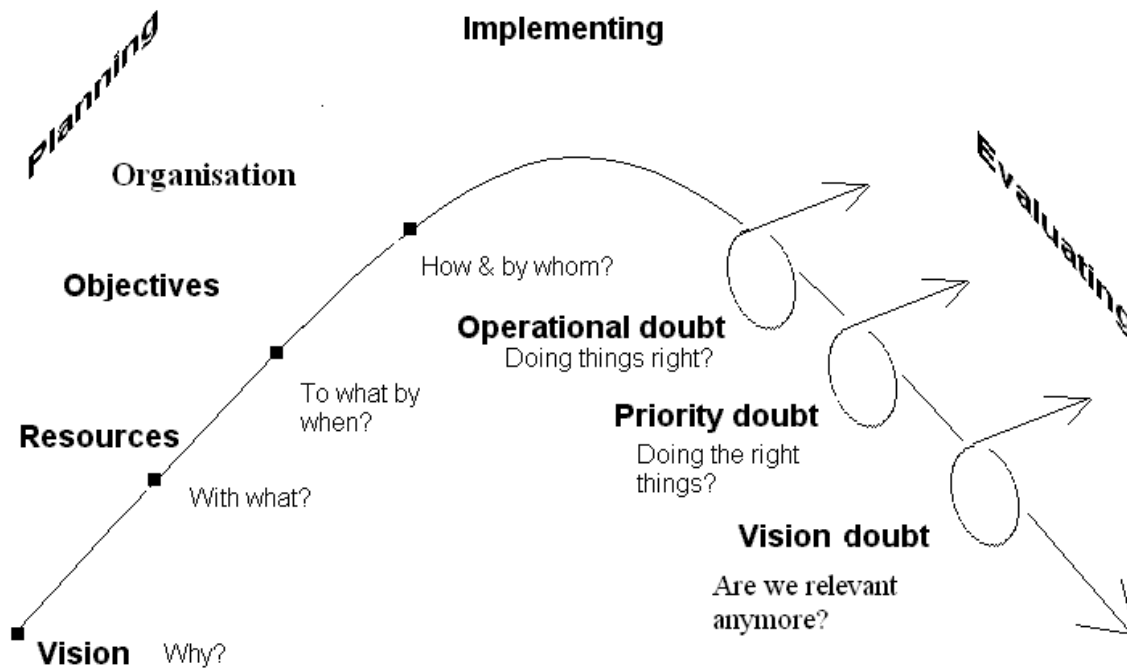
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Martin Kennedy 25/08/10

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Framework for evaluation

I used the following model as a framework for this evaluation.<sup>1</sup>



The organization's vision is based on an assessment of objective needs in the community and a set of values which informs the response to those needs. The vision gives energy for action, but needs to be balanced by a realistic assessment of organizational resources (what is available to us to implement our vision) – otherwise vision can be tyrannical, drawing the organization into unsustainable and ultimately demoralising commitments.

Objectives are concrete, realistic targets that arise from the balancing of the vision with the resources. Objectives name what is to be achieved. Organization is a description of how the objectives are to be achieved, including the programmes, roles etc.

Evaluation involves providing the opportunity for those involved in any way in a project to express their sense of the strengths of the project, but also their doubts. Doubts are a normal part of any evaluation process and a healthy group will create the space for its members to articulate their doubts.

The deeper the doubt the more difficult for the organisation to hear. It is generally not that difficult to hear and address operational doubt, which looks at how the organization

<sup>1</sup> Hope and Timmel **Training for Transformation Book 2** (Mambo Press) 1996

is functioning to achieve its objectives. But priority doubts can be much more threatening in that they call into question the very objectives of the organization. Thus they may challenge the operations, structures, skills etc. that have built up over a period. Vision doubts raise questions about the very existence of an organization, and ask whether it is relevant or necessary in the light of the current objective reality.

I looked at relevant literature to identify the vision, resources, objectives and organization of the Partnership, and interviewed a range of people in the sports and community sectors to hear their assessment of the Partnership and its work. (Appendix 8.2)

## 2. Vision

### 2.1 Irish Sports Council vision for Sports Partnerships

The local sports partnerships were established by the Irish Sports Council. It articulated a very clear vision for the partnerships which included the following elements.

- The creation and implementation of plans for long term local sports development
- The establishment of a sustainable structure to assist all those involved in local sports development to face the associated challenges -e.g. recruiting and managing volunteers, quality training, etc
- Delivery of projects and programmes particularly for target groups - establishing networks at local level and liaising with existing initiatives

The desired outcomes were named as follows.

- Club development
- Volunteer training
- Enhanced planning of sport at local level
- Local directories of sports bodies & facilities
- School, club, community and national governing body (NGB) links
- Increased levels of local participation, especially amongst specific target groups such as older people, girls & women, people with disabilities, unemployed people, and those who live in identified disadvantaged communities

The values of coordination, sustainability and social inclusion come across very strongly here.

### 2.2 Offaly Sports Partnership Vision

In 2008 Offaly Sports Partnership (OSP) produced its first strategic plan which outlines a long-term vision of *a county with a vibrant sport culture which is inclusive of all people* and its' mission *to increase participation in sport in County Offaly by promoting inclusion, building capacity, promoting sustainable infrastructure, and developing partnership.*

It is clear that there is a very close correspondence between the vision of the Irish Sports Council and that of the partnership. Both are very comprehensive in their scope. This comprehensiveness underpins some of the key issues arising in the evaluation. *How can the inclusive agenda of the partnership be pursued in the context of the more narrowly focused vision of most sporting organisations? How will it be possible to manage such a wide vision when the available resources from some Departments have declined and are likely to decline further?*

### **3. Resources**

#### **3.1 Major reduction in resources available for the vision**

The decline in the Irish economy occurred after the strategic plan was produced and during its period of implementation. This had a significant impact on the work programme. The suspension of the Sports Capital Programme, the reduction in sources of funding for a range of projects, and the restrictions on the employment of sports graduates were some of the challenges that the Partnership faced as a result. This will obviously have implications for the strategic planning going forward. And while funding from the Sports Council has held up over this period it seems likely that it will come under some pressure going forward. While the vision has to have the same breadth the specific objectives that the OSP sets for itself within that vision will need to be very realistic and focused, utilizing limited resources for optimal impact. However there is a clear sense coming through that this situation has not been fatal to the core work of the Partnership. As is outlined below, some 66% of program actions were achieved, and only 13% were not pursued because of lack of resources.

## 4. Objectives

### 4.1 Offaly Sports Partnership Objectives 2008-2010 (14)

In its strategic plan the partnership translated its vision into 14 objectives under four broad goals as follows.

#### **Promoting inclusion**

- 1.1 To monitor sport participation levels in the county.
- 1.2 To increase the involvement of people with a disability in sport.
- 1.3 To support increased participation in sport by low participation groups.
- 1.4 To support sport development in rural communities.

#### **Building Capacity**

- 2.1 To promote sports provision in County Offaly.
- 2.2 To develop a well structured, sustainable sport sector.
- 2.3 To enhance the quality of introduction to sport for children.
- 2.4 To increase community involvement in sport development.

#### **Support the development of sustainable infrastructure**

- 3.1 To initiate planning for the future development of sports infrastructure in the county.
- 3.2 To promote the development of inclusive, multi-sport facilities.

#### **Build partnerships**

- 4.1 To effectively promote the identity of Offaly Sports Partnership.
- 4.2 To promote coordination and collaboration between key provider agencies in the county.
- 4.3 To facilitate regular communication between all stakeholders in sport development inside and outside the county.
- 4.4 To operate an effective Sports Partnership.

