

# **MIXED MARTIAL ARTS WORKING GROUP**

**Report:**

**May 2017**

## INTRODUCTION

A Working Group was established by Sport Ireland to examine how to progress mixed martial arts in Ireland (See schedule 1 for TOR, Composition of Working Group and Process). The key findings and recommendations to the main stakeholders are:

## KEY FINDINGS

1. The Irish Mixed Martial Arts Association (IMMAA) is not yet fully established as an organisation. A draft memorandum and articles of association has been developed, as has a draft Constitution, both of which are to be discussed by proposed members by the end of June at the Association's first AGM.
2. The IMMAA membership is in very early stages of development and governance. Its representatives recognise that there is considerable work still to be done. There has been much good work completed by its leaders thus far but at this point there are no binding arrangements or model in place until the initial meeting to ratify the memorandum and articles of association; its Constitution; and completion of its membership model.
3. IMMAA need to be clear on the status of its proposed member clubs. Are they independent clubs or franchises of the main leaders of the IMMAA? This is not clear. At present, the membership model is more like that of a group of health and fitness clubs. The governance and status of the club membership structure within the IMMAA needs to be clarified.
4. IMMAA also needs to address:
  - how they intend to regulate the amateur side of their sport and accommodate the professional component within the same organisational framework?
  - how will they apply health and safety standards which are binding on all individuals and members?
  - how are events currently regulated if there is no formal body or code binding/governing participants?
5. IMMAA does not meet the criteria to be recognised by Sport Ireland (see schedule 2). It has considerable work to meet the criteria and to ensure it operates as an effective organisation before it can even apply for recognition. This is normal for any start up organisation.

6. In order to achieve the necessary governance maturity and capacity, the IMMAA may need assistance and technical support to complete this process from an independent source experiences in the field of sports governance and law.
7. It follows that, at least until it is formally established, IMMAA is not yet in the position to apply to the Irish Martial Arts Commission (IMAC). IMAC is the recognised NGB for the martial arts sector. Sport Ireland has made it clear that this is the preferred route for IMMAA.
8. IMAC already have very detailed membership and technical support library and codes of information in place. IMAC have indicated they would be willing to receive an application from IMMAA, but foresee challenges in this regard.
9. It is unlikely that such an application to IMAC would be successful at the outset. IMMAA are newly formed and at present are unlikely to meet the membership criteria for IMAC. However, a membership application to IMAC would, under its rules, trigger a review and discussion process and the opportunity exists for IMMAA to work with IMAC to address how and if it could become a member. IMMAA can undertake a journey similar to Kickboxing in Ireland, which established itself in 1982 and is now one of the strongest Martial Arts in the country. Such a process would involve detailed and difficult discussions. Although difficult to predict, it is feasible that a successful outcome could be achieved.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. IMMAA to complete its process to become a formally established organisation with members affiliated according to the draft memo and articles of association and Constitution.
2. IMMAA to ensure all individual members are bound by relevant codes and charters and that the IMMAA's individual and club membership criteria are clear and transparent.
3. IMMAA to draw up a realistic model and pathway for becoming a recognised sport and to educate its members on the issues, including the benefits and burdens, it will have to address to meet the onerous standards required of a modern sporting organisation.

4. IMMAA to make an application to IMAC at the earliest opportunity to become a member and to seek the technical support and advice of IMAC on putting in place appropriate guidelines for a modern sporting organisation and member discipline.
5. Sport Ireland to monitor the progress to IMMAA and assess if any technical assistance or advice is required by IMMMA to become formally established with appropriate codes and standards.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Chairman and Facilitator wish to acknowledge the open spirit of the discussions with the representatives from IMMAA and IMAC and Sport Ireland and the respect that all parties had for the confidentiality of the process. The establishment of a national sporting organisations is complex and depends on long hard hours and work by dedicated volunteers. Gaining recognition as a national recognised sporting organisation is a challenging process. The threshold of competence and standards to be adhered to be a recognised sport are understandably onerous and technical support is required if IMMAA and its members are to meet such standards.

Gaining recognition does not confer accreditation in terms of health and safety standards for events and other processes. The leaders and members of sport have, currently, serious responsibilities to self-regulate and to adhere to relevant standards and are ultimately responsible for how their sport operates.

