



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

---

**COMMITTEE FOR  
CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE**

---

**OFFICIAL REPORT  
(Hansard)**

---

**Spending Plans**

16 September 2010

**NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY**

---

**COMMITTEE FOR CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE**

---

**Spending Plans**

---

16 September 2010

**Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Mr Barry McElduff (Chairperson)  
Mr Declan O'Loan (Deputy Chairperson)  
Lord Browne  
Mr Thomas Burns  
Mr Billy Leonard  
Mr Kieran McCarthy  
Mr Raymond McCartney  
Mr David McClarty  
Miss Michelle McIlveen  
Mr Ken Robinson

**Witnesses:**

Mr Shaun Cassidy                    }  
Mr Ronan McCay                    } Special Olympics Ulster  
Mr Liam McGarry                   }

**The Chairperson (Mr McElduff):**

We are joined by three representatives of Special Olympics Ulster, including its regional director, Shaun Cassidy. I will hand over to Shaun to introduce his colleagues.

**Mr Shaun Cassidy (Special Olympics Ulster):**

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to give the Committee a little rundown on Special

Olympics Ulster, the programme and the impact on the organisation of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure's decision. I am accompanied by Liam McGarry, who is a volunteer with the organisation and a family member, and Ronan McCay, who is the fundraiser with Special Olympics Ulster.

As the Chairperson said, the Committee has requested that Special Olympics Ulster provide a written submission outlining our response to the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure's decision not to make a bid under the current comprehensive spending review exercise for the Special Olympics business case, which has been undertaken and approved by Sport Northern Ireland. Special Olympics Ulster has also been asked to outline the decision's impact on the organisation. The submission addresses the following: the background to Special Olympics Ulster; an update on the business case and any discussions between Special Olympics Ulster, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure and Sport Northern Ireland; current and future funding needs of Special Olympics Ulster; availability of funding between 2010 and 2014; and the impact of a reduction in funding.

I will provide a brief background to Special Olympics Ulster. We operate 14 Olympic-type sports for children and adults with an intellectual disability. We are based in Belfast but cover the Ulster region, and we provide opportunities for physical fitness, for our athletes to demonstrate courage and for our athletes' families and volunteers to experience joy and to share gifts, skills and, above all, friendships. That is all done among the athletes, their community and ours. An intellectual disability is a significantly reduced ability to understand new or complex information; it is an impaired social functioning that begins before adulthood and which has a lasting effect on development. We help the most vulnerable people from all communities.

Special Olympics Ireland is an accredited Olympic organisation through its affiliation to Special Olympics International, which is based in the United States. The Special Olympics movement is on a par with mainstream Olympics and Paralympics and is aimed at individuals in Northern Ireland and in Ulster with an intellectual disability. The organisation was established in 1978 and is a year-round sports and support organisation that operates a four-year cycle. We deliver to 1,381 athletes in 78 affiliated groups in Northern Ireland; there are 104 in Ulster. Athletes compete in 14 Olympic-type sports that range from bocce to badminton and from

swimming to, believe it or not, alpine skiing, which, because of its popularity, we will take to a regional level this year. Special Olympics Ulster provides for athletes from age six upwards. They can join the organisation at six, but competition starts at age eight for people with intellectual disabilities.

Special Olympics Ulster provides many benefits, including health, social inclusion and education benefits; however, it is, first and foremost, a sports organisation that is linked to the worldwide Olympic movement. Our programme aims at providing athletes with at least two hours' training a week from a qualified coach. All 78 affiliated groups have an individual qualified coach who provides expertise on their specific sport. Pages 3 to 12 of the business case show how the organisation dovetails with other Departments' strategies. Our athletes compete at area, regional, national, European, world and international games.

People with intellectual disabilities require ever-increasing support. That support requirement is reflected in the organisation's policies and overall structures and is included on page 27 of our business case. The organisation has a comprehensive and encompassing structure. The more athletes there are in a programme, the more volunteers we require to care for them. The athlete leadership, the motor activities, the school education and the families programmes continually achieve because they enable athletes and volunteers to guide the organisation. Special Olympics Ulster is based in the Gasworks complex and supports 6,518 volunteers, such is the demand for the programme.