## 5. Organisation

### 5.1 Operational plans overview

In 2008 and 2009 the partnership published operational plans where it identified some 75 actions which describe how it intended to deliver on its objectives. The following summarizes the delivery.

➤	<i>Actions Planned</i>	75
➤	<i>Actions delivered</i>	52
➤	<i>Actions commenced that couldn't be pursued</i>	3
➤	<i>Actions that couldn't commence</i>	20
➤	<i>Actions not included in operational plan but delivered</i>	4

The following is a breakdown of actions delivered under the four broad goals of the strategic plan.

➤	<i>Inclusion</i>	<i>13 delivered from 22 planned</i>
➤	<i>Capacity</i>	<i>17 delivered from 27 planned</i>
➤	<i>Infrastructure</i>	<i>3 delivered from 5 planned</i>
➤	<i>Partnership</i>	<i>19 delivered from 21 planned</i>

The following summarises the reasons why the 23 actions were either not commenced or not completed

➤	<i>Lack of funding</i>	10
➤	<i>Research restrictions</i>	3
➤	<i>Capacity issue with target group, partners or Partnership</i>	10

The above figures indicate that the Partnership took its operational planning seriously and systematically followed up on each of its commitments. However the percentages do not do justice to the fact that some actions were far bigger than others. This is particularly so in the inclusion sector, where for example actions related to Travellers, migrants and the disability sector were very substantial. The five actions alone in the disability sector amounted to the work of one third of the staff. In the capacity sector the action related to children was also very substantial.

### 5.2 Detail of operational plans

This section amalgamates the 2008 and 2009 operational plans and draws on Partnership reports over the period to name whether and how these actions were delivered. (Actions color - coded in green went ahead, actions in red didn't.)



## Objective 1.1 – Monitor sports participation

2008

1. Develop a framework for monitoring overall sport participation in County Offaly.
  - *SPEAK returns made annually*
2. Implement a *Women in Sport* initiative which will establish a Working Group, conduct research into participation in sport by women and host a conference to present local/national data.
  - *Establishment of working group was deferred until 2009 as research brief was excluded from Sports Partnership remit by Sports Council.(see action 19)*

2009

3. Complete the Strategic Planning Evaluation and Knowledge (SPEAK) return for 2009
  - *SPEAK returns made annually*
4. Undertake research into participation levels of students of school-going age in Offaly in extracurricular competitive sport for their schools
  - *Research brief excluded from remit. In 2009 this was raised with a student placement as a possible topic for her thesis.*
5. Review relevant research that has a bearing on sports participation within Offaly.
  - *Research brief excluded from remit by Sports Council.*

## Objective 1.2 – Increase involvement of people with disability

2008

6. Appoint a Sports Inclusion Development Officer for people with a disability and delivery of work plan in line with funding application.
  - *An officer was appointed and in 2008 delivered a range of programmes involving 158 people with disabilities.*
  - *Three “come try days” for children with disabilities, the National Learning Network and Down Syndrome Ireland;*
  - *A kit fit programme for people with intellectual disabilities in Rehab Care;*
  - *A Boccia programme with the National Learning Network, Rehab Care and the Sisters of Charity of Jesus and Mary Services;*
  - *A Lawn Bowls programme with the Peter Bradley Foundation and Rehab Care;*
  - *A summer athletics programme in conjunction with the Irish Wheelchair Association, Sport*
  - *ASA Helper’s Certificate (swimming for people with disabilities);*
  - *A Transition Year Disability Awareness Programme;*
  - *Power Soccer for users of power wheelchairs with limited mobility.*
7. Establish a *People with a Disability in Sport Forum*.
  - *Established.*

2009

8. Continue the roll out of the Sports Inclusion Disability programme in line with the proposal agreed by Pobal

- *The officer has continued her work with programmes for people with physical, sensory and intellectual disabilities. She has also developed working relationships with a number of disability organizations leading to the following range of activities:*
  - *Children's sports camps for families with autistic children*
  - *Kit fit programmes for people with intellectual disabilities*
  - *Boccia programmes for the National Learning Network, Rehab Care and the Sisters of Charity of Jesus and Mary Services, St Cronin's Day Services Birr and Riverview Resources Services Birr*
  - *A summer athletics programme in conjunction with the Irish Wheelchair Association, Sport*
  - *Two Amateur Swimming Association's Helper's Certificate (for swimming for people with disabilities);*
  - *Transition Year Disability Awareness programmes with St Rynagh's Secondary School, Banagher and Tullamore College;*
  - *3rd level Disability Awareness programmes with Athlone Institute of Technology and Moate Business College*
  - *Power Soccer for users of power wheelchairs with limited mobility;*
  - *Additionally funding for the purchase of an adapted rowing boat was dispersed to Offaly Rowing Club in 2009 in support of their efforts to prepare people with a disability to participate in the 2012 Paralympic games*
  - *To date, a total of 396 (202 in 2008, 194 in 2009) people with disabilities have been reached by the above activities.*
  - *Support of €15,000 was secured from the Health Services Executive, through the Offaly Centre for Independent Living, toward the purchase of adapted sports equipment.*

9. Identify a strategic direction for disability sports in Offaly

- *A strategic plan for increasing the involvement of people with a disability in physical activity 2010 - 2012 was developed with the support of the Sports Ability Forum. The plan sets out three strategic goals - improving information, enabling access and empowering providers*

10. Develop (in conjunction with the Offaly Centre for Independent Living) a peer led, three year business plan for submission to the Community Services Programme, with the aim of securing long term funding in order to further increase the participation of people with disabilities in sport and establish a sustainable structure for their ongoing engagement and participation.

- *Proposal developed and submitted, but on hold due to economic situation.*

### **Objective 1.3 - To support increased participation in sport by low participation groups**

2008

#### **11. Develop Phase 1 (Training and Business Planning) of an *Increasing Traveller Participation in Sport* initiative.**

- *Funding was secured to develop a three-year business plan under the Community Services Programme for a Traveller Sports initiative involving the training of Travellers to deliver range of sports programmes to Travellers.*
- *A training of tutors programme was delivered that covered five FETAC modules and nine sports specific and holistic health courses. Seven trainees received FETAC and sports specific awards.*

#### **12. Support activities that involve migrant participation in mainstream sport.**

*The following activities were run*

- *a Midlands Volleyball Tournament in conjunction with the Volleyball Association of Ireland with 12 teams participating;*
- *a sports hall athletics programme in the towns of Tullamore and Edenderry with over 200 children participating (approximately 70:30 ratio),*
- *the participation of migrants as guests in the County's Senior Track and Field Championships,*
- *the hosting of our annual international games festival in the sports of basketball, volleyball and soccer in July with teams from Edenderry, Tullamore, Banagher and Birr participating,*
- *a 12-bout intercultural boxing competition for juveniles in October 2008 in conjunction with the Offaly Boxing County Board.*

#### **13. Support the implementation of a *Soccer on the Green* Project for disadvantaged young people in Local Authority Housing Estates.**

- *Funding for this action was not secured as action perceived to be within remit of Governing body rather than Sports Partnership.*

#### **14. Implement a project to increase participation in a selected minority sport amongst disadvantaged young women.**

