



Northern Ireland
Assembly

**COMMITTEE FOR
CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE**

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)**

IFA Briefing on Governance and Stadia

2 December 2010

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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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 David Hilditch
Mr William Humphrey
Mr Billy Leonard
Mr Kieran McCarthy
Mr Raymond McCartney
Mr David McClarty
Mr Ken Robinson

Witnesses:

Dr Leslie Caul)	
Mr Patrick Nelson)	Irish Football Association
Mr Terence Pateman)	
Mr Jim Shaw)	

The Chairperson (Mr McElduff):

Good morning. We are joined by a senior delegation from the Irish Football Association (IFA). I will ask the new president, Mr Jim Shaw, to introduce his team and make an opening statement, after which members will have an opportunity to ask questions. This evidence session will be recorded by Hansard.

Mr Jim Shaw (Irish Football Association):

I am joined by Terence Pateman, the association's vice-president; Patrick Nelson, our chief executive, whom I assume most of you have met before; and Dr Leslie Caul, who was recently elected as chairman of the IFA's executive board. Patrick will do the presentation and go through the briefing paper.

Mr Patrick Nelson (Irish Football Association):

Thank you, Chairman and members, for inviting us. Our organisation has been around for a long time now, so it is appropriate that we are in an historic room. We have been around since 1880. We celebrated our one hundred and thirtieth anniversary a couple of weeks ago. We look after all association football in Northern Ireland: international, domestic and grass roots.

We are pleased to have with us our new president, vice-president and chairman of the executive board. The provision of those three new offices heralds a new dawn for the Irish Football Association. Jim was elected unanimously by the council of the Irish Football Association on 25 November. He was the sole candidate, and that shows evidence of a shared agenda among the football family, which is good for the future.

I will begin by talking about the independent governance review that we have begun. We agreed a while back that we needed a review of the governance of the Irish Football Association. We agreed detailed terms of reference on 15 November this year. Work started immediately after that, and I hope that the team that we put together to carry out the review is without reproach from any quarter. It has strong Northern Ireland experience, private and public sector experience, and it has football experience from several other jurisdictions. It includes: Timothy Quin, who chairs the panel; David Watkins, a former civil servant; and George Cummings, a Scot and former deputy head teacher with considerable football experience. They are all senior individuals in their own right. We pulled them together as a specific team for this, and we hope that they will do an excellent job for Northern Ireland.

The review will look at the structures, processes and relationships in the association; how we interact with senior leagues in particular; and how we work with the divisional associations in

Northern Ireland and the affiliated organisations, such as boys', women's and schools' football organisations. It will examine stakeholder relationships, with bodies such as this Committee, UEFA, FIFA, as well as the general public, our supporters. The review team will consult widely among the football family and we hope that the review will uncover lessons to be learned.

I move to our ongoing activity. Like any company, we have a lot of ongoing activity and there is an engine to run on a regular basis. A lot of football goes on in Northern Ireland and we manage a great deal of it. There are nearly 900 adult teams, 50 women's teams, 500 boys' teams and 300 school teams. We have an involvement in that. As you would expect of any company, we are developing our strategy. We are looking at what the vision of the association should be and what our mission is. We try to ascertain, both within and outwith the association, the values that we hold dear, bearing in mind the fact that we are a 130 year-old company that looks to work for the future. We are building a business plan and budget like any other company. I hope that you see us like that: we are businesslike, and we intend to be so for the future.

One of the major planks of that strategy is the proposed stadium redevelopment. We made a strategic decision that redeveloping Windsor Park is the right decision for association football in Northern Ireland. We have been working on a business case for that with our friends at Sport Northern Ireland, consultants and Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) staff over the past 14 or 15 months. We hope to have a redevelopment of Windsor Park that will create an 18,000 capacity, all-seat stadium. That is smaller than is seen elsewhere in the United Kingdom, but it is appropriate for purpose in Northern Ireland. That business case has had a lot of scrutiny from Sport Northern Ireland and DCAL. It is now with the Department of Finance and Personnel.

It is an all-for-one, one-for-all project. We are working a little bit — not absolutely — hand in glove with colleagues at rugby and the Gaelic Athletic Association, because it is three projects, not one. It is not just about a stadium or three stadiums; it is about the potential regeneration of important parts of south Belfast and west Belfast, in particular. We need to bear in mind that aspect of the project. It is not just about building a stadium.

