

**A REVIEW OF IRELAND'S PREPARATION
FOR AND PERFORMANCES IN THE
ATHENS 2004 OLYMPIC AND
PARALYMPIC GAMES**

**PREPARED FOR THE IRISH SPORTS COUNCIL BY
WHARTON CONSULTING**

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DISCLAIMER

This report has been prepared on the basis of the limitations set out in Section 3 (especially 3.11ff.). While every effort has been made to check and validate information which has been provided to us, we cannot be held responsible for errors arising directly or indirectly from incorrect or misleading information supplied to us. Similarly, while we have attempted to conduct widespread research as a basis for this report, we cannot be held responsible for oversights and omissions within the scope of that research, or for the direct or indirect consequences of those oversights and omissions.

We have carried out this review and prepared this report in accordance with the terms of reference provided to us which are set out in Section 3, and on the basis that we are responsible solely to the commissioning agency (the Irish Sports Council) for the research work and for any advice contained in the report. We shall under no circumstances be under any liability to any other party other than the Irish Sports Council for whatever you may or may not do in reliance on this report. Any other information and advice given in relation to this review will be on the same basis.

1. Chairman's foreword

The purpose of this report is to assess the performance of the Irish teams at the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Athens in 2004. In addition, it reviews the extent to which the recommendations from the Sydney Review were implemented and assesses the role and performance of the relevant sporting bodies and agencies. Finally, a series of recommendations are proposed based upon these assessments and taking into account a review of international best practice.

Significant improvements have taken place in the delivery of support systems to athletes in the build-up to the Athens Games as a consequence of the implementation of many of the recommendations of the Sydney Review. The nature of the relationship between the various key agencies has, properly, moved to a new and more constructive level. These relationships must be built upon for the future, particularly in the preparation for Beijing in 2008.

It is a key conclusion of this report that investment in the development of elite athletes should continue. While the level of investment in sport by Government has grown significantly since 1998, a comprehensive strategy to support elite athletes commenced in 2002, two years in advance of the Athens Games. The lessons from other countries which are engaged in similar strategies longer than Ireland are informative. The focus of support is highly targeted, the performance of athletes who are being supported is monitored closely, the national governing body structures are being professionalised, world-class coaches are being retained, and comprehensive systems of sports medicine and science are being delivered to targeted sports people. To achieve this, investment needs to be maintained over a number of Olympic cycles.

The report recommends that many of the processes put in place for the Athens Games should continue for the Beijing Games, the focus of investment should be narrowed, and that the establishment of structures for an Institute of Sport should now be acted upon.

There is a public expectation that, as a consequence of the level of investment in elite sports, there should be a visible return. This is most obviously measured in terms of medals won. It is the recommendation of this report that the "process" objective should be to see six to nine Irish athletes reach the finals in their respective disciplines at each of the Games, with the expectation that over time this will yield an average of two medals at each Olympics and four to five medals at the Paralympics. There can be no guarantee of success, but it is clear that if the investment is not made and if continued improvements are not delivered in support systems, Irish athletes will not be capable of performing at the highest level and the stated objectives will become increasingly difficult to achieve.

I would like to express my thanks to the individual members of the Review Committee for their commitment and contribution to this process. Many athletes provided direct feedback which was vital to this review. A wide range of organisations including the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism, the Irish Sports Council, the Olympic Council of Ireland, the Paralympic Council of Ireland, the National Coaching and Training Centre, many national governing bodies of sport, and the media, contributed with great interest their views and experiences, to the benefit of the report. On behalf of the Review Committee I would like to express our thanks to Wharton Consulting who prepared this report at our request. Finally, I would like to convey our thanks to members of the staff of the ISC, in particular Austin Mallon and Kathryn Gallagher, who supported the work of the Committee with great efficiency and skill.

We commend to all of the relevant bodies the implementation of the recommendations contained in this report.

Dan Flinter
Chairman
January 2005

2. Summary of key conclusions and recommendations

(a) Games performances

2.1 In terms of the targets which individual sports set for themselves at the Olympic Games, only two of the nine sports came close to fulfilling their own stated expectations: rowing achieved its primary aim of qualifying two crews for the Games, while sailing achieved one of its six outcome targets. However, these two sports would also rank among those who could be said to have underperformed against potential in Athens – together with athletics and boxing.

2.2 In terms of medal outputs the 2004 Athens Olympic Games saw Ireland maintain its success rate from previous Games, and its overall position in the medal table from Sydney in 2000. In addition to the gold medal won, there were also notable individual performances in athletics, cycling, shooting and showjumping – while the number of athletes who exceeded their world ranking also gives cause for cautious optimism.

2.3 What is suggested by the calculation of outcome performance against sports' preparations and predictions is as follows:

- In preparation for the Olympic Games, some sports' performance programmes included too many athletes who were unlikely to qualify
- The outcome targets set by many sports were arguably overambitious

2.4 Almost paradoxically, the Irish Paralympic team won fewer medals in Athens than in Sydney, but can still be said to have performed well. Pitched against an increasing number of larger nations who have invested intensively in Paralympic programmes, inside a smaller and much more competitive environment, Ireland's return of four medals was to its great credit.

2.5 There were particular Paralympic successes in athletics and swimming, while the lone cyclist and one of the sailing crews performed extremely well against their world rankings. Where there were disappointments, they were found in boccia, football and the other sailing class, each of which presented unfulfilled medal prospects.

(b) Comparison with other nations

2.6 Consideration of the global context in which Ireland is competing, and the experiences of comparator nations, suggests that the following are elements of good practice in high performance systems:

- Substantial, sustained and planned investment across a number of Olympic/Paralympic cycles
- Focused investment, which targets those sports in which improvement and outcomes are most likely
- A parallel emphasis on talent identification and the development of potential, alongside performance support
- A support system which encompasses all areas which are contingent upon high performance – including coach education, sports science and medicine, lifestyle support, facilities development, etc.
- The creation of sound systems of governance and management are important counterparts of the development of high performance support systems
- Processes of change management, which assist stakeholders in effecting the necessary culture change

2.7 The nations against which Ireland is competing at international level have historic and longstanding records of investment in such systems. This means that, notwithstanding recent and substantial levels of its own Government investment, Ireland suffers by comparison. The specific outcome is that Ireland currently has the Olympic performance record of a nation

much weaker than it is in socio-economic terms – both in respect of achieving medal success, and in its strength of performance across a range of sports.

(c) *The Sydney Review recommendations*

2.8 It has been a principal task of this review to assess the extent to which the 29 recommendations contained in the Sydney Review Report were implemented. In doing so, it should be noted that these recommendations were made solely in the context of the Olympic sports, and their impact on the performance of the Irish Olympic team in Athens; they had no Paralympic point of reference.

2.9 Those 29 recommendations fell into three principal categories – thus:

- Those concerned with strategic scene-setting, and partnership-building among the key players
- Those which were Athens-specific, concerned with improving the preparations for and practicalities surrounding the Irish team at the Olympic Games
- Those concerned with the establishment of a high performance system in Ireland

2.10 These categories reflect the state of play which surrounded the Irish Olympic campaign for 2000. Interviewees suggested that this was thoroughly dysfunctional and marked by the following, *inter alia*:

- Profound relationship difficulties between the various stakeholder groups, especially between the Irish Sports Council (ISC) and the Olympic Council of Ireland (OCI)
- A variety of team management issues within the Irish Olympic camp, which led to a high level of discontent among the athletes
- An absence of structured performance planning and preparation in the build-up to the Games, from both the national governing bodies of sport and the OCI

2.11 Examination and assessment of each of the recommendations leads to the summary conclusion that each one has been addressed in whole or part. As a result, the following developments have taken place within Irish sport:

- The partnerships that were considered necessary by the Sydney Review, and the strategic background, are now in place
- The immediate environment surrounding the Irish team in preparation for and at the Olympic Games has much improved
- The high performance system for Olympic and Paralympic sports in Ireland is in its first phase of development

2.12 That this is so represents a sea-change from the aftermath of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games – for which much credit is due to those who have worked through the issues which required redress. What has emerged four years later is a situation which provides a solid platform for further development, especially in respect of the establishment of the high performance system.

2.13 It should, however, be stated that not all of the recommendations have been fully implemented – nor has the spirit behind them been properly observed. Quantitative solutions have been applied in some cases, and not qualitative ones.

(d) *The major stakeholder organisations*

2.14 It has been a further task for this review to assess the role, contribution, effectiveness and outputs of each of the major stakeholder organisations in preparing the Irish teams for the Olympic and Paralympic Games, and for their participation. Those organisations are the Irish Sports Council, the Olympic Council of Ireland, the Paralympic Council of Ireland (PCI), the national governing bodies of sport, and the National Coaching and Training Centre (NCTC).

2.15 In respect of the ISC:

- The investment decisions which the ISC has taken in the delivery of those strategies have been entirely sound:
 - The successor to the Athens Enhancement Programme (AEP) requires a longer-term and more holistic approach which links it to the supporting developmental infrastructure within sports
 - The International Carding Scheme (ICS) requires a review which will narrow its focus, enhance its systems of accountability, and tighten the links between athletes, their governing bodies, and service providers
- The ISC's performance strategies require review, especially to quantify and specify their desired outcomes
- The internal processes through which the ISC manages high performance require review and additional resource, in order that the functions which it wishes to be fulfilled may be effectively delivered

2.16 In respect of the OCI, it can be stated to have made substantial progress in return for the investment which the ISC has made in it over the past four years. Areas remain in which its planning, preparation and Games-specific operations can be improved; these improvements should be prioritised for delivery over the next four years.

2.17 In respect of the PCI, it can also be stated to have made substantial and positive progress in return for the investment that the ISC has made in it over the past two years. There are numbers of matters of detail which need to be addressed, which process can be conducted from the platform that has been established to date.

2.18 In respect of the national governing bodies of sport:

- Some responded very positively to the institution of the AEP, both management and athletes, and conducted thorough and effective performance programmes; others were less responsive
- The first phase of the development of a high performance culture has been completed, which comprises the foundation for future development – thus:
 - Performance plans have been produced and delivered, and lessons learned
 - Professional staff have been appointed, and have the experience of completing an Olympic cycle
- Culture change is still required, especially among volunteers and athletes, to ensure that the principles of performance professionalism can be fully embraced

2.19 In respect of the NCTC, it is clear that the calibre of individuals working within the NCTC is high, and that their work in support of national governing bodies and their athletes is generally well received. However, the structure and/or system within which they are working are not considered to be wholly efficient or effective. The core elements of this are as follows:

- The exceptionally wide brief of the NCTC – spanning athlete development, coach and volunteer education, sports science and medicine, and residential services
- Deficiencies within the prioritisation of these functions, which have led to the NCTC over-reaching itself and its resources
- The consequent sub-optimal delivery of key services: in the attempt to do everything, not enough is done thoroughly

2.20 In particular, the burden of the treble function of demand generator, supply co-ordinator, and supply deliverer is insupportable. This suggests that a fresh look at the role and responsibilities of the NCTC may now be appropriate. Such an exercise should not throw away the experience of the past four years, or the expertise developed by those who have been part of it. However, the recommendation of the High Performance Strategy that there should be a network of sports science and medicine provision for elite athletes in other selected locations in Ireland remains to be delivered: serious consideration should now be applied to how that network might emerge out of what is currently in place.

(e) *Key recommendations*

2.21 In response to the findings as summarised above, a series of recommendations are made for future implementation. These concentrate especially upon the delivery of Olympic and Paralympic finalists – otherwise stated as athletes ranked in the world's top eight or ten – with a view to achieving two or three Olympic medals, and four to five Paralympic medals, on a consistent and repeatable basis

2.22 In order to fulfil these targets, the recommendations of this report include the following:

- The continuation of Government investment in high performance Olympic and Paralympic sport
- Investment in the high performance system with the specific aims of generating:
 - Outputs/impact – the fielding of finalists, the winning of medals
 - Sustainability – deepening and optimising talent pools
 - Quality processes – of governance and management
- A focus for performance funding and support on those sports which offer natural and national resources and advantages, a track record of success, and the capacity and willingness to deliver the desired outcomes
- A requirement on the governing bodies of those sports to deliver complementary and holistic athlete, coach, official and facility development programmes, and high-quality systems of governance and management
- Sport-by-sport performance planning for the next four years which attends especially to the home training environment of the athletes, and the provision of world-class coaching expertise
- An individual athlete support system which prioritises likely Olympians and Paralympians, and especially those with the potential to be finalists; and which engages these within coach-led and fully accountable development programmes
- The continuation of the collaborative working which has been instituted between the ISC and the OCI and PCI
- The establishment of structures for an Irish Institute of Sport, to deliver optimal support services for Olympic and Paralympic athletes and sports, and to form the basis of a long-term and sustainable high performance infrastructure – taking into account the experiences of and the expertise within the NCTC

2.23 Recommendations specific to the OCI and PCI include the following:

- The OCI should review and strengthen its operations in the specific areas of:
 - The professionalisation of its administration, including and especially through the appointment of a Chief Executive Officer
 - Qualitative planning
 - Qualification and selection processes, policies and deadlines
 - Role definition for support staff
 - Team Manager training
 - Multisport training and holding camps – especially their purposes, and levels of attendance
 - Communications within the Olympic Village
 - Team spirit
 - Media management
- The PCI should review and strengthen its operations in the specific areas of:
 - The early preparation of athletes
 - Sports science and medicine services which are both sport- and disability-specific, and the receptivity of athletes to these
 - Team Manager training
 - The selection of a training/holding camp venue
 - Role definition for, and the balance of, support staff
 - Kit and equipment
- There should be enhanced levels of collaboration between the OCI and PCI, within specific programmes of development which address both the unique challenges in

prospect for the 2008 Beijing Games, and the areas identified for improvement by this review

3. Brief, and methodology

3.1 At the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, Ireland finished 64th in the medal table, with one silver medal. At the Sydney 2000 Paralympic Games, Ireland finished 31st in the medal table, with a creditable five gold medals, three silvers and one bronze. The Olympic performance was perceived by the public to be a disappointment, representing a significant downturn from the previous Games in 1992 in Barcelona (32nd in the medal table) and in 1996 in Atlanta (28th in the medal table).

3.2 In response to these performances, and at the request of the then Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation, a review was commissioned by the Irish Sports Council and conducted with the support of Leisure Partners Ltd. This review had the following terms of reference:

3.2.1 To examine the performance of the key players and their role in the preparation, support and selection of Ireland's team in the 2000 Games;

3.2.2 To consider the appropriateness and effectiveness of the procedures, arrangements and schemes which applied to the preparation, support and selection of the team, and the relationships between the many agencies involved in the preparation and participation of the team, with these aspects to be compared with international practice;

3.2.3 To identify the particular factors which contributed to or impacted upon the team's performance in Sydney.

3.3 The review report was published in February 2001, and made 29 recommendations which were phased over four specific time periods, from March 2001 until the 2004 Athens Olympic and Paralympic Games. Those recommendations set out a new vision for the systems and structures impacting upon Ireland's preparation for the Olympic and Paralympic Games, and required a comprehensive overhaul of what was previously in place. In particular there was a requirement for:

- The establishment of a High Performance Committee, by way of partnership between the ISC, OCI, PCI, the NCTC, governing bodies of sport and other relevant agencies, to focus on the definition and delivery of support services, including sports science and medicine
- The production of athlete-focused performance plans by the national governing bodies of sport, which looked at the identification and development of athletes, and their preparation for qualification for Athens
- The review and professionalisation of the functions and operations of the OCI, in order to discharge its responsibilities under the statutes of the OCI and the Olympic Charter
- The planning and development of the Ireland team management and support staff, coaching and preparation programmes, sports science/medicine and lifestyle services, and logistical and operational practices, through the pre-Athens Olympic cycle

3.4 The review followed hard on the heels of the ISC's strategy document, "A New Era for Sport", which set out objectives for the years 2000-02. The document contained the vision that Ireland should be a country in which Irish sportsmen and women achieve consistent standards of excellence – for which it was acknowledged that a structured approach was necessary.

3.5 In April 2001 the High Performance Committee met for the first time. The Committee's first priority was to produce a High Performance Strategy, which was launched in December 2001. The strategy had six major thrusts, as follows:

- Build Irish sports policy, resources and competencies
- Create the Irish Institute of Sport national performance network and services

- Build real excellence in coaching
- Invest in effective national governing body structures
- Establish clear pathways to the top
- Communication, promotion, research and development

3.6 Within these broad strategic headings, the key conclusions of the strategy included the following:

- That the strategy should be athlete-centred, and develop pathways from the grassroots to elite levels
- That resources should be targeted at those sports and athletes who show the most potential
- That there should be significant investment in coaching, the deployment of paid coaches, and the attraction of the world's best coaching talent to Ireland
- That there should also be investment in the technical and administrative skills of the governing bodies of sport, and the Olympic and Paralympic Councils of Ireland
- That performance committees should be established for both the Olympic and Paralympic programmes
- That funds should be identified early to support the Athens campaign

3.7 In July 2004 the ISC commissioned a further review, to produce an objective assessment of the preparation and performance of the Irish teams at the 2004 Athens Olympic and Paralympic Games. This assessment was to identify the strengths and weaknesses of all aspects of the programmes over the course of the four-year cycle, with a view to making recommendations regarding the development of programmes for the 2008 Beijing Olympic and Paralympic Games.

3.8 The terms of reference for the review were:

- To assess the extent to which the 29 recommendations contained in the Sydney Review Report were implemented in the context of the Olympic sports and the impact on the performance of the Irish team in Athens
- To appraise the effectiveness of the programmes of preparation delivered by the national governing bodies of sport, and the quality of debriefs following the Games
- To review the effectiveness of the workings of the Olympic Performance Committee and the Paralympic Performance Committee as the two key bodies responsible for overseeing the Olympic and Paralympic programmes
- To evaluate the quality and delivery mechanisms of the athlete support services, especially relating to sports science and medicine
- To assess the roles of the key agencies involved in the preparation and participation of the Irish Olympic and Paralympic teams, namely the ISC, the OCI, the PCI, the NCTC, and the national governing bodies of sport
- To identify key priority outcomes and make recommendations for inclusion into programmes of preparation for the cycle leading up to the 2008 Beijing Olympic and Paralympic Games

3.9 At the end of July 2004 Wharton Consulting was commissioned to conduct this review on the ISC's behalf. The project was overseen by a Steering Group, which was attended from time to time by:

- Dan Flinter (Chair)
- Maurice Aherne – ISC
- John Treacy – ISC
- Tom Rafter – OCI
- Dermot Sherlock – OCI
- Tony Guest – PCI
- Con Haugh – DAST
- Michael Carruth – former athlete
- Austin Mallon – ISC (Secretary)

- Kathryn Gallagher – ISC (Secretary)

3.10 It was agreed by the Steering Group that the methodology for the project should comprise the following principal elements:

- Desk research – to ensure familiarity with all relevant strategies, plans and other documentation, including the Sydney Review, the ISC’s strategy documents and High Performance Strategy, the OCI’s “Perform” magazine, national governing bodies’ performance plans, the websites of relevant organisations, etc.
- Face-to-face and telephone interviews with:
 - Representatives, both non-executive and executive, of the ISC, OCI, PCI, NCTC, and the Department for Arts, Sport and Tourism
 - Staff and athletes from the Irish Olympic team
 - Staff and athletes from the national governing bodies of the Olympic and Paralympic sports – to include:
 - Senior governing body personnel (executives and non-executives)
 - Staff who had had responsibility for performance planning/management
 - Staff who had accompanied the Irish Olympic team to the Games
 - Other relevant individuals internal and external to Ireland who may be able to provide an informed perspective on the preparation and performance of Ireland’s Olympic and Paralympic teams
- Athlete questionnaires, to canvass the opinions of Olympic, Paralympic and other international athletes on the issues germane to the review
- Athlete forums, to test the outcomes of the athlete questionnaires through the medium of selected panels of athletes
- A Team Manager’s questionnaire, delivered to the Team Managers of Paralympic sports
- A comparator review, to assess Ireland’s performance against other sporting nations of similar size
- A best practice review, to compare Ireland’s preparation programme with that of other comparable sporting nations

3.11 The timeframe over which the report was to be conducted was the four months from the end of July/beginning of August until December 2004. This timeframe therefore included the period of both the Olympic and Paralympic Games. While this was helpful in allowing the opportunity to observe the events unfolding “live”, it meant that numbers of potential interviewees were unavailable for a large part of the project period.

3.12 Within those constraints, the methodology was fulfilled to best effect within the timeframe available. A full schedule of the 69 individuals who were consulted within the project is included at Appendix A: in the most part, the proposal to contact these particular individuals came from the Steering Group.

3.13 The athlete questionnaires attracted a response rate of 43.75 per cent among Olympic athletes (total 21), and 37.5 per cent among Paralympic athletes (total 15). The former response was supplemented by a further nine questionnaires returned by able-bodied athletes who had not attended the Olympic Games, but who had participated in the preparation programme. In respect of this data, the following points are made:

- These percentages are not high, especially when compared with the 58.82 per cent response rate on the Sydney Review. Reasons why this may have been so include the following:
 - The athletes participated in at least two parallel reviews following the Athens Games, which may have tried their patience and affected their willingness to provide data (see 8.71.4 below)
 - There was less to complain about in Athens than there had been in Sydney – therefore the athletes’ enthusiasm to contribute to the review was diminished
- While the response rate is somewhat disappointing, it does provide indicative data with which to work

- In view of these response rates, allowances must be factored into the analysis of results which cater for error or imbalance occasioned by high numbers of respondents from a particular sport, or unrepresentative viewpoints being expressed by a small number of athletes

3.14 The conclusions of the Olympic questionnaire were tested and validated by means of an athlete forum conducted on Wednesday 3 November, and attended by eight Olympic athletes from seven different sports. There was a further athlete forum staged on Monday 22 November, which was attended by six athletes from six different sports who did not qualify for the Olympic Games but who were none the less able to give opinions on the effectiveness of the preparation programme.

3.15 A draft report was circulated to the Steering Group upon which written and verbal comments were invited from the key stakeholder organisations. Specifically, those organisations were asked to identify:

- Areas wherein the contents of the draft were materially incorrect
- Areas wherein the conclusions drawn by the draft were based on incomplete or misinterpreted data

3.16 An undertaking was given that such areas would be corrected and revised during the reworking of the draft. However, in areas where the draft was based on full and accurate data, whose interpretation was subjectively questioned by consultees, there was no undertaking given that revision would be made.

3.17 Following receipt of such comments, and the completion of the data-gathering exercise, a final draft report was produced which was reviewed, amended and approved for publication by the Steering Group in January 2005.

4. Ireland's performance at the 2004 Athens Olympic Games

(a) *The team*

4.1 Ireland's 2004 Olympic team comprised 49 athletes in nine different sports. This compares with the 68 athletes in ten different sports who attended the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games. The smaller team is a reflection of both stringent selection criteria, and rising performance standards on a global basis.