- *A number of women in sport circuit training programmes carried over from 2007 took place in various clubs and locations throughout the county - Lusmagh, Tullamore and Gracefield. At least one of these programmes continued with the support of Cúl le Chéile, a Community Development Project based in Portarlinton in 2008.*
- *Additional women in sport programmes were also delivered to Traveller women and Disadvantaged teenage girls.*
- *A women in sport Basketball programme was delivered to 27 girls of secondary school age who left mainstream education early and enrolled in youth training centres (Clara Youthreach, Edenderry Youthreach and Tullamore Community Training Workshop). This six week basketball programme culminated in a blitz in St Mary's Youth Centre, Tullamore at the start of 2009.*

- *A women in sport Boccia programme was also delivered to 36 Traveller women from the Birr and Tullamore Traveller Training Centres. Like the six week basketball programme, this culminated in a blitz in St Mary's Youth Centre, Tullamore in December 2008.*

2009

**15. Pilot an inter agency programme of sport and physical activity for disadvantaged young people in an urban area (Edenderry town)**

- *The anticipated facilities for this event were not funded in 2009, but have been put in place in 2010.*

**16. Continue to host an International Games Festival as a method of showcasing and creating an opportunity for migrant participation in sport**

- *Festival suspended due to mobility of migrants.*
- *The Migrants in Sport funding received from the Department of Justice in 2007 as part of the National Action Plan Against Racism was finally expended in 2009.*
- *An evaluation of the programme was carried out in 2009.*
- *Ongoing work with migrant communities was targeted at some schools with high migrant populations.*

**17. Support a number of activities that encourage older people to participate in sport and physical activity.**

- *Five Go for Life taster sessions were delivered for 98 participants*
- *An evaluation of the 2008 pilot programme (o50s Boccia for Men) was carried out in 2009.*
- *The first round of the league was held with five groups and over 60 men participating*

**18. Commence the implementation of the three year business plan to be approved by Pobal, which is designed to employ members of the Traveller community on peer led programmes designed to increase participation in sport and physical activity by five specific target groups**

- *Funding was received from the Irish Sports Council towards two targeted actions to be led out by the trainees. Delivery of these actions was dependent on support from the Community Services Programme which did not materialise. The funding was used for integration (Migrant and Traveller) actions in 2010*

**19. Undertake a detailed piece of local research in relation to the participation of women within decision making structures of sport, and develop a comprehensive proposal to increase women's participation in decision making structures for submission to the Equality for Women Measure of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform**

- *The Partnership established a Women in Sport working group to examine the participation of women within decision making structures of sport with a view to responding to an anticipated funding call from the "Equality for Women*

*Measure” of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. As the funding call did not materialize, the work of this group was deferred after five meetings.*

**20. Pilot a “Fit for Girls” programme in secondary schools for teenage girls**

- *The roll- out of this was dependent on lead out by the HSE, which was deferred until 2010. The programme is currently being rolled out in two post-primary schools in the county.*

**Objective 1.4 - To support sport development in rural communities.**

**2008**

**21. Formulate an initiative to increase participation in sport by older men.**

*Go for Life activities delivered were attended by 88 participants and included: -*

- *Go for Life information sessions;*
- *Go for Life taster sessions;*
- *Go for Life refresher training;*
- *Go for Life forum.*

*Other initiatives included the establishment of an Older Men in Sport working group, with a series of consultation days taking place involving 25 men. During the consultation days, the older men had the opportunity to try out some new activities including Boccia, Gym machines, Kurling and Pitchy. A number of discussions were held on the barriers to older men participating in sport, the importance of physical activity for older men, and also assisted in the development of a winter Boccia programme for older men.*

**22. Pilot a masters (o35s) project for Gaelic Games with a view to encouraging people in rural communities to continue to participate in their later years**

- *This was agreed with the GAA but didn't happen due to other work commitments of both the GAA development officer and the Partnership coordinator.*

## **Objective 2.1 - To promote sports provision in County Offaly.**

2008

- 23. Develop an Information Point promoting opportunities for sports participation in Offaly during 2008.
  - Website established

2009

- 24. Update the website of the Partnership regularly
  - Website updated
  
- 25. Continue to publish newsletters detailing opportunities for participation in sport and physical activity in Offaly
  - Newsletter discontinued due to non-availability of a communications budgets

## **Objective 2.2 - To develop a well structured, sustainable sport sector.**

2008

- 26. Update database of sports clubs in Offaly.
  - Completed
  
- 27. Link with National Governing Bodies to develop new clubs
  - An athletics club was established in Birr.
  
- 28. Deliver a Rugby Development Programme targeted at children of school going age.
  - Rugby training was out reached to ten Community Games areas with over four hundred children (boys and girls) participating in the project.
  
- 29. Organise and deliver a 2008 Sports Club Development Programme with a focus on strategic planning and coach education.
  - This didn't happen as planned. A series of ad hoc events were run. Under a coach / volunteer education training programme 54 volunteers attended Code of Ethics training, 14 attended First Aid training, 24 attended Heart saver AED training; 25 attended the Lucozade Sports Education programme, and 17 attended a presentation on the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism's Sports Capital Grant Scheme.
  
- 30. Administer a Sports Clubs Grant Scheme.
  - Nineteen grants totaling € 15,000 were distributed to clubs under the Club Development Grant Scheme 2008.

2009

- 31. Update database of sports clubs in Offaly
  - Reviewed in 2009

### 32. Support the ongoing development of clubs

- *The Partnership provided Code of Ethics training to 72 volunteers.*

### 33. Support the continued implementation of the Sports Club Development programmes in Offaly

- *Didn't happen as envisaged – funding to subsidise non-Irish Sports Council programmes was not forthcoming.*

### 34. Allocation of club development grants

- *20 clubs shared a total of €15,000 under the 2009 scheme.*

## Objective 2.3 - To enhance the quality of introduction to sport for children.

### 2008

#### 35. Deliver *Buntús Teacher Training* for Primary Schools.

#### 36. Deliver *Buntús Start Training* for Pre-School leaders.

#### 37. Deliver an *Athletics Development Programme* for children in the school and community setting.

- *A total of 55 schools in the county were engaged with in 2008.*
- *A fitness assessment of 727 children in eighteen schools in Offaly was undertaken using the agility challenge of IFTA (International Fun in Team Athletics). Of seven possible rankings over 75% of the pupils at age nine ranked in the lowest two.*
- *As a follow on to the cross country programme, and in response to research findings into the motor skills of children, a programme of sports hall athletics was piloted in seven locations in the county. The programme culminated in the first ever Inter Schools Sports Hall Athletics Competition to be staged in Offaly or the Republic of Ireland. Six schools and over 300 pupils participated in the competition.*
- *Support was offered to nineteen primary schools on aspects of the physical education curriculum which the individual schools felt needed to be strengthened. The main activities supported on the programme were athletics, basketball, gymnastics, dance, orienteering and innovative games.*
- *The Partnership also continued to deliver the Buntús programme of the Irish Sports Council to primary schools in the county. Seven new schools availed of training for the Buntús Generic programme, five schools availed of training in Buntús Soccer, and five schools availed of training in Buntús Badminton.<sup>2</sup> Two of the beneficiary schools were special education schools.*
- *Sports specific programmes (i.e. soccer and badminton) were run in 5 schools*
- *A pre season cross country and summer fitness programme was delivered in twelve GAA fields across the county and over 300 children participated on the programme.*
- *12 childcare centres also availed of training in Buntús Start.*

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<sup>2</sup> The commencement of the delivery of the Buntús programme pre-dated the strategic plan, and to date over 90% of Primary schools in Co. Offaly have been reached.