Football is not just about being in that stadium when there is a big game. We are proud of the

work that we have done during the past 10 years or so as part of Football for All. Part of everything that we do involves focusing on the grass-roots game and on using football as a hook to help society. I will touch on a couple of examples. The Belfast Street League, which we launched in this Building with the assistance of your colleague John McCallister MLA several months ago, has just ended its third mini-season. The Belfast Street League gives hope to homeless people.

We have held a couple of positive “dealing with the past” workshops, which focus, in particular, on the historical relationship between Linfield Football Club and Belfast Celtic Football Club. We hope to bring a piece of theatre to Stormont early next year. Hopefully, everyone will be able to take part in and enjoy that. That has been a thought-provoking and interesting project over the past few months.

I will briefly touch on Academy North, which is another interesting project. It involves Crusaders Football Club and Cliftonville Football Club, two major senior clubs in north Belfast, working together to encourage youngsters to stay in education so that they can stay in football. It is a great way of using football as a hook to help kids who may not otherwise be on the right path and ensure that they stay on it. I could mention several other examples but I know that we will run out of time if I stay too long on that subject.

Finally, before I hand over to Jim, I want to mention some independent research that we did, around this time last year, with Millward Brown, a highly respected independent research company. Of the people who were surveyed, 80% said that the Irish Football Association works for all sides of the community in Northern Ireland; 76% said that Northern Ireland games had become much more family friendly over time; and 78% said that the IFA has worked hard to move football forward in Northern Ireland. We want to focus on those issues. We want to indicate to everybody that we are here for the entire population of Northern Ireland. We are here to make football the best that it can be. We are here to make Northern Ireland that best that it can be, too, through football. That is all that I want to say. I will hand over to Jim, who will finish off.

Mr Shaw:

Thanks, Patrick. Perhaps I could add to that. The Committee's remit is to look at governance and stadia development. Patrick has outlined that well. Obviously, he could not help but talk about the good stories that emanate from the IFA. That is a significant point. We do a great deal of work beyond just running the game of football. We have three strands: grass roots, which is the level that was described and includes schools and boys' football, the street league and night-time football; the domestic level, which include the senior game and all other adult football in Northern Ireland; and international level. That is where we come to the stadium. You go from grass roots and you end up at the stadium.

We make no secret of the fact that the stadium is our cash cow. We generate most of our revenue from adult men's international football at Windsor Park. Our accounts for 2009 show that we had a turnover of £10 million, which is big compared with that of recent years. Five years ago, it was around £5 million. At the start of the millennium, it was something over £1 million. Now, it is £10 million. That shows how we have grown. If I remember correctly, nearly one third of that income comes from the men's senior international game. We are self-sustaining to a large degree. That money gets ploughed into some of the good schemes to which Patrick referred. There are many more that we could sit here and tell you about for the next half an hour, but that is not our intention. That emphasises the link between the stadium and the work that we do at all levels of the game, particularly at grass-roots level.

Obviously, we need government support — if I could use that term — because we cannot redevelop the stadium on our own. We do not have the revenue stream or the capital investment potential to do that. I hope that what we have presented today satisfies what you are looking for. Governance is a key aspect of all organisations. We do not like to think that we are starting to look at governance; we have been doing that for the past five years and have been through a lot of interaction. I suggest that, in percentage terms, the IFA has had more change in the past five years than any other organisation in Northern Ireland.

We realise that, as with any organisation, our organisation needs to keep examining itself in order to survive. We see this as the start, if not a continuation, of a continuous improvement process. When an organisation stops examining itself and improving, it becomes static and starts

going backwards, and we realise that. The governance review will be part of the ongoing change, and perhaps that will take us to a level that makes us more than acceptable. That is all that I want to say, and members want to ask questions, so, considering the time restraint, I will hand back to you, Chairman.

The Chairperson:

Thank you for that.

Mr O'Loan:

Good morning, gentlemen. Welcome to the meeting and congratulations on coming in front of us so soon after your appointment. You might feel that you are coming into the lion's den and it is commendable that you are willing to do that so rapidly. Jim, you have a particular leadership role as president of the association, and I congratulate you on having already spoken publicly about that role. I think that that has given significant public confidence in what you and your organisation are about.

Patrick referred to a new dawn in his introduction. I think that there is an opportunity for exactly that, and it is what all of us are seeking. It has been obvious to all in the outside world that there has been a great need for change at the top in the Irish Football Association, and that has been long delayed. That delay concerns me. Does that indicate that there was significant internal resistance to modernisation? I think that modernisation is a key word and a key thought. Will that internal resistance still be there as you, as the new leaders, attempt to take the organisation forward?