Since 2008, we have requested that our business case be brought before Sport Northern Ireland and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. The original presentation for government funding was presented by a Special Olympics Ulster delegation, including myself, on 4 September 2008 to Ministers and other officials at Stormont Castle. A delegation from Special Olympics Ulster met the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure in December 2008, at which we updated the Committee on Special Olympics Ulster's funding request. From December 2008 until September 2009, there were various discussions about the progression of Special Olympics Ulster's business case and the request for funding with representatives from Sport Northern Ireland and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure.

In September 2009, discussions were held between Sport Northern Ireland and representatives of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Special Olympics Ulster and Special Olympics Ireland. At that stage, DCAL requested Sport Northern Ireland to complete a business case to government standards based on Special Olympics Ulster's requirements for core funding for its programme. Timelines were then agreed for that business case to be completed and submitted.

Further meetings and discussions took place with Catherine Martin and John Beggs of Sport Northern Ireland until the business case was completed in February 2010, at which point it was submitted to the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. In May 2010, the Department sought further clarification on the business case from Special Olympics Ulster through Sport Northern Ireland. Special Olympics Ulster also met the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure to progress the business case.

In July 2010, further discussions took place between Sport Northern Ireland and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. At that stage, the Department asked for further information about how the Special Olympics programme could help to deliver not only its objectives but those of the Departments of Health, Education, Social Development and the Office of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister.

In August 2010, Special Olympics Ulster met Sport Northern Ireland's John Beggs, Catherine Martin and Paul Donnelly to discuss the business case. By July 2010, all work had been completed and submitted to the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure on the Special Olympics business case.

With regard to current and future funding needs, Special Olympics Ulster is funded mainly by Special Olympics Ireland; all our core costs come through Special Olympics Ireland. All funds that are raised by the two bodies go towards the upkeep and running costs of the Ulster regionals programme, which include costs for training, utilities, volunteer expenses, games and competitions, and support programmes, to name a few. Special Olympics Ireland pays all staff and all rental costs of Special Olympics Ulster's regional office programme.

Page 4 of the submission shows Northern Ireland costs only and a breakdown of what we ask

for in the business case. Briefly, the business case for Special Olympics Ulster considers five options. On page 3, the breakdown of the cost analysis is option 2, which was the preferred option in the business case that was completed by Sport Northern Ireland; option 2 also represented best value for money. Of the £4.025 million that is requested, £2.66 million has been requested through the business case. Special Olympics Ulster will provide 34% of matched funding for that £4.025 million. Although that is a challenging target that will be raised through fundraising and donations, to date we have secured £226,000 against our fundraising costs, which is 53.7% of our 2010-11 annual budget of £421,000. Therefore, we are proactive and are taking that role extremely seriously.

Funding for Special Olympics Ulster will be supported through a full-time fundraising officer in the Ulster office. That resource will assist Ulster to meet challenging fundraising targets. The role has been implemented as part of a new fundraising model and in support of option 2, which was supported in the business case and by Sport NI.

Previously, Special Olympics Ulster secured funding from the Big Lottery Fund, the Modernisation Fund and Co-operation Ireland. We will continue to access and assess potential new funding streams through grant applications. However, that method is not sustainable and will not support Special Olympics Ulster's core costs.

Special Olympics Ulster will also continue to attract health and social care trusts' funding. However, that amounts to £8,000 each year through two funding opportunities, from the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust and the Southern Health and Social Care Trust. However, that falls outside the remit of core funding for the organisation.

All other funding will be raised through entry fees to competitions, donations to Special Olympics Ulster and games fees. However, games fees are only particularly relevant in one of those four years, so it is a small amount.