4.2 The team won one medal – a gold, in showjumping. This was the first equestrian medal ever won by Ireland at the Olympic Games. However, at the time of the preparation of this report, this medal was in dispute as a result of a positive drug test given by the horse concerned.

4.3 In the previous three Olympic Games Ireland won two medals in Barcelona in 1992 (gold and silver), four medals in Atlanta in 1996 (three gold, one bronze), and one medal in Sydney (silver). The 2004 performance maintains Ireland's average medal haul at "modern" Olympic Games since 1960, which is one.

4.4 On the strength of the showjumping gold medal, Ireland finished in equal 54th place in the medal table, as calculated by the number of gold medals won. In the medal table calculated by the number of medals (any colour) won, Ireland finished in equal 64th place. This more or less maintains Ireland's position in the medal table since Sydney (64th), as calculated by the number of gold medals won.

4.5 To look at other performance indicators:

- The number of athletes per medal won was 49. This statistic might otherwise be expressed as medals per athlete, a 1:49 ratio, which gives a strike rate of 2 per cent
 - Depending upon selection policies, the athletes-per-medal figure will ideally be low and, optimally, 1. A low number will signify that a large proportion of the athletes who qualified for and participated in the Games achieved medal success
 - A 1:1 ratio, or a 100 per cent strike rate, will never be achieved. For a sense of what other nations are achieving, one might usefully examine comparative athletes-per-medal ratios for Denmark, which is 1:11.25; for New Zealand, 1:33.8; and for Great Britain, 1:11.83 (see 6.40 below)
- The average number of medals won per sport was 1:9 – a strike rate of 11 per cent
 - Ideally, the medals-per-sport figure will be as close to 100 per cent as possible and, optimally, over 100. This will signify that a large proportion of the individual sports governing bodies which qualified athletes to participate in the Games produced medal-winners
 - Again, in acknowledgement that this ideal will never be achieved, the comparative strike rates for other nations are, for Denmark, 50 per cent; for New Zealand, 28 per cent; and for Great Britain, 130 per cent (see again 6.40 below).
- No athletes achieved personal bests, where such marks were measurable
- Only one athlete achieved a season's best, where such marks were measurable:
 - The production of numbers of personal or season's bests may show that Olympic athletes have structured their preparation effectively so that they peak at the time of the Games
 - However, this statement must be modulated by the following riders:
 - In some events, tactical considerations will override the need for maximal performances
 - The environmental conditions in Athens were not ideal for the production of maximal performances
- Eight athletes produced performances which surpassed their world rankings, where such were identifiable:

- It should be noted, however, that nations are limited in the number of competitors which they may field in individual events in the Olympic Games. In this respect, then, performances against world rankings may be a false indicator, as not all competitors who feature in the world rankings may be present at the Games

(b) *Sport by sport*

(i) Athletics

4.6 The Olympic athletics team comprised 14 athletes across 12 events. Of these, eight were track athletes, four were road athletes (i.e., walkers), and two were field athletes. This compared with the 36 athletes who had qualified for the Sydney Games – 27 track, four road and five field.

4.7 Irish athletics over the last ten Olympic Games had produced two medals, in 1984 and, most recently, in 2000. The sport's performance programme in 2003 embraced 18 individual athletes and two relay squads, and the original medal target which it set for itself in advance of the Athens Games was two, subsequently revised to one. Other targets were to qualify three athletes for their event finals, and four for semi-finals.

4.8 The actual performance of the Irish Olympic athletics team included the following headline elements:

- Two athletes reached the finals of their event through qualification
- One other athlete reached the semi-final of his event through qualification
- No athlete recorded a personal best performance, and only one athlete recorded a season's best
- Three athletes withdrew from their event through injury – one as a victim of a car accident while in Athens. One of these athletes represented arguably Ireland's best chance of a medal, in the women's 20km walk
- One athlete was disqualified from his event, and one failed to finish
- One selected athlete was withdrawn from the Irish Olympic team as a result of failing a drug test in advance of the Games

(ii) Boxing

4.9 Boxing is considered to be a strong event for Ireland, as a result of its previous medal success at the Olympic Games of 1952, 1956, 1964, 1980 and 1992. However, following the break-up of the Soviet Union, the process of qualifying boxers out of Europe for the Olympic Games has become considerably more arduous – meaning that the circumstances in which that historical success was achieved were wholly different to the present.

4.10 Ireland qualified one boxer for the 2004 Games – as had also been the case in Sydney in 2000. This was from a performance programme which supported ten potential Olympians, of whom it was hoped that two would qualify and go on to win medals.

4.11 Ireland's sole representative – a middleweight – won his first-round contest on points, but was then eliminated from the competition in the second round, on a count-back.

(iii) Canoeing

4.12 Irish canoeing's performance programme supported a squad of nine athletes in advance of the Olympic Games, of whom it was hoped that four would qualify and finish in the top 15 in their event. These targets were set against a previous track record of no medals won in Olympic Games, and a total of three canoeists qualifying in 2000.

4.13 In the event, two canoeists qualified for Athens in the K1 Kayak Slalom event, one male and one female. The former did not progress from the heats, finishing 21st; the latter, who had

also competed in Sydney, reached the semi-finals stage, wherein she finished 11th. The female athlete thus exceeded her world ranking of 18th, while the male athlete fell short of his world ranking of ninth.

(iv) Cycling

4.14 There were four Irish cyclists who qualified for the Olympic Games, two in the men's road race, and a male and a female mountain biker. This was from an original performance squad of 28 cyclists, which was later revised to 17. Five cyclists had previously represented Ireland in Sydney, but no cycling medals had ever been won. There were no predictions that medals would be won in Athens, either.

4.15 The Olympic performance targets which were set were to finish one cyclist in the top 12, and nine in the top 20. In the event, only one of the road racers finished, in a highly creditable 13th place, against a world ranking of 496; while the mountain bikers finished 23rd and 30th against world rankings of 32nd and 44th respectively.

(v) Equestrianism

4.16 The Irish Olympic equestrian team comprised ten athlete/horse combinations – five three-day eventers, four showjumpers, and one entrant in the dressage. This compared with the seven horsemen and women who were in Sydney – six three-day eventers and one dressage rider.

4.17 Ireland had no track record of Olympic equestrian success. Its performance programme in the lead-up to the Games included 25 riders, and set the targets of achieving team medals in both the eventing and showjumping, and two dressage riders in the top 15.

4.18 Showjumping provided Ireland's only medal success at the Athens 2004 Olympic Games (but see 4.2 above). The other results for the team were:

- In the showjumping individual event, one equal fifth and one equal 19th
- The showjumping team finished seventh
- The eventing team finished eighth
- The individual eventers finished 21st, 23rd, 32nd, 49th and 62nd
- The dressage rider finished 50th

(vi) Rowing

4.19 Two lightweight men's crews qualified for the Olympic Games – a coxless four and a double sculls – as opposed to the one which competed in Sydney. This fulfilled one of the performance targets which the sport had set for itself in advance of the Games, within a performance programme which included 15 male rowers and three female rowers.

4.20 It was further anticipated that both qualifying boats would win medals – a projection which was supported by an impressive performance by the double sculls at the previous World Championships. Had these latter targets been fulfilled, they would have been the first rowing medals ever won by Ireland at the Olympic Games.

4.21 In the event, the double sculls failed to reach the final of their event, having experienced problems making the weight prior to the semi-final, in which they finished fourth. Meanwhile, the coxless four did reach their final, in which they finished sixth.

(vii) Sailing

4.22 The six classes into which Irish sailors qualified in Athens were as many as had ever been contested at the Olympic Games – with only one class which was supported through the performance programme missing out. Nine of the 19 sailors originally identified for support through the sport's performance programme qualified for Athens.

4.23 No medals were projected, although popular expectations were high following a bronze medal in the Finn class at the previous World Championships. Instead, the targets were for three boats in the top five, one in the top ten, one in the top 15, and one in the top 20.

4.24 Ireland had won one sailing medal in the previous 40 years, a silver in 1980. Meanwhile, just three crews had made it through to the Sydney Games – each of which made a repeat appearance in Athens, albeit with one change of personnel in the Star class.

4.25 In the event, one boat made it into the top 15 in Athens – the Finn, which finished 12th overall. Two of the remaining boats finished 16th, while the others were 17th, 18th and 30th.

4.26 The world rankings for these five other boats suggest that three underperformed, while two did as well as, if not better than might have been expected. The world rankings were:

- 470M – 25th
- Laser – 42nd
- Europe – 13th
- 49er – 12th
- Star – 4th

(viii) Shooting

4.27 Ireland qualified one athlete for the trap shooting event in the Olympic Games, as opposed to the three (two trap, one prone) who had shot in Sydney. The sport was not subject to a performance plan, and so no targets were given for this athlete's performance – although a considerable amount of support was provided to him as an individual.

4.28 The athlete registered a considerable improvement on his Sydney performance, where he was 18th, by coming equal seventh. He did, however, miss out narrowly on reaching the final, by just one place.

(ix) Swimming

4.29 Two athletes achieved the A standard to qualify for the Olympic Games – in the women's 100m breaststroke, and the men's 200m breaststroke. Since swimming was a latecomer to the Athens Enhancement Programme, no performance plan was provided which gave targets for either to fulfil.

4.30 Four swimmers had been selected under special circumstances to represent Ireland in Sydney, across eight different events. Previous medal success in the pool had come in Atlanta in 1996, when one swimmer had won no fewer than four medals – three gold, and one bronze.

4.31 Both swimmers had set national records in qualifying for the Athens Games, but neither was able to progress beyond the heats. The female swimmer finished eighth in her heat, and the male swimmer sixth in his.

(c) Summary

4.32 As stated above, in terms of medal outputs the 2004 Athens Olympic Games saw Ireland maintain its success rate from previous Games, and its overall position in the medal table from Sydney. In addition to the gold medal won, there were also notable individual performances in athletics, cycling, shooting and showjumping – while the number of athletes who exceeded their world ranking also gives cause for cautious optimism.

4.33 In terms of the targets which individual sports set for themselves at the Olympic Games, only two of the nine sports came close to fulfilling their own stated expectations: rowing achieved its primary aim of qualifying two crews for the Games, while sailing achieved one of its six outcome targets. However, these two sports would also rank among those who could

be said to have underperformed against potential in Athens – together with athletics and boxing.

4.34 What is suggested by the calculation of outcome performance against sports' preparations and predictions is as follows:

- In preparation for the Games, some sports' performance programmes included too many athletes who were unlikely to qualify
- The outcome targets set by many sports were arguably overambitious

5. Ireland's performance at the 2004 Athens Paralympic Games

(a) *The team*

5.1 Ireland's 2004 Paralympic team comprised 40 athletes in eight different sports. This compared with the 39 athletes in seven sports who attended the Sydney 2000 Paralympic Games. It should be noted that, of these 40 athletes, some 25 per cent comprised a single football team.

5.2 The team won four medals – three silvers, two in athletics (in the F32/51 discus and the T13 400m), and one in swimming (in the S8 100m backstroke); and one bronze, also in athletics, in the T38 800m.

5.3 This performance compared with the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, where nine medals were won in total – five gold, three silver and one bronze. Four of these medals were won in swimming, three in athletics, and two in boccia. However, it should be remarked that:

- There were fewer nations present in Sydney than in Athens – 123 against 136
- The Chinese nation did not perform to such effect in Sydney as in Athens – 72 medals in Sydney (34 gold), 141 in Athens (63 gold)
- Eight nations in total won more than 70 medals in Athens – showing the benefits of substantial investment programmes
- Four of the medals won in Sydney were unrepeatable due to a combination of athlete retirements and events being removed from the Games:
 - There were 30 fewer events on offer in Athens than there had been in Sydney, given the removal of events for athletes with learning disabilities and the combination of classifications

5.4 Ireland's 2004 Paralympic performances placed her 60th in the medal table, as calculated by the number of gold medals won; and equal 47th in the medal table calculated by the number of medals (any colour) won. This compared with Sydney, where Ireland were 31st in the medal table, as calculated by the number of gold medals won.

5.5 To look at other performance indicators (for context, see 4.5 above):

- The number of athletes per medal won was 10
 - Again, otherwise expressed as medals per athlete, a ratio of 1:10, and a strike rate of 10 per cent
 - See the table reproduced in 6.41 below for other nations' comparative performances in this and the following respects
- The average number of medals won per sport was 1:2 – a strike rate of 50 per cent
- There was one world record achieved by an athlete who did not medal (an apparent contradiction accounted for under the classification system)
- There were no fewer than 11 personal bests, and a greater number of season's bests, where such marks were measurable

(b) *Sport by sport*

(i) Athletics

5.6 The Paralympic athletics team comprised 11 athletes across 20 events. Of these, four were track athletes, and seven were field athletes.

5.7 The performances of the Irish Paralympic athletics team included the following headline elements:

- Three medals were won – 75 per cent of the total medal haul, as listed in 5.2 above. This repeated the success of Sydney, where three medals were also won, including a gold, silver and bronze
- One classification-based world record was recorded by an athlete who did not achieve a medal
- Eight personal best performances were recorded, and two other season's bests

(ii) Boccia

5.8 Ireland qualified six boccia players for the Paralympic Games, each of whom competed as an individual, with the BC1/BC2 athletes combining as a team, and the two BC3 athletes operating as a pair.

5.9 The boccia team was defending two gold medals won in Sydney – the BC3 pairs title, and the BC1 individual title. While the BC1 individual gold medallist was present in Athens, his world ranking had slipped to sixth in the intervening period. Meanwhile, only one of the Sydney BC3 pair participated in the Athens Games: with a personal world ranking of third, he was also a serious medal prospect in the individual event. No other player held a world ranking higher than 16th.

5.10 By contrast with the success of Sydney, the boccia players returned home without medals. In the individual competition, two of the BC2 athletes reached the quarter-finals, while the remaining six players did not progress from the preliminary round.

5.11 Neither the BC1/BC2 team nor the BC3 pair qualified for the knock-out stages of their competitions. The team finished fourth in their pool, so equalling their world ranking of eighth. The pair finished third in their pool, which was some considerable distance in arrears of their Sydney performance.

(iii) Cycling

5.12 One cyclist was sent to the Paralympic Games, ostensibly on a developmental basis. Together with his sighted partner/pilot, he competed in four tandem events on track and road, achieving two personal bests and finishing 16th, 17th, 18th and 19th against a world ranking of 38th.

(iv) Equestrianism

5.13 Ireland qualified one disabled rider and her horse for the Paralympic Games, in the Grade 2 dressage competition. Although ranked 12th in the world, she finished 17th in the championship test and 19th in the freestyle test.

(v) Football

5.14 Ireland's seven-a-side football team at the Paralympic Games carried a world ranking of fifth, but ultimately finished seventh. They failed to qualify for the semi-finals by finishing bottom of their pool after defeats by the Ukraine (0-6), Argentina (2-5) and Iran (2-7). They then beat the USA 4-0 in the crossover game.

(vi) Judo

5.15 Two visually-impaired judoka qualified to represent Ireland in the Paralympic Games, both of whom were ranked ninth in the world. One was unable to compete through injury, while the other lost both his bouts.

(vii) Sailing

5.16 In the Paralympic Games, the Sonar crew finished ninth against its world ranking of fifth; while the 2.4mR boat was 15th against a world ranking of 32nd.

(viii) Swimming

5.17 The Paralympic swimming team was three-strong, competing in the men's S8 100m backstroke and S9 50m freestyle, and the women's S9 100m butterfly. Two of these swimmers exceeded their expectations, while the other fell somewhat short – thus:

- The S8 100m breaststroke swimmer outstripped his world ranking of fourth to win silver
- The S9 100m butterfly swimmer achieved a new personal best in finishing fifth in her heat, against a world ranking of 18th, but failed to qualify for the final
- The S9 50m freestyle swimmer finished sixth in his heat and failed to progress – against a world ranking of tenth

5.18 While this performance was in arrears of that in Sydney, where four medals were won in the pool, it should be noted that three of these were won by a single swimmer who did not compete in Athens. Meanwhile, mention should be made of the fact that the S8 100m breaststroke swimmer's Athens medal was his third in consecutive Paralympic Games since Atlanta in 1996.

(c) *Summary*

5.19 Almost paradoxically, the Irish Paralympic team won fewer medals in Athens than in Sydney, but can still be said to have performed well. Pitched against an increasing number of larger nations who have invested intensively in Paralympic programmes, inside a smaller and much more competitive environment, Ireland's return of four medals was to its great credit.

5.20 There were particular successes in athletics and swimming, while the lone cyclist and one of the sailing crews performed extremely well against their world rankings. Where there were disappointments, they were found in boccia, football and the other sailing class, each of which presented unfulfilled medal prospects.

6. Best practice and comparator review

(a) Best practice review

i. Great Britain

6.1 The Sydney Review held the United Kingdom Lottery-funded performance system in development in Great Britain as an example of good practice from which Ireland might learn valuable lessons in the development of its own system. Certainly, its implementation has had significant effect: the British team achieved significant levels of success in the 2000 and 2004 Olympic and Paralympic Games (see 6.40-41 below), over and above those which were achieved pre-UK Lottery in Atlanta in 1996.

6.2 The blueprint for the high performance system currently being developed in Ireland carries hallmarks of the system which has been developed in Great Britain since 1997. These are as follows:

- Programme funding for individual sports, which has allowed them to develop their own performance systems and infrastructures featuring:
 - Full-time personnel engaged in programme management and administration, coaching, and the co-ordination and delivery of key services
 - Training and competition support for teams and athletes
- Individual athlete funding, underwriting both living and sporting costs
- Sports science and medicine delivery on a networked, institute basis
- The divide of responsibility between the Sports Councils (performance lead and funding) and the national Olympic/Paralympic committees (Games preparation and participation)

6.3 That said, there are obvious and substantial differences between the British and Irish systems, including the following:

- The scale of the investment. The two summer Olympic Games in Sydney and Athens have seen a total UK Lottery revenue investment of €234 million, out of which 20 gold medals were achieved. Over €91 million went into the Athens Olympic Games to produce nine gold medals, 30 in all, at an average cost of €3 million per medal. Overall, in revenue and capital funding, the UK Lottery has put €4.2 billion into British sport at all levels, from grassroots to elite
- The timeframe over which the system has developed. The British system has been under development for eight years now, which has allowed time for human and capital infrastructure development, and for these to begin to bear fruit
- The state of professionalisation of the national governing bodies of sport. These were arguably more advanced than their Irish counterparts when UK Lottery funding began, and have eight years subsequently to establish their own structures and sustainability
- The underlying infrastructure on which the British system has been built – in terms of the overall and longstanding wealth of the nation, and the sheer size of a population almost 15 times that of Ireland; also the contribution of factors such as physical education in schools, etc.

6.4 What is interesting for Ireland is the process through which the British system reached maturity. For the introduction of UK Lottery funding has caused severe problems in certain areas, which have been identified through Sports Council-commissioned research and analysis:

- The initial approach was top-down – i.e., beginning with a programme to support senior athletes, and only later introducing programmes for talented junior and emerging athletes. The imperative behind this was political: the UK Lottery needed to be seen to produce “quick wins” to establish its credibility. However, this meant that the initial programme was sub-optimal, dealing as it did with the products of an

imperfect system who had habits that were difficult to reform. Only now, as the system is rolled out in its entirety, and it addresses talent at all stages of its development, can it be said that it is approaching its optimum

- The sudden influx of major sums of money into the small/medium enterprises which were British governing bodies of sport created stresses that, in more than one case, were fatally destructive. There were simply not the business infrastructures in place to manage this investment effectively. No support was forthcoming from the investment agencies in areas of corporate service such as financial management, human resources, change management, etc., which were vital to the creation of an appropriate business environment out of which performance sport could flourish
- Cultural conflicts emerged, most especially in the following areas:
 - Between UK Lottery-funded, highly paid performance staff, and others within the governing bodies whose rates of remuneration remained comparatively low
 - Between professional staff and the volunteers who had previously managed and operated in the performance stratum
 - Between performance staff imported from overseas to deliver world's best practice, and the domestic staff and volunteers who were unready for the levels of change that would be required
- There was often misunderstanding over the roles that performance staff would fulfil – most especially the Performance Director, who was in many cases seen as a panacea for all ills and was therefore pulled divisively between political, management and technical roles
- Performance planning was rudimentary, especially in three areas:
 - The setting of targets, which were overambitious – understandably so, given that the award of UK Lottery funding was to be contingent on the anticipation of medal success
 - Programming, which was centred around squad training and competitions, but which failed to address the importance of influencing the athletes' training habits and environment in between squad get-togethers
 - Internal processes of quality assurance, monitoring and evaluation at both macro- and micro-levels
- Suddenly transported from penury, or from the state of coupling full-time employment with an elite-level training programme, many athletes developed a “social security mentality” – i.e., they lost hunger and commitment, and focused instead on what needed to be done to maintain their UK Lottery funding year on year
- Sports science and medicine services were initially neither applied nor sport-specific. This was largely the result of unsophisticated demand from athletes and coaches, and of a level of mistrust of the potential benefits that such services could bring. Moreover, there was duplication within the system as a whole, between the institute services under development and those which individual sports chose to rely on

6.5 Following the Sydney 2000 Olympic and Paralympic Games, and the identification of these problems, Great Britain's overall investment in high performance was reviewed and revised. The result was that the nation's spend on Athens was approximately 40 per cent less than its spend on Sydney (see 6.3 above). This reflected the increased maturity of the system, an improvement in its focus, better defined priorities, and the elimination of waste which had previously existed.

6.6 From this it can be seen that, while there remains much for Ireland to learn from the history of the development of Great Britain's high performance system, those lessons should include the recognition of the mistakes which had been made within it, and how to avoid them.

ii. New Zealand

6.7 New Zealand represents a good comparison for Ireland, with an almost identical population, a weaker economy, and a superior sporting performance record. It is perhaps this performance record which Ireland would in an ideal world seek to emulate.

6.8 New Zealand has recently reformed its sporting governance through the merger of the Hillary Commission, the New Zealand Sports Foundation and the policy arm of the Office of Tourism and Sport. The new agency – SPARC – was formed in 2002 and sits directly beneath the Minister for Sport and Recreation.