It is clear that IMMAA cannot meet the criteria for recognition as set out by Sport Ireland. It must make the choice to gain recognition through membership of IMAC, but this also is not clear-cut or a foregone conclusion. It will require compromise and discussion, but this has been a journey other groups have experienced within IMAC. Ultimately the safety and welfare of amateur and professional participants is at stake and it is paramount that whatever route taken by the IMMAA serious and onerous issues and duty of care are at stake. They can learn much from members of IMAC and other sporting codes who have had to make tough choices in prioritising the needs of athletes.

***Jack Anderson (Chairman)***

***Morgan Buckley (Facilitator)***

## **SCHEDULE 1: WORKING GROUP COMPOSITION, TOR AND PROCESS**

### **Purpose of the Working Group**

The overall objective of the Mixed Martial Arts Working Group is to explore opportunities for the development of a relationship between the Irish Martial Arts Committee (IMAC) and the Irish Mixed Martial Arts Association (IMMAA) in the area of mixed martial arts.

The functions of the Working Group will include but are not limited to the following:

- Work jointly with the Group Facilitator to explore common areas for potential development
- Work jointly with the Group Facilitator to identify challenges or barriers that may impact the development of a relationship between the organisations
- Identify and bring to the attention of the Group Facilitator any additional actions that may be necessary in order to achieve agreed outcomes

### **Membership of the Group**

- 2 Representatives of the Irish Martial Arts Commission ( IMAC)
- 2 Representatives of the Irish Mixed Martial Arts Association (IMMAA)
- 1 Independent Facilitator: Morgan Buckley
- 1 Chairperson: Jack Anderson

*Representatives from both IMAC and the IMMAA should be decision makers within the organisation leadership.*

### **Responsibilities of the Group**

The Working Group is responsible for:

- Exploring opportunities for collaboration
- Removing obstacles to the successful development of a relationship between the parties
- Maintaining at all times the focus of the Working Group

### **Members of the Working Group will commit to:**

- Attendance at all scheduled meetings
- Working with integrity, transparency and accountability
- Make timely decisions and take action to ensure progress of the Working Group
- Notify members of the Group, as soon as practical, if any matter arises which may be deemed to affect the work of the Group

### **Members of the Working Group can expect:**

- That each member will be provided with complete, accurate and meaningful information in a timely manner
- To be given reasonable time to make key decisions
- To be alerted to potential issues that could impact the Groups work
- Open and honest discussions

### **Role of the Chair**

The principal role of the Chair is to ensure that discussions flow smoothly by involving all members present and ensuring that discussions are not dominated by a single party. The Chair will also be responsible in indicating progress, or lack of; refocusing discussions where needed, clarifying any misunderstandings, summarising key points and assisting the Facilitator if necessary.

### **Role of the Facilitator**

The principal role of the Facilitator is to promote communication between the two parties with a view to assisting them explore common areas of interest for future development.

By offering observations, options for consideration and identifying new perspectives, the Facilitator serves as a stimulant for the parties to explore areas of common interest. The Facilitator may where appropriate identify and raise issues to help parties further explore options.

The Facilitator shall remain impartial throughout the process.

### **Reporting of the Group's Activities**

Representatives from both IMAC and the IMMMA are responsible for reporting activities of the group to the Board/Executive Committees of their organisations.

The Independent Facilitator will report on the activities of the group to Sport Ireland.

### **Meetings of the Working Group**

- All meetings will be facilitated and chaired by a Third Party
- Decisions will be made by consensus. In the event that a consensus cannot be reached, the third party Facilitator will make suitable recommendations
- Meeting logistics will be organised by Sport Ireland
- An initial meeting will be held on **28<sup>th</sup> February 2017, 6pm – 8pm at Sport Ireland Institute**
- Should additional meetings be required, Sport Ireland will arrange these on behalf of the Working Group

### **Confidentiality**

It is recognised that members will need to discuss issues and/or decisions with members of their organisations in order to gain feedback and assess consensus. It is not the purpose of this

confidentiality clause to prevent this from occurring, but to protect individual members from being quoted out of context.

Members are to be aware that meetings, including agenda material and minutes, of the Working Group are deemed confidential. Members are requested not to publicly comment or discuss the Groups position or deliberations with the media while discussions are in progress. All documents should be kept secure to ensure that this confidentiality is maintained.

### **Amendment, Modification or Variation**

This Terms of Reference may be amended, varied or modified in writing after consultation and agreement by Working Group members.