38. Assist the delivery of summer activities/camps in disadvantaged communities.
- Done in five communities primarily through the student placement programme

2009

39. Deliver Buntús training (both generic and sports specific) in primary schools
40. Deliver Buntús Start training in pre schools, crèches, etc
- The Partnership continued to deliver the Buntús programme of the Irish Sports Council within primary schools. 19 primary schools and 31 childcare providers took part.
  - Additionally a new children's programme called "School Superstars" was developed for delivery in primary schools in the spring / summer period. This ten event programme which combined fitness and sports specific skills was based on the Superstars competition which was popular in the 1980s and eight schools took part.
  - The sports specific aspects of the programme were designed for delivery using equipment from the Buntús programme which is in most primary schools.
41. Support primary school teachers in delivering aspects of the PE curriculum that they are least comfortable with
- This wasn't operable due to lack of student placements
42. Support ongoing collaborative efforts between development officers for Athletics and Gaelic Games designed to rejuvenate juvenile athletics in the county and improve core fitness for participation across a range of sports
- With the reduction in resources this didn't prove feasible.
43. Develop (in conjunction with national schools) a mechanism for the coaching of sports hall athletics in the autumn / winter months, and the annual staging of an inter schools competition in the sport.
- With a start up grant from Social Entrepreneurs Ireland, Olympian James Nolan established the FAST (Fun, Agility, Speed and Technical-proficiency) Kids project to address the poor motor skills evident among children in the county in 2008.
  - This work involved the establishment of a promotional website ([www.fastkids.ie](http://www.fastkids.ie)); the delivery of a 10 week intervention in Daingean primary school establishing that improvements in core fundamental skills can be achieved with a focused intervention; and the expansion of the Sportshall Athletics programme across the county in the winter months.
  - The Sportshall Athletics programme, which was piloted in 2008, was expanded to 20 schools in 2009. Up to 1,600 children participated on the two month programme, and over 1,100 children participated in the second annual inter schools fun competition.
44. Assist in the delivery of summer camps in disadvantaged areas and among disadvantaged communities



- *Was dependent on a student placement programme with the Dundalk Institute of Technology which did not materialize*

## **Objective 2.4 - To increase community involvement in sport development**

2008

45. Formulate a pilot inter-agency project to empower communities develop and implement locally relevant plans to increase participation in sport.

- *Didn't happen. Partnership unable to concretize this enough to enable the participation of the other agencies.*

2009

46. Deliver the Active Leadership Award training for community, youth and voluntary organisations

- *Didn't happen. Though it was widely publicized among community organizations there was only a limited response from the communities.*

47. Pilot the development and implementation of a community based plan for increased participation in sport and physical activity, in conjunction with schools, the community and the private sector in rural areas

- *No developments here due to lack of funding opportunities.*

48. Develop and implement a volunteer recruitment and retention training programme in conjunction with Laois, Longford and Westmeath Sports Partnerships

- *The Sports Partnerships in the Midlands came together to produce a new resource entitled "Volunteering in Changing Times", offering guidelines on how to identify, recruit and retain volunteers.*
- *To coincide with the launch of the booklet, two workshops on the theme of volunteerism were held.*
- *The publication, "Volunteering in Changing Times", has been distributed to sports clubs on the Partnership's database, and is available to download from its website, [www.offalysports.ie](http://www.offalysports.ie).*

49. Convene an ad hoc water sports activities group with a view to developing a strategy for maximizing opportunities in water sports participation in the county

- *Initial soundings made but no development to date.*

**Objective 3.1 - To initiate planning for the future development of sports infrastructure in the county.**

2008

50. Conduct an analysis of National Sports Facilities Strategy (subject to its publication) and identify key issues as they relate to County Offaly.

- *National Facilities Strategy not published to date*

2009

51. Complete an audit of sports facilities in Offaly

- *An audit of sports and community facilities for the county has been completed by the County Council with input from the Partnership. A sports facilities directory has been posted on the Partnership's website ([www.offalysports.ie](http://www.offalysports.ie)). This exercise involved the collection of GIS references for the mapping of all facilities.*

52. Establish a facilities working group to identify priorities for facility development in Offaly

- *This is being held back until publication of the National Facilities Strategy.*
- *Inputs were made by the Partnership to the Network of County and City managers in relation to the draft "Facilities Strategy" which was circulated by the Department.*
- *The Partnership participated on the "Infrastructure Working Group of Offaly GAA" in relation to the development of its strategic plan.*

**Objective 3.2 - To promote the development of inclusive, multi-sport facilities**

2008

53. Deliver a workshop which assists clubs and communities with application for Sports Capital Programme and promotes inclusion and multi-usage of facilities.

- Workshops delivered.

2009

54. Deliver workshops which assist clubs and communities in applying for the Department of Arts, Sport & Tourism Sports Capital Programme

- Workshops commenced but then stopped with the suspension of the Sports Capital Grant Scheme.

#### **Objective 4.1 - To effectively promote the identity of Offaly Sports Partnership.**

2008

55. *Launch Strategic Plan 2008-2010.*

- Launched in March.

56. *Promote Strategic Plan 2008-2010 to sports clubs, schools and communities.*

- *Copies of plan circulated to all sports clubs, schools and the Community Forum.*
- *Inputs on plan made to County boards of Badminton, Athletics, and Ladies football*

57.  *Develop Offaly Sports Partnership Website.*

- *Website developed*

2009

58. *Update the website of the Partnership regularly*

- *Website was updated regularly, and expanded to include weekly news reports and the online availability of club and facility directories.*

59. *Launch the website*

- *No formal launch, but all stakeholders notified of Website.*

#### **Objective 4.2 - To promote coordination and collaboration between key provider agencies in the county.**

2008

60. *Develop and implement an inter-agency Operational Plan for 2008*

- *Plan developed and substantially implemented*

61.  *Create and facilitate working groups to plan/oversee implementation of various actions.*

- *The Partnership was involved with two projects in 2008 involving two governing bodies of Sport working collaboratively. The first project involved the promotion of Tag and Mini Rugby through the local Community Games structures. The Partnership facilitated the coming together of Offaly Community Games and the Regional Development Officers for the Leinster and Connaught branches of the Irish Rugby Football Union. The second project involved the promotion of endurance among children and was facilitated in conjunction with Offaly GAA and Athletics Ireland.*

2009

62. *Develop and implement an inter agency Operational Plan for 2009*

- *Plan developed and implemented as described here.*

63. Facilitate working groups to develop and oversee implementation of various actions as laid out in the Operational Plan

- *This was limited compared to the previous year. The major area of collaboration with the sports sector during the year concerned the gathering of GIS references for the mapping of sports facilities in the county.*

**Objective 4.3 - To facilitate regular communication between all stakeholders in sport development inside and outside the county.**

2008

64. Organise regular meetings of Offaly Sports Partnership.

- *Organized*

65. Maintain ongoing contact with the Irish Sports Council (ISC), National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs) and other national agencies involved in sport development.

- *The Partnership collaborated with the Football Association of Ireland, the Volleyball Association of Ireland, Basketball Ireland and Athletics Ireland in the delivery of its migrants in sport programme.*

66. Explore potential to collaborate on projects with other Local Sports partnerships

- *Explored and agreed for 2009 programme*

2009

67. Organise regular meetings of the Offaly Sports Partnership Executive Committee and Management Committee in 2009

- *Organised*

68. Maintain contact with the ISC, Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs), NGBs and other national agencies involved in sports development

- *Maintained*

69. Continue to collaborate with other LSPs on projects of mutual benefit

- *The Partnership collaborated with other Partnerships in 2009, including Laois, Longford, Offaly, Meath and Westmeath.*

70. Continue to collaborate with NGBs on projects of mutual benefit

- *Contact maintained but no specific projects developed*

**Objective 4.4- To operate an effective Sports Partnership.**

2008

71. Secure financial support to implement 2008 Operational Plan.

- *Funding of €307,856 achieved*

72. Establish working group to seek funding to resource the appointment of a Sports Development Officer and to examine the potential of securing corporate and private sector investment for sports development in Offaly.