The Department's decision not to fund the business case will have a hugely detrimental impact on Special Olympics Ulster, the programme's core aspects and its potential for development. Special Olympics Ulster will not have the capacity for athletes to take part in area, regional,

national, European or international competitions; neither will it be able to maintain the training of coaches to the required standards. Special Olympics Ulster will be unable to keep to recognised and evolving sporting standards; Special Olympics Ulster will not be able to maintain current administration activity levels; Special Olympics Ulster will be unable to attract, maintain and train volunteers, including qualified coaches.

It will not be possible to maintain the volunteer centre in Ulster, which runs two days a week, to its current standard. The marketing capability of the organisation will be diminished, which will, in turn, have an impact on the ability of the organisation to fundraise.

The support that athletes require from volunteers and from programmes such as the athlete leadership programme, the motor activities training programme and the school education programme will suffer a significant downturn. That will have a hugely detrimental impact on the programmes and affect not only volunteers but athletes directly.

There are an estimated 16,366 people with an intellectual disability in Northern Ireland. In the Special Olympics Ulster programme we see 1,381 of those people, which is one in 12 of the people in Northern Ireland who have an intellectual disability. Research by Special Olympics Ulster after the 2006 all-Ireland games in Belfast showed that many people would like to become involved in the programme. It is in our mission statement that all those with intellectual disabilities should have access to the programme or at least have information about it.

In our sister organisation in the South of Ireland participation rates are proportionately much higher: Special Olympics Ireland deals with one in three of those in the South who have an intellectual disability; we deal with one in 12. Special Olympics Ireland and its funding sources fully fund the core running costs of Special Olympics Ulster. Special Olympics Ulster requires funding to maintain and develop all aspects of its programme, from the 2010 programme through to the 2014 one.

The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure's decision not to make a bid in the current comprehensive spending review will have far-reaching implications for Special Olympics Ulster. Without the prospect of funding, as per the business case, Special Olympics Ulster cannot

continue in its present format. I cannot stress enough that, without the support infrastructure, athlete numbers will be greatly reduced. Participation in games and in other support programmes that are run through Special Olympics Ulster and Special Olympics Ireland will also be restricted to a small number of athletes.

With appropriate funding, Special Olympics Ulster can continue to improve health and well-being by actively training, coaching and competing in 14 Olympic-type sports across the Special Olympics programme. The business case for the Special Olympics shows that funding it as an organisation matches the strategic direction of various Departments. For that reason, the business case proposes a cross-departmental funding package across five Departments: the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, the Office of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the Department of Education and the Department for Social Development. The main conduit for the cross-departmental approach should be the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, as the lead Department for sport in Northern Ireland.

We are seeking the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee's support for Special Olympics Ulster's business case to the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure and the Minister, Mr Nelson McCausland. Special Olympics Ulster further asks that the Committee lend its support to the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure's leading of a cross-departmental funding approach to discuss funding and the inclusion of the business case, as completed through Sport Northern Ireland, as a priority.

**The Chairperson:**

Thank you, Shaun. We received correspondence today that has not yet been circulated. It is a letter from Colin Watson on behalf of the Department. It says:

“It was agreed following a meeting of representatives of interested Departments that DCAL would lead in producing the business case. It was never agreed that DCAL would lead in funding.”

What is DCAL doing to lead a cross-departmental approach to discuss funding? Is it proactively involving the other Departments or is it waiting for something to happen? What is your understanding?



**Mr Cassidy:**

A number of meetings have taken place since 2008 with the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure and Sport Northern Ireland. There has been a variety of discussions, the culmination of which was Sport Northern Ireland's support for the business case. Subsequent developments with the Department have been engaging and positive.

**The Chairperson:**

Is there an interdepartmental group chaired DCAL? What is your understanding?

**Mr Cassidy:**

My understanding is that the Minister is fully behind the request.