6.9 SPARC's direction is set out in a strategy document entitled "SPARC – Our Vision and Direction: Strategies for Success from 2006". The title is significant: clearly, the agency does not expect its strategies to begin to bear fruit until four years after its establishment. The key elements of these strategies include the following:

- Working together:
 - Set national priorities and standards
 - Clarify key institutional roles and relationships
 - Develop long-term partnerships
 - Help to build sustainable organisations with effective governance
- Smart investment:
 - Operate as a strategic investor in the sector
 - Target SPARC investments to priority areas
 - Establish three- to five-year funding paths
 - Focus on outcomes rather than outputs
 - Align sector investment
 - Provide leadership on infrastructure development, rationalisation and facility mix
- Innovation and growth:
 - Promote research and development across the sector
 - Provide best practice advice and access to a wide range of information
 - Create links and partnerships with key economic sectors
- Vision and leadership:
 - Articulate a clear vision and strategic framework for SPARC that enables the sector to build a national vision for sport and recreation
 - Lead the development of policy and monitoring functions
- People:
 - Develop and recognise good people – in SPARC and throughout the sector
 - Foster specialist knowledge, skills and experience
 - Support training to up-skill people and to increase the performance of the sector as a whole

6.10 The implementation of these strategies has begun, with three notable innovations being launched in 2004:

- CoachForce, to create world-class coaching through regional and national governing body investment
- A talent identification report, as the foundation of a new programme in this regard
- The No Exceptions disability sports strategy, aimed at greater integration at all levels

6.11 SPARC has four main operating divisions – Participation, Performance, Physical Recreation, and a corporate services division. The Performance division is otherwise recognised as the New Zealand Academy of Sport, which operates at both regional and national levels:

- The national function provides financial and technical support for national governing bodies of sport
- The regional function comprises a delivery network for sports science, sports medicine and athlete lifestyle support services

6.12 Seven key sports are supported in full by SPARC, with a further three being identified as having potential to be supported. These sports are identified in accordance with their willingness and ability to assist in the fulfilment of the principal objectives of SPARC – and in holding these objectives to be mutual. The criteria against which these sports have been selected are:

- High participation levels among New Zealanders
- The ability to be world-leading and to achieve recognition for New Zealand
- Links to important industries and infrastructure
- The ability to “stop New Zealanders in the street” when they do well

6.13 Once these sports have demonstrated themselves to be properly sustainable – ideally by 2006 – SPARC will de-emphasise them and turn its attention to supporting a further group of sports.

6.14 For its part, the Academy offers financial support to sports in the following ways:

- To national governing bodies, in the form of the salaries of:
 - National coaches
 - High performance drivers – e.g., managers, directors, administrators, etc.
- To elite athletes in 20 sports, through the Performance Enhancement Grants (PEG) scheme – newly introduced in 2004 and comprising:
 - Direct grants
 - Training and competition support

6.15 Over the four years to 2008, around €84.5 million will be provided to sports through direct revenue funding and through services provided by the New Zealand Academy of Sport. The annual revenue budget for high performance sport (including non-Olympic sports) is over €10.5 million. The new PEG scheme is worth €6.2 million over four years, with per capita grants allocated in proportion to the number of eligible athletes. In addition, there is a Prime Minister’s Scholarship scheme worth €2.65 million per annum, which gives elite athletes free access to university.

6.16 SPARC is quite clear in its expectation of the timeframe over which results will be achieved by the Academy’s funding programme. Its website states that there will be a three-to four-year time lag before the programme begins to produce meaningful outcomes.

iii. Denmark

6.17 Denmark has a larger population than Ireland, is somewhat wealthier, and boasts a much superior sporting performance record in Olympic sports – better even than New Zealand, and on the rise over the past 20 years. The reasons behind this are worthy of examination.

6.18 Denmark’s high performance system is embodied within Team Denmark, an organisation formed in 1985 by collaboration between Government, sports, business and commerce. It is governed by a Board of Directors of eight, and funded to 75 per cent by Government and the Danish Sports Federation (the equivalent of the Sports Council); the remaining 25 per cent comes from the sale of broadcast and commercial properties. Team Denmark’s annual budget is approximately €17.5 million.

6.19 Team Denmark has 12 objectives set for it by an act of Government, and its funding is predicated against a contract which requires delivery of key results. Those 12 objectives are primarily concerned with:

- Elite sports development – largely through financial support provided to national governing bodies of sport
- Athlete identification, development and support
- The provision of support services in sports science, sports medicine, athlete lifestyle management and finance
- Research and development
- Liaison with municipal facility providers, the media and sponsors

6.20 As a basis for its investment, Team Denmark has established outcome-orientated partnerships with those national governing bodies of sport which share its objectives. This has

seen the prioritisation of ten or eleven sports, in whom that investment is concentrated. The success of this policy can be seen in Denmark's performances across a range of sports on the international stage, where results have described an upward curve over the past 20 years.

6.21 While Team Denmark concentrates on the development of elite performance, the Danish Sports Federation continues to drive recruitment and participation, which the Danish Olympic Committee retains its responsibilities under the Olympic Charter for Games preparation and participation. It would be untrue to state that the divide and delivery of responsibilities has been untroubled by political tension.

6.22 Team Denmark's base is in the House of Sports in Copenhagen, together with the majority of national governing bodies. However, it is currently seeking the development of a sports village in Farum, north of Copenhagen, where it wishes all sports' national training centres to be located on a single site; also to provide education there, as well as sports science, medicine and athlete lifestyle services.

(b) Ireland's circumstances

6.23 By way of comparison with these other nations, it is important to remark initially upon the socio-economic circumstances of Irish sport – thus:

- Ireland's wealth as a nation is a comparatively recent phenomenon. Traditionally, its Government has not had the capacity within its Exchequer to commit major sums of money to the development of sport, or to the single aspect of high performance sport
- A strategic and structured revenue investment in high performance sport is also a recent phenomenon for Ireland. Unlike Great Britain (which has invested for eight years) and Denmark (20 years), the attention which Ireland has paid to this stratum is restricted to the period under review – i.e., it has begun within the past four years

6.24 While Ireland has always been a nation immersed in sport, it is only in relatively recent years that the value of sport – especially to the development of communities and the well being of individuals – has been recognised by Government. This in turn has led to a significant increase in the investment of money into sport, funded through public expenditure and national lottery funds.

6.25 Since the appointment of the first Minister with responsibility for Sport to the Cabinet in 1997, Government expenditure on sport has increased from €17m to €131m in 2004. Given the considerable lack of basic sports facilities, including public swimming pools, which existed in Ireland prior to this, a substantial portion of available resources has been devoted to improving the standard and availability of such facilities in communities nationwide.

6.26 In the four-year cycle leading up to the Athens Olympics, almost €500 million has been spent across the spectrum of sport by Government in the provision of sports facilities, support for competitive athletes, and the implementation of sports programmes by the ISC aimed at increasing participation and improving performance in sport. In this period, total funding of €104 million was provided by the Department of Arts, Sport & Tourism to the ISC to fulfil its many functions, including delivering support to national governing bodies of sport, and providing financial and sports science and medicine support to Ireland's elite athletes.

6.27 In excess of €360 million was expended on funding the development of sports facilities countrywide, both for competitive and recreational sport. This included a number of national sporting facilities which were considered essential to assist the development and meet the training needs of high performance sportsmen and women. Examples of such facilities funded are:

- New 50-metre swimming pools at Limerick University and the National Aquatic Centre in Abbotstown
- The National Boxing Stadium in Dublin
- The National Rowing Centre at Inniscarra
- The National Hockey Arena in University College Dublin

6.28 The Government has also supported plans for the development of a National Sports Campus at Abbotstown which would include high-quality indoor and outdoor sports facilities together with living accommodation. It is intended that the Campus will have medical and training support for elite athlete development and, eventually, an indoor sporting arena. This facility is intended to be of benefit not only to major sports organisations, but also to some of the smaller sports whose need for modern facilities are important.

6.29 Of the sums made available to it as described in 6.26 above, the revenue budget which the ISC has allocated to high performance in Olympic and Paralympic sports over the past three years is as follows:

| Year | ISC expenditure item | Sub-total | Total |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------|------------|
| 2002 | Athens Enhancement Programme grants | €1,917,349 | |
| | International Carding Scheme payments | €2,076,654 | |
| | Payments to OCI/PCI | €441,655 | |
| | Funding for NCTC | €1,155,534 | €5,591,192 |
| 2003 | Athens Enhancement Programme grants | €1,833,850 | |
| | International Carding Scheme payments | €2,287,473 | |
| | Payments to OCI/PCI | €744,208 | |
| | Funding for NCTC | €1,120,000 | €5,985,531 |
| 2004 | Athens Enhancement Programme grants | €2,155,060 | |
| | International Carding Scheme payments | €2,304,529 | |
| | Payments to OCI/PCI | €964,495 | |
| | Funding for NCTC | €1,224,000 | €6,648,084 |
| Grand Total: | | €18,224,807 | |
| Average spend per annum: | | €6,074,936 | |

6.30 These figures indicate that, of its overall budget between 2001 and 2004, the ISC committed 17.52 per cent to high performance in Olympic and Paralympic sports.

6.31 The comparison between the ISC's annual revenue budget for performance, and those of the competitor nations described above, is broadly as follows:

| Nation | Annual spend | Annual spend (€) |
|---------------|----------------|------------------|
| Ireland | €6,074,936 | €6,074,936 |
| New Zealand | NZ\$27,937,500 | €14,759,432 |
| Denmark | DKK125,000,000 | €17,500,000 |
| Great Britain | £16,250,000 | €22,750,000 |

- Herein it should be noted that the data from New Zealand and Denmark which is available to this review does not allow for separation between Olympic and non-Olympic sports, and so may not provide an absolute comparison

6.32 These statistics suggest that Ireland lags some considerable distance behind its principal competitors, not only in respect of the time over which it has been investing in high performance, but also in the amount that it commits in revenue spending to elite sport per annum. In real terms (and acknowledging the rider attached to 6.31 above), it spends:

- 41.16 per cent of what New Zealand commits per annum
- 34.71 per cent of what Denmark commits per annum
- 26.7 per cent of what Great Britain commits per annum

6.33 In total, the ISC supports 62 governing bodies through its core grants programme – of whom ten have been included in the Athens Enhancement Programme. The AEP's focus on this small range of sports mirrors the "target sport" policy which is in place in other competitor nations. However, the fact that such a broad range of other sports is supported may contribute to the fact that the proportion of its budget which the ISC has available for high performance in Olympic and Paralympic sports is comparatively small.

6.34 The human resource which the ISC commits to high performance is confined within a High Performance Unit of four full-time officers. This unit is complemented by five further staff working full-time within the athlete/player services section of the NCTC. These staffing levels compare with the following:

- New Zealand's Academy of Sport is managed nationally by a General Manager, who works alongside four Performance Directors, each of whom has responsibility for liaising with four or five sports in respect of their high performance programmes; and a senior Performance Adviser. In the three Regional Academies there are a further 26 full-time staff who are concerned with the local co-ordination and delivery of services to elite athletes
- UK Sport's Performance Directorate has recently been remodelled to comprise 29 positions covering overall programme direction and management, individual sports' liaison, business support, investment management, and strategic oversight of sports science and medicine, athlete services, elite coach education, research and development

6.35 Externally, there are unique circumstances within Ireland which must also be mentioned as significant in respect of its attempts to succeed in Olympic and Paralympic sports. These include the following:

- The dominance of the three field sports – Gaelic sports, soccer and Rugby Union. The size, professionalism and resource of the three governing bodies dwarfs that of all other sports in Ireland. Thus the recruitment of athletes and administrators within Olympic and Paralympic sports, and the securing of finance, is extremely difficult:
 - The ISC confirms that more money is given in grant-aid per annum to the three field sports for their participation development programmes than is spent on the whole of the Olympic and Paralympic performance system
- The absence of a physical education curriculum in primary schools. Although such a curriculum is in draft form, it has yet to be implemented. This means that young athletes do not have a systematic grounding in sport and physical activity prior to the age of 11

(c) *Comparators*

6.36 Having looked at what other nations are doing to develop and maintain their high performance systems, and the comparative circumstances of Irish Olympic and Paralympic sports, it will be instructive now to examine the respective performance outputs of these nations – together with those of other nations of a similar size and profile.

6.37 The Sydney Review chose to compare Ireland's performances in the 2000 Olympic Games with a range of competitor nations whose similarity was based solely on population size. These included New Zealand and Denmark, as well as nearer European nations Norway, Croatia and Moldova. For the purposes of this Athens Review, it may be instructive to widen the net somewhat, and look at a greater range of similar nations not only in Europe and Oceania, but also in the Americas and the Middle-East. It will also be important to look at these nations not just in terms of their comparative populations and the medals which they won in Athens (in both Olympic and Paralympic Games), but also:

- To examine something of their socio-economic background compared to Ireland, based on an assessment of gross national income (GNI) and GNI per capita
- To examine other performance indicators as well as medals won, to get an impression of the overall strength of these countries across a range of sports

6.38 The 15 nations selected for this review are as follows – each of whom has a similar population level to Ireland. Also included is Great Britain, an unequal comparator as stated above, but included for the purpose of illustrating the foregoing best practice review:

| Nation | Population 2003 | GNI 2003 | GNI p.c. | World ranking 2003 | | |
|---------------|-----------------|-----------|----------|--------------------|-----|----------|
| | | | | Population | GNI | GNI p.c. |
| Ireland | 3,947,000 | 106,417 | 26,960 | 124 | 36 | 14 |
| New Zealand | 4,009,000 | 63,608 | 15,870 | 122 | 48 | 40 |
| Denmark | 5,387,000 | 181,825 | 33,750 | 105 | 25 | 8 |
| Norway | 4,560,000 | 197,658 | 43,350 | 114 | 23 | 3 |
| Croatia | 4,456,000 | 23,839 | 5,350 | 116 | 64 | 70 |
| Slovakia | 5,381,000 | 26,483 | 4,920 | 106 | 62 | 73 |
| Lithuania | 3,454,000 | 15,509 | 4,490 | 128 | 80 | 74 |
| Bosnia-HG | 4,140,000 | 6,386 | 1,540 | 120 | 108 | 123 |
| Moldova | 4,238,000 | 2,137 | 590 | 119 | 150 | 157 |
| Turkmenistan | 4,863,000 | 5,426 | 1,120 | 112 | 116 | 131 |
| Jordan | 5,308,000 | 9,800 | 1,850 | 108 | 93 | 116 |
| Lebanon | 4,498,000 | 18,187 | 4,040 | 115 | 72 | 81 |
| Costa Rica | 4,005,000 | 17,157 | 4,280 | 123 | 75 | 76 |
| Puerto Rico | 3,898,000 | 42,057 | 10,950 | 125 | 54 | 53 |
| Great Britain | 59,280,000 | 1,680,300 | 28,350 | 21 | 4 | 12 |

6.39 In terms of population, and their comparative wealth, Table D.1 which is reproduced in Appendix D shows that Ireland is the 13th most populous among these nations. However, it is the fourth wealthiest nation both in terms of GNI and GNI per capita. Those nations which rank above it are Great Britain, Norway and Denmark.

6.40 In the Athens 2004 Olympic Games, the number of athletes which each nation qualified, the number of sports in which they were represented, the medals they won, and the “strike rates” for those medals (see 4.5 above for context), were as follows. As in section 4 above, the assumption remains that the gold medal won by Ireland stands:

| Nation | Athletes | Sports | Gold | Silver | Bronze | Total | Athletes per medal | Medals per sport |
|---------------|----------|--------|------|--------|--------|-------|--------------------|------------------|
| Ireland | 49 | 9 | 1 | - | - | 1 | 49 | 0.11 |
| New Zealand | 169 | 18 | 3 | 2 | - | 5 | 33.8 | 0.28 |
| Denmark | 90 | 16 | 2 | - | 6 | 8 | 11.25 | 0.5 |
| Norway | 84 | 13 | 5 | - | 1 | 6 | 14 | 0.46 |
| Croatia | 80 | 14 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 5 | 16 | 0.36 |
| Slovakia | 77 | 13 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 6 | 12.83 | 0.46 |
| Lithuania | 94 | 14 | 1 | 2 | - | 3 | 31.33 | 0.21 |
| Bosnia-HG | 16 | 10 | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Moldova | 35 | 8 | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Turkmenistan | 9 | 6 | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Jordan | 8 | 5 | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Lebanon | 6 | 4 | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Costa Rica | 47 | 7 | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Puerto Rico | 52 | 15 | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Great Britain | 355 | 23 | 9 | 9 | 12 | 30 | 11.83 | 1.30 |

6.41 In the Athens 2004 Paralympic Games, the number of athletes which each nation qualified, the number of sports in which they were represented, the medals they won, and the “strike rates” for those medals (again, referencing 4.5 above), were as follows:

| Nation | Athletes | Sports | Gold | Silver | Bronze | Total | Athletes per medal | Medals per sport |
|---------------|----------|--------|------|--------|--------|-------|--------------------|------------------|
| Ireland | 40 | 8 | - | 3 | 1 | 4 | 10 | 0.5 |
| New Zealand | 37 | 9 | 6 | 1 | 3 | 10 | 3.7 | 1.11 |
| Denmark | 33 | 9 | 5 | 3 | 7 | 15 | 2.2 | 1.67 |
| Norway | 34 | 8 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 6.8 | 0.62 |
| Croatia | 18 | 5 | - | - | 4 | 4 | 4.5 | 0.62 |
| Slovakia | 37 | 9 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 12 | 3.08 | 1.33 |
| Lithuania | 20 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 7 | 2.86 | 1.4 |
| Bosnia-HG | 15 | 4 | 1 | - | - | 1 | 15 | 0.25 |
| Moldova | 6 | 3 | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Turkmenistan | 4 | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Jordan | 10 | 3 | - | 1 | 1 | 2 | 5 | 0.67 |
| Lebanon | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Costa Rica | 5 | 2 | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Puerto Rico | 4 | 3 | - | - | 1 | 1 | 4 | 0.33 |
| Great Britain | 166 | 15 | 35 | 30 | 29 | 94 | 1.77 | 6.27 |

6.42 Tables D.2 and D.3 reproduced in Appendix D show how these performances were reflected overall in the Athens medal tables; also how the Athens results compared to those of the previous three Olympic Games. The pertinent points to emerge from these tables are that:

- Ireland is ranked lowest of the eight comparator nations which won Olympic medals in 2004
- Ireland is ranked eighth of the 11 comparator nations which won Paralympic medals in 2004
- Ireland has stood still in performance terms since 2000, while other nations – notably Great Britain, New Zealand, Norway, Croatia and Slovakia – have kept pace with the rest of the world, consolidated and improved their position

6.43 *Prima facie*, this raw data offers the following inferences in respect of Ireland's Olympic and Paralympic performances, and her comparative standing against the rest of the world:

- Ireland's relative economic prosperity, highlighted in 6.38-39 above, is not yet reflected in Olympic and Paralympic terms:
 - Nations such as Croatia, Slovakia and Lithuania, which are much weaker economically, achieved greater levels of Olympic and Paralympic success than Ireland – most likely on the strength of longstanding performance infrastructures which are the legacy of their previous centralised state systems
- Ireland's sporting strength in depth, as signified by its achievement in qualifying numbers of athletes for the Olympic and Paralympic Games across a range of sports, appears as follows:
 - In Olympic terms, markedly inferior to New Zealand, Denmark, Norway, Croatia, Slovakia, Lithuania and Puerto Rico, and more or less equal to Costa Rica
 - In Paralympic terms, as strong as any of its competitor nations. Its strike rate in both athletes per medal and medals per sport, however, is much inferior to the majority of those nations who medalled at the Games

(d) *Summary*

6.44 The experiences of comparator nations suggest that the following are elements of good practice in high performance systems:

- Substantial, sustained and planned investment across a number of Olympic/Paralympic cycles

- Focused investment, which targets those sports in which improvement and outcomes are most likely
- A parallel emphasis on talent identification and the development of potential, alongside performance support
- A support system which encompasses all areas which are contingent upon high performance – including coach education, sports science and medicine, lifestyle support, facilities development, etc.
- The creation of sound systems of governance and management are important counterparts of the development of high performance support systems
- Processes of change management, which assist stakeholders in effecting the necessary culture change

6.45 The historic and longstanding investment of other nations in such systems means that Ireland suffers by comparison with them. Indeed, Ireland has the Olympic performance record of a nation much weaker than it actually is – both in terms of achieving success, and in its strength of performance across a range of sports.

7. The Sydney Review – the recommendations and their fulfilment

7.1 It is a principal task of this review to assess the extent to which the 29 recommendations contained in the Sydney Review Report were implemented. In doing so, it should be noted that these recommendations were made solely in the context of the Olympic sports, and their impact on the performance of the Irish Olympic team in Athens; they had no Paralympic point of reference. This section will therefore concentrate on those recommendations, and examine whether, how well and how effectively they were each fulfilled in respect of the Irish Olympic campaign.

7.2 By way of preliminaries, it should be remarked that the 29 recommendations seem to have fallen into three principal categories – thus:

- Those concerned with strategic scene-setting, and partnership-building among the key players
- Those which were Athens-specific, concerned with improving the preparations for and practicalities surrounding the Irish team at the Olympic Games
- Those concerned with the establishment of a high performance system in Ireland

7.3 It appears that these categories reflect the state of play which surrounded the Irish Olympic campaign for 2000. Interviewees suggested that this was thoroughly dysfunctional and marked by the following, *inter alia*:

- Profound relationship difficulties between the various stakeholder groups, especially between the ISC and the OCI
- A variety of team management issues within the Irish Olympic camp, which led to a high level of discontent among the athletes
- An absence of structured performance planning and preparation in the build-up to the Games, from both the national governing bodies of sport and the OCI

7.4 The 29 recommendations should therefore be viewed as a roster of initiatives, both general and specific, via which these difficulties and deficiencies might be addressed. The extent to which they have been implemented will offer a strong indication of how Ireland has improved over the past four years in each of the areas covered by the three categories listed in 7.2.

i. The ISC should convene a meeting with the key agencies as a matter of priority to agree and adopt the vision and recommendations encapsulated in the Sydney Review.

7.5 Two such meetings were convened, with a view to accepting the review and its recommendations, and adopting a shared vision. These took place on 6 February 2001 and 25 April 2001, and were attended by representatives of the ISC, OCI, NCTC, and the national governing bodies of sport. The end result was that the review was accepted in full.

ii. The enormous potential of working together is realised by the ISC, OCI and NCTC, and the NGBs, in a co-ordinated programme for the athletes representing Ireland in the Athens Games and beyond.