### **Process**

The process for the Working Group was

1. Initial review of key information
2. Meeting 1 of working group to confirm Terms of reference and hear initial statement from stakeholders
3. Review of background papers and information
4. Meeting 2 of working group to confirm key findings and recommendations
5. Preparation of draft and final report

### **Information Review**

The following papers were reviewed by the Chairman and Facilitator:

1. MMA Recognition Process: Key Points, Spring 2017
2. Martial Arts: Overview of Sector for Irish Sports Council, Dec 2014
3. IMAC Martial Arts Ltd (Memo & Arts) received by ISC on 9 Nov 2012
4. IMMMAA Structure in 2016/7
5. IMMMAA update to Sport Ireland on 15 July 2016
6. IMMMAA update to Sport Ireland on 5 August 2016
7. IMMMAA paper post 26 August 2016 meeting with IMAC
8. IMMMAA update to Sport Ireland on 14 Dec 2016
9. Council of Europe MMA Working Group meeting 18 Jan 2017
10. The IMAC Operational Framework (Part 1)
11. The IMAC Rules of Membership & Policy Decisions (Part 2)
12. The IMAC Membership Application form and letter
13. The IMAC Application criteria for new System / Advisory Board
14. The Benefits & Responsibilities of IMAC Membership
15. IMAC Development Blue Print
16. IMAC Road To Recognition agreement
17. IMAC Proposal to support possible Irish MMA Council (June 2015)
18. IMAC Proposal on Standards/Legal Controls MMA in Ireland (2016)

## **SCHEDULE 2. CRITERIA FOR RECOGNITION BY SPORT IRELAND**

The following are the criteria for recognition and/or assistance by Sport Ireland:

1. The sport meets the criteria for sport as outlined in the Sport Ireland Act 2015, which is adopted from the Council of Europe “Definition of Sport”.
2. The NGB is recognised as the single national governing body by its International Federation and/or World Federations for all aspects of the sport in Ireland, including its disciplines and events.
3. The NGB has a leadership structure that is democratically elected by the membership.
4. The NGB has a written constitution (or in the case of a Limited Company a Memorandum and Articles of Association), by-laws and objects that are voted on and adopted by the membership.
5. The organisation has been established as a corporate entity in good standing under the Companies Act or other relevant legislation for a least three (3) years prior to the application for recognition.
6. The NGB has independent unqualified audited financial statements for each of the last three (3) fiscal years.
7. The NGB is committed to providing its members with technically and ethically sound and safe sport coaching programmes and content based on the Lifelong Involvement in Sport and Physical Activity (LISPA) framework.
8. The NGB has a multi-year strategic plan, ratified by its Board. This plan should identify measurable outcomes across the full range of sport development and be based on the LISPA framework.

***As the National Governing Body for its sport in Ireland, the NGB is responsible and accountable at the national level for providing its members with technically and ethically sound and safe sport programmes and services that can be accessed by all. This commitment is demonstrated through its policies, programmes, procedures and practices.***

9. The NGB must demonstrate its willingness to fully comply with the Sport Ireland Code of Ethics and Best Practice for Children’s Sport in Ireland.
10. The NGB has a formal policy or policies demonstrating commitment to equity and access, notably for women, persons with a disability and people as athletes, coaches, officials, volunteers and leaders.
11. The NGB has a formal disciplinary policy for members and officials.
12. The NGB must formally endorse the Sport Ireland Policy Against Doping in Sport and adopt the Sport Ireland Anti-Doping Rules.



13. The NGB has an Internal Appeal process consistent with established principles of due process and natural justice and containing a provision that allows disputes to be referred to the alternate dispute resolution services of Just Sport Ireland.
14. The promotion of the sport must be the core and primary objective of the organisation.
15. The NGB must satisfy Sport Ireland that it has an established annual subscription income.
16. Pending resources and facilities, the NGB must satisfy Sport Ireland that it has a wide geographical spread in terms of registered clubs.
17. The NGB's Headquarters must be based in and operational from Ireland.
18. Application of Alternative Criteria in the case of certain NGBs and other bodies

Where in the opinion of Sport Ireland an organisation meets several, but not all, of the above criteria, the organisation may be recognised as an NGB and/or as a body suitable for the provision of financial or other assistance where one of the following criteria is met:

- a. The organisation's activities and responsibilities are in relation to the promotion, development and coordination of sport and the achievement of excellence in sport; or
- b. The organisation's activities are focused on developing strategies for increasing recreational participation in sports; or

c. Such recognition and/or assistance is consistent with written government policy”  
Where in the opinion of Sport Ireland, there are two or more bodies currently organising the development and regulation of a sport or sports which, though different are similar in many respects, Sport Ireland may refuse to recognise and/or provide assistance to such individual bodies but may require them for the purposes of recognition as a National Governing Body of Sport to form an umbrella body for the governance of the sport generally.