Mr Shaw:

I will answer that question. First, even though three of us are new to our posts, two of my companions have been in the game for, I will say over 20 years, but it is probably more like 30 years. I am very close to the IFA and all its workings, so we have been through all this. I want to qualify that we are not new in off the street. However, it was good to point out that we have come here today in our new roles.

In answer to your question about resistance to change, we have gone through an enormous

amount of change in the past five years as I said, and you have to recognise that all organisations resist change. I cannot think of too many organisations that willingly take change on. We had to go through a learning process that change is essential, especially because, as I mentioned, we moved from being a business with a £1 million turnover to one with a £10 million turnover in a very short period. That means that change and better governance are needed and, without answering your question directly, we should see a more participative leadership style in the future. Hopefully, that will bring all strands of the game in line and aim for our key vision and mission objectives. I know that that sounds a bit far-fetched, but when there is something to aim for, it provides focus.

You are right in saying that it has taken too long to get here. We cannot go back, so all we can do is ensure that the process will be a bit faster in future. The governance review demonstrates that. We are aiming, without putting an exact date on it, to have the governance review completed around Easter. I suggest that, where appropriate, it should be implemented over the following summer. That will be a lot quicker than previous, similar reviews, which have taken up to two years.

Dr Les Caul (Irish Football Association):

To add to what Jim said, we are conscious of the need to manage change, and we are conscious of the need to develop communication with those involved in all aspects of the game and listen to what they have to say. In that sense, our first, short-term objective was to build confidence and a stable organisation that would give us the opportunity to do that. The whole essence of the governance review, although it will point clearly to where it sees shortcomings, is to work with the association to bring about the necessary changes.

Mr O’Loan:

There is no escaping the fact that sectarianism has been a significant issue within soccer and for the leadership at the top of soccer. How do you read the recent history of addressing that in the organisation? Where do you feel you are now, what needs to be done, and how will you tackle it?

Mr Shaw:

I will attempt to answer that, unless Patrick wants to add something. I know that you had our

community relations manager here earlier this year.

The Chairperson:

Mickey Boyd.

Mr Shaw:

That strand has been very successful. It is not just about sectarianism; it is about bringing society into the game of football. We use Football for All to get everyone in Northern Ireland involved. I have been involved in the game for a long time and come from a league that has crossed the divide since the day and hour it was started.

We do not give ourselves credit for — and we never will, because once you start talking about it there is a danger of highlighting it — having played throughout the so-called Troubles. Not just at senior level where it is easier, but at intermediate and junior level, and we missed only three or four games during the height of the Troubles. Those teams travelled to the housing estates that we all talk about where the pitches are. Those four games were missed because it was impossible to travel to the venue. We are talking about real cross-community involvement.

There is work still to be done. You are never there on such things; you have to keep working at it all the time; street soccer is an example, as are the Cliftonville, Crusaders and Newington developments. Those are all extremely positive, and we have been involved in discussions about some of them. Sectarianism is not mentioned in those discussions; it is about coming together for the good of football and of society in general.

Mr O'Loan:

I respect the steps that have been taken and the analysis that you are presenting, but I want to carry on that theme to the case of the new stadium. Given your commitment that it will be at Windsor Park, what kind of outreach do you feel will have to be done to change the associations that there are with Windsor Park so that the flagship stadium for the game is widely perceived as a place for everyone?

Mr Shaw:

I have to accept some of that. I will let Patrick speak, because I am hogging the limelight.

Mr Nelson:

Should the redevelopment of Windsor Park go ahead, the relationship between the IFA and Linfield Football Club will be turned on its head completely. The idea is that the Irish Football Association will lease Windsor Park; it will become our stadium, and it will be the national stadium. We are about Football for All; we are not about football for one part of society.

DCAL's research on young people and sport, which was published last year, suggested that football is still the sport played by most young people, regardless of any divide, and we need to recognise that. The original memorandum of association of the Irish Football Association, when it became a limited company in 1908, expressed the need to develop, foster and promote football. The only thing that we have added to that — so that we remember at all times that we are here to serve all sides of the community — is that football should be for all not just for some.

Mr Humphrey:

Thank you very much for your presentation. I congratulate you all on your new posts and wish you well. As a Northern Ireland supporter and a block booking holder for international games, I was pleased to hear Patrick speaking of the IFA now being like a company. I welcome that businesslike approach, which has perhaps been lacking over the years but which has improved in recent times. Representing north Belfast — I declare an interest as a member of Belfast City Council — I am aware of the IFA's work with the council on interface projects and welcome it. Midnight soccer schemes are important diversionary activities for young people.