7.6 Various initiatives were sponsored by the ISC with a view to bringing the key agencies closer together, both strategically and operationally. These included the following:

- Follow-on meetings were staged with each of the national governing bodies whose sports were represented in Sydney, with a view to discussing the specific detail of implementation of the Sydney Review
- Following the implementation of the Athens Enhancement Programme, these meetings were continued with a view to commissioning and agreeing performance plans, enacting them, and then monitoring their progression
- A bridging committee was established in April 2001 as a vehicle for the ISC and OCI to meet on an informal, ad hoc basis to seek rapprochement on matters related to

Ireland's preparation for and participation in the Olympic Games, and to discuss the implementation of the Sydney Review

- Out of the bridging committee, and the High Performance Strategy which was devised around the same time, came the Olympic and Paralympic Performance Committees, which were convened in February 2002. Meeting every six to eight weeks, these committees have provided a forum in which ISC performance personnel and OCI/PCI representatives can discuss specific issues relating to Games preparation and logistics
- A number of sub-committees were also convened by the OCI to address the detail of multisport camps, media and management training programmes
- The ISC has met regularly with the NCTC since 2001 to agree programmes of activities covering support services for athletes, and the staging of training camps in Limerick

7.7 Interviewees have attested to the enormous progress which has been made by the ISC, OCI, NCTC and the national governing bodies of sport in overcoming their relationship difficulties to work together within a co-ordinated programme in support of the athletes who represented Ireland at the Athens 2004 Olympic Games. These testimonies leave little doubt that the background against which the Athens campaign has been delivered has been significantly more constructive and more stable than that which underpinned the Sydney effort.

iii. The ISC should establish and drive the High Performance Committee with support from the OCI and NCTC.

7.8 The High Performance Committee was established in April 2001, independently chaired and including representation from the ISC, OCI, PCI, NCTC, the Department for Tourism, Sport and Recreation, the Sports Council for Northern Ireland (SCNI), Sports Campus Ireland, the Irish Rugby Football Union, the Irish Cycling Federation, and Olympic athletes past and present.

7.9 Working with consultants First Genesis Ltd, the committee consulted widely among the national governing bodies of able-bodied and disabled sport, the Government departments for sport and education, the OCI and PCI, the NCTC and SCNI, prior to producing its conclusions.

7.10 The principal output of the High Performance Committee was a report which was concluded on 31 July 2001. The report paved the way for the High Performance Strategy which followed in December 2001, and included among its key conclusions the following:

- That the High Performance Strategy should be athlete-focused
- That resources should be targeted at those sports and athletes which show the greatest potential
- That an Irish Institute of Sport should evolve from the NCTC, to provide co-ordinated non-funding support services to elite athletes and coaches
- That there should be a major investment in coach education, coaching and coaches
- That there should be significant investment in the technical and administration skills of the OCI, PCI and national governing bodies
- That the Olympic and Paralympic Performance Committees should be immediately enacted
- That funding should be determined early to support the preparations for Athens
- That an additional £32 million over five years (i.e., €44,800,000, at €8,960,000 per annum) was necessary to underpin the strategy

7.11 The High Performance Committee, and the strategy which it foreshadowed, therefore served as the catalyst for much that was done in the remainder of the Athens cycle towards the creation of a new high performance system – including and especially the creation of the Athens Enhancement Programme and its provision of new money for high performance direct to athletes and sports; the investment in the professional infrastructures of the OCI and PCI; and the commencement of the Olympic and Paralympic Performance Committees.

7.12 It should be noted that some parts of the High Performance Strategy instigated by the committee still await full implementation. This is especially true in respect of the following:

- The establishment of an Irish Institute of Sport
- A major and cohesive investment in coach education, coaching and coaches
- The establishment of a National Facilities Strategy
- The new physical education curriculum (which exists, but has yet to be implemented)

iv. Networked sports science and medicine services for athletes should be a key focus of the High Performance Committee, particularly linking Dublin and the emerging UK Sports Institute in Belfast.

7.13 As indicated in 7.10 above, the High Performance Committee identified the need for a national performance network to be provided which could deliver support services to elite athletes in all areas of Ireland. This it foresaw as an Irish Institute of Sport, evolving out of the NCTC.

7.14 The High Performance Strategy added detail to this:

“It is proposed to establish the Irish Institute of Sport (IIS) with a network of National Centres initially in Dublin and Limerick linked to the Sports Institute Northern Ireland (SINI) involving all appropriate service partners in these centres. It is envisaged that the Institute will be established by the end of 2002”

7.15 The further recommendations of the strategy were that:

- Quality control mechanisms should be established in the area of sports medicine, and the Olympic and Paralympic Performance Committees should address the issue of continuity of care
- Existing sports science services should be enhanced through investment in personnel, equipment and research in partner institutions, and should be co-ordinated with coaching programmes within a sport-specific context
- A variety of amendments should be made to the International Carding Scheme which would consolidate its delivery through a squad system, instead of to individual athletes
- Lifestyle support should be provided, both through the IIS and through educational scholarships

7.16 The IIS, as envisaged by the strategy, has not been delivered. The delivery of sports science and medicine services has been the responsibility of the NCTC, which has maintained and co-ordinated a network of service providers throughout Ireland.

7.17 This network has involved a large number of service providers (in excess of 350, mostly doctors and physiotherapists) who have made themselves available to work with athletes under the International Carding Scheme. The NCTC also states that it has established provisional relationships with a number of other third-level institutions which, if formalised, may provide the basis for a network of national centres such as was suggested in 7.14 above.

7.18 Section 8 below will explore some of the issues related to this network. In particular, it will consider whether the recommendations of the High Performance Strategy have been met in respect of quality control, investment in partner institutions, the delivery of the International Carding Scheme, and lifestyle support.

v. The NCTC should have a review of its functions and services carried out by the ISC.

7.19 A review of the NCTC had in fact been previously agreed between the ISC and NCTC, prior to the publication of the Sydney Review, and this was completed by the ISC in 2000. Although NCTC officers indicate that they remain unaware of its conclusions, nevertheless these led to new terms of reference for the NCTC being established in April 2001.

7.20 Under these terms, a new Board of Management was appointed to serve on an interim basis until the end of December 2002. This board was subsequently replaced by a new three-strong Board of Management comprising an independent chair, and nominees of both the ISC and the University of Limerick. The principal task for this Board was to oversee and ensure delivery of the NCTC's operational plan.

7.21 At the same time a sub-group comprising representatives of the ISC, the University of Limerick and the NCTC has investigated the establishment of a secure corporate structure for the NCTC – one which would separate it out from the University of Limerick which houses it, and provide greater clarity of governance, management and accountability within its operation. This task has not, however, progressed beyond the processes of due diligence – leaving a series of outstanding issues to be addressed in respect of the NCTC, which were left over from the aforementioned review.

vi. NGBs should undertake, with support from the ISC, to produce athlete-focused performance plans for their organisations.

7.22 In May 2001 a consultant who had worked on the Sydney Review was commissioned to assist in the implementation of its recommendations. This included working with national governing bodies of sport in the preparation of appropriate, realistic and athlete-centred performance plans. Such plans were to be dovetailed with the operational planning of the NCTC, so that support service provision could be properly integrated within them.

7.23 In December 2001, the Government announced the award of €3 million of new money to the ISC to underpin the implementation of the High Performance Strategy. From this money, in July 2002, the ISC was able to launch the Athens Enhancement Programme. This programme allowed funding to be offered to sports which was additional and complementary to their existing programmes, in recognition and support of their performance plans. In its first allocation, the AEP embraced five Olympic sports – athletics, boxing, equestrianism, rowing and sailing.

7.24 In 2003 and 2004 that number was raised to eight, with a further two sports being offered “bubble support” – i.e., funding around the training and competition programme of a single athlete. The sports which were funded through to the Athens Games were:

- Athletics
- Boxing
- Canoeing
- Cycling
- Equestrianism
- Fencing (bubble)
- Hockey
- Rowing
- Sailing
- Shooting (bubble)

7.25 As to whether the plans advanced by governing bodies were athlete-focused, 57.1 per cent of respondents to the Olympic athlete questionnaire stated that they were; 23.8 per cent stated the opposite, and 19 per cent did not know.

7.26 The quality and effectiveness of these plans has been questioned at 4.31-32 above, and will be examined further in section 8 below. Suffice it to say here that it was always unlikely that the delivery of a performance plan over as short a period as two years would ever be truly effective in producing improved performance outputs on a deliberate and sustainable basis.

vii. The OCI should undertake a review of all aspects of its role, constitution and administrative structures to ensure transparency in its operation.

7.27 The OCI did indeed undergo a review of its memorandum and articles of association in 2001, which was delivered by a commission comprising representatives of its member federations. This was originally an internally-motivated process which had been commenced by the time that the Sydney Review was published, in response to an International Olympic Committee (IOC) initiative in 1999 which had required all National Olympic Committees (NOCs) to incorporate elements from its own charter within their respective constitutions. The review's terms of reference then widened to include an examination of the OCI's Executive Committee and its administrative structures.

7.28 The review commission presented recommendations for change to the OCI Executive Committee which were unanimous in all respects but one. These recommendations were referred to the OCI membership, which was invited to propose amendments but did not seek to do so; instead, it approved the recommendations by the requisite 75 per cent majority at an Extraordinary General Meeting in March 2002.

7.29 As to whether these changes brought about transparency within the operation of the OCI, it is not within the capacity of this review to judge. Such an assessment could only be made by a detailed observation of the OCI's workings over a sustained period – and would necessarily be both subjective and political.

viii. The OCI should be provided with partnership funding to assist in developing a more professional approach in its operations.

7.30 This recommendation marked a significant shift in the prevailing direction of sporting politics within Ireland. Prior to 1997, the OCI had been the body responsible for distributing grant-aid funding to the Olympic national governing bodies of sport, to support their preparation programmes in advance of the Games. Now, in the aftermath of Sydney, not only was that responsibility to be handed to the ISC instead, but the OCI was to be placed in the role of recipient rather than donor. The upshot of this, especially in respect of the OCI's response, will be considered at 8.22ff. below.

7.31 In November 2001 the OCI submitted an Olympic Plan to the ISC for funding through to the Athens 2004 Olympic Games. This provided a background against which annual grants which were awarded to the OCI in each of the subsequent three years, and which covered technical and administrative staff and costs, and Athens-specific programmes and activities.

7.32 Such annual grants account for in excess of 50 per cent of the OCI's funding. The remainder is largely forthcoming from the IOC, by way of a distribution of its central sponsorships to those NOCs which will agree to observe the rights of those sponsors.

7.33 Specifically, the ISC offered funding to the OCI to support two key appointments – a Chief Executive Officer and a Technical Officer. The latter position was advertised nationally, but appointed from within the OCI's existing administrative staff in August 2003, with the alternative title of Sports Director. This was considered to be more appropriate to the role which he was required to fulfil – which is principally concerned with liaising with sports on the preparations for summer and winter Olympic Games, and the European Youth Olympics.

7.34 The OCI has yet to appoint a Chief Executive Officer. The reason given for this is that it would have been wrong to make such an appointment in mid-cycle, when the Chef de Mission and his support staff were fully operational. Interviewees stated that plans are in place now to recruit a Chief Executive, following the relocation of the OCI headquarters to Howth. At the same time, the role of Sports Director is to be reviewed and strengthened, and placed more central to the technical operations which have previously been addressed by the Chef de Mission and his deputy.

7.35 The OCI has therefore become more professional through the application of the funding it has received – in terms of both the reduced reliance on volunteer staff, and the quality of its processes and outputs. In both respects, however, there is progress still to be made – as will be discussed below in section 8.

ix. An athlete-centred quadrennial plan for the 2004 Athens Olympic Games should be agreed and published by the OCI with the support of the NCTC and the ISC.

x. A "road map" to Athens should be rolled out detailing all key events and services to the NGBs, which is to be revised quarterly.

7.36 To look at both of these recommendations together, it seems that the OCI produced only one plan for Athens – instead of the two that are suggested here. This plan was the "road map", which set out key dates, deadlines and targets in the preparation process, and was the product of discussions within the Olympic Performance Committee.

7.37 The "road map" was published two and a half years out from the Athens Games. It was communicated to the national governing bodies of sport, athletes and coaches primarily through the medium of the OCI's "Perform" magazine. The "road map" was a constant feature in the magazine, allowing readers to identify amendments and additions which were made on a continuous basis. It was also published on the OCI's website, and presented in an Olympic Forum staged in January 2004.

7.38 As to why the envisaged quadrennial plan was never produced, a draft version was considered by the OPC in 2002 but subsequently abandoned on the basis that half of the Athens cycle had already expired by this date. In its stead the "road map" was supplemented by the Olympic Plan described at 7.31 above, which formed the basis of the OCI's funding application for the three years 2002 to 2004 inclusive.

7.39 There are question marks as to whether, between them, a funding application and a "road map" represent the kind of detailed and strategic plans which the Sydney Review had in mind when it made these two recommendations. The quality of planning on all sides within the Athens cycle is a subject which will recur later in this report. In the meantime, it should be noted that the quadrennial plan for the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games is in production at the time of writing.

xi. The ISC and NGBs should consider the employment of performance coaches as a matter of some urgency, focusing on medal-potential sports.

7.40 This recommendation was picked up by the High Performance Committee, which urged the appointment of a greater number of paid coaches, and the attraction of coaches with extensive international experience to Ireland. It also called for investment in the technical skills of governing body staff. These calls were subsequently reorientated by the High Performance Strategy, which recommended that there should be Performance Directors appointed to prioritised sports.

7.41 The governing bodies which were subject to the Athens Enhancement Programme were effectively given the choice as to whether they thought it most appropriate to engage Performance Directors or performance coaches. Those sports which took on Performance Directors to direct and manage their high performance programmes were athletics, boxing, rowing and sailing.

7.42 Those sports which chose not to appoint a Performance Director were equestrianism, which placed its performance programme instead in the hands of a committee of volunteers; canoeing and cycling, both of whom chose to go to Athens with no full-time executive officer dedicated to performance, but instead elected to engage experienced and expert coaches to work directly with their athletes.

7.43 This is not to say that all sports should have gone down the road of a Performance Director. The principal requirements behind the creation of a high performance system include a widespread understanding of the role of the Performance Director, and a supporting infrastructure which allows him/her to operate with responsibility and authority. Section 8 below will suggest that several Irish sports lacked both of these key elements.

xii. NGBs should assist and inform the media to ensure that the “management of expectation” strategy advocated for each Games is embraced.

7.44 Members of the Irish sports media stated after the Athens Olympic Games that they believed that public expectations surrounding the performances of the Irish team had been realistic. However, they also stated that this message had come primarily from the ISC and OCI, instead of from the national governing bodies of sport.

7.45 The ISC and the OCI appear to have collaborated effectively in the construction and delivery of a media strategy which was designed to dampen down any excessive expectations in advance of the Games. This was conveyed through the medium of press conferences and statements in which senior officers had been carefully briefed to display caution when talking about the medal prospects of Irish athletes. Meanwhile, good relations had been cultivated with key members of the press by taking them to Athens early in 2004, primarily to familiarise them with the venues.

7.46 However, the effects of this strategy do not seem to have survived the Games. Its effectiveness was apparently undermined by some individual athletes and Team Managers, who went “off-message” in their conversations with journalists to suggest that, in fact, they and their colleagues had very real prospects of medal success. That the athletes were a geographically disparate group, in preparation for the Games, immediately before them and during them, rendered control of their media pronouncements extremely difficult to exercise. Meanwhile, the difficulties in maintaining communication with – and therefore also a co-ordinated approach among – the Team Managers who had responsibility for those athletes are described in 7.113-114 below.

7.47 On the other side of the coin, media members complained that some sports’ representatives in Athens had been wholly unhelpful in granting access to their athletes. Thus, for some, a major opportunity to provide valuable exposure to sports which spend the majority of the four-year cycle in the shade was lost. This did not, however, apply to all sports – some of whom were considered to be almost too co-operative, to the detriment of their performance focus.

7.48 This situation was further complicated by the following:

- The presence of news media at the Games, who were unaware of the media strategy and the subtler nuances of the state of Ireland’s preparation and performance levels, but were keen to identify any issue which they considered newsworthy
- The inflationary effect of the increased level of Government investment in the ISC and the Athens Enhancement Programme (see 6.25, 7.23 above), which created public expectation of immediate and dramatic returns
- The wall-to-wall media coverage provided during the Games, which created an intense demand for content and comment
- The public’s demand for medal success as a minimum return from any major multisport championships – and their one-dimensional view of this as the only meaningful performance criterion
- The fact that as many as 76.2 per cent of respondents to the Olympic athlete questionnaire stated that they failed to achieve their own primary performance goals at the Games

xiii. The International Carding Scheme and funding to Olympic sports should be reviewed as a matter of urgency by the ISC.

7.49 As stated in 7.15 above, numbers of amendments to the International Carding Scheme were proposed through the medium of the High Performance Strategy, on the basis of the results of the consultation which took place during its formulation with athletes and their governing bodies.

7.50 The strategy provided a backdrop to the revision of the scheme for 2002, which introduced change in respect of the depth of the support services on offer, the delivery of a

pilot project for team sports, and the scope of the junior/developmental categories. These changes were, however, considered to be minor: the overall scope of the scheme as one which spanned as many athletes as could fulfil performance criteria set by as many governing bodies who could claim a foothold on the international stage, remained unaltered.

7.51 A full review of all aspects of the International Carding Scheme is now imminent within the ISC, with a view to having a new and revised scheme operational in 2006. In principle, the value of the scheme going forward remains unquestioned: across the athlete questionnaires which were issued to Olympic, Paralympic and other elite athletes for the purposes of this Athens review, a composite total of 90.75 per cent of respondees stated that the ICS had brought about improvements in their personal performances, and in those of the Ireland team overall.

7.52 That said, there were other issues raised both by the questionnaire responses and by interviewees which will need to be taken into account during that review. These include:

- The number of athletes supported by the scheme, and the criteria for their inclusion
- The inclusion of a full range of Paralympic athletes within the scheme
- The levels of financial support afforded to athletes
- The means via which financial support is channelled to athletes
- The levels of control applied over athletes' choice of service providers
- Access to a wider range of services than currently – including lifestyle education and management

7.53 Meanwhile, the broader issue of funding to Olympic sports was addressed through the medium of the Athens Enhancement Programme, described in 7.23-24 above.

xiv. A medical/science working group should be established by the OCI with support from the ISC and NCTC to consider the challenging environmental and climatic conditions for Athens.

7.54 A sports science and medicine planning group was established jointly by the ISC, OCI, PCI and NCTC in November 2002 to oversee the production of an acclimatisation strategy and guidelines in other relevant areas which could be reproduced for presentation to athletes and their Team Managers in Athens. Interviewees stated that this group revolved around a very positive relationship between the OCI's new Chief Medical Officer and NCTC personnel.

7.55 Responsibility for the production of an acclimatisation strategy was devolved to these individuals. However, the ISC subsequently enlisted the additional services of a nutritional expert from Loughborough University in England, to assist them. A report was produced which addressed the issues of heat, hydration and pollution, and a corresponding strategy was formulated for distribution to both Olympic and Paralympic athletes.

7.56 A proactive package of education and support was also devised and delivered, in the run-up to and during the Olympic Games. This included *inter alia* the following elements:

- Pulmonary function testing for every asthmatic athlete who had the potential to be selected
- A medical/science meeting for all national governing body medical teams in November 2003, which focused not only on disseminating information, but also on relationship-building across the OCI, ISC and NCTC

7.57 Through the medium of the athlete questionnaires, over 85 per cent of Olympic respondents, and 100 per cent of Paralympic respondents, stated that they had been aware of the acclimatisation strategy. Of the Olympic athletes, 86.7 per cent considered it thorough, and 76.9 per cent considered it both effective and clearly communicated; 100 per cent of the Paralympic athletes considered it to be all of those things.

7.58 As a further measure of effectiveness, athletes were asked through the questionnaire whether they believed that their performance had been adversely affected by the climatic conditions in Athens. Some 13.6 per cent of Olympic respondents, but as many as 33.3 per

cent of Paralympic respondents, believed that their performances had been adversely affected. The contrast between this response from Paralympic athletes, and their response in respect of the thoroughness of the strategy (see 7.57), is marked, and defies interpretation (though see 8.47.3 below).

xv. A feasibility project for a Holding Camp in Athens 2004 should be undertaken as a matter of urgency, led by the OCI with support from the ISC and NCTC.

7.59 The Olympic Performance Committee staged early discussions in respect of a pre-Games Holding Camp for Athens and considered a variety of potential venues, including Cyprus, Malta, Barcelona, Seville, Sierra Nevada and Italy. Visits were subsequently undertaken to Cyprus, Malta, Seville and Sierra Nevada to evaluate facilities, and an initial decision was taken to utilise Cyprus and Seville.

7.60 However, it was decided that climatic conditions in Seville in July and August would be too severe, and so Zagreb was identified as a more suitable alternative venue for the rowers, flatwater canoeists (who subsequently failed to qualify) and walkers. Meanwhile, the equestrian and sailing teams were excluded from consideration in respect of the Holding Camps, given their unique requirements; instead, separate arrangements for pre-Games training in Athens were facilitated for both of these sports.

7.61 Thereafter the walkers requested that alternative pre-Games training arrangements should be made for them away from Zagreb – whereupon a third Holding Camp venue was identified in Ioannina, north of Athens.

7.62 Ultimately, then, there were three Holding Camps arranged by the OCI, as follows:

- Cyprus – for some athletes, cyclists and swimmers
- Zagreb – for the rowers
- Ioannina – for the walkers

7.63 The patchy attendance at such camps is attested by the Olympic athlete questionnaire, to which 50 per cent of respondents stated that they did not attend a Holding Camp organised by the OCI. Those who did attend unanimously stated that the accommodation, transport and the OCI's management were either excellent or good – while 72.8 per cent gave similar gradings to the training facilities.

xvi. The OCI Athletes' Commission with the Athletes Forum should consider a range of "lifestyle" services for immediate delivery to athletes.

7.64 In the aftermath of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games the OCI convened a meeting of Olympic athletes to which some 178 participants from the previous four Games were invited. The purpose of this meeting was to elect an Athletes' Commission which could serve in an advisory capacity to the OCI on planning and logistical matters.

7.65 However, only a dozen or so athletes attended from a very small number of sports. A commission was elected, but failed to agree terms of reference with the OCI, which therefore moved its disbandment. (A secondary motivation appears to have been political: interviewees suggested that the OCI believed the commission to be unrepresentative, and in danger of being hijacked to fulfil the agendas of a minority of sports/athletes.)

7.66 In place of the commission three athletes (one present, two from the 1996 team) were appointed on an interim basis to fulfil the advisory role through to the Athens Games, and to prepare for democratic elections which are scheduled to take place in 2005. This new commission has not to date had direct representation on the OCI Executive Committee – although it is intended that the chair of the re-elected commission will be an ex-officio member of it.

7.67 In the face of this situation, certain limited "lifestyle" services have instead been delivered to athletes through the International Carding Scheme and the NCTC. A large

percentage of respondents to the Olympic athlete questionnaire graded such services as either poor or very poor – which in many cases reflects their absence rather than their quality. A similarly large percentage (68.2 per cent) gave similar gradings to the lifestyle/welfare advice they received from their governing bodies – which will surely similarly reflect its non-delivery.

xvii. Clear lines of communication should be put in place with Irish athletes based abroad (25%), and these should be networked to access services.