- *An Investment in Sport working group was established with the remit of establishing whether adequate funding could be secured to employ a dedicated Sports Development Officer for the county, and additional programme funding to go with the role. Following a national directive for statutory bodies to reduce payroll costs, it was not possible to secure financial commitments from the three key statutory bodies*

73. Establish systems to effectively manage the affairs of the Partnership.

- *New accounts system established to tie into the reporting requirements of the Irish Sports Council*

2009

74. Secure financial support to implement the Operational Plan for 2009

- *Funding of €323,576 achieved*

75. Continue to review systems established to effectively manage the affairs of the Partnership

- *Governance systems all maintained and managed with no systems failure.*

#### **Other actions**

It is evident from the Partnership reports that a number of actions were developed that were not included in the operational plans. The following are some examples.

- 1. The Partnership established linkages between the Foróige sponsored Big Brother- Big Sister project and the Volleyball Association of Ireland for the local introduction of Spikeball.*
- 2. The Partnership also monitored the impact being made from Dormant Accounts funding approved in 2007 for disadvantaged youth in five areas.*
- 3. A working group was established in Edenderry to develop an all weather facility for use by the local Youth Diversion project, local Secondary school and the wider community. In 2008 the Partnership wrote the business plan for submission to the National Lottery for funding. However funding was not secured in 2009 due to a delay in transfer of property deeds. Following suspension of the lottery the working group sought support from the Offaly Local Development Company and the facility was opened in 2010.*
- 4. The Pauline Curley Inter Schools Simultaneous Marathon Relay project was organized in 2009 involving five schools and 105 participants. It was modeled on a similar programme in the UK involving international partners. It followed on from an invitation from the UK Amateur Athletic Association to the Partnership to visit.*

## 6. Evaluation of stakeholders

### 6.1 Large sports organizations (Rugby, Soccer, GAA, Athletics)

#### **Vision doubt?**

What is apparent talking to the sports organizations, both big and small, is that each is fairly focused on its own agenda in regard to running and developing its own sport. And each has a sense of its own capacity to do this. Each is busy doing its own thing, and there has not been a strong tradition of working in partnership with outside organizations. In that regard the existence of the Sports Partnerships has not been of central concern to the sports organizations, and there may be some level of ‘vision doubt’ in regard to the Partnerships. While two of the key goals of the Partnership (partnership and inclusion) are not irrelevant to the sporting organizations neither are they priority. And while the Partnership has been involved with the organizations in regard to the other two key goals (capacity and infrastructure), traditionally each organization has sought to develop its own code independently.

However this questioning of the very existence of the Partnerships was only expressed explicitly once. The point made was that the sporting organization believed it could do inclusion work more effectively if it was given the funding directly by the Government.

#### **Positive encounters to date**

For the great part people with strategic responsibility for the development of their particular sport in the Offaly area were aware of the OSP, had a positive experience of working with the OSP, and had a clear sense of potential for cooperation with the OSP. At the same time there was a sense that this would take effort and initiative, as there is a culture of self-reliance and single focus within the organizations that will have to be overcome.

There is clear feedback from the sports organizations that the contact with the OSP has been positive, and has left them open to further such contact. Key points made here included

- The OSP making a big contribution to the development of a code
- The OSP providing access to socially excluded groups
- The need for cooperation among governing bodies and the OSP
- The need for on-going dialogue, especially with reduced funding all around
- The need to utilize the Partnership more for the promotion of particular codes

#### **Areas for cooperation**

What specific suggestions came for the organizations in regard to working with the OSP? A number of points are apparent in the feedback.

##### **a. Communications**

Essentially this is about building up a culture of dialogue to counter the individualistic culture of the past. While it may result in specific projects, these do not have to be the starting point for discussions.

### **b. Child protection**

This was named explicitly by a number of organizations as a valuable contribution being made to them by the OSP, one they would want to see continued, particularly as it would be expensive if each organization had to do its own training in this area.

### **c. Access to marginal groups**

There is a recognition of the social skills and experience of the OSP, and its value in bringing the sports organisations into contact with groups they would otherwise find hard to access. For the different organisations there are definite geographic and social areas where they feel they need to develop a strategy for gaining access, and they believe the OSP can contribute to this.

### **d. Volunteering**

Building the capacity of volunteers to provide for sustainability is a strong cross-organizational concern. This entails identifying people with a passion for the different codes, and providing training and support for them.

### **e. Promotions**

A number of the organizations named this as an area where they would be glad to receive support from the OSP.

### **f. Non-duplication**

The point here was that the OSP and sports organizations should not be in competition with one another in regard to sports activities. While this point was raised explicitly by one organization it also came through more indirectly from some of the other organizations. They see that their expertise lies in their particular sport, and what they most want from the OSP is complementarity, initiatives that enable the organizations to get on with their own work of promoting their own sport.

## **6.2 Small sports organizations**

### **Support received**

All of the small organizations I made contact with had heard of the OSP and had some contact. But as with the larger organizations it is clear that these groups are primarily focused on getting on with their own business. They identified three areas where they had received support from the OSP - funding, child protection and promotion.

### **Support needed**

On the whole they have no strong agenda or expectations in regard to the OSP. Most of their concerns are around immediate local needs.

But it is also clear that the areas where they have received support continue to be relevant – particularly in regard to grants and child protection.

A number of other specific areas of possible support were named.

- The need for training, to equip volunteers to become trainers themselves

- The need to make the Partnership literature more concise
- The need for training in committee skills

### **6.3 Schools**

As is clear from the programme details above the Partnership invested heavily in the primary schools, and to a lesser extent in 2<sup>nd</sup> level schools.

#### **i. Primary schools**

Feedback from the schools was on the whole very positive and covered the following areas.

##### **Strong appreciation of input of OSP**

There was a general sense of the Sports Hall Athletics (SHA) being well organized and well adapted to school circumstances. Schools reported being very impressed with how it was run. They named it as professional and well organized. They said it engaged the pupils at their own level, that it caught their imagination.

One school found the experience less satisfactory. The research that led to the SHA programme involved extensive measurements of the children's capacity. This required the attendance of the teachers and created a supervision problem for the school.

##### **Recognition of its inclusiveness**

What was appreciated here is that the SHA showed that some of the children have skills outside of the traditional sports. Some with special needs were picked out as skilled in certain areas. This was new for them and it was a big boost to their confidence. Overall the SHA catered for children who are not succeeding in the mainstream sports offered in the schools.

##### **Relevance of the athletics work with the children**

Some of the schools expressed concern that a large number of the children are not active and are over-weight. There is far less natural playing now. Children have to be brought to parks. Activities have to be organized and formalized. This is a big cultural shift. They see a real value in this attempt to measure fitness. It can feed into their own work in the school

##### **Desire for input to continue**

On the whole the schools would be very positive about future interventions like this and very glad to engage with the Partnership again. They appreciated the specialized skills that the Partnership brought in, particularly in primary school where they can't specialize – they have to maintain a wide range of programmes and subjects. One school noted that they weren't able to work with the results of the testing as the children had moved on. They would like to repeat the exercise again, and would be more prepared for a follow up.