I congratulate the IFA on its efforts with the international team. Huge progress has been made at all levels of the international set-up in improving the atmosphere at games and on the pitch. We can talk in isolation about what does and does not go on at games, but as someone who goes to them, I am aware of exactly what happens. The IFA's work with the Community Relations Council and Belfast City Council should be commended. Sport has united our community; there is now one community in Northern Ireland. When I drive around the city, I find it gratifying to see young fellas in the Falls Road and the Antrim Road wearing Northern Ireland replica gear.

That is very welcome.

People may dwell on past difficulties, but the focus must be on the future. I want to see all levels of the national team develop but particularly the main national side. We need to focus on young players coming through and on a new stadium and centre of excellence. I know that Belfast City Council is happy to work with the IFA to address those issues.

Northern Ireland supporters are officially recognised by the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) as the best in Europe. That is not just because of their behaviour at home but because they are tremendous ambassadors when they leave our shores and travel across the globe. In fact, people travel from all over the world to attend Northern Ireland home games. I recently attended the two international games, where I met visitors from Toronto. I also recently attended the launch of a book by a Englishman born and bred who decided some time ago to join the green-and-white army and to travel the world supporting Northern Ireland. That is hugely significant.

I also congratulate the IFA on Football for All, as it will improve community relations and will enable young people to work and play together in a team.

Declan mentioned sectarianism, which we need to address. The IFA has addressed the issue, but it would help if others followed suit. I credit the IFA for its work in tackling that. However, I am concerned — I raised this point with Patrick at a meeting the other day —

The Chairperson:

I know that you will frame your concern in the form of a question, William.

Mr Humphrey:

What is being done to ensure that all those who are eligible to play for Northern Ireland actually do so? We can talk about sectarianism around this table, in the Chamber or in any other forum, but if players are not encouraged to play for the national team, they will not do so. It is an entirely different matter if people do not want to play. However, we should encourage all those players who are available to play to do so. We do not want to create a team in Northern Ireland

that only one section of the community supports. So many people from both sides of the community now support the team. However, some people from a section of the community are being encouraged not to play for the national team. What is being done to ensure that all available players play for Northern Ireland?

Mr Shaw:

That is a valid question. Football for All and grassroots development do not differentiate from each other in any way. All youngsters of primary-school age and up get exactly the same treatment. At some stage, those youngsters will have to make a choice if they are given one. We would like every youngster whom we develop and who is good enough to play for our international team.

We do not have to look too far to find great players from across the divide — we do not like to use that term, but we have to recognise it occasionally — such as Pat Jennings, Martin O’Neill and Gerry Armstrong, who still dines out on scoring Northern Ireland’s most famous goal. They are absolute stalwarts, and long before them there were others. Even today, most of us do not know where our international players’ allegiances lie or whether they even have any. However, it is very difficult when a player really does not want to play for Northern Ireland. As you know, we recently raised the issue with FIFA and others, but the rulings have not gone our way.

Given the concept of a shared future, which I presume came from here, we hope that every player who qualifies to play for Northern Ireland will be willing to put his hat in the ring. Patrick may wish to add some detail to that.

Mr Nelson:

It is an excellent question, on which we need to concentrate at all times. We send out nine teams wearing the green shirt of Northern Ireland, including the under-16 schoolboys’ team, which, by the way, has a chance of winning the Victory Shield at the Oval on 9 December. If any of you are available for that, they will be playing England, and, hopefully, they have a good chance. We have the schoolboys’ team, a disabled team and women’s and men’s teams of all ages.

Whether boys, girls, men, women, able-bodied or disabled, we encourage everyone in training

camps to do their best for Northern Ireland, and, as Jim said, if people do not want to play for Northern Ireland, that is their prerogative. We want to make Northern Ireland training camps as welcoming as possible so that when people are part of them they know and enjoy being part of a family.

Mr Hilditch:

The IFA is probably in a stronger position now than it was a few months ago, and I hope that it goes from strength to strength. I wish you well in the task ahead.

Patrick mentioned a potential capacity in the new stadium of 18,000. Bearing in mind our health and safety culture, what discussions have taken place about the project with health and safety? Ballymena United opened a new stand, but, all of a sudden, it was hit with the news that it could not be used and had to be reduced in size. We do not want to open an 18,000-seat stadium only for health and safety to tell us that it can hold only 15,000 people.