7.68 Some 23.8 per cent of respondents to the Olympic athlete questionnaire stated that they were based outside of Ireland; however, none of the Paralympic respondents demonstrated an overseas base.

7.69 Communication with such athletes has been conducted by the ISC through the International Carding Scheme, which operates a database containing full contact details for all funded athletes; and by the NCTC, which has assumed responsibility for ensuring that such athletes can access appropriate support services.

7.70 In respect of networking these athletes to access services, the NCTC's stated policy has been to require the athletes to source their own providers, and to reclaim the cost of doing so from the Carding Scheme. The NCTC described its role as ensuring that such providers are of the same calibre as those active within Ireland, in so far as this is possible; or to assist the athlete in sourcing providers when he/she has been unable to do so for him/herself.

7.71 In respect of communication, those athletes who were based outside of Ireland stated as follows through the medium of the athlete questionnaire:

- Communication was not regularly maintained with the NCTC in the build-up to Athens, nor were support services accessed via the NCTC
- Communication from their national governing body was more or less on a monthly basis, and was generally considered to be poor
- Communication in respect of the International Carding Scheme was given a neutral rating

7.72 More generally in respect of communication, respondents to the Olympic athlete questionnaire gave the following comments:

- 63.6 per cent stated that they were not in regular communication with the NCTC on sports science and medicine matters
- 76.2 per cent stated that communication from their governing body was either poor or very poor
- 54.6 per cent stated that communication through the International Carding Scheme was either excellent or good, while 22.7 per cent rated it either poor or very poor

xviii. Performance plans for selected Irish sports should be developed with clear talent identification and development programmes, to help them achieve Olympic qualifying standards.

7.73 This recommendation is coupled with nos. vi and xi above, and was fulfilled through the medium of the Athens Enhancement Programme. However, in respect of the specificity of this particular recommendation, the following should be stated:

- The funding allocated to governing bodies was for the specific, short-term purpose of preparing athletes to qualify for the Athens Olympic Games, and not to support talent identification or development programmes
- 61.9 per cent of respondents to the Olympic athlete questionnaire believed they had been adequately supported by their governing body in their attempts to achieve qualification and selection for the Games – while 38.1 per cent felt that they had not

xix. The OCI, supported by the ISC and NCTC, should produce quarterly athlete and governing body newsletters to ensure communication of key information.

7.74 This recommendation has been fulfilled through the OCI's publication of "Perform" magazine, broadly on a quarterly basis since December 2001. The magazine has a circulation of some 2,000 copies, and is distributed to the governing bodies of sport (Olympic and non-Olympic), individual athletes whose details are on the OCI database, all OCI members and delegates, the ISC, and various other interested individuals and organisations.

7.75 The magazine has been utilised as a principal vehicle for the conveyance of key information to athletes and their governing bodies in respect of Games planning, preparation and deadlines (see 7.37 above). It was also offered to sports as a medium via which they might convey their own information, either practical or promotional.

7.76 Further initiatives to facilitate communication were undertaken in the form of:

- The establishment of an OCI website, which was utilised to convey key information such as breaking news and selection standards
- The staging of an Olympic forum in January 2004, to which all athletes, coaching, management and support personnel who might potentially be involved at the Games were invited to receive presentations and to provide vital information
- The medical/science meeting staged in November 2003, for which see 7.56 above

7.77 The effectiveness of these communications from the OCI can be estimated from the responses to the Olympic athlete questionnaire:

- 90.9 per cent of respondents had received publications from the OCI, and 68.4 per cent considered these to have been useful and informative
- 57.1 per cent considered themselves familiar with the OCI's website, but only 8.3 per cent of these regularly visited the site for information
- 59.1 per cent had attended the Olympic forum in January 2004, and all of these considered it to have been useful and informative

xx. Olympic qualifying standards should be negotiated early in the Olympic cycle and agreed and signed by the OCI with each sport, and communicated to all athletes.

7.78 The OCI informed all national governing bodies of the qualification standards for the Athens 2004 Olympic Games in December 2002. Also at this stage a cut-off date of 30 June 2004 was established by which all athletes were expected to have achieved these standards in order to be selected. The standards were posted on the OCI website, published in "Perform" magazine, and individually communicated to each governing body.

7.79 In their responses to the athlete questionnaire, Olympians stated the following:

- 90.5 per cent believed that this timetable gave them enough time to prepare in advance of the Olympic Games – while 92.3 per cent believed that the qualification standards had been published early enough
- Almost 79 per cent of respondents stated that the standards had been published clearly and effectively – while 76.2 per cent believed that the closing date was about right
- 95 per cent believed that the qualification standards were realistic

7.80 In the majority of sports, qualification for Athens was uncontroversial: achievement in world or continental championships prior to the Games was the accepted way of securing selection. However, in two sports – athletics and swimming – there was controversy, while a selection dispute also arose internally within sailing.

7.81 In respect of athletics and swimming, the issues at stake were:

- In athletics, the deadline for the fulfilment of the qualifying standards – over a month before the Games began. Interviewees suggested that this did not take into account either the flow of the athletics season, when a number of major events were scheduled for July; or the attempts of athletes to bring their preparation to a peak around July/August in order to be at their best for the Games
- In swimming, there was apparently some argument as to whether B standards should be acknowledged. This was in order that more swimmers should qualify for the Games than the two who did win selection, and that these additional qualifiers might participate in Athens not to pursue medals but to gain experience

7.82 In each of these respects:

- The deadline for athletics was subsequently extended by the OCI – but the following points were made against such an extension:
 - Athletes had had all of the previous 18 months in which to qualify for the Games
 - Athletes who had not been competing at the level of the qualifying standards in the years prior to the Games were unlikely to achieve that level consistently enough at Games time to present realistic prospects of success
 - Administrative requirements were such that an early finalisation of the Irish team was desirable
- The argument in swimming was successfully resisted – not least because the standards set by the OCI were agreed by a special commission which included representatives from Swim Ireland. Retrospectively this can be judged to be the right course of action, on the grounds that those swimmers who did qualify on the A standard failed to progress from their heats – thus demonstrating that the A standard is the absolute minimum necessary to compete at the Games, rather than any positive indication of likely success

7.83 Some sports chose to produce their own selection policies to augment the qualifying standards published by the OCI: 71.4 per cent of questionnaire respondents said that this had been the case in their sports. Of these, 91.7 per cent considered these policies to be fair; 75 per cent considered them to be transparent; and 53.8 per cent considered them to have been clearly communicated.

xxi. The Team parade, training and competition kit should be managed professionally with input from the athletes, to ensure it maximises performance in competition and is smart and comfortable and “fit for purpose”.

7.84 The OCI established a clothing working group in February 2002, comprising OCI members and athletes, to advise on the quality and design of parade, training and competition uniforms for the Olympic Games. Contracts were entered into with ASICS for the supply of training and competition wear, and with Penneys for the supply of the parade uniform. The latter engaged a renowned international designer to work with them to design the formal attire.

7.85 The athletes responded to these initiatives with the following assessments of their kit:

| | Parade uniform | Training uniform | Competition uniform |
|-----------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| Smart | 95.5% | 81% | 85% |
| Comfortable | 65% | 95.2% | 90% |
| Fit for purpose | 80% | 68.4% | 65% |

7.86 While 52.4 per cent of athlete respondents stated that the distribution and management of the kit was either excellent or good, 19.1 per cent opined that it was either poor or very poor.

7.87 These responses indicate a general level of satisfaction with the kit – which represents a significant improvement on Sydney. However, there were particular issues which interviewees pointed out:

- Last-minute qualifications, and inaccurate or changeable information provided by governing bodies and athletes, made it difficult to order enough of the right sizes of clothing in advance of the Games
- A decision taken to distribute the kit either in pre-Games training camps or in Athens, rather than in Ireland prior to departure, meant that the kit was in transit prior to the finalisation of the team
- Some mistakes were made in the information provided by the OCI to the supplier in transporting kit to Athens, rather than to the training camps where the athletes were expecting it
- Such questions as were raised over the parade uniform were aesthetic, and reflected a resistance among athletes to wearing formalwear in 30-degree heat

xxii. The Athens Village HQ staff should be selected by the OCI with input from the NGBs based on ability and experience matched against job descriptions, functions and responsibilities. A programme of professional training should underpin this.

7.88 The process of selecting OCI headquarters staff for the Olympic Village remained unchanged from previous cycles. For the Chef de Mission and his deputy, nominations were sought from within the OCI's Executive Committee; applicants were interviewed by the President, and recommendations for appointments made to the Executive Committee. Thus the recruitment process was wholly internal to the OCI; the reason given for this is that a prerequisite for the role is an intimate knowledge of the Olympic Games and movement.

7.89 Science and medicine support staff were similarly appointed from within – either from those consultants who had served the OCI at previous Olympic Games, or from nominations provided by individual sports. This was the result of careful deliberation: the OCI decided that their principal criteria for selection were compatibility and experience of working with elite athletes, and that these were unlikely to be fulfilled from outside the programmes currently operated by the national governing bodies.

7.90 Nominations for support staff were informally trialled at multisport camps and the Youth Olympics in the year prior to the Games, to assess their effectiveness and compatibility prior to confirmation in their role. The NCTC was also asked for its opinion on which staff should be appointed, and its recommendations accepted.

7.91 This process of selection was entirely in line with the strictures proposed by this recommendation. It was further extended to include written protocols for the management and operation of medical and physiotherapy staff – although not for the massage therapist, whose line of reporting was direct to the Chief Medical Officer. There were, however, no formal job descriptions for any of the roles, as required by the recommendation.

7.92 A programme of professional training was instituted by the OCI, utilising an external business consultancy – but this was principally for the sports' own Team Managers, and not for the headquarters staff. Feedback indicates that this training was not well received: while the initial session was well attended, subsequent sessions were less so, ostensibly because the training was considered to be of little applicability or relevance.

7.93 That said, 86.4 per cent of respondents to the Olympic athlete questionnaire considered the OCI's headquarters staff to be either excellent or good. Similarly good feedback was provided on the performance of the sports science and medicine support staff in the Village. Together, these responses represented a quite dramatic improvement on the situation which had emerged in Sydney four years earlier.

xxiii. Team Managers should be nominated by the NGBs and approved by the OCI early in the Olympic cycle. Programmes for Athens should have a more professional focus.

7.94 In one sense, this recommendation was met in that all sports bar boxing had Team Managers in place some way out from the Olympic Games. However, in another sense – that

relating to the professionalisation of sports' programmes and management – this recommendation was not fulfilled.

7.95 Despite the Athens Enhancement Programme introducing a number of professional performance personnel into the governing bodies of sport, not all of these found a place on the Irish team for the Olympic Games; indeed, there are at least two sports whose Performance Directors were not nominated as part of their team for Athens. (See also 7.42 above, for sports which chose not to appoint professional performance staff.)

7.96 The utilisation of volunteers by numbers of sports in the capacity of Team Manager appears to have had a variety of consequences, including:

- Poor communications from the governing bodies to the OCI – especially the late or non-submission of required information
- Unfamiliarity with the athletes – 13.6 per cent of questionnaire respondents stated that they had not met their Team Manager prior to the Games
- A lack of performance professionalism in the Village:
 - 57.2 per cent of athlete questionnaire respondents rated their Team Manager as either poor or very poor overall
 - Team Managers were otherwise rated either poor or very poor in various areas of their performance in 48.47 per cent of responses

7.97 The issue of Team Manager training has been addressed at 7.92 above. However, it should also be said that the OCI did not provide sample job descriptions to sports against which they might appoint their Team Managers, nor did it seek to influence or regulate the calibre and profile of the nominees which it received from sports – despite it reserving to itself the right to do so. The reason given for this was that it is not the OCI's place to dictate to sports how they should manage their athletes.

xxiv. Annual multisport training camps should be organised by the OCI, NCTC and ISC to prepare athletes for the Olympic Village.

7.98 Multisport training camps were organised by the OCI in the build-up to the Athens 2004 Olympic Games – as follows:

- In October 2002, at the NCTC in Limerick, for five sports – athletics, boxing, equestrian, rowing and sailing
- In October 2003, in Cyprus, for 51 athletes and support personnel from four sports – athletics, boxing, judo and taekwondo
- In December 2003, in Seville, for 46 athletes and support personnel from four sports – athletics, canoeing, cycling and rowing

7.99 In terms of the value of these camps in preparing athletes for life in the Olympic Village:

- Not all sports which qualified athletes for Athens participated in these camps – swimming for one was not represented because of its late inclusion within the Athens Enhancement Programme
- Not all athletes who attended the Games participated in these camps – 57.7 per cent of Olympic athlete questionnaire respondents stated that they had not done so
- Numbers of those who did attend camps did not subsequently qualify for the Games – nor, in several cases, were they realistically likely to
- Not all sports utilised these camps to attempt to replicate the Games experience – some utilised them for testing, some for rehabilitation, some for structured training, etc.
- Those athletes who did attend the camps rated them highly overall – 100 per cent of questionnaire respondents graded them either excellent or good, with no real adverse comment other than in respect of their own sport's management and the quality of coaching received

- 42.9 per cent of those respondents who attended the camps stated that they were either quite or very ineffective in preparing them for life in the Olympic Village
- In other respects, respondents stated that:
 - It was good to share experience and expertise with other sports (57.2 per cent)
 - The camps were effective at generating team spirit (85.8 per cent)
 - They were effective in preparing for Olympic performance (85.7 per cent)

7.100 To summarise these responses, it would seem that the organisation of such camps was most effective – but the objectives of the OCI in staging them, and the sports in utilising them, were not clearly or consistently set or delivered.

xxv. Realistic levels of expectation should be set for the Irish team through a media campaign developed by the OCI with support from the ISC.

7.101 Comment has already been made in this respect at 7.44ff. above, which indicates the qualified success of the OCI and ISC in fulfilling this recommendation. The following additional comment might usefully be added:

- During the course of the Games the OCI adopted a deliberate policy of not attempting to control or influence the flow of media comments surrounding the team. Instead, it chose to concentrate on managing access to the athletes, and did not stage press briefings or issue press releases except in response to specific matters arising. The reasoning behind this policy was the shortage of accredited manpower among the headquarters staff
- The OCI was itself at least partly responsible for generating negative media coverage during the Games, surrounding comments attributed to its President regarding one particular section of the team

xxvi. Support staff should be nominated by sports to attend future Holding Camps to ensure continuity of care for athletes.

7.102 As indicated at 7.89ff. above, with the exception of those consultants with whom it had a longstanding and historical relationship, the OCI recruited support staff largely on the nomination and recommendation of national governing bodies of sport and the NCTC. This ensured that its medical staff were familiar with the demands of elite athletes, that they were known to the athletes themselves, and that the fundamentals of a proper system of continuity of care were therefore in place. That this was possible was the result of the positive and constructive liaison established between the OCI's Chief Medical Officer and the NCTC – for which, see also 7.54 above.

7.103 Furthermore, the OCI was able to enhance the familiarity of its medical team with the athletes who were preparing for Athens by giving these staff the opportunity to work at multisport training camps in the build-up to the Olympic Games (see 7.90 above).

7.104 In preparation for the Games, the majority of the carded athletes on the Olympic and Paralympic teams underwent a medical and physiotherapy screening via the NCTC either in late 2003 or in 2004. The introduction of athlete consent forms meant that the information gathered could then be made available to the respective medical teams at the holding camps and at the Olympic and Paralympic Games. Screening results were also passed on to national governing bodies' medical officers/physiotherapists where possible.

7.105 Where there were question marks over the process of continuity of care, they occurred earlier in the chain, in respect of the linkages between athletes and their governing bodies – i.e., well before it reached the OCI and the Games environment:

- The International Carding Scheme allowed athletes to select their own medical practitioners – some of whom were known to and in communication with the national governing bodies' medical staff, and some of whom were not

- There was therefore a grey area within the process of ensuring that all information related to the treatment of athletes' injuries and general healthcare was known and shared between the athletes' own practitioners, their national governing body's medical staff, the NCTC and the OCI
- This grey area was exacerbated by the fact that some sports did not have their own Chief Medical Officers/physiotherapists, which resulted in limited or non-existent athlete injury management from within the national governing body on an ongoing basis
- The information coming out of the physiotherapy screening conducted via the NCTC was felt by some to be rudimentary

7.106 It has been stated at 7.93 above that the OCI's medical provision at the Olympic Games was well received by those within the Irish team who completed an athlete questionnaire – and that this was a tremendous improvement on Sydney. Where criticism did arise, it emanated from the medical team itself, who made the following points:

- Athlete care was in some cases hindered by a lack of role definition between physiotherapists and the massage therapist: there were occasional disputes as to whose advice should take precedence
- It was further suggested that the arrangement for remunerating medical practitioners were old-fashioned: for example, payment was provided for the Holding Camp, but not for the four weeks of the Games themselves. This undoubtedly put financial pressure on the consultants who were engaged, who needed not only to cover their own salaries during this period, but also to engage locums to act in their stead. As a result, more than one member of the support staff doubted whether they would be able to provide their services over the course of a further cycle: the issues of succession which arise from this are therefore profound.

xxvii. The allocation of accreditations by the OCI should be fully transparent, with the primary focus of ensuring that the needs of athletes are met.

7.107 The OCI have stressed during this enquiry that the overall numbers of accreditations which are provided to the Irish team are in accordance with formulae preset by the Olympic Games organising committee which relate to the numbers of athletes who qualify. Since it is not known until the last minute how many athletes have qualified, it is also not known until late how many accreditations will be provided.

7.108 The OCI has also stressed that the Irish team is treated holistically at the Games – i.e., there is no separate consideration of the athletics team, the equestrian team, etc. Thus each sport will have fewer accredited officials than it would have at its own sport-specific championships.

7.109 That said, the allocation of the accreditations which are received by the Irish team is largely at the discretion of the OCI. Given that the number of accreditations on offer is finite and limited, it is perhaps inevitable that some sports will feel badly done by in the exercise of that discretion – and it is surely this that lay behind the formulation of this recommendation.

7.110 For the Athens Olympic Games, the OCI took the entirely laudable policy decision that it would restrict its own core team within the Village to the bare minimum. This allowed a much greater number of accreditations to be handed out to the sports for their technical and support staff. To facilitate this, the OCI placed a number of unaccredited sports science and medicine staff outside the Village who were able to provide support as and when access was permitted to them.

7.111 This policy was communicated to sports through an accreditation seminar staged in June 2003, and was published on the OCI website. Awareness of it was widespread: 68.2 per cent of respondents to the athlete questionnaire stated that they knew of it. Thus the transparency requirement of the recommendation was met.

7.112 As for ensuring that the needs of the athletes were met, each sport had a manager and at least one coach in Athens. In total there were 19 technical staff accredited – an average of 2.11 per sport. When asked for their opinion of how their sports utilised the accreditations which were given to them, 45.4 per cent of athletes who responded to the questionnaire stated that this was either excellent or good.

xxviii. Regular Team Managers' meetings should be held where possible at the Olympic Village to enhance communication.

7.113 Given the hectic schedule of the Olympic Games, the need for a small OCI headquarters staff to spread themselves as far and wide as possible, and the widespread distribution of athletes and support staff within and outwith the Village, it was not considered possible to convene regular Team Managers' meetings during the Games.

7.114 Instead, communication took place largely by mobile phone. This had understandable limitations – not least given the difficulty of squaring up Irish and Greek network providers, and of ensuring that all interested parties knew the requisite phone numbers.

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

7.115 The strategy for the Irish Hospitality Suite was indeed rethought by the OCI, with the net result that it was abandoned for Athens.

Summary

7.116 Following examination and assessment of each of the recommendations, in the detail that is laid out above, it can be summarily stated that each one has been addressed in whole or part. As a result, the following developments have taken place within Irish sport:

- The partnerships that were considered necessary by the Sydney Review, and the strategic background, are now in place
- The immediate environment surrounding the Irish team in preparation for and at the Olympic Games has much improved
- The high performance system for Olympic and Paralympic sports in Ireland is in its first phase of development

7.117 That this is so represents a sea-change from the aftermath of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games – for which much credit is due to those who have worked through the issues which required redress. What has emerged four years later is a situation which provides a solid platform for further development, especially in respect of the establishment of the high performance system.

7.118 It should, however, be stated that not all of the recommendations have been fully implemented – nor has the spirit behind them been properly observed. Quantitative solutions have been applied in some cases, and not qualitative ones. The instances in which this is true will be explored in more detail in the next section.

8. Key contributors, and their performances

8.1 This section seeks to fulfil the following requirements that were set out in the terms of reference for the Athens Review – namely:

- To appraise the effectiveness of the programmes of preparation delivered by the national governing bodies of sport, and the quality of debriefs following the Games
- To review the effectiveness of the workings of the Olympic Performance Committee and the Paralympic Performance Committee as the two key bodies responsible for overseeing the Olympic and Paralympic programmes
- To evaluate the quality and delivery mechanisms of the athlete support services, especially relating to sports science and medicine
- To assess the roles of the key agencies involved in the preparation and participation of the Irish Olympic and Paralympic teams, namely the ISC, the OCI, the PCI, the NCTC, and the national governing bodies of sport

8.2 It would seem that the most effective way of fulfilling these requirements is to concentrate on the last one and, through an assessment of the roles played by each of the major contributing bodies over the course of the last four years, to consider also the quality and effectiveness of their outputs and activities.

(a) *The Irish Sports Council*

8.3 The ISC's principal roles are those of performance strategist and investment banker: it formulates strategy and policy and then, supported by Government funding, it makes investment decisions against this strategy and policy and the development plans which are submitted to it by the potential recipients of funds. In this latter category come the principal deliverers of high performance sport in Ireland: the athletes, their governing bodies, the OCI and PCI, and the NCTC.