### **Desire for some capacity building**

Two points were made here. One that the teachers should be as up-skilled as possible to enable continuity with the activities. Secondly that parents be included as volunteers. There are already good examples of programmes involving parent volunteers in primary schools.

### **ii. Secondary schools**

The Pauline Curley relay marathon was the main initiative in 2<sup>nd</sup> level schools, targeting young women.

### **Positive experience of relay marathon**

The marathon was seen as a good idea. But one teacher spoke of her amazement at the number of girls who turned up for it without having had breakfast. They are so afraid of putting on weight. They didn't know the benefits of nutrition. Another noted that it was more difficult for the participants than expected, and that the boys felt excluded.

### **Ideas going forward**

There was a strong sense that the initiative could be built on for the future, but that it needs to be more focused on the reality of where young women are at in the culture. For one of the teachers the issue that needs to be addressed is life fitness – with a focus on health and appearance. The young women need help to make a connection between fitness and what most concerns them – image. The strategy that is more likely to engage them is sport for leisure, not sport for competition. The key target group needs to be those not involved in competitive sports.

Another felt that the school could have made much better use of the event. Among those from the school who participated and had not been up to then involved in sport, none subsequently stayed involved in sports. But the school would love to do it again. The next time they would include some educational discussions and reflections.

## **6.4 Social organizations**

The broad thrust here is a welcome for the particular sporting skills of the OSP in the community sector. This complements the welcome for their community skills in the sports sector. People in this sector found the OSP to be effective partners, well organized with a capacity to deliver.

### **i. Disability**

As was outlined above the partnership has a full-time member of staff working in the disability sector. She is working to a strategy developed with a sector working group and has a substantial programme of activities. It is clear that this programme is much appreciated in the sector. Beneficiary bodies spoke of her being experienced and very approachable, a good facilitator and well organized. They spoke of her work as being extremely important to the well-being of clients. The OSP is seen to have made a big impact in the disability sector. A number of areas in particular were named.

### **Recognition of relevance of sport to the sector**

Sport is seen as an important means of reactivating people with disability. It is a great way for people to get a social outlet. Physical activity is seen vital for the health of people with mental health difficulties. The activity needs of people with disabilities are seen as the same as for able bodied people – fitness, fun, social contact. But they have less opportunities and there needs to be specific initiatives to engage them. In that regard the OSP has given very valuable services.

### **Desire for continuation of partnership**

This was a strong theme coming through in the sector. There was a recognition of the need for and potential of a partnership approach right across the sector, including the area of sports. Here the sports and partnership skills of the OSP were named and appreciated.

### **Need for sustainability**

There needs to be a training of peer facilitators in groups on the ground so that they are not dependent on an on-going basis on outside support. This would also give more flexibility, in that the needs within the groups and between different groups are so varied.

### **ii. Migrants**

The migrant work described above was evaluated separately. The evaluation summarized the learning from the project as follows

*The reality of migrant life is complex and difficult. Initiatives to foster integration, including sports initiatives, need to begin at local level. Here a partnership approach between community organisations, migrant leaders and sports organisations offers a very fruitful, if slow way forward.*

The evaluation made this recommendation.

*This evaluation considers that the basis of such a partnership now exists in the county, and that the sports initiatives of the last two years played a significant role in bringing this about. The Partnership showed both courage and flexibility in sustaining its integration initiative. It attempted a range of approaches, some highly successful, some not, through which key learnings have been identified in how integration through sports can be practically fostered. In the light of this the key long term role of the Partnership is not that of a direct 'player' on the ground, but of an envisioning, enabling and coordinating body that works primarily to bring the partners together, to support them to plan for what realistically they have the energy and capacity to deliver.*

It recognized the need for a dedicated resource person for this work, perhaps in partnership with other Sports Partnerships. The impact of the economic downturn on migrants and on funding has obviously made this whole area much more difficult.

### **iii. Travellers**

A huge amount of work was undertaken on sports work with Travellers, including research on the sporting interests of Travellers, the training of peer sports facilitators and the development of a Traveller Sports business plan. The funding application for the plan didn't succeed, and this was a major disappointment. But there was still a positive sense

of the initiative in Tullamore Travellers Movement, the local Traveller organization. Sport was seen as a good way of engaging Traveller men. The peer training programme succeeded in connecting with men that didn't connect with any other programme.

Going forward from here there is a desire that Travellers are not excluded from sports, and a view that the best way to achieve this is to mainstream the involvement of Travellers, rather than having all-Traveller initiatives. This means making links with the main sporting organizations.

#### **iv. Older people**

Two points were named here. Firstly the importance of physical activity for older people, and thus the value of the OSP work in that area. Secondly, the need for sustainability of sports activities in groups for older people, through the training of peer facilitators.

#### **v. Some general comments from community sector**

##### **Prioritise and focus on deliverable actions**

Two points were made under this heading. Firstly the need for the OSP to focus more sharply, particularly with a view to sustainability. While holding on to core activities – code of ethics, club development, work with school children, the disability sector, older people - its key work should be to build the capacity within existing organizations to deliver the various programmes themselves.

Secondly, in view of the enormous scope of the work of the OSP, it should not try to be all things to all people. Rather it should prioritize and focus on a limited number of actions where it can really make a difference. The school's project was offered as a good example of this.

##### **Seek to bring added value to existing projects**

It was noted that there are lots of groups and organizations out there already established and sustainable, such as women's groups, residents' groups, the Volunteer Centre, the Rural Development programme. The question was raised as to whether the OSP can link with these to bring added value to their work through sports.

##### **Other**

One person emphasized the need for the Partnership to prioritise the direct delivery of sports solutions rather than focusing on analyses or the engagement of others to do the work. In the overall context of the evaluation, where there is strong emphasis on capacity building, this is a minority view. Another said that there is a need to review Board membership to include facility operators and school representatives.

## 6.5 Staff

### **Work experience**

There is a very positive sense coming through from staff in regard to working in the OSP. What comes across is a team of people who work well together and have strong energy for and commitment to their work.

### **Work priorities**

There is also a clear sense among the staff in regard to the priorities that should be addressed going forward. Some of the points named here include the following:

- The importance of empowerment, the training of trainers
- The need to become familiar with and build good relations with the wide range of organizations in the sector
- The challenge to change people's attitudes about disability and sport, so that disability sport isn't ghettoized.
- The challenge to make strategic interventions to support clubs and low participation groups.
- The need for clarity in regard to who the target groups are and what is to be achieved
- The need to maintain direct action. The sense here is that the OSP cannot always be dependent on other organizations to take necessary initiatives. There will be times when the OSP needs to lead through example.
- The value of the work with children, especially measuring and monitoring their fitness levels on a mass scale as a strategic contribution to sports in the County.
- The need to stay focused on the work of club formation to ensure additional choice for people, particularly in rural areas
- The need to maintain the work in the disability sector, as laid out in the strategic plan developed by the Disability Forum.
- The value of the model of partnership developed with organizations - working groups focused on specific tasks for a defined period.
- The value of general work with national organizations, and the work of linking organizations such as schools with sporting clubs and organizations.