Mr Nelson:

I could bore the Committee for hours about S factors, P factors, C factors, but I will not. Suffice to say that health and safety legislation has been an interesting challenge for football. I suspect that it may be an interesting challenge for other sports as well. For the most recent international at Windsor Park, we worked very hard with the health and safety people to get the safety-management factor up to 1, which meant that we could fill every available seat. We will try to keep it at that level, although we cannot be complacent. In the modern era, we have to make sure that health and safety is always at the top of our list. I know that we are talking about the IFA and international football matters, but we also work with clubs that are affected by the legislation to make sure that they learn the lessons that we have learned.

Mr Hilditch:

I was a meeting in Carrickfergus last night to do with the horrendous figures on domestic abuse that were released yesterday. You have been absolutely fantastic in taking the lead on a number of social issues, including sectarianism and racism. I was asked by people there, including representatives from the PSNI, DPP, Women's Aid and Men's Aid, who heard that I would be meeting you this morning, whether it would be possible to use the IFA, which they consider to be

a wonderful vehicle, to help to sort those things out. Perhaps through Michael Boyd you could become involved in helping to address that tragic issue.

Mr Shaw:

Terry Pateman comes from Carrickfergus, so it would be appropriate for him to answer that.

Mr Terry Pateman (Irish Football Association):

I will do anything to help Carrickfergus. There is no reason why Dr Boyd could not be approached. Our organisation tries to help with the development of young people in all fields in order to keep them on the straight and narrow. Over the years, sport has been proven to work. I come from the grass-roots level, the Amateur League, where, as Jim said, I have been for 40 years. At the moment, the froth is coming to the top of the glass, because people have put everything into making football work and we are determined to use any resource. At the grass-roots level, clubs are working and will continue to work with local communities.

Mr Burns:

I am a football man; I played junior football in the Amateur League. Thank you for coming here today.

The problem is not at the bottom end or at grass roots; great work is done in the amateur leagues. The matches, the referees and all the community stuff are absolutely brilliant. The problem is at the senior level of the IFA. There has been a problem with the GAA, rugby and the IFA moving into a stadium. Until the IFA gets its house in order, you are holding back the other sporting organisations. We want all the stadiums here to move on before the recession kills the whole thing off. It is vital that you come forward with the documents and join the scheme to allow everyone to move forward. The stadium would be a great flagship and enable all three sporting codes to move forward.

There is a difference between junior and senior football in that, although junior football is operating well, senior clubs seem to have very little money. You talked about health and safety at grounds, the need to generate money and increase your figures. Everyone would like to see the return of the home internationals. If England does not wish to play in that competition, it should

move forward with Scotland, Wales, the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. It is vital that that happen and that there is a stadium at which everyone can watch those matches. I want you to move forward and not dwell on the past.

Mr Nelson:

Thank you for the question. You touched on senior clubs, and I will cover a little bit on that because we have not done so in this meeting. We have to deal with a legacy of senior clubs having spent too much money in the past, which is not unique to Northern Ireland; you will see the same thing in football in many countries. We have done three things about that in the recent past.

First, we signed letters of agreement with clubs and HM Revenue and Customs to have tripartite talks about issues, which will let HMRC know that we are standing alongside our clubs to solve historic problems. Secondly, we brought in salary capping for the senior league; that is advisory this year but will be compulsory next year. It will start to reduce the amount of money that clubs pay for their players, which is a sensible thing for all clubs to do. Thirdly, as you will perhaps be aware, we have worked hard to put down two third-generation pitches, one at Cliftonville and one at Crusaders. If you go past either late at night now, you will see the floodlights on and community activity taking place. That brings revenue into those clubs. If we can do a little bit more of that, it will benefit as many senior clubs as we can cover.

The Chairperson:

A few years ago, Fintan Drury moved between clubs talking about the future of professional soccer on the island of Ireland. He came up with a radical proposal — it may not have been his invention — for a 12-team all-island premier league. Where does that stand?

Mr Shaw:

The concept is still around, but it is difficult to put in place. Speaking personally, the main issues are cost and travel. We do not have a culture of travel in Northern Ireland. Some teams say that they do not want to travel from Newry to Derry because it is too far; they want to be in a league in which they never travel more than 20 miles. In the United States of America, people will move jobs tomorrow, go from New York to Los Angeles on the next plane and never look back. There

are cultural issues as regards attitudes to travel here. However, the concept has been looked at, and, as you say, it has been pushed for a long time.