8.4 The key issues for the ISC must therefore be to ensure that:

- Its strategies and policies are correct, and effectively delivered
- The development plans submitted to it are robust, systematic, outcome-orientated and effectively delivered
- It is efficient and consistent in holding the parties in which it invested accountable for their outcomes

8.5 The strategies observed by the ISC, which include elite sport along with the other areas which comprise the ISC's overall brief, were twofold:

- Its own corporate strategies – “A New Era for Sport 2000-02”, and “Sport for Life 2003-05”
- The High Performance Strategy produced in December 2001

8.6 It is beyond the scope of this enquiry to review these strategies. However, there are two observations which may be made here:

- The strategies talk of “consistent world class performance”, “[achieving] potential at international level”, “[improving] the performance of Irish athletes in international competition”, “the achievement of excellence in competitive sport”, “a nation achieving consistent success at World, European, Olympic and Paralympic levels”. These are general objectives which are not underpinned by quantifiable or specific targets. In the absence of these, it is difficult to gauge whether the policies which are put in place will fulfil those ambitions or, indeed, how long it will take for them to do so
- Notwithstanding the progress which has been made in the implementation of the High Performance Strategy, the areas which have yet to be delivered, as described at 7.12 above, has led to interviewees describing it as “aspirational” – i.e., a wish list that may

never be fulfilled. Indeed, the danger is that, the longer it remains unfulfilled, the more it may be considered to be unfulfillable

8.7 The major policy decisions which the ISC has made towards the delivery of these strategies are to invest in governing bodies, individual athletes, and performance agencies. This it has done through its core grant programme, the Athens Enhancement Programme, the International Carding Scheme, the NCTC, and the OCI and PCI. Thus it has spread its investment across each of the areas critical to the establishment of an Olympic and Paralympic high performance system – namely:

- The national governing bodies' development and management structures
- The national governing bodies' performance programmes
- The elite athletes
- The sports science/medicine support network
- The agencies responsible for Games-specific preparation and participation

8.8 The delivery of these investment policies has generally been sound and well received: respondents to the athlete questionnaires believe that both the AEP (61.75 per cent composite) and the ICS (90.75 per cent composite) have brought about improvements in their personal performances, and in those of the Ireland team overall; while a majority (58.45 per cent composite) further stated that sports science and medicine provision has improved over the past four years. The increased professionalism of the OCI has also been highlighted (see 7.35, etc.), while the PCI will be discussed below.

8.9 To comment specifically on the Athens Enhancement Programme:

- Its prioritisation of a small number of focus sports – just eight in the build-up to the 2004 Games – represents acknowledged good practice, as has been identified in the high performance strategies of principal competitors such as Denmark, New Zealand and Great Britain (see 6.44 above)
- It was, however, severely limited by its short term: it had a maximum operational period of just over two years – an impossibly short timeframe which needed to encompass start-up, infrastructure development, operation and productivity
- As a short-term initiative focused on a specific event, it did not seek to underpin itself with any structured or longer-term talent identification and development programme. This meant that it was seeking to fine-tune the mature products of an inefficient system, in which it could only expect limited success
- It relied heavily on the national governing bodies for its delivery – some of which responded well, some less so (see below)
- It was operated separately from the ISC's core grants programme, through which the non-performance activities of each funded sport are supported. It did not uniformly replace the performance element of the core grants programme – in some cases being additional to or augmenting parts of it
- These two programmes were administered from separate departments within the ISC – the High Performance Unit, and the National Governing Bodies Unit. While the effectiveness of the liaison between these departments is not in question, the situation has had implications:
 - Sports were not required to plan holistically, but in two often unrelated strategies
 - In particular, there was no necessary connection between athlete recruitment and development strategies, and performance strategies
 - Some sports had separate points of contact (and therefore also of accountability) within the ISC

8.10 To comment specifically on the International Carding Scheme:

- Interviewees suggested that the criteria for inclusion were too wide. These allowed too many sub-elite athletes (especially in the sub-World Class International category

which, in 2003, contained 74 of the 220 athletes on the scheme, or 33.64 per cent) to draw down funding and support

- The exclusion of team sports from it has disadvantaged numbers of sports (ladies' hockey, football) in which Ireland might otherwise have hoped to do well. This has meant especially that a large proportion of the Irish Paralympic team (i.e., the football team) were not covered by the scheme
- It was also suggested that the method of entry to the programme – the one-hit fulfilment of performance targets, leading to two years' guaranteed support – has not encouraged consistency of achievement or a drive for excellence
- There is some evidence that a "social security mentality" has emerged, wherein retaining a place on the scheme has become in some cases more important than achieving international success
- The fact that funding for athletes through the scheme has been channelled via their national governing bodies has created a wide variation in the levels of efficiency with which their monies are paid. Numbers of athletes complained that their governing bodies were frequently late and irregular in transferring money to them
- Athlete use of services has had limited management by either the NCTC or the national governing bodies. That is to say, athletes have had considerable autonomy to choose how, when and from whom they have sought support (see 8.66 below). This has allowed too many athletes to operate their own "institutes of one" – which in some cases have run contrary to the support programmes established by their national governing body through the AEP (see 7.105 above, for the impact of this on continuity of care)
- Given the existence of two parallel systems for funding elite athletes and their programmes, and the dangers of double-funding that this presented, the ISC has established effective safeguards to militate against this possibility

8.11 Issues in respect of the ISC's investment in the NCTC, OCI and PCI will each be considered on their separate merits below.

8.12 In its relationships with those in whom it invests, the ISC has been painfully aware of the need to establish partnership working with key agencies and organisations over this first era of its own existence. Its stated intention has been to persuade and empower, rather than to enforce and drive; to include, rather than to exclude. While this approach is entirely understandable under what have been difficult circumstances (see 7.30, 8.22ff., 8.74-75, etc.), it has been argued by interviewees that the result has been the avoidance of hard decisions and confrontation in the delivery and monitoring of the ISC's investment policies.

8.13 There is a case made for the ISC to be firmer in its approach to this process, in at least five respects:

- Greater prescription in the required structure and content of forward plans which serve as funding applications
- More rigorous assessment and challenge of such plans
- The attachment of terms and conditions to the award of funding, e.g., that funded sports should participate in key OCI Games-preparation initiatives
- Greater scrutiny of the detail of the fulfilment of such plans, e.g., in auditing athletes' observation of the programmes which they submitted in advance to secure funding under the International Carding Scheme
- Greater accountability being applied to the authors of such plans, e.g., in ensuring that non-fulfilment of stated targets has direct consequences

8.14 In order that the ISC may fulfil this recommendation, resource will be a requirement in addition to attitude. The ISC maintains a small High Performance Unit of just four core staff, supported by one part-time consultant. Even including the five personnel employed by the NCTC in their athlete/player services section, this level of resource suffers by comparison with that employed by New Zealand to similar effect, let alone the performance support function operated by UK Sport in Great Britain (see 6.34 above). In relation to the breadth of tasks which it is required to deliver, it seems scarcely adequate.

8.15 The ISC's High Performance Unit is only two years old, and is therefore still evolving and refining the definition of the brief that it fulfils. Currently from within this unit there is a requirement to fulfil at least three demanding and time-consuming functions:

- Performance leadership and management – i.e., establishing performance policy and strategy, and commissioning performance programmes from governing bodies and key agencies in accordance with it
- Performance development – i.e., taking on and delivering key roles in specific areas of the high performance system under development
- Performance monitoring and auditing – i.e., ensuring the quality of the performance programmes which it receives, in both process and outputs

8.16 There is some potential conflict between the first and third of these functions: the High Performance Unit is required simultaneously to be “good cop and bad cop”; both to establish positive and productive partnerships with funded organisations, and to take a hard line in policing their expenditure of those funds. Since there are insufficient staff within the ISC to allow these functions to be delivered by separate individuals, they remain in the hands of the same officers.

8.17 Given this situation, and in order to ensure the continued integrity of the investment process, the ISC should regularly review the effectiveness of its procedures for the validation, monitoring and auditing of sports' and athletes' performance expenditure. It may even wish to consider establishing a discrete monitoring and audit/compliance function – but without creating an additional, unwelcome and costly tier of bureaucracy.

8.18 As well as performing these two occasionally conflicting functions, the ISC's High Performance Unit has sought to fulfil a third function: that of performance development agency. In doing so, it has unintentionally generated tension with the NCTC; for the latter views itself as the technical/performance development agency for Irish sport, and the ISC as trespassing on its territory. (See 8.73-75 below, for further comment.)

8.19 Most notably in this respect the High Performance Unit has been responsible for staging High Performance Corners – forums in which sports might receive information and advice on world's best practice, and share their own experience and expertise. Opinion on the efficacy of these events has been generally positive:

- Sports' representatives who had attended the High Performance Corners thought that they were important and effective, and added considerable value to the performance plans which they were delivering
- However, there was some comment from Paralympic representatives – the majority of whom are volunteers – that the events were difficult to access, in that they usually took place during working hours

8.20 In summary, then:

- The investment decisions which the ISC has taken in the delivery of those strategies have been entirely sound:
 - The successor to Athens Enhancement Programme requires a longer-term and more holistic approach which links it to the supporting developmental infrastructure within sports
 - The International Carding Scheme requires a review which will narrow its focus, enhance its systems of accountability, and tighten the links between athletes, their governing bodies, and service providers
- The ISC's performance strategies require review, especially to quantify and specify their desired outcomes
- The internal processes through which the ISC manages high performance require review and additional resource, in order that the functions which it wishes to be fulfilled may be effectively delivered

(b) *The Olympic Council of Ireland*

8.21 The ISC has invested in the OCI in its capacity as the agency responsible for the preparation of the Irish Olympic team, and its participation in the Games themselves. The objectives behind this investment were apparently twofold:

- To professionalise its management, in the sense that it would employ and deploy more executive staff with greater delegated responsibility for operational matters
- To professionalise its sporting support systems, in respect of preparation for and participation in the Olympic Games

8.22 Ahead of the ISC's expectation that the OCI would fulfil these objectives there were three potential obstacles – one circumstantial, and the other two uncontrollables which the OCI might hope to influence but never determine:

- First, the background out of which the relationship between the ISC and OCI was forged – a highly uncomfortable one, wherein the OCI had had its role as the performance lead transferred to the ISC (see 7.30 above), a development which had caused considerable resentment
- Second, the parameters set around the OCI by external parties, principally the guidelines set by the IOC and the Athens Organising Committee (ATHOC)
- Third, the fact that the athletes, coaches and managers whom the OCI took to Athens did not belong to it, but to their respective governing bodies

8.23 The first of these meant that the early history of the Olympic Performance Committee was stormy, marked by profound and apparently largely political disputes. Yet the committee survived this unpromising beginning and went on to produce some highly positive outputs, in the course of which a much improved and stable relationship between the ISC and OCI was established. This is a tribute both to the determination of those involved to stay on task, and the diplomatic manoeuvrings of those outside the group.

8.24 That said, interviewees opined that the effectiveness of the Olympic Performance Committee had been compromised somewhat by the need to work around this political difficulty. Some felt that the emphasis within the committee was on keeping the peace and maintaining the relationship at all costs, instead of tackling hard performance issues head-on. (See also 8.12 above for this.)

8.25 The first objective stated in 8.21 above, in respect of the OCI's management, recognises the principal risks inherent in any organisation where there are large numbers of volunteers involved. These may be that:

- There is a shortfall in operational efficiency – as work tends to get done when volunteers have time to do it, not when it needs doing
- Internal politics will prevail, as personal status and recognition becomes as important as getting the job done

8.26 As implied at 7.33-34 above, the OCI's rationale for not taking the envisaged steps towards the professionalisation of their organisation was that the middle of the cycle, when the Chef de Mission and his deputy were already well advanced with the fulfilment of their roles, was not the time to be making radical change. This seems entirely reasonable. However, the stated intentions to initiate these steps in the aftermath of the Athens Games must now be fulfilled.

8.27 The major challenges for the OCI going forward over the course of the next cycle will be as follows:

- To proceed as planned with the appointment of a Chief Executive Officer, and the full empowerment of the Sports Director
- To ensure that the orientation of the job description against which the Chief Executive Officer is recruited, adequately represents the needs of the organisation

- To draw a manageable and sustainable line between strategic management (the preserve of the Executive Committee) and operational management (the preserve of the employed executive staff)
- To conduct a managed and sustainable transfer of day-to-day control of the organisation from the Executive Committee to the Chief Executive Officer

8.28 A further challenge will be to ensure that the intention to include athlete representation within the OCI's governance, through the medium of a properly constructed and orientated Athletes' Commission, is fulfilled. The steps which have been taken towards this, and the false start which dogged these, have been mentioned at 7.64ff. above.

8.29 The second objective stated in 8.21, to professionalise the OCI's sporting support services, has delivered welcome change in some respects, less so in others. Herein lies the divide between quantitative and qualitative fulfilment which was referred to at 7.118: there is no doubt that the OCI has paid attention to each and every one of the Sydney Review recommendations, and moved change in respect of all of them; there are, however, some questions as to whether that change has demonstrated positive effect.

8.30 Areas in which the OCI has demonstrably excelled over the course of the Athens cycle are as follows:

8.30.1 The quality of the staff it appointed to key roles. Both the Chef de Mission and his deputy were highly praised by all who worked with them for the delivery of their respective roles, while the Chief Medical Officer and the other members of the Irish Olympic team's support staff also appear to be of an appropriately high calibre;

8.30.2 The utilisation of accreditations. The OCI did well to recognise that, with a small team of athletes qualifying for the Games, it could not justify the retention of a large headquarters staff. The decision to maximise the number of accreditations given to sports was a good one;

8.30.3 The provision of kit and equipment. This seems much improved from Sydney and, although there were some concerns over distribution, and some gripes from athletes, these will naturally occur even under the best of circumstances. (Going forward, however, the OCI would do Irish sport a great service if it exercised its collective bargaining powers in closer partnership with the PCI; see 8.47.7 below);

8.30.4 Medical/science support. The processes that the OCI's medical commission went through to identify and recruit support staff for the Cyprus Holding Camp and the Games themselves were thorough and well designed – as was the acclimatisation strategy which the group produced; as was the procedure devised with the NCTC to deliver continuity of care.

8.31 Areas where the OCI performed well, but where there were still questions arising, include the following:

8.31.1 Planning. The OCI produced and published a "road map" which largely comprised a list of dates, deadlines and targets to fulfil – which seems to have been an improvement on previous practices. However, this quantitative approach falls some way short of a quality-based strategic plan: the former states merely that things have to be done within a certain schedule; the latter states how they will be done, and how well. It is this additional level of delivery that the OCI should seek in its planning for the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games – especially to justify the investment which the ISC makes in it;

8.31.2 Qualification and selection. The OCI did well to stand its ground and insist that A standard criteria should be uniformly observed – but there seems to have been some high degree of dissatisfaction (especially within athletics) over what was seen as a lack of sympathy displayed in the timing of the qualification deadline. Therefore greater consideration of the periodisation of training and competition programmes

might usefully be taken in the formulation of future qualification deadlines for athletics and swimming, and more flexibility allowed as a result. The OCI should also seek to augment its published selection process with a selection policy (i.e., the underlying rationale behind the imposition of the process);

8.31.3 Multisport training and holding camps. These were undoubtedly well organised by the OCI, as the respondents to the athletes' questionnaire attest. However, the fact that the Cyprus Holding Camp was poorly subscribed, and that two other parallel camps were also in operation, watered down the rationale for staging this initiative. Team spirit in particular – highly underrated by the members of the Irish Olympic team – suffered badly as a result; while athletes stated that the camps did not fulfil the vital function of adequately preparing them for life in the Olympic Village. Ironically, then, the OCI stands accused of being almost too compliant with the wishes of athletes, in providing too wide a range of pre-Games preparation opportunities. While there may have been limits to the extent to which it could have influenced attendance in Cyprus, the OCI should be especially mindful in future of:

- The venue for such camps – that it accesses facilities appropriate to the needs of as many sports as possible, to eliminate athletes' reasons for not attending
- Methods through which it might exert an obligation on athletes to attend such camps (for which, see 8.13 above)
- The needs of the PCI – that these may be accommodated as much as possible within the same site

8.31.4 Media management. The OCI played its part in delivering the joint strategy for the management of public expectations but, as stated at 7.46 above, the effects of this did not survive the Games. While there were some mitigating circumstances for this, some interviewees were critical of the OCI for not attempting to set the agenda for their media coverage in a way that would be expected in other major tournaments, such as soccer or rugby World Cups. It is acknowledged that resource is an issue here, as stated at 7.101 above: notwithstanding this, and subject to issues of accreditation being resolved, instead of pursuing a media policy which is restricted to facilitating media access to athletes and other relevant parties the OCI might usefully consider ways of adopting a more proactive and interventionist approach.

8.32 Areas where the OCI made apparently little progress in the course of the Athens cycle include the following:

8.32.1 Role definition for support staff. No member of the Irish Olympic team's support staff had a written job description or terms of reference. This lack of formality presents the prospect of sub-optimal operation within the Games environment, and is a risk which should be better managed;

8.32.2 Team Manager training. While this was delivered, it was generally considered to have been inappropriate and therefore lacking in value. Greater care needs to be exercised to ensure that the training programme is specific to the needs of the managers, and adds value to their preparation; also that it extends to cover other support staff at the Games;

8.32.3 Communications within the Olympic Village, and outwith. Regular Team Manager meetings were deemed impractical, and the preferred method of communication by mobile phone was not considered by all of those involved to be sufficiently effective. Intra-team communication is a fundamental operational matter which requires microscopic attention;

8.32.4 Team spirit. As in Sydney, this was largely conspicuous by its absence. It is something which serves other nations exceptionally well, and is a galvanising force which can have a powerful effect across sports and disciplines; without it, the psychological support mechanisms which underpin performance are lacking. Notwithstanding the circumstantial and logistical difficulties of so doing, as the owner

of the property that is the Irish Olympic team the OCI needs to recognise the importance of team spirit, and to focus attention and resource on its generation. (In this, it will be important that the OCI is met halfway by the athletes and their governing bodies, and that they too acknowledge their own responsibilities in this area.)

8.33 In summary, then, the OCI can be stated to have made substantial progress in return for the investment which the ISC has made in it over the past four years. Areas remain in which its planning, preparation and Games-specific operations can be improved; these improvements should be prioritised for delivery over the next four years as the OCI looks to build now on the foundations which it has laid.

(c) *The Paralympic Council of Ireland*

8.34 The ISC has invested in the PCI in its capacity as the agency responsible for the preparation of the Irish Paralympic team, and its participation in the Games themselves. As with the OCI, the objectives behind this investment were apparently twofold:

- To professionalise its management, in the sense that it would employ and deploy more executive staff with greater delegated responsibility for operational matters
- To professionalise its sporting support systems, in respect of preparation for and participation in the Paralympic Games

8.35 The background to this investment seems to have lacked the tension which was a hallmark of the relationship between the ISC and the OCI around the time of the Sydney Games (see 7.30, 8.22-23 above). By contrast, the ISC's relationship with the PCI has been entirely harmonious, which has led to what all involved have described as a very positive and constructive dialogue.

8.36 The medium through which this relationship has been conducted has been the Paralympic Performance Committee – a direct parallel of the Olympic Performance Committee. Although the Paralympic campaign received no mention in the Sydney Review, it was deemed appropriate that similar processes were instituted to support the PCI going forward as were afforded to the OCI. This equitable approach is to be applauded, and will need maintenance if Ireland is to compete consistently on the Paralympic stage.

8.37 The PCI dealt with core business, and delegated specific areas such as travel and apparel to dedicated sub-committees. This delegation seems to have produced mixed success, not least because of the irregular availability of volunteers. Given the drive towards increased professionalism, this policy will require review in future.

8.38 Having considered various alternative options to serve the same end, the PPC supported the proposal to appoint a Technical Director to the PCI in January 2003. The effective responsibility of this officer was to serve as a Performance Director for all Paralympic sports.

8.39 Specifically, the Technical Director worked directly with sports' Team Managers, athletes and coaches on the delivery of the Athens Enhancement Programme. In Paralympic terms, AEP funding was provided directly to the PCI who assumed responsibility for funding and creating support networks around the individual athletes who would comprise the Irish Paralympic team – including those who were not part of the International Carding Scheme.

8.40 Given the strong element of central control, and the “added value” approach, this programme to support “institutes of one” was considered highly successful. Over 61 per cent of athlete questionnaire respondents believed that it improved their own personal performances, while 100 per cent of respondents believed it improved Ireland's overall performances. Interviewees believed that it was directly responsible for at least three of the four medals which Ireland won in the Paralympic Games.

8.41 The Technical Director was very well received and highly rated both by athletes and their Team Managers. Some 85 per cent of respondents to the athlete questionnaire rated him as either excellent or good, while the Team Managers who were interviewed concurred with this majority view.

8.42 The appointment of the Technical Director can therefore be considered a success. There are, however, improvements which might be made to his position going forward:

- His job description and brief should be reviewed and tightened up – and he perhaps requires a different title. As with all positions which carry this title, the Technical Director appears as all things to all men – for “technical” covers a very wide area, from the technicalities of high performance to the technical specifications of facilities and equipment, etc. Comment was made that the PCI’s Technical Director became involved in some areas which were non-essential to his role, albeit relevant to the organisation as a whole. This was perhaps inevitable, and requires managing in future
- His accreditation for the Paralympic Games should be a given. While Paralympic Organising Committees offer no specific accreditation for a technical position within national Paralympic teams, for Athens the PCI recognised the need to provide education and experience for its Technical Director. It therefore sought alternative means of accreditation, which was ultimately afforded as the guest of the Secretary General. This allowed the Technical Director valuable and unrestricted access to the team and the Games, and allowed him to evaluate Ireland’s performances effectively. Going forward, the PCI should again take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that the executive officer charged with improving the performance of elite athletes has access to the arena in which that performance is delivered
 - As an aside, the presence of the Technical Director in Athens turned out to be crucial, as first he stood in for the athletics Team Manager when he fell ill, and latterly he was given responsibility for continually updating the PCI’s website. Both of these were highly valuable functions, if not actually core to his position

8.43 The Technical Director was responsible and accountable to the PCI’s executive officer, the Secretary General, whose position was part-time for three years of the Paralympic cycle and full-time in the fourth. Given the increasing profile of the Paralympic Games, and the rising standards of the opposition, the time is right to review whether this is sufficient for the purpose of managing the PCI; also whether other dedicated appointments would be appropriate to fulfil specific briefs such as marketing, fund-raising and commercial exploitation. (Indeed, such a strategic review is currently ongoing within the PCI, and is intended to be concluded by mid-2005.)

8.44 It would be appropriate for such a review to include an overall debate over what the PCI does and does not do. For, if it is to take more responsibility for performance development among Paralympic athletes, then its operations begin to creep into the territory occupied by individual governing bodies of sport. It should therefore take careful consideration of where it wishes the boundaries around its own territory to be located, and how this may impact upon its relationships with other Paralympic stakeholders.

8.45 In respect of the professionalisation of the sporting support systems surrounding the Irish Paralympic team, there were a number of welcome innovations. These included the following:

8.45.1 There was a formal recruitment process for the post of Chef de Mission, albeit only from within the member federations of the PCI. This represented a positive development – although it was undermined somewhat by the absence of a job description or formal brief against which the Chef de Mission could operate. (There were a number of adverse comments made by athletes and Team Managers about the Chef de Mission’s performance in Athens; however, there is no reason to connect these with either the efficiency of the recruitment process, or the absence of a job description);

8.45.2 The Athens Games were the first at which Team Managers had been appointed for sports, rather than for disability groupings. Again, this was a very positive development: athlete questionnaire respondents gave high approval ratings for their own sports' personnel, and a contingent benefit was that accreditations were liberated to allow a full sports science/medical support staff to accompany the Irish team for the first time;

8.45.3 This full sports science/medicine team was extensively used by the athletes in Athens, and was unanimously highly rated by them. There can be no doubting the necessity of this level of provision in support of a full team of disabled athletes;

8.45.4 The increase in funding for the PCI allowed for a pre-Games training camp in Cyprus in the year prior to the Games, which was a further new initiative. This created an environment in which preparations and arrangements could be trialled in advance of staging the Holding Camp proper, which optimised the operation of the latter. All who attended this training camp, and who responded to the athlete questionnaire, considered it to be either good or excellent;

8.45.5 In addition to the Cyprus camp, domestic training camps were also staged at the NCTC in Limerick, whose purposes were to team-build, and to educate and inform the athletes, their coaches and Team Managers. Again, these were considered to be either good or excellent by the majority of attendees.