**Mr Ronan McCay (Special Olympics Ulster):**

The last correspondence that we received from the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure was a letter that indicated that he intended to convene a meeting between Special Olympics Ulster and the relevant Ministers from the Department for Social Development, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, DCAL and the junior Ministers from the Office of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister. We have made it clear, and we reiterated it in recent correspondence to the Minister, that DCAL needs to continue to play the lead role on the business case. We fear that our case will fall between various stools or get passed from one Department to another. We need a constant contact point, and DCAL is the obvious choice.

**The Chairperson:**

Has any such meeting been convened?

**Mr McCay:**

We have not been told of one. The last correspondence said that the Minister intended to convene that meeting. Special Olympics Ulster is, above all, a sports organisation, although it is one of the few sports organisations in Northern Ireland that does not get core funding. It needs to be recognised as such. Although there are health benefits, social inclusion benefits and education benefits, we are primarily a cutting-edge sports organisation. It is a very professional and high-level sports organisation.

**Miss McIlveen:**

I understand why you need a lead Department and why DCAL is the obvious choice; however, there is a recognition that the issue is cross-departmental. The Committee recently completed an inquiry into participation in sport and physical activity, and health has a huge impact. The letter that we received today from the Health Committee, which is from the Health Minister, is very disappointing, especially in conjunction with the letter from Colin Watson, which says that:

“If any of these Departments say no it may be deemed as being unaffordable.”

The letter from the Health Minister says:

“I am unable to provide any funding contribution towards Special Olympics Ulster.”

I am concerned that the Department of Health has washed its hands of the matter entirely. We understand the health benefits of your organisation, and your sector is very much entrenched in health. You receive a very small pot of money. Perhaps you could enlighten us as to how much the Health Department has contributed in the past. Have you been able to secure a meeting with Minister McGimpsey?

**Mr Cassidy:**

No; not as yet.

**Miss McIlveen:**

Has there been a refusal to meet or have you asked to meet?

**Mr Cassidy:**

As part of our lobbying campaign, we asked various Ministers and colleagues; some have not come back to us, including the Health Minister.

**Miss McIlveen:**

What contribution have you received from the Health Department to date?

**Mr Cassidy:**

There has been a contribution from health and social services trusts, although it has been minuscule over the past number of years. We have maintained service level agreements with the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust and the Southern Health and Social Care Trust to a

maximum of £8,500 a year.

**Miss McIlveen:**

I propose that the Committee write a strong letter to the Health Committee to be passed to the Minister about our disappointment at how he has responded to Special Olympics Ulster. How are other UK regions funded?

**Mr Cassidy:**

Special Olympics Ireland is funded by a core grant from the Irish Sports Council. We asked for the business case in the first place because the Irish Sports Council, to a certain extent, funds Special Olympics Ulster. It will face drastic cuts this year, as it did last year and in the previous year. In the last session, Seamus McAleavey hinted at cuts and said that pension schemes are on hold. Our organisation has similar pay structures. Special Olympics Great Britain is a much smaller programme than Special Olympics Ulster and is core-funded through the developments by Mary Davis, who is the managing director of Special Olympics Europe/Eurasia. It has been core-funded to the tune of nearly £6 million by the European Parliament.

**Mr McCay:**

I want to make a further point about the Health Minister's response. The headline figure of £2.6 million sounds like a great deal and, in this climate, it is. However, the business case asks for that total over four years from five Departments. Broken down that way, however, it is a relatively meagre sum, particularly for Departments whose budgets run into billions of pounds. It equates to between £100,000 and £200,000 a year. Perhaps the headline figure scares some people. However, it provides excellent value for money, and the return on it represents a very strong investment.

**Miss McIlveen:**

We must be mindful that DCAL has a tiny budget in comparison with some other Departments.

**Mr McCartney:**

Does the breakdown in the business case say that the Department of Health should give a certain amount of the funding?

**Mr McCay:**

I assume that the idea is for all Ministers to meet round the table to thrash that out and to determine who is willing to provide what funding and whose budget is under what pressures.

**The Chairperson:**

I accept many of your points, Michelle, although I think that the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure should convene the meeting of Ministers.