### **Elements of a new strategic plan**

I asked the staff to identify their own sense of what should be included in the next strategic plan in the light of reading a first draft of this evaluation. Their submission is included in the appendices. The key elements they identified are as follows:

1. Support a Culture of Lifelong Involvement in Sport and Physical Activity in Co. Offaly
2. Promote measures for sustaining & mainstreaming the inclusion of Low Participation Target Groups in Sport and Physical Activity within the County
3. Facilitate dialogue between stakeholders to support sustained increases in participation
4. Market Sport and the Sports Partnership inside and outside the county

What comes across strongly in the submission is the sense of the need to be realistic, given the situation in regard to resources. This means that while the overall vision of a vibrant, inclusive sports sector should be maintained as a long-term vision, the mission of the OSP for the duration of the next plan should not be confined to that of the last plan, which was articulated explicitly in terms of the four key action areas, i.e. inclusion, capacity, infrastructure and partnership.

Actions concerned with the strengthening of schools, clubs and communities to deliver quality sporting experiences should be included under the theme 'Lifelong Involvement' which they believe should be *the* priority for the new plan.

- *That is not to say that it would be mutually exclusive of the inclusion measures. We should seek to attain maximum overlap across both themes.*

Here staff are saying that they can target their actions to optimise their impact under both the themes of inclusion and lifelong participation.

## 7. Conclusions

### 7.1 Key patterns emerging for evaluator

The evaluation model outlined at the beginning of this report suggests three levels of critique – operational, priority and vision. I'll take each of those in turn here.

#### **a. Operational doubt – were we doing things right?**

It seems to me that little operational doubt emerges from this evaluation. What comes across very strongly is the quality of the commitment and capacity of the Partnership in regard to how it delivered on its programmes. It is clear that there is a professional ethic in the organization, one that values good planning and delivery. It is clear also that this has been sustained across a wide range of programmes.

One of the factors underpinning this ability to bring a quality delivery to a large quantity of programmes has been the capacity of the organization to marshal dedicated resources into specific areas. It is clear for instance that the success of the work in the disability sector is related to having a dedicated disability worker. Similarly the substantial work done with Travellers couldn't have been achieved without the support of a funded training coordinator. And while the student placement scheme was in place the Partnership's capacity to deliver programmes across the whole county was very substantial.

Another strong theme that emerged at operational level was the ability of the Partnership to foster good working relationships. This was a very strong theme emerging from almost all of the organizations consulted. The Partnership personnel have come across well wherever they have gone, and have generated much good will. While other resources are diminishing in the prevailing economic climate, this is a resource that is increasing, and provides a very positive platform for forward planning from here.

#### **b. Priority doubt – were we doing the right things?**

I think that a number of healthy priority doubts emerge in the evaluation

- **Tension between driving and advocating developments**

It is clear that the primary energy that drives the work of the Partnership is one that seeks to 'walk the talk'. There is a very strong work ethic in the organization, one that translated the vision in 14 objectives, and the objectives into some 75 actions, over two thirds of which were achieved in a period of substantial cut backs in resources. There is a definite sense of leading through doing. And I think there is some level of impatience within the organization in regard to the more narrowly focused sports culture mentioned above. This may underpin the sense that the OSP should lead through example. This indicates some tension between driving developments and advocating developments. One of the ways the Partnership has sought to deal with this is through project-focused, time-bound working groups, which have been promoted as a model of good practice by the Sports Council. But there may be a weakness here too. It seems from the evaluation of sports and social organizations that there is also scope for dialogue in a more general

sense, one not focused exclusively on the delivery of particular projects. In the short-term the outcomes of such dialogue might be hard to measure, and the time given difficult to justify, but it may have a part to play in the overall process of culture change, one that complements the predominant action orientated approach of the Partnership.

▪ **b. Tension between innovative delivery and equipping others to deliver**

This is reflected in fairly widely expressed concerns, both among staff and organizations, about the issue of sustainability. Should the Partnership focus on delivering services or equipping organizations to deliver services? There is a clear sense coming through, and this is reflected in the staff submission, of the value of inputs that promote sustainability, such as the training of trainers, the equipping of peer facilitators and so on. So that the Partnership staff can move on and leave behind them a capacity within organizations to deliver their own sports programmes. But this principle needs to be balanced with another principle that is a strength of the Partnership. That is innovative delivery. It seems to me that there is energy, imagination and capacity in the Partnership in regard to breaking new ground. This necessarily involves hands-on engagement, at least for a period. The work in the schools and the vision for how this could progress, as expressed in an upcoming publication<sup>3</sup> is a good example. It seems to me that if the Partnership is to maintain its energy it needs to retain the scope for ‘direct action’, and such should be part of any strategic plan going forward. But it also needs to keep an eye on longer term sustainability. The evaluation of the migrant sports initiative makes this point.

▪ **Diminishing resources – need for realistic strategy going forward**

This point emerges very clearly. With current resources the Partnership cannot sustain both the quality and quantity of its work in the past. There needs to be a refocusing going forward, identifying a realistic set of objectives with a view to achieving optimal impact. That point comes across strongly in the staff submission. Being faithful to the vision of a vibrant, inclusive and collaborative sports culture doesn’t necessarily entail working to the same foundational objectives as in the last strategic plan.

**c. Vision doubt – Is there any need for the Partnership?**

▪ **Tension of cultures**

It is clear that the vision underpinning the work of the Partnership is enormous, embracing development, inclusion and partnership. There is obviously the need for some agency to hold and advocate a comprehensive vision for the development of sport in any area, and that is the core reason why the Sports Council established the Partnerships. But this sets up a difficulty for the Partnerships in that it represents a substantial challenge to the prevailing sports culture which is focused on particular interests. And that is part of the strength of the sports sector. It is populated by people with a passion for their particular discipline. But it does mean that the Partnerships face a long, slow and difficult challenge of bringing about culture change. On the one hand

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<sup>3</sup> *Visions for Ireland - Pathways for a New Generation*, a provisionally titled compilation from innovative and visionary thinkers on the shape of Irish society and culture in the years and decades to come. Eamonn Henry and James Nolan have a chapter included on their fitness work with children.

working with the particular interests of the organizations, and on the other hand opening them up to the values of inclusion and partnership. That tension is certainly evident in this evaluation.

▪ **Potential for convergence**

As is also evident in the evaluation, the Partnership has considerable energy, imagination and capacity in relation to the overall vision. While it is carrying some priority doubts in regard to how the vision is to be concretised going forward, it is not carrying doubt about the vision itself. Neither is the community sector, and while there is some level of vision doubt in the sports sector, there is also some evidence of a desire for a deepening of a relationship with the Partnership, particularly in view of the shared economic and cultural challenges now apparent across the sports sector.

<b>7.2 Going forward – initial sense of priorities</b>
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1. It is outside the scope and competence of this evaluator to detail what the work programme of the Partnership should be going forward from here. Certain priorities are recommended below. But it seems very clear to me that the staff represent a considerable resource in the determination of the details of that strategy. Their wealth of experience, their commitment and their capacity is evident in the evaluation. Their track record suggests that they have earned the trust of the Board. While it is the task and competence of the Board to make the final decisions on the strategy this evaluation recommends a strong inclusion of staff in the process. The submission from staff in regard to the strategic plan is included here as an important reference.
2. The development of the work with children in primary schools and the articulation of a vision for the future of that work seems to offer a clear example of strategically focused, innovative work that brings added value in a number of ways. Its inclusiveness of all sectors of the community and of all levels of competency, its foundational work on the fitness levels of children means that it makes for a very substantial contribution to both inclusion and capacity building. A very concrete question that should be explored here is how the capacity of the bigger organizations can be availed of for this programme, including that of the GAA.
3. There has obviously been substantial development in the work with the disability sector, including the development of a strategic plan that prioritizes information, access and empowerment. All of the feedback suggests that this needs to be maintained as a key priority going forward.
4. There has been a value in the development of partnership-based working groups to address specific actions with specific target groups where funding can be sourced. While funding opportunities are much reduced now there may be scope in the current climate to explore the question of an initiative for the unemployed, as was recommended recently by Minister Hanafin.
5. The evaluation affirms the work with specific groups such as young women and older people. The question the evaluation raises is how these can be developed with a view



to sustainability. Coming through is a sense of a double strategy. Firstly offering opportunities for capacity building that can enable specific groups to carry sports/activity programmes, and secondly offering a range of options to those groups that have the capacity to sustain them.