The Chairperson:

Is it fair to say that people are genuinely worried about the future viability of professional clubs?

Mr Shaw:

In 1957, Linfield signed Jackie Milburn from Newcastle United and paid him more than Newcastle could. It is hard to imagine that happening again. Alan Shearer could never have come here for more money than he was getting at Newcastle. The Premiership in England has become so attractive that, each week, we are losing people who travel across the water in large numbers to support the various teams. Forty years ago, travel was not so easy or attractive, and most people went to an Irish League club.

We have an almost impossible task to rejuvenate large crowds at so-called Irish League games, but there is still a product and a level of support that we need to maximise. Statistics can fool us all, but there have been significant increases in the numbers of people who attend Irish League matches, not necessarily across the whole spectrum but at certain clubs. Work through our marketing and public relations has helped that. There has been a 6% year-on-year increase recently. Maintaining that is difficult, Thomas, but, in a marketing sense, we are not in the best place to attract crowds because of English football, TV, other interests and so on. It will be a continual struggle, but we are moving in the right direction. We are bringing in a bit more management and business acumen to those clubs.

Mr Burns:

You mentioned some of the senior soccer clubs that have new 4G pitches. I visited Crusaders and talked to the people there about the problems that they had when the pitches were being laid for the first time and about how those were well improved the second time. That perfect pitch is used by the community, and it is fantastic that it is used by schools. However, Crusaders' fantastic pitch does match the standard of the club's ground. The great difficulty is that the pitch is light years ahead of the stadium and the facilities.

Mr Pateman:

Yes, the pitch is way ahead of the facilities, but the club, in conjunction with Newington, is working on a project for a new stadium. If it comes off, the pitch will be lifted and taken to the new location, which will have twenty-second century not twenty-first century facilities. The facilities will be the best in Britain, and senior, intermediate and junior football will take place on the one site.

Mr Burns:

Sometimes, when we are in Britain, we go around wee clubs that we have never heard of to see their facilities. I am not talking about Premiership or Championship; they are what I call division two teams. The facilities that teams of Irish League standard have in their community are light years ahead of anything in Northern Ireland.

Mr Nelson:

I have to agree. A couple of factors help to explain that. After Lord Justice Taylo's report on the Hillsborough disaster, a great deal of money was pumped in through the Football Foundation to ground development in England. Northern Ireland has not had that advantage.

As you know, Premier League clubs are extremely well funded by Sky television. In addition, the Football League clubs, and, to a certain extent, the Premier League clubs, have their community arms funded with grant money of £180,000 a year, which allows each of the 72 clubs to do a tremendous amount of work in their community. I speak from the perspective of having been a chief executive of one of those clubs before I came to Northern Ireland. We have a much more limited budget to work on here, but, as Jim and Terry said, we are encouraging clubs to get further into their communities. We had someone go to a recent GAA conference in Armagh to look and listen on behalf of association football. That is a great lesson for us.

Mr Burns:

I am a Gaelic man too. The difference between Gaelic and soccer is that Gaelic is based much more on volunteering. There is no professionalism in Gaelic sports, unlike the top level in soccer. Soccer drifts into professionalism and money. A young GAA player plays for his club and his county voluntarily; the whole community is behind him. It is not like that with soccer, where, if a

player is good enough, he tries to get to England and gain professional status.

Mr Shaw:

Football, Gaelic and rugby all have different models; for example, Gaelic is based on the parish. A town such as Ballymena may have 20 or 30 football teams but only one Gaelic team. Where I come from, there is only one Gaelic team in the parish. That makes a difference. There is more unity and, as you say, professionalism has not yet permeated the game.

The Chairperson:

I have shown considerable indulgence to members. We have five questions remaining.

Mr McCartney:

Thank you very much for your presentation. I congratulate you on your promotion. Declan covered some of the earlier issues. You have set out an impressive stall and you know exactly what you are trying to achieve. I congratulate you for that and wish you well.

Overstating a problem may cause an organisation to switch off; however, an understated problem will not be tackled. The independent research points you in a direction. Michael Boyd was here; he also visited Derry, and I met him in the Brandywell Stadium. Michael neither overstates nor understates the problem of sectarianism, and I wish you well as you go forward with it.

Jim is right to mention resistance to change: no one likes to be told that their organisation is not working well. The independent review is a good idea, and I have absolutely no doubt that it will point you in the direction that I know you will want to take.