**Miss McIlveen:**

I do not have a problem with that. I find the Health Minister's response, which we received via the Health Committee, very disappointing. He is saying that he will not touch the issue.

**The Chairperson:**

I agree.

**Mr O'Loan:**

Thank you for your excellent presentation. I commend what your organisation and its many volunteers do to offer sporting opportunities to those with intellectual disabilities. You receive funding from Special Olympics Ireland. What is the future of that funding? Given the scale of your programme, what other funding opportunities are open to you?

**Mr Cassidy:**

The funding from Special Olympics Ireland is under imminent threat. I cannot discuss percentages, but Special Olympics Ireland fully funds the core running costs of the Special Olympics Ulster programme. Difficulties have been raised by its funders — it is core-funded by the Irish Sports Council — as to why money goes to Northern Ireland to fund a programme that should be core-funded. That is the argument that Special Olympics Ireland faces, and it is a valid one. Special Olympics Ireland funds our staff costs, rent costs and all our programme costs as detailed in the submission.

In relation to future funding costs, as we highlight in the business case, we have brought on

Ronan as the fundraiser for the programme. Ronan's targets are set very high, and we are taking seriously the target of raising in the region of £400,000 this year, and then a diminishing ask based on the percentages that the four-year cycle of the funding submission is based on. The potential for funding and for us to meet that target has always been very good. We are always hitting fundraising targets, but the core running costs of the organisation cannot be completely supported by fundraising efforts alone. We fall 53% short of that funding year on year.

**Mr O'Loan:**

Does anyone duplicate what your organisation does?

**Mr Cassidy:**

No. We are working intensively with Disability Sports Northern Ireland and with Sport Northern Ireland on a service level agreement. As Seamus McAleavey hinted, it is about resources and about opening ourselves up to consider what we can provide, how we can provide it and how we can provide value for money. No other organisation in Northern Ireland does what we do.

**Mr Liam McGarry (Special Olympics Ulster):**

I will provide a bit of context in relation to the funding for what was previously Special Olympics Northern Ireland, and, more recently, Special Olympics Ulster, after the success of the 2003 and 2006 games. The 2003 games were the World Olympics, and the event was the biggest in the world in that year. It was the first time that Belfast had been part of an Olympic event. The fundraising for that created a legacy surplus, which was used to shelter the costs. Although it may appear that Special Olympics Ulster is suddenly asking for a great deal of money, I will put it in context. Special Olympics Ireland used that legacy fund without referring to other public funds. There was a limit for that funding, which was exhausted in three to four years.

**The Chairperson:**

That is a very strong point; I had not understood that.

**Mr McGarry:**

Special Olympics Ulster provides value for money. Page 72 of the business plan outlines the detail, and it works out at about £1.40 for every £1 of public money. We mentioned £2.6 million,

and money is tight, so value for money is important; however, it is also important to realise the full cost of Special Olympics Ulster is £5.1 million, and in the Northern Ireland context it is £4 million. That is why we referred to it as “lean and mean”. Special Olympics Ulster is raising almost £1 for every £1 of public money. This is not just an ask; we are stepping up to the plate.

Michelle asked about Special Olympics GB. The UK organisation has not been as successful as Special Olympics Ireland. Special Olympics Ireland is probably, outside America and on a per-capita basis, the leading organisation in the world. To put that into context, the European games are being run by five or six people from Special Olympics Ireland. At the last world games, Special Olympics Ireland brought out the third highest number of volunteers. It is recognised as a world leader.

We are providing a world-class service that people in Europe and the rest of the world look up to. Those most in need deserve that. The UK is not at the same standard yet, but people from Special Olympics Ulster and Special Olympics Ireland are going to the UK to bring its organisation up to the same standard. All those efforts could be lost.

**Mr O’Loan:**

I strongly support what Michelle said about the reaction from the Department of Health. While there is a process ongoing, it was inappropriate to receive a definitive negative answer. I even see that the letter appears to refer to this financial year and does not appear to discuss the future, which is what I thought we were discussing. Nor does it reflect the shift in thinking on public health at the moment. We should respond strongly to that. You may not want to do so, but could your bid be scaled down if Departments were unwilling to bear the cost in full?