8.46 The PCI can be considered to have been successful in delivering the following:

8.46.1 Its processes of qualification and selection. These were determined early in the cycle, they focused on ensuring that selected athletes were capable of competing at world level, and they were considered clear and effective by the athletes who were subject to them. (A possible improvement here might be the publication of a selection policy, which gives the supporting rationale behind the standards and processes used: see also 8.31.2 above):

8.46.2 Performance against potential. It has already been remarked in section 5 how many members of the Irish Paralympic team performed optimally at the Games – while almost 40 per cent of athletes who responded to the athlete questionnaire stated that they had achieved their performance goal. While there were also those who underperformed, the PCI's preparation for performance coupled sound process with tangible outputs;

8.46.3 Media coverage. The PCI forged a very constructive partnership with the ISC, whose media relations personnel accompanied the Irish Paralympic team to Athens and ensured a regular stream of positive and informative news releases. This was coupled with the daily updating of the PCI's website by its Technical Director. Together, these provided the basis for an increase in media coverage, and the creation of a favourable impression around the team which diverted attention away from the potentially negative fact that baseline results were worse than in Sydney.

8.47 Where there are areas in which the PCI might improve its operations over the cycle to the Beijing 2008 Paralympic Games, they include the following:

8.47.1 The preparation of athletes should begin earlier in the cycle. The PCI's Technical Director did not take up his position until January 2003, and it was not until later that year that AEP funding could be brought to positive effect. It is true that Paralympic sport allows for great progressions to be delivered in very short periods of time; however, that truism should not be utilised as a reason to hold off from preparation for Beijing until the second or third year of the cycle;

8.47.2 Sports science and medicine support. The NCTC recognises that it did not provide sufficient or specific service provision to cover Paralympic athletes in the

build-up to Athens – and this is a particular challenge going forward. Paralympic athletes require support services which are not only sport-specific, but which are disability-specific and wholly accessible. Detailed attention and resource should be diverted into this area;

8.47.3 Athlete receptivity. The excellence of the acclimatisation strategy devised for dissemination among Olympic and Paralympic athletes has been mentioned at 7.54-58 above. Yet 7.58 also points out that a third of Paralympic athletes still complained that they had been affected by the environment in Athens. Insofar as this is decipherable, it may reflect upon the athletes' comprehension of the science which was being put to them – in which case the sports science/medicine provision which is required in 8.47.2 must acknowledge this and cater specifically for it;

8.47.4 Team Managers and their training. The PCI opted out of the Team Managers' training programme delivered by the OCI (for which, see 7.92 above), and conducted its own training by means of quarterly sports managers' meetings. It acknowledges now that there needs to be a longer-term and more structured programme which is specific to the requirements of managing Paralympic athletes, and which is delivered in accordance with the availability of volunteers. As with the OCI, the PCI should also consider the appropriateness of seeking greater influence over the appointment of individuals to these key roles (see 7.97 above);

8.47.5 Selection of the training/holding camp venue. This was conducted by the OCI: while the Cyprus venue was appropriate for the majority of the PCI's needs, this was more by luck than judgement. Greater levels of co-operation must be demonstrated between the OCI and PCI in sourcing a venue which suits the requirements of both agencies;

8.47.6 Support staff – in two respects:

- These should have written job descriptions and terms of reference. The PCI states that it did not feel able to impose these on the volunteers with whom it was working. However, it is important to support such volunteers through the establishment of security and certainty, and the eradication of risk – while at the same time allowing for the flexibility which is necessary in dealing with the complex demands of Paralympic athletes
- The balance of the support staff within and outwith the Paralympic Village. The PCI should review this, with particular consideration given to the relative positioning of exercise physiologist, team psychologist, and additional medical personnel

8.47.7 Kit and equipment. The PCI shared the OCI's supply deal with ASICS, but were not adequately catered for within it; they were left with the sense that they had been provided with leftovers, and were compelled to spend time sourcing alternative supplies. As previously stated at 8.30.3 above, this is a further area where the collaboration between the OCI and PCI could be conducted on more equitable terms.

8.48 Summarily, then, it can be stated that the PCI has made substantial and positive progress in return for the investment that the ISC has made in it over the past two years. The foregoing suggests that there are numbers of matters of detail which need to be addressed, which process can be conducted from the platform that has been established to date.

8.49 Meanwhile, however, there are also wider issues within the landscape of Irish disability sport which require review and redress. If Ireland is to continue to compete within an increasingly intense Paralympic environment, these supporting areas need to be fully and effectively functioning in order to support the performance stratum:

:

- The overall governing body environment. There are anomalies still in the governance of individual sports, as is evidenced by the fact that disability athletics has three separate governing bodies, while the wheelchair sports federation manages ambulant

amputee athletes. These anomalies require redress in order that the pathways described below may be coherently and cohesively delivered

- Athlete performance pathways. These should be clearly defined and effectively delivered through national governing bodies of sport, in order to ensure a future supply of elite Paralympic athletes (cf. the progress being made by other nations in this respect)
- Coach development pathways. These should combine an elite coach's education with a disability-specific aspect, to ensure the future provision of guidance to elite Paralympic athletes
- Ongoing support networks in between Paralympic Games, especially through the International Carding Scheme. It should be noted that 33 per cent of Ireland's Paralympic athletes are full-time, as compared to 58 per cent of the Great Britain Paralympic team

(d) *The national governing bodies of sport*

8.50 It is not the role of this enquiry to evaluate the performances of each individual sport in Athens. Instead, its purpose is to look at national governing bodies in the round, and how they responded to the investment provided through the Athens Enhancement Programme.

8.51 By way of implementation of the sixth recommendation of the Sydney Review (see 7.22ff. above), the AEP required sports to consider the development of new performance infrastructures which would exercise centralised direction, programming and support for elite athletes. The wisdom of this investment objective has already been confirmed at 8.8 above, as has the ultimate outcome: the task at hand here is to assess whether the plans which were put forward to fulfil that objective were robust, systematic, outcome-orientated and effectively delivered.

8.52 This assessment might most usefully be broken down into an assessment of the principal factors which were likely to impact upon the effective delivery of the AEP, which included the following:

- The quality of the initial planning process and outputs
- The quality of personnel recruited or deputed to deliver those plans
- The role which such personnel were required and able to fulfil
- Levels of acceptance by other governance and management personnel within the sports
- Levels of acceptance by the senior, performance-level athletes active within the sports
- The underpinning processes of athlete and coach development within the sports

8.53 It should be noted that the vital process of performance planning was an entirely new phenomenon within Irish Olympic sports, even in fundamental respects such as nominating squads and setting targets. The result was that there was some variation in the standard of plans submitted by governing bodies: some were good, some much less so. The most commonly arising issues were as follows:

- The targets set by the majority of sports were ambitious at best, unrealistic at worst (see 4.33-34 above). However, it should be recognised that sports may have perceived that the targets they set would influence the level of investment they attracted; therefore they aimed high purely to secure more money
- Too many athletes were included within performance plans who did not represent genuine prospects of qualification for the Games (see 4.34 above, and also 8.10 for a parallel issue within the International Carding Scheme)
- The majority of plans concentrated solely on squad training activities and competition schedules; few if any proposals were advanced which sought to influence the day-to-day practices of the athletes, and the training and coaching regimes that they followed in between squad sessions and competitions.

8.54 In this last respect, the key to delivering meaningful results within the timeframe allowed for the delivery of the AEP was to ensure that mature, senior athletes modified their habits in every respect to accord with world's best practice. However, in that they did not attempt to make prescription or to move change within their athletes' immediate training environment, the performance plans of the governing bodies did not suggest that such results could be achieved.

8.55 The introduction of paid staff into supported sports was in line with the 11th recommendation of the Sydney Review, and was discussed at 7.40ff. above. Herein the original intention of the Sydney Review was to appoint performance coaches, but this was subsequently reorientated by the High Performance Strategy, which suggested that Performance Directors might be equally appropriate.

8.56 The timing of the launch of the AEP – just two years out from the Games – had an impact in this area. The principal implications of it were that:

- Some sports decided not to appoint a Performance Director, as they did not consider themselves ready to do so. Thus the responsibility for performance continued to lie with volunteers who, with the best will in the world, were not able to dedicate the requisite time to the fulfilment of detailed and enhanced performance plans
- Those sports which did make appointments did so largely from within, or at least from within Ireland. At that stage of the Olympic cycle, a very great majority of suitable international candidates for the role of Performance Director would be already engaged in preparing a nation for the Games. Thus it was not possible for Irish sports to advertise widely and hope to recruit the best available candidate from a worldwide search

8.57 This is not to say that those who were appointed were not of the requisite calibre. When interviewed, colleagues and peers suggested that some sports had attracted very able individuals whose capacity to fulfil the role as it was ideally intended was not in doubt. This view was supported by around half of the respondents to the athlete questionnaire: that the remaining half expressed the converse view will be considered at 8.63ff. below.

8.58 Issues which appear to have arisen surrounding governing bodies' appointment of performance professionals to deliver their plans include the following:

- A misunderstanding of the role of the Performance Director, as to whether it embodied technical or management expertise. The ideal is that it should embody both: some sports thought it was one or the other, or simply could not decide
- The required involvement of the Performance Director in areas which were not related to high performance, by dint of the presumed applicability of his/her technical expertise
- A reluctance among the volunteers to cede the control that they had traditionally exercised in this area to a full-time performance expert. This may have lain covertly behind the failure of some sports to make an appointment in the first place
- The failure of some sports to nominate their Performance Director for accreditation for the Olympic Games.

8.59 On this last point, common sense dictates that, if a suitably expert and experienced individual is appointed to take charge of performance, then he/she should be given full executive responsibility for so doing. It also dictates that, if an individual is responsible and accountable for delivering a programme which seeks to produce medals at a major championship, then he/she should have a presence at that championship in order to influence the outcome of his/her programme. This common sense has not been applied in more than one Irish Olympic sport.

8.60 Instead of nominating their executive performance staff for accreditation for the Games, some governing bodies chose to continue a policy of utilising Team Manager positions as rewards for good or long volunteer service within their sport. This raised profound issues of quality in several sports, which were identified at 7.96 above.

8.61 This friction between executives and volunteers is not the only corporate concern to arise from the institution of the AEP. As has been identified around the British World Class Performance Programme (see 6.4 above), some traces of the problems of integrating large performance systems and investment within small corporate infrastructures have become apparent in Ireland. Some governing bodies have provided evidence that the stresses eventuating from this process have become acute – not least in financial terms.

8.62 Ultimately, the success or failure of performance planning and management is in the hands of the athletes: their fundamental calibre and potential, and their responsiveness to the programmes which are provided to support them, is key.

8.63 Whereas the Sydney Review attracted adverse comment from athletes across a broad range of Olympic issues, this Athens Review has seen athletes concentrate their criticism around their governing bodies – including through the medium of the athlete questionnaire, wherein:

- 59.1 per cent believed their governing bodies were either poor or very poor overall
- In specific areas the following percentages of respondent thought their governing bodies either poor or very poor:
 - General administration – 45.4 per cent
 - Communication – 76.2 per cent
 - Use of resources – 61.9 per cent
- Approximately half of those who responded thought that both their Performance Director and the base components of their performance programme – provision of training facilities, competition logistics, competition management – were either poor or very poor

8.64 There are perhaps three, contrasting ways to look at the athletes' comments:

- First, to take them at face value and to respect these judgements. Professional athletes demand similar levels of professionalism from those who support them, and their comments here suggest that around half of them were not encountering this
- Alternatively, to view such comments as a manifestation of the athletes' resistance to the change being delivered through the Athens Enhancement Programme – most notably the efforts to subject them to centralised direction and programming. When faced with the prospect of losing freedom, and the requirement to conform to a system of accountability, it would not be surprising to find senior athletes reacting negatively and lashing out against the agency which seeks to bring them in line
- More cynically, to see them as an attempt to offload responsibility for poor performances at the Games on to their governing bodies and support staff

8.65 The truth will probably lie somewhere between the three, but with all having some validity in specific cases:

- It is true that some sports have not responded to the institution of the AEP with the requisite professionalism
- In the experience of some sports involved in the British World Class Performance Programme, the principles of centralised direction and management became established only when senior athletes grew out of the programme and were replaced by younger athletes who were accustomed to living by those principles
- The athletes who attended the Athens 2004 Olympic Games were perhaps the best prepared and supported in Irish history – but several performances did not reflect that background. In such circumstances, it would be understandable if regrettable if they sought to deflect the blame elsewhere

8.66 What is of particular concern in the development of Ireland's high performance system over the past two years is the amount of latitude given to athletes within various performance programmes. The recommendation to adopt an "athlete-focused" approach seems to have been taken to its ultimate conclusion, as evidenced by the following:

- Some athletes determining their own sports science and medicine support staff – as indeed they have been allowed to through the International Carding Scheme (for which, see 8.10 above)
- Some athletes determining for themselves whether they attended training and holding camps, and the dates on which they arrived and departed
- The absence of collective buy-in to the team ethos within the Olympic campaign
- The absence of employment-style contracts which set out in detail the obligations of the athletes in return for the funding and support that they receive
- Deficiencies within processes of accountability, against which athletes are audited for their fulfilment of the programmes which they predetermined and the targets which they set for themselves

8.67 Giving the athlete so much responsibility for their own destiny within the scope of a programme assumes that he/she will be intimately acquainted with world's best practice, and able to replicate this within his/her own environment and regime. It also demands that the athlete is subsequently held accountable for his/her choices, and the performance outcome of these:

- It is questionable whether this assumption has been borne out in the case of numbers of Ireland's performance-level athletes
- The accountability demanded of and accepted by individual athletes has also left something to be desired.

8.68 These concerns suggest that there is a need to reorientate the recommendation to adopt an "athlete-focused" approach, so that it becomes instead an "athlete-focused, coach-led" approach. To express it thus gives a better indication of where the balance of power should lie within a centralised performance programme, and puts the onus on the individual who should be the repository of world-class expertise and experience (the coach) rather than the one who should be benefiting from it (the athlete).

8.69 The final critical factor which was listed in 8.52 above as likely to influence the effective delivery of a performance plan was the state of the underpinning athlete and coach development infrastructure. It has been beyond the scope of this enquiry to examine these areas in any detail. However, certain indicators would suggest that this underpinning infrastructure is far from robust in numbers of sports– including:

- The fact that the High Performance Strategy and, latterly, the Olympic athletes' forum chose to emphasise coaching as a key area for change
- The fact that a physical education syllabus for primary schoolchildren has yet to be implemented – which has consequences for the initial development of physical literacy among potential Olympic athletes

8.70 In summary, the following:

- The response to the institution of the AEP from national governing bodies of sport, their management and their athletes, has been mixed in its thoroughness and effectiveness
- The first phase of the development of a high performance culture has been completed, which comprises the foundation for future development – thus:
 - Performance plans have been produced and delivered, and lessons learned
 - Professional staff have been appointed, and have the experience of completing an Olympic cycle
- Culture change is still required, especially among volunteers and athletes, to ensure that the principles of performance professionalism can be fully embraced

8.71 To comment finally on debriefs:

8.71.1 This review was just one of three which were separately conducted in the aftermath of the Athens Games; the other two were by the OCI, and by the individual national governing bodies of sport in respect of the Athens Enhancement Programme;

8.71.2 The institution of cellular debrief processes for both the OCI and the national governing bodies of sport is a new and wholly positive development. However, each of these was delivered from within, with a single exception. There is no reason to cast doubt on the integrity of any of these processes; however, it would surely be preferable for a degree of external objectivity to be applied to ensure that all relevant issues are thoroughly and properly examined;

8.71.3 What is missing from these debrief processes is an exercise which seeks to debrief the athletes as individual performers in respect of their experiences over the past four years – instead of merely canvassing their opinions on what has gone on around them. This exercise should be conducted routinely within governing bodies of sport, by way of a detailed, structured and periodic performance appraisal. This would seek to assess the level of fulfilment of athletes' objectives, the underlying reasons behind this, lessons to be learned from this, and their application in the form of objectives for the forthcoming cycle;

8.71.4 A consequence of the nexus of reviews which has been conducted is that athletes and officials were asked on three separate occasions for their views on what had gone before – and in at least two cases were required to complete substantial questionnaires. Not only will this repetition have been irritating for them, but it will also surely have affected both the quantity and the quality of the responses they provided (see 3.13 above).

(e) *The National Coaching and Training Centre*

8.72 Under the heading of the NCTC there are two parallel functions for this review to fulfil:

- To evaluate the quality and delivery mechanisms of the athlete support services, especially relating to sports science and medicine
- To assess the role of the NCTC in the preparation and participation of the Irish Olympic and Paralympic teams

8.73 Since its establishment in 1992 on the campus of the University of Limerick, the NCTC has had the dual responsibility for maximising sports science and medicine services, and for delivering the National Coaching Development Plan. As such it still sees itself as the technical/performance development agency for Irish sport.

8.74 As with the OCI (see 7.30, 8.22 above), the grant of statutory authority to the ISC in 1999 led to a transformation in the status of the NCTC. It went from being an agency which had a direct funding and reporting relationship with Government, to one which was wholly funded by the ISC in return for its fulfilment of specific set objectives.

8.75 As a consequence, the relationship between the NCTC and its major investor has been strained. At the time of the preparation of this report, particular elements of that relationship are subject to scrutiny in different forums; it would not therefore be appropriate to comment further, other than to make this general background point.

8.76 The NCTC employs 15 full-time personnel, of whom five work on athlete/player services (i.e., sports science and medicine), and three work on coaching and development:

- Compare and contrast the staffing levels of the New Zealand Academy of Sport, wherein there are 26 full-time staff in its Regional Academies who are concerned with the co-ordination and delivery of services to elite athletes

8.77 Over the course of the Athens cycle, the personnel deployed in athlete/player services have had three principal functions:

- To maintain and deliver a network of sports science and medicine service providers to fulfil the requirements of athletes under the International Carding Scheme
- To work with sports governing bodies to formulate and deliver sports science and medicine support programmes within the context of their high performance plans
- To work with the OCI and PCI to develop and deliver sports science and medicine support services for the preparation initiatives staged in advance of the Athens Games, and during the Games themselves – including an acclimatisation strategy

8.78 The first comment to make about these functions is that they have enjoined the NCTC in three roles – thus:

- The generation of demand – working with governing bodies to develop the sports science/medicine requirements of their performance programmes
- The management of supply – the co-ordination of networks of sports science/medicine practitioners
- The delivery of supply – the provision of support services by personnel working within the NCTC

8.79 In an ideal world, these three roles would be distinct and separated by Chinese walls. There is a potential conflict of interests between them: the conditions are in place for the generation of demand and the management of supply to be manipulated so that the delivery of supply (and therefore also the funding to support it) is concentrated within the same, single source. It does not represent good practice for such conditions to exist.

8.80 In respect of the first of the functions listed in 8.77 above:

8.80.1 The NCTC maintains a network of over 350 individual service providers who have declared their willingness and availability to work with the 262 athletes who are on the International Carding Scheme. The majority of these service providers would appear to be medical and physiotherapy practitioners;

8.80.2 The NCTC states that this network includes provisional relationships with other third-level institutions throughout Ireland which are not formally developed. If it were, it might form the basis of the strategic framework of national centres for service provision which was envisaged by the High Performance Strategy (see 7.13ff. above);

8.80.3 In the identification of these service providers, the NCTC has tasked the relevant professional bodies of the various disciplines involved with setting the minimum qualification standards against which individuals are selected;

8.80.4 Each discipline has a volunteer co-ordinator appointed by the NCTC to set a lead and offer specific advice and guidance;

8.80.5 Athletes based overseas are required to identify their own service providers, and to reclaim the cost of doing so from the NCTC. The NCTC attempts to ensure that such providers are of the requisite standard, and will also attempt to identify a provider if the athlete is unable to do so for him/herself (see 7.68ff. above for the effectiveness of this);

8.81 The NCTC acknowledges that its provision of services to carded athletes is quantitative, and not qualitative. Given the numbers of athletes who need to be serviced, the emphasis has been largely on ensuring that they can access services, rather than ensuring that those services are delivered well. Issues such as quality assurance, and the continuous professional development of service providers, have not been effectively addressed:

8.82 Because of this lack of absolute rigour in selecting, monitoring and training service providers, the NCTC recognises that not enough has been done to ensure that a majority of the 350-plus service providers within the network can be considered to be truly and demonstrably world-class in their delivery of sports science and sports medicine services.

- In these respects, there is surely a requirement to consider the establishment of professional sports science and medicine bodies in Ireland which can assume responsibility for setting standards across all aspects of delivery – as exist in Great Britain in the form of the British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences (BASES) and the British Association of Sports Medicine (BASM)

8.83 The athletes' questionnaire responses stated the following in respect of the support services received through the International Carding Scheme:

- Over a third of Olympic respondents did not receive services from or via the NCTC – while the high number of athletes who claimed not to be in regular communication with NCTC was remarked upon at 7.72 above
- Broadest subscribed among Olympic respondents were physiology, nutrition, psychology, medical and physiotherapy services
- Broadest subscribed among Paralympic respondents were strength & conditioning, nutrition and psychology services
- Most frequently accessed were physiotherapy services: almost a third of Olympic respondents, and a quarter of Paralympic respondents, accessed these weekly. Paralympic respondents also made frequent use of sports massage, with one-third of them getting weekly treatment
- Of all the other available services, the most frequently accessed were strength & conditioning, with almost half of Olympic respondents using these either weekly or monthly; and psychology support, with a quarter of Olympic respondents utilising this on a monthly basis
- Overall, just over half of the Olympic and Paralympic respondents thought that sports science services had either improved or improved greatly over the course of the Athens cycle – while 36.8 per cent and 44.4 per cent respectively thought they had stayed the same
- Over a third of Olympic respondents, and almost all Paralympic respondents, thought that sports medicine services had either improved or improved greatly over the course of the Athens cycle – while half the Olympic respondents and the remainder of the Paralympic respondents thought they had stayed the same

8.84 The two most notable issues arising from these responses are that:

- There are comparatively low levels of uptake of strength and conditioning advice among Olympic athletes: the questionnaire indicated that it is accessed by only 57.1 per cent of respondents – albeit that those who access it do so frequently
- The absence of career/education/lifestyle support services. The NCTC points out that the development and implementation of these areas was not included within their remit, despite their requesting that it should be

8.85 Strength and conditioning has been recognised as an absolute fundamental by Ireland's competitor nations; being fit is seen as a simple prerequisite for being able to compete at the highest level. Meanwhile, lifestyle support services are a major contributor to the cultural change towards athlete professionalism which has been identified as crucial in 8.70 above. These deficiencies within the network of support service provision can therefore be viewed as a principal challenge to be addressed in future.