6. Innovative delivery should be part of any future mix of Partnership activity. While the evaluation is clear that the Partnership should not be putting all its time and energy into taking direct action there needs to be scope for some such action as a means of opening up new ground. But even here there needs to be a built-in strategy for long-term sustainability.
7. Club development is a core brief of the Partnership. But it is clear that the range and interests of the clubs are very wide, and it is not feasible for the Partnership to be engaged in significant work loads with individual clubs. The evaluation recommends strategic interventions such as has been done with funding advice and child protection. Other possibilities may emerge if a process of dialogue with clubs and organizations is maintained.
8. The final recommendation is that the Partnership would build into its programme some opportunity for structured dialogue that is open to all key social and sports organizations across the county. The danger of exclusively project-based approaches is that the dialogue will be confined to only those organizations relevant to the projects. This may be small meetings with different sectors or it could be something like a single, low-key annual gathering to explore the needs and issues of all the participants. One model worth looking at here is *Open Space*, a facilitated structure that allows participants to name and discuss the issues of their choice, and also to name what action they want to take. This latter could be important if the Partnership wants to avoid being left with unreasonable responsibilities from the discussion outcomes. In this case its role would be confined to bringing people together.

## 8. Appendices

### 8.1 PRIORITY THEMES FOR NEW PLAN – STAFF SUBMISSION

Below are the 4 key themes which the staff of Offaly Sports Partnership feel should be prioritised for the next 5 year Strategic Plan (2011 – 2015 inclusive) –

1. Support a Culture of Lifelong Involvement in Sport and Physical Activity in Co. Offaly (**Abbreviate: A Lifelong Involvement in Sport**)
2. Promote measures for sustaining & mainstreaming the inclusion of Low Participation Target Groups in Sport and Physical Activity within the County (**Abbreviate: Sustainable Inclusion**)
3. Facilitate dialogue between stakeholders to support sustained increases in participation (**Abbreviate: Dialogue to increase participation**)
4. Market Sport and the Sports Partnership inside and outside the county (**Abbreviate: Market Sport**)

The themes proposed are based on the existing long term vision of the Partnership (in particular the first two<sup>4</sup>). However as a staff team we feel the current Mission of the Partnership is based on the first strategic plan and as such should be changed.

#### **Rationale for the four themes**

In discussing the priority themes staff considered the four themes of the first plan, what changes or amendments, if any, were needed and the order of priority.

#### *Existing Themes (2008 – 2010 Plan)*

The existing four themes, in order of priority are –

- Promoting inclusion
- Building capacity
- Sustainable infrastructure
- Developing partnership

#### *Assessing existing themes and determining new themes*

##### *Theme 1*

On the first theme (**promoting inclusion**) it was felt that this has been our most successful measure to date and ongoing Sports Council funding will require us to continue to use a targeted approach. On the other hand, the issue of sustainability and work load with specific groups came through in the external review and at our team discussions. It was also felt that our work of increasing participation has to be focused on the entire population of the county and across all life stages. In the final analysis, staff felt that the “promoting inclusion” theme be changed to “**sustainable inclusion**” to take

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<sup>4</sup> The third theme is based primarily on the findings from the independent review, while the fourth theme is reflective of C&E sections being required to take a more leading role in economic development and the desire to move forward on the building partnership measure of the first plan

account of the need to better plan our actions with target groups keeping sustainability or mainstreaming outcomes to the fore.

### *Theme 2*

On the second theme (**building capacity**) we were conscious that the external review spoke about us working in separate worlds to the general sports sector. We also felt that it was over presumptuous to believe that the Partnership, with its limited resources, was in a position to substantially increase capacity in the sports sector. We do believe that we have a role to play to continue to deliver the supports contained in our first plan, particularly to smaller clubs and minority sports. However we felt that our key role is to increase participation across all stages of life, both through various programmes and through influencing the range of stakeholders we come into contact with. Our focus needs include schools, clubs and with community organisations. A statistic of note is contained in the Irish Sports Council's own participation strategy. It sets a target of a 1% increase in adult participation rates per annum (excluding walking). To attain such an increase in Co. Offaly it will be necessary for over 500 "new adults" per annum to engage in sport or physical activity and to continue to do so. We therefore believe that the "building capacity" theme should be replaced with a theme of "**Lifelong Involvement in Sport**" which promotes different initiatives at various stages in the life cycle. Actions concerned with the strengthening of schools, clubs and communities to deliver quality sporting experiences should continue to be included under **this theme** which we believe **should be the priority for the new plan**. That is not to say that it would be mutually exclusive of the inclusion measures. We should seek to attain maximum overlap across both themes.

### *Theme 3*

On the third theme (**sustainable infrastructure**) we were conscious that accessing facilities, particularly indoor access in winter months, remain an issue in Co. Offaly. We were also conscious that in the absence of Sports Capital funding and a national facilities strategy framework, Offaly Sports Partnership is limited in the interventions and supports it can offer. However this may change in the lifetime of the plan. We recommend removing "sustainable infrastructure" as a key theme for the next strategic plan but keeping it as a sub theme under another measure ("e.g. lifelong involvement"). In this way we can make an annual commitment to monitor the changing environment in relation to facilities and to inform and advise our sports sector accordingly.

Based on the findings of the external review we are recommending a new theme ("**Dialogue to increase participation**"). The review indicates openness on the part of a number of stakeholders for further dialogue. Our working groups approach in the first plan was also generally positive. By including such a theme we will make a commitment to have some form of annual dialogue or convene at least one working group to explore a particular topic. When convening such groups there should be a reasonable chance of a successful outcome.

#### *Theme 4*

The fourth theme (“**Developing Partnership**”) was largely concerned with establishing our corporate identity, our internal workings and the promotion of a partnership approach to sports development. While we have been largely successful on the first two areas of work, there is still room to better market ourselves and to make our identity known. The area of partnership working would be best incorporated under the theme of “dialogue” as this remains a relatively new approach to sports development. We should also look at the scope for better marketing our programmes internally and also marketing sport in Offaly externally as a strategy for promoting our county. Thus we recommend a fourth theme of “**Marketing Sport**”

## **8.2 List of organizations contacted for evaluation**

1. GAA (provincial and county)
2. Rugby (regional)
3. FAI (regional)
4. Edenderry coarse angling
5. Clara Town Boys Soccer
6. Birr Active Retirement group
7. Boyneside Tug of War club
8. Wolftrap cycling club
9. Boora badminton
10. Birr Athletics
11. Cloghan boxing club
12. Tullamore GAA
13. Tullamore Harriers
14. Lumcloon NS
15. St. Joseph's NS
16. Scoil Mhuire
17. Killana Secondary School
18. Sacred heart Secondary school
19. Offaly Centre for Independent Living
20. Irish Wheelchair Association
21. Shine (Mental health organisation)
22. HSE
23. Tullamore Travellers Movement
24. Offaly Integrated Development Company
25. Offaly Community Forum
26. Board of Partnership
27. Partnership staff