**Mr McCay:**

That is a very good question. However, what we are asking for is the bottom line to sustain the programme. Shaun spoke earlier about all those who would like to be involved in the Special Olympics but cannot because we do not have the capacity to accommodate them.

The bid that we have made will keep us going at the level we need in order to sustain the programme, never mind growing it in the future. Once we get into questions of what we can live

with below that level, athletes will begin to pay a heavy price. Indeed, the further we go down that road — and you rightly said that we do not want to go there — the more athletes will be affected by our inability to provide the service that they need. Our position is clear: we requested the bottom line for what we need to keep going.

**Mr K Robinson:**

There are a couple of points that we have been asked to address here in how we can help these gentlemen. Colin Watson's letter is undated. When did the Committee receive it?

**The Chairperson:**

Today.

**Mr K Robinson:**

OK. Therefore it is right up to date. Mr Watson says in the letter that:

“All interested Departments are now being asked whether the benefits provided by SOU in their areas are significant enough to warrant their funding of the organisation. If any or all of them say no then it may be may be deemed as being unaffordable.”

Other than the message that the Committee appears to have received from the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, have you been given a definitive no by anyone to your business plan?

**Mr Cassidy:**

We were not in the loop for those discussions.

**Mr K Robinson:**

That is what I am trying to reverse the order on.

**Mr Cassidy:**

We are not aware of anyone coming back with an answer.

**Mr K Robinson:**

Where is your business plan at the moment?

**Mr Cassidy:**

As far as we are aware it is still sitting on Mr McCausland's desk.

**Mr K Robinson:**

Therefore, as far as you aware, it has reached the desk of the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure?

**Mr McCay:**

Yes. The last correspondence that we received from the Minister was that the business case was on his desk and that he intended to convene a cross-departmental meeting. The correspondence and message from the Health Minister is new information to us. Not only have we not had a definitive no, but we have had positive support from this Committee and its members and positive indications from others.

**The Chairperson:**

Is it correct that the Minister is not prepared to forward the business plan until the affordability issues had been addressed and until he had received feedback from the other Ministers?

**Mr K Robinson:**

That is basically what he said.

**Mr McCarthy:**

Nelson's comment on Tuesday in the House was that:

"That business case has been circulated to other Ministers to seek their views on future funding...and on the way forward." – [*Official Report, Vol 55, No 2, p119, col 2*].

Therefore, it has been forwarded to other Ministers. The response that the Committee got from the Health Department is the first it has seen. It was written on 16 August and is, therefore, a month old.

**Mr Leonard:**

I am sorry to cut across the main question, but that is exactly the point.



**Mr K Robinson:**

That is no problem. I am just trying to find out where everything is.

**Mr Leonard:**

One month ago, Michael McGimpsey signed a letter saying that he could not go there. Yet the Minister told the House on Tuesday that the business case was still out with the other Departments and Colin Watson's letter to the Committee today also suggests that. That is a direct contradiction and, like Declan, I support Michelle's line that that is deeply disappointing. We are being told on one hand that there is a process and that there is due to be a meeting to discuss the issue, yet on 16 August, as Kieran rightly said, the Health Minister had made his decision. That is very strange.

**The Chairperson:**

We need to keep asking questions.

**Mr Leonard:**

Sorry.

**The Chairperson:**

That is OK, Billy. Do you want to ask a question or has your issue been addressed?

**Mr Leonard:**

Perhaps Liam could take the Committee through the type of work that he does as a volunteer. We have heard about business cases and figures, but what about the work of the people involved?