**Points to Note:**

1. The recognition process is merely a means for organisations to become eligible for Sport Ireland support.
2. It is not an accreditation scheme that benchmarks safety standards in the sports sector.
3. The recognition process does not include any assessment or validation of safety standards within a particular sport, as to do so would effectively require regulatory powers to oversee, implement and monitor.
4. Responsibility for event safety and the safety of athletes and participants rests with the National Governing Bodies of Sport.

### **SCHEDULE 3: MIXED MARTIAL ARTS KEY POINTS**

- Sport Ireland recognises the Irish Martial Arts Commission (IMAC) as the official National Governing Body of Sport for Martial Arts in Ireland.
- IMAC are the recognised National Governing Body of Martial Arts across the 32 Counties. They are a multi-disciplinary Umbrella body representing 30 different Martial Arts Organisations and 350 clubs in disciplines including Aikido, Ju-Jitsu, Kendo, Kickboxing, Kung-Fu.
- Mixed Martial Arts is a broad term used for Hybrid Combat Sports. It usually comprises of four disciplines including Wrestling, Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, Boxing and Kickboxing.
- It has existed in various forms for some years, making its public breakthrough via the commercial organisation The Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) which was established in 1993.
- Sport Ireland has no direct relationship with Mixed Martial Arts - neither amateur nor professional.
- Pankration presented itself as a form of Amateur Mixed Martial Arts and affiliated itself to the Irish Amateur Wrestling Association (IAWA). The Irish Amateur Pankration Association (IAPA) established itself in 2014 and disbanded in May 2016.
- In 2014 Sport Ireland conducted a review to identify strategic issues within the Martial Arts Sector. One of the issues highlighted was the challenges and opportunities presented by the increased popularity of MMA and the UFC in Ireland.
- Notwithstanding this popularity, Sport Ireland has no Regulatory Authority for commercial events.
- The death of fighter Joao Carvalho on April 11th 2016 at a commercial MMA event has propelled the issue of regulation into the forefront.

#### **Overview and Timelines**

##### **2014**

**December:** Announcement of the establishment of the Irish Amateur Pankration Association (IAPA) and its intention to affiliate with Irish Amateur Wrestling Association (IAWA).

##### **2015**

**January:** Sport Ireland meet with Irish Amateur Wrestling Association with regards to the Irish Amateur Pankration Association affiliation. IAWA confirm that Pankration is a traditional form of wrestling and differs from MMA in that there is no striking involved and protective gear is worn on both the head and shins. Commitment from the IAWA that processes were in place to ensure Pankration did not migrate over to MMA.

**February:** Meeting held with Irish Martial Arts Commission (IMAC) with regards to MMA. IMAC reconfirm their position on MMA stating that they did not recognise it and prohibited their affiliated clubs & members from participating in MMA fights and events. IMAC advise that they have developed a proposal to support the development of an Irish Amateur MMA Council (working title only) with a view to the eventual full recognition of an Amateur MMA Advisory Board within IMAC.

##### **2016**

**May:** Disbandment of the Irish Amateur Pankration Association and re-establishment of the organisation as Irish Mixed Martial Arts Association (IMMAA).

Contact from the IMMAA to Sport Ireland advising of their establishment and their intention to seek recognition.

Confirmation from IMAC to Sport Ireland of willingness to work with MMA with regards affiliation.

**August:** Initial meeting takes place between IMAC and IMMAA. Both parties report that the meeting was positive with a number of key areas addressed including affiliation, sanctioning, future development of the sport, establishment of a 'technical' panel to look at 'striking' element of MMA.

**December:** Sport Ireland meet with IMMAA who state they wish to seek independent recognition outside of the IMAC structure. Sport Ireland recommend third party facilitation between them and IMAC to further explore affiliation.