As to the future, how important is it for your organisation that you deliver the stadium?

Dr Caul:

That echoes Mr Burns's question. First, the stadium will be an icon of good practice in stadium provision. With due respect to all sports, Northern Ireland does not have that. People have to look at the big models in the English Premiership. The stadium will suggest to people the sort of

facilities that they will want to get for themselves, scaled down. Secondly, it is an icon for us, in that it says that football is about the twenty-first or twenty-second century. We are going forward.

Mr McCartney:

I live in Derry, where some young lads declared that they wish to play for the Republic, including some who play for the Northern Ireland team, including Patrick McCourt; I welcome your acknowledgement of that fact. As Irish citizens, they are entitled to make that choice. A decision to play for the Republic should not be taken as a declaration of sectarianism. It is not; it is a declaration of citizenship.

Mr Leonard:

You are very welcome; it is good to see you. I know that there are new posts all round, but Jim in particular is the organisation's face and voice. I wish him good luck. There is a fair bit of catching up to be done, and I do not mean that in a cynical way; you know the background. Supporters of local soccer have said as much openly, so do not take that remark as coming from one particular side.

I want to talk about two areas. It is a must for the IFA to drive forward with the Windsor Park set-up. It is not an abuse of position to say that, because everybody is saying it. The Minister is insisting on a three-sport package, and, as the other two disciplines are getting on with it, we are asking the IFA to drive it forward.

There was one reference made to leasing, which brings in the money aspect of the completed job. There have been all sorts of things in the past, such as 100-year agreements. What are the finances of the new set-up going to be like? Patrick, you mentioned leasing. Will you go over that without breaking any confidentiality? Where is the money going? Socceros that I know have talked about money getting down to the youth level. I am sure that there is a lot more to the story than the headlines or what has been shared with me. Will there be a provision for the profit from the use of the new stadium to filter down? I have a second question to ask after you answer that.

Mr Shaw:

There is absolutely no doubt about that. As I said, and it may have been the wrong term to use, but the stadium, which could have a greater capacity than 18,000 if we had the wherewithal, will be a cash cow. Let us face it; it is our one source of income from the game itself. Last year, one third of our revenue came from it. That is being used to support grass roots. The subtle difference is that the grass roots tend to receive soft support and the higher level tends to get the infrastructure support that is required.

We still need good facilities and centres of excellence for the grass roots, because everything is predicated on that, but the support is more for the volunteers and coaches who will develop youngsters in every aspect of football. They will provide support in health or other areas, and that will, ultimately, help international football, because the few George Bests will come to the top.

Mr Nelson:

We inherited, and there is no easier way of putting it, a very clear contract that lasts until 2087. That will outlive most of us, or at least our interest in football. We worked hard, not only to build a business case for the new stadium through our work with Sport Northern Ireland and DCAL officials, we also negotiated with Linfield Football Club to change the basis of our agreement with them. I will not break any confidences, but I will say that the new contract is more beneficial than the old one.

Our job is to bring in as much resource to the IFA as we can and to determine how to divide that among international football, grass-roots football and domestic football. If we make more money out of the stadium, which is exactly what we should be doing according to the business plan, that money will go into the areas of football that need it most.

Mr Leonard:

I do not want to be partisan about any of the clubs that are supported by members on the opposite side of the table, but it sticks in the throat of the genuine soccer person that one club benefits incredibly while other areas of the family are not getting a fair slice of the cake.

My second point is about players who opt to play for the Republic. One of your previous members of staff has cost you quite a bit of money because of that campaign. There have been comments around this table about wanting people to play for Northern Ireland. From the press statements that have been made and from the fights that have been fought, a clear signal was being sent that things would be made difficult for players from Northern Ireland who opt to play for the Republic. I totally agree with Raymond. I have aspirations for a Rugby-esque Ireland team, but that is for another day. As Raymond began to intimate, are we at the point at which people who want to play for the Republic are given the respect and allowed to get on with it? Are we there, totally and utterly? This is an important opportunity to say whether that is the case.

Mr Shaw:

Somebody else may want to comment on this, but we will make our best efforts to get anyone who qualifies for FIFA to play for Northern Ireland. We are entitled to do that. We will do whatever we can, and it will all be positive, there will be no negatives, to convince everyone who qualifies for Northern Ireland to play for us if they are good enough. However, as I said earlier, if someone ultimately decides that that is not where they want to play, we have to accept that. However, they make that decision; we do not make that decision.