**Mr McGarry:**

As a volunteer I am involved as a family member and I work with clubs with fundraising and supporting the club as and when I am needed. I was involved in the organisation committee of Special Olympics Ulster, which changed all the structures to ensure that governance was improved. I also assisted in the creation of the business plan and with the current process. When I started as a volunteer, I was involved in the World Games of 2003 and was in charge of the

King's Hall and of logistics in the Belfast games. The reason that I volunteer, and that I see volunteers, is that getting involved with the athletes creates an amazing sense of goodwill. I have had many highlights in my life; I often worked 100-hour weeks and more, but I would do it again in an instant, and everyone I that I speak to feels the same. There is goodwill, and people experience an enormous sense of achievement when they get involved; I would encourage anyone to volunteer.

**Mr McCartney:**

You say that you made a presentation to Ministers in Stormont Castle. Were all Ministers in attendance?

**Mr Cassidy:**

Most of them. Michael McGimpsey sent an official to represent him. I think that every other Minister was there, including Gerry Kelly and Robin Newton.

**Mr McGarry:**

Six Ministers, including the two junior Ministers, were invited; two sent deputies.

**McCartney:**

Did you circulate the business case that you submitted to DCAL to the other Ministers?

**Mr Cassidy:**

No; it was submitted to Sport Northern Ireland, which gave it to DCAL.

**Mr McGarry:**

Sport NI conducted the business case, so it has been in charge of its distribution.

**Mr McCartney:**

Ok.

**Lord Browne:**

I will attempt to be brief. I appreciate the work that you do, as I was indirectly involved when the

Special Olympics came to Dublin in 2003. Belfast City Council hosted the United States team, which consisted of 1,600 competitors and their families. There is no doubt that participation in the games increases the self-esteem of the athletes and their families. Anyone who attended those games could not help but be emotionally affected; therefore I have some sympathy for you.

You say that you do not receive much core funding. Have you asked for lottery funding, for example? Have you tried to attract the private sector? During the Olympics and the World Games, there is considerable interest from large firms looking for publicity. Could you receive support from the United States?

**Mr Cassidy:**

The organisation, as Liam said, has increased enormously since 2003, as have the structures attached to it. After the Belfast games of 2006, the organisation successfully applied to the Big Lottery Fund for a development post across Northern Ireland to look at 10 specific areas in which clubs could be developed.

In three years, 37 new clubs affiliated to the organisation; that was a huge amount of work and a huge development potential that we grasped and ran with. That came to an end in December 2008. We made another subsequent application to the Big Lottery Fund, but it was turned down. The Big Lottery Fund focuses on specific examples of disability: older people or younger people with a disability. It is for work that lies outside core activities; therefore the core activities of the organisation cannot be fully funded by Big Lottery grants.

However, we will continue to apply. Recently, we were very successful with the Modernisation Fund in getting sports equipment for our clubs. However, that funding does not apply to the core activities of the organisation.

**Mr McCay:**

You mentioned funding from the private sector, and, as fundraising co-ordinator, that is my job. The economic climate is difficult. There is nothing but goodwill towards the Special Olympics; however, there is a difference between supporting the Special Olympics and resourcing them. Nevertheless, we will leave no stone unturned on any front to raise funds.

This has been a very illuminating conversation. Declan said earlier that there are no special cases. However, we work with the most special and inspirational people; I have learnt that in the past six months. Those involved in the Special Olympics are deeply committed to what they do, but they do not get support from the people who represent their interests. All the parties here are represented in our business case, including the four main parties in the North with a departmental locus, namely the Ministers from DSD, Health, Education, DCAL and OFMDFM.

The Executive have a huge opportunity to show that, even in difficult economic times, they know who they are here to serve, look out for and help. The programme can be delivered for relatively meagre sums of money to benefit people. The Executive can now show the wider world that they can take the right decisions for the right reasons and for the right people. They can show everybody that, regardless of what happened in the past, the Executive work on a cross-party basis and, when it comes to the crunch, can deliver results. I remind members that the decision is for our athletes, their families and our volunteers, who make a real difference every day of the week. They are worth supporting.

**The Chairperson:**

I thank Shaun, Ronan and Liam for their presentation. We will discuss possible actions when you depart.