8.86 In respect of the second of the functions described in 8.77 above:

8.86.1 The NCTC sees its work with the Athens Enhancement Programme as complementary to the International Carding Scheme. That is to say, it has sought to identify and provide service providers to national governing bodies who are able and

willing to support their training and squad sessions, and to travel with their teams to competitions;

8.86.2 In a highly positive development, the NCTC is currently seeking to work with a small number of national governing bodies to put together multidisciplinary teams of service providers who can develop, manage and deliver localised and sport-specific services on a more consistent basis. The outcomes of this are most likely to be realised in the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games;

8.86.3 Handicaps in this respect have included:

- Limited capacity within the NCTC
- The often unsophisticated demand within national governing bodies
- The absence of robust internal science/medicine infrastructures within sports
- The unwillingness of athletes to access the NCTC – complaining of the remoteness of the location, and the unsuitability of the student accommodation and catering
- The diverse origins and backgrounds of service providers
- The absence of a structured induction programme, or continuous professional development, for service providers (see 8.81 above)

8.87 Comment has previously been made in 7.105 on the need for linkage between the management of athletes' health and fitness by practitioners accessed through the International Carding Scheme, and the sports science/medicine programmes delivered through the governing bodies of sport. For in some sports there appears to have been limited, if any, overall management of athlete care by lead medical staff – with particular reference to injury management. Neither has the NCTC addressed this shortfall: practitioners who treat athletes via the International Carding Scheme have not been required to update either the NCTC or the respective national governing body's medical officer on "work in progress" with their athletes. It is hoped that the developments described in 8.86.2 above will address the situation here.

8.88 Data suggests that the institution of the AEP, and the appointment of performance staff within sports, produced an enormous increase in the uptake of services among athletes on the International Carding Scheme in 2003. This demonstrates that a vital prerequisite of effective service delivery – athlete awareness of the benefits of sports science and medicine support – was facilitated through the AEP:

- This development is to be welcomed, and bodes well for the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games. However, it is questionable whether its manifestation less than two years out from the Games had a direct performance effect in Athens
- This doubt is underlined by the NCTC's recognition that it has had to apply "trial and error" in the development of its service provision to governing bodies and athletes. This has meant that there have been numbers of misfires which have eroded confidence in that provision
- The increase in uptake had an unwelcome effect, in that demand came to exceed budgeted levels of supply. This created profound internal and financial pressures which exerted severe strain on the International Carding Scheme

8.89 In respect of the third of the functions described in 8.77 above, interviewees attested to the strength of the relationship and liaison between the NCTC and OCI – especially between the OCI's Chief Medical Officer and the NCTC's Head of Athlete Services. This relationship was stated to be the key to a significant improvement in the OCI's preparations for and management of the Athens Games, as manifested especially in the acclimatisation strategy and the processes through which continuity of care was addressed (see 7.54ff, 7.102ff. above)

8.90 The NCTC's relationship with the PCI seems to have progressed more slowly. As stated at 8.39 above, the PCI sought to develop a coaching and science/medicine support team around each individual Paralympic athlete and, for this, they required athlete buy-in,

sophisticated and inclusive coaches, and willing and able service providers. Problems were encountered in each of these areas, especially the latter. The NCTC recognises that its co-ordination and delivery of appropriate services to Paralympic athletes was below the level of that which was provided to Olympians (see 8.47.2-3 above).

8.91 There was an additional issue for the PCI in that numbers of its athletes were not included on the International Carding Scheme, and so were ineligible for support via the NCTC. The reasons for this included the following:

- Team sports, such as football, were not catered for through the ICS. This excluded around 25 per cent of the Irish Paralympic team from NCTC support
- The criteria for inclusion are set by national governing bodies. In those sports where there is more than one governing body, operating on a disability-specific basis, different sets of criteria apply – which make it easier for some disability classes to access support than others

8.92 The answer to this was provided by the PCI's Non-Carded Athlete Support Scheme, funded by the PCI and delivered by volunteer discipline co-ordinators from outside the NCTC network. These sought to establish a parallel scheme which matched that operated by the NCTC, but utilising alternative practitioners. This was a good and innovative initiative which provided a practical solution to the problem; it will now be important for the problem itself to be considered as part of the review of the International Carding Scheme which has been referred to at 7.51 above.

8.93 A useful summary of the overall success of the NCTC's efforts might be found in the following dichotomy which appears in the testimonies of interviewees from within sports:

- Sports' representatives spoke highly of the support that they had received from the personnel at the NCTC
- However, at the same time those representatives were sceptical as to whether the support service provision they were receiving through NCTC was truly and consistently world-class across all disciplines

8.94 What this suggests is that, while the calibre of individuals working within the NCTC is high, the structure and/or system within which they are working is not. The core elements of this are as follows:

- The exceptionally wide brief of the NCTC – spanning athlete development, coach and volunteer education, sports science and medicine, and lifestyle services
- Deficiencies within the prioritisation of these functions, which have led to the NCTC over-reaching itself and its resources
- The consequent sub-optimal delivery of key services: in the attempt to do everything, not enough is done thoroughly

8.95 In particular, the burden of the treble function of demand generator, supply co-ordinator, and supply deliverer (see 8.78-79 above) is insupportable. This suggests that a fresh look at the role and responsibilities of the NCTC may now be appropriate. Such an exercise should not throw away the experience of the past four years, or the expertise developed by those who have been part of it. However, the recommendation of the High Performance Strategy that there should be a network of sports science and medicine provision for elite athletes in other selected locations in Ireland (see 7.13ff.) remains to be delivered: serious consideration should now be applied to how that network might emerge out of what is currently in place.

9. The way forward

(a) Where are we now?

9.1 The foregoing suggests that, over the past two years, Ireland has developed the basis of a high performance system for its Olympic and Paralympic sports. Many new and welcome initiatives have been instituted which provide a platform for future and further development, and a range of new national sports facilities have been constructed or are planned to support these.

9.2 These initiatives have been developed in the knowledge of a variety of limiting factors, which include the following:

- Small talent pools in the Olympic sports, which are limited by the drawing power of the three major field sports
- A developing governing body infrastructure, which requires modernisation in terms of its governance, management, planning and operations
- Significant Government investment in sport, both capital and revenue, has only been committed since 1998
- The state of physical education in schools

9.3 Because the base that Ireland has been building on was low, and because its attempts to institute a high performance system are only recent, the nation's position in Olympic and Paralympic terms remains in arrears of its major competitors. The initiatives put in place over the past cycle have yet to bear real fruit. Comparisons with other nations suggest that investment in high performance must be sustained over a number of cycles for its results to be deliberate, sustained and repeatable.

9.4 There are sufficient resources within Ireland to justify the belief that a native high performance system can be completed within a reasonable timeframe. The talent, skills and competencies exist: what is required is a system which engages them and co-ordinates their delivery to best effect.

9.5 There is a need, then, to continue the building process, including in the following ways:

- By focusing effort and existing resource on that which is likely to be successful
- By instituting greater levels of quality control, to ensure that money is well spent and produces results
- By looking at the desired long-term outcomes, at the same time as ensuring that short-term process goals are achieved

(b) Where do we want to be?

9.6 Going forward, it is both essential and desirable that Government continues to invest in elite sport – and some of the recommendations of this review will require that current levels of investment are increased in order to effect meaningful and lasting change in Ireland's performance profile at international level.

9.7 That said, there should also be an expectation that there is a yield on any investment – but that expectations of the size and nature of that yield should be tailored in accordance with the size and nature of the investment. If Government continues to invest in Irish Olympic and Paralympic sports at current levels, it should expect to see a certain, limited return on that investment; but, if it invests at higher levels, then the return could be more impressive.

9.8 At the outset, it is unrealistic to expect Ireland to emulate nations of similar size and wealth such as Denmark and New Zealand. The outline statistics adduced in Section 6 suggest that these nations invest in high performance sport around twice and three times the sum which Ireland commits – and have done so for a prolonged period of time:

- Denmark in particular has a national wealth which has been established for much longer than Ireland's, and has been investing in Team Denmark since 1985

9.9 Given these approximate comparative levels of investment, Ireland should expect to produce approximately one-third of the performance outputs which Denmark and New Zealand produce. From the figures produced in Section 6, this can be quantified as two or three medals per Olympic Games, and four to five medals per Paralympic Games – targets which should be pursued regularly and consistently:

9.9.1 In order to deliver two or three Olympic medals, and four to five Paralympic medals, Ireland will need consistently to convert one in three of its medal chances. Thus it will need to field between six and nine athletes in finals or equivalent in every Games:

- Ireland's primary process goal will therefore be to get as many individuals as possible into the finals or top eight in their events in every Games
- This will involve each sport which is supported by and included within the ISC's programmes to pursue the projection of as many athletes as possible (or its representative teams) into the world's top ten

9.9.2 In order to support these targets and goals, Ireland should state clearly that success in the Olympic and Paralympic Games is a primary objective. Success in World Championships should be a secondary objective, and European Championships a tertiary objective – with both of these latter seen as essential measures of progress towards the achievement of Olympic success

(c) *How do we get there?*

i. Policy

9.10 In pursuit of these targets and goals, the ISC's investment policy should continue to be conducted broadly as it has been over the past two years. Thus it should invest in:

- National governing bodies of sport – but with the focus suggested below
- Individual athletes of international standing – but with a new focus on the demonstrably and progressively elite
- The overall high performance support system – reorientated in line with the recommendations made below
- The agencies responsible for the preparation and participation of the Irish Olympic and Paralympic teams – i.e., the OCI and PCI

9.11 In making this investment, the ISC – and the Government which supports it – should remain aware of the simultaneous needs to achieve interim success and to deliver long-term goals and benefits through funding. Thus:

- There should be a realistic concept of the likely timeframe over which a mature high performance system will be developed – which may encompass more than one cycle
- There should be an appreciation of the need of those in receipt of investment to plan and build over prolonged periods of time – i.e., there should be serious consideration given to the award of multi-annual funding
- There should be an appropriate focus on the delivery of success over the cycle to the Games in Beijing in 2008, in order to generate confidence in the process

9.12 The desired outcomes of the ISC's investment policy should be found in the following three areas:

- Outputs/impact –the fielding of finalists, top-eight or ten positions in world rankings, the winning of medals, etc.
- Sustainability – deepening and optimising talent pools, and increased and consistent throughputs from junior to senior levels

- Quality processes – in the governance and management of governing bodies and their programmes, and in essential support agencies

ii. National governing bodies of sport

9.13 In seeking to deliver these targets and goals, the ISC should focus its investment on a small number of prioritised sports which have:

- Natural and national resources and advantages
- Robust infrastructures and a track record of success
- A critical mass of Olympians, or potential Olympians
- The demonstrable capacity and willingness to deliver the desired outcomes stated in 9.12 above

9.14 The ISC should also consider the benefit of forming investment partnerships with professional sports whose established infrastructures suggest that short-term Olympic or Paralympic success may be deliverable, e.g., soccer, tennis (especially wheelchair tennis):

- In particular, the ISC should consider how it might encourage the Football Association of Ireland to pursue more actively the qualification of a team for the Olympic Games

9.15 The funded sports should be encouraged to build on the progress made over the period between 2002 and 2004; they should therefore be considered to be in “action learning mode”. In particular, their national governing bodies should be required to develop holistic structures in line with ISC objectives. These structures should be concerned with:

- Robust and professional systems of governance and management
- Recruitment initiatives to widen participation
- Skills development programmes for young athletes
- Elite pathway development for athletes and coaches, including benchmarking
- Performance planning for athletes from junior levels
- Coach and official education programmes
- Volunteer investment and training programmes
- Facilities development at national, regional and local levels

9.16 These sports should plan on a multi-annual basis, and funding should be offered to these sports against the following and other appropriate conditions:

- The making of key appointments, including and especially in respect of their performance programme, and their coach education programme
- The fulfilment of process goals and key performance indicators on a progressive basis, as assessed through a process of annual review

9.17 Focusing on the achievement of success at the 2008 Beijing Olympic and Paralympic Games, each funded sport should be required to produce and deliver a detailed performance programme which will relate especially to:

- Programmes of training and competition for elite athletes through to 2008
- The optimisation of athletes’ home coaching and training environment
- The provision of world-class coaching support for elite athletes
- The development of junior and youth athletes and squads, and the pathway from these levels to senior elite status

9.18 In particular, funded sports should be encouraged and supported to institute world-class coaching programmes in preparation for the Beijing 2008 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Where necessary, this should include the early and prioritised recruitment of elite coaches, either from within the domestic market or from overseas.

9.19 In its quest to fulfil its targets and goals, the ISC should keep under review the purpose and extent of the funding which it allocates to other sports, especially through the core grants programme.

iii. Individual athlete support

9.20 Programmes of individual athlete support should have as their immediate focus the delivery of short-term success over the cycle to the Games in Beijing in 2008. The following recommendations should therefore form the basis of the review of the International Carding Scheme which will take place in 2005 – together with those issues which have been raised at 7.52 above and such others as are considered appropriate.

9.21 In particular, the selection of athletes for individual support should be against a set of generic criteria which define the elite athlete. These criteria should focus on the following:

- In concert with the primary goal stated at 9.9 above, those athletes who are or have the potential to become ranked in the top ten in the world in Olympic and Paralympic sports
- On a sport-by-sport basis, those athletes who are likely to qualify for selection for the Beijing 2008 Olympic and Paralympic Games

9.22 For each of the athletes identified against the criteria of 9.21 above, the ISC should commission individual preparation and competition programmes to Beijing on both four- and one-year bases:

- For those athletes who are part of funded sports, this process should form part of the overall performance planning referred to in 9.17 above
- For athletes in other sports, this exercise should be conducted on a stand-alone basis

9.23 Individual athletes' programmes should prioritise the following key services:

- Coaching
- Strength and conditioning
- Medical and physiotherapy
- Lifestyle management

9.24 The offer and award of individual funding and support services to athletes should be contingent upon their agreeing to enter a contract which requires of them:

- Compliance with the submitted programme of preparation and competition
- Utilisation of approved and appropriate service providers
- The fulfilment of key performance targets which prioritise the Olympic and Paralympic Games
- Observance of the requirements of their national governing body's performance programme, where such exists
- Observance of the OCl and PCI's requirements and events

9.25 Consideration should be given to developing the option of providing funding for elite athletes direct to their nominated bank accounts, instead of processing it through their national governing bodies.

9.26 For athletes who are not part of funded sports, programmes of individual funding should include an element which can be utilised to engage and compensate coaching support of an appropriate level.

9.27 For all senior elite athletes, there should be a formal process of annual review by way of reapplication for funding, using the fulfilment of targets/contractual requirements as key criteria.

iv. The High Performance System

9.28 The existing systems via which the ISC manages and delivers support for the national governing bodies of sport and elite athletes – and the investment which is made in these – should be rationalised and consolidated. This process will include the ISC's own High Performance Unit, and the NCTC in its roles as generator of demand in respect of support services, and its co-ordination and management of supply.

9.29 It is proposed that structures for an Irish Institute of Sport should be created over the course of 2005, with a view to:

- Delivering optimal support services to athletes who are likely to compete in the Beijing 2008 Olympic and Paralympic Games
- Establishing a sustainable infrastructure for the long-term development and support of the high performance system in Ireland

9.30 This institute should have a secure central management comprising the following three principal functions:

- Demand management – working with the national governing bodies of funded sports, world-class athletes, and the OCI and PCI, to identify and build their performance programmes and demands, and to add value to these processes
- Supply management – identification and co-ordination of service providers who can meet this demand; induction, continuous professional development, etc.
- Quality assurance and compliance

9.31 The first of these functions should be fulfilled by development and extension of the performance leadership/management and development roles which are currently delivered by the ISC's High Performance Unit.

9.32 The second of these functions should oversee a network of service providers which largely comprises three or four third-level institutes, together with SINI and individual consultants who are demonstrably world-class within their discipline. This network should:

- Offer complete geographical coverage of Ireland, through the identification of key centres in the north, south, east and west of the country – taking into account the services currently delivered through the University of Limerick
- Pursue the particular aim that sport-specific services for funded sports are generated as specialisms within certain designated institutes

9.33 The third of these functions should include especially the delivery of the following:

- Mid- and end-of-cycle reviews of programme delivery by the funded sports, the OCI and PCI
- The conduct or facilitation of individual athlete debriefs on a periodic basis

9.34 This institute should as its initial priority seek to work with those athletes who can be securely identified as likely to participate in the Beijing 2008 Olympic and Paralympic Games – namely:

- Athletes included within the programmes of national governing bodies of funded sports
- Athletes who are not part of funded sports, but who have been identified against the criteria described at 9.21 above

9.35 In order to ensure the performance fundamentals of fit and healthy athletes who are professional in their approach and aware of the benefits of accessing support services, the priority services for delivery through this institute in the short term will be:

- Strength & conditioning
- Medical
- Physiotherapy
- Lifestyle management and support

9.36 Athletes who are funded through the programmes of individual support described above, and who are based in Ireland, should be required by contract to utilise institute services unless they have good and compelling reason to do otherwise.

9.37 The ISC, in consultation with the relevant stakeholders, should develop proposals for the Department for Arts, Sport and Tourism which detail clear processes through which this institute should be delivered, managed and operated. This discussion will take special note of the current role and operations of the NCTC, and how these might be integrated within the new structure.

9.38 Alongside this institute, consideration should also be given to the establishment of professional sports science and medicine bodies in Ireland which can assume responsibility for setting standards across all aspects of delivery – as exist in Great Britain in the form of the British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences (BASES) and the British Association of Sports Medicine (BASM).

v. Support agencies

9.39 The initiatives and developments which have been introduced by both the OCI and PCI over the past four years as a result of the Sydney Review and the High Performance Strategy should be continued, and enhanced where appropriate. Where these have been done well, the recommendation is that they should be maintained.

9.40 The OCI and PCI should begin their planning and preparation forthwith, and adapt their usual practices to focus on the Games environment that is likely to be encountered in Beijing in 2008 – with specific reference to:

- The unique geographical and cultural demands of China
- The psychological challenges posed by the Games

9.41 Best efforts should be made to bring about an enhanced collaboration between the OCI and PCI, with a view to delivering economies of scale, especially in respect of the following:

- The production of an acclimatisation strategy – as for Athens
- The delivery of a Games-specific Team Manager training programme – within which other support staff should also be included, and for which an expert and appropriate agency should be engaged
- The sourcing of a Holding Camp venue, which has facilities appropriate to the majority of Olympic and Paralympic sports
- The sourcing of kit and equipment suppliers, within a deal which provides for the full requirements of both Olympic and Paralympic teams

9.42 Recommendations which apply equally to both the OCI and PCI include the following:

- Each should ensure the agreement and publication of its qualification criteria as early as possible, and should support this through the formulation and publication of a selection policy
 - In establishing qualification deadlines for athletics and swimming, special consideration should be given to the requirements of periodised training schedules within these sports
- Each should ensure the early nomination of Team Managers and support staff by sports, and should attempt to ensure through use of their veto that professional performance staff employed by sports are nominated for accreditation where appropriate

- Each should ensure that all sports road-test the Holding Camp venue and the support infrastructure through multisport training camps in the lead-up to 2008
- Each should ensure that its pre-Games multisport training camps have secure purposes and deliverable objectives, including the specific objective of preparation for life in the Olympic/Paralympic Village
- Each should ensure that all members of its headquarters and support staff have formal and written job descriptions and terms of reference
- Each should formulate and deliver a detailed participation agreement for athletes and support staff, which outlines the expectations and responsibilities of Irish team members in preparation for and during the Games:
 - This should include the obligation to attend the official Holding Camp, unless there is good and compelling reason to do otherwise
 - This should also include appropriate codes of conduct to cover, e.g., communications and media contact
- Each should seek to agree with the ISC and the national governing bodies of sport a consolidated statement of performance expectations at the Games, and formulate a media strategy for the delivery of this
- Each should ensure that athletes are fully and properly represented within its decision-making processes

9.43 Recommendations specific to the OCI include the following:

- Its processes of professionalisation should continue, including through the following:
 - It should appoint a Chief Executive Officer, who should be afforded a prominent role within the headquarters management of the Irish Olympic team for Beijing
 - It should review and strengthen where appropriate the position of Sports Director
 - It should ensure the transfer of day-to-day management of operations from the Executive Committee to the professional staff
- It should establish a qualitative four-year plan to Beijing, with one-year breakdowns, for submission to the ISC
- It should produce a strategy for the generation of team spirit within the Irish Olympic team which is operated in conjunction with the obligations imposed on athletes through 9.24 above, and supported by their national governing bodies
- It should establish in advance secure processes via which its headquarters staff will communicate with Team Managers and other support staff during the period of the Olympic Games
- It should review its policy for remunerating medical support staff, with a view to securing continuity within its medical team from Games to Games

9.44 Recommendations specific to the PCI include the following:

- As part of its ongoing strategic review it should conduct an overall review of its purposes, functions and operations, with specific reference to:
 - The extent of its brief for Paralympic sport
 - The professionalisation of its operations
 - The supporting infrastructure of disability sport within Ireland, the provision of athlete and coach development pathways, and the impact of these upon the PCI's ability to deliver the targets and goals set out in 9.9-10 above
- It should work specifically with the proposed Irish Institute of Sport to ensure that:
 - Sports science and medicine services to Paralympic athletes are both sport- and disability-specific
 - Programmes are in place to develop the awareness and receptivity of Paralympic athletes in respect of sports science and medicine services
- It should review the balance of its headquarters team at the Paralympic Games, both in terms of the disciplines represented, and the respective location of these inside and outside the Paralympic Village

vi. Miscellaneous

9.45 In addition to the foregoing, and in liaison with relevant agencies, the ISC should take upon itself the following:

- To support the Department for Sport, Arts and Tourism in the research, formulation, publication and delivery of a national facilities strategy based around the requirements of the funded sports
- To pursue a multi-agency approach to school sport development, to underpin the national governing bodies' holistic plans for athlete development – including and especially the promotion of downsized activities and small-sided games in primary schools
- To conduct elite athlete forums on a regular basis, through which it might remain apprised of issues of particular concern to the athletes
- To formulate and deliver a programme of leadership training for current athletes with appropriate and demonstrable personal qualities, with the specific objective of assuring processes of succession planning within the performance programmes of the national governing bodies of sport