Mr K Robinson:

Welcome to all of you, and congratulations, or commiserations, as only time will tell, on your appointments. Your coming here this morning is a breath of fresh air. It is a very positive thing. I think that it is an historic occasion in this historic setting, because it is the first time that Northern Irish football has had an opportunity to put its case in a positive manner for almost an hour.

The question that I want to pose to you is that that positivity is unfortunately not the case in the media. Most of the media coverage of football locally tends to be negative, or at least not positive. Compare that with other sports. Every so often I feel guilty that I am not in Dublin supporting another code because I am told what the weather is going to be that day and I am told what a wonderful occasion I am missing. The Chairman obviously has the benefit of going down to Croker.

The Chairperson:

It is a very emotional time for me when I go to Croke Park.

Mr K Robinson:

The media know where Croker is; it is not Croke Park, it is Croker. Really, I should be there too. However, there may be a football international that Northern Ireland are playing in, and six players have cried off and the manager is tearing his hair out. There is this sectarian thing about Windsor Park. It might be worth noting that the majority of voters in the Windsor ward in Belfast are non-unionist voters, so I do not know how that is a sectarian location. I speak as a Glentoran supporter, so I have real grievances against Linfield and Windsor Park. *[Laughter.]*

The Chairperson:

You are being magnanimous. *[Laughter.]*

Mr K Robinson:

To be serious, how do you break through? What do you intend to do? Are you going to go to the local media — whether it is print media, radio or television, which I think are the greatest offenders — and say that we have a product that we are trying to modernise and portray in a very positive way, that we want to be as inclusive as we can, yet you consistently find the “ah, buts” and the downsides?

Mr Shaw:

Patrick will answer that question, but, one thing that strikes me, and I do not want to over-emphasise this, is that perception can become reality. We are trying to address that today, because there are a lot of perceptions around that are not strictly true. We have work to do to turn the media around. We need to be more proactive in getting the good stories out there, if the media will receive them. Perhaps we have been reactive in the past, we have waited until we are under criticism, but all the good projects that we undertake do not hit the media at all, or most of them do not.

Mr Hilditch:

Football and politics are the same, you see. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Shaw:

I was not going to say that, David. That is my opener; Patrick, or any of the other three, may want to add to that.

Mr Nelson:

Thank you, Jim. I will not commiserate with you as a Glentoran fan; I have decided since I came to Northern Ireland that I support the home team wherever I go. Last Saturday, I was at the Oval, so I was a Glentoran fan on Saturday.

Mr McCartney:

Come up to the Brandywell any time.

Mr Nelson:

I was a Linfield fan on Tuesday night at the County Antrim Shield, and I have not yet decided where I am going for my next game. A lot of what we see in the media is positive. We benefit from a free press, as the England 2018 team has noticed over the past few days. Let us hope that it is successful today, because if the tournament is held in England, it will not be here, but we will be so close that we will undoubtedly benefit from it. Let us hope that the team gets a good vote in Zurich today.

Much of the press is positive, but we have to work hard to change the perceptions of members of the press who may not be so positive. I will give one example from the television, which says two things. We played Italy here on the evening of Friday 8 October. The television showed, by the way, that we should have had a penalty in the ninetieth minute, but that is another matter entirely. We were on Sky Sports 1 for one of the first times. Sky Sports 1 is Sky's biggest channel, and it also put on a 45-minute lead-up to the game. That is the first time that it did that for Northern Ireland, and it was a tremendous advertisement for Northern Ireland.

Mr K Robinson:

Sorry to interrupt you, Patrick. You will accept that that was not local media. It was international media.

Mr Nelson:

It was UK media. Yes, we have to work on local media, including the local papers and, if you like, the national papers in Northern Ireland to try to carry some more of the positive stories. If we do the right things and continue to do so, the media will follow that. If we choose to shoot ourselves in the foot for whatever reasons, we deserve the media that we get. We will work hard to try to ensure that we do the right things.

Mr McCarthy:

Thank you for your presentation. Someone said that it was a breath of fresh air, and it really is a breath of fresh air to hear you and to see you present this new mood that is in the air for the IFA. That is to be welcomed enormously. My disappointment and that of my party is that the shared future idea of the Maze stadium, at which the three major sporting organisations and the community could have come together, did not materialise. However, that is water under the bridge.

Billy talked about the inequality for the other football teams in Northern Ireland as a result of the agreement, or whatever it is, between the IFA and Linfield Football Club for the use of Windsor Park. There is certainly an inequality that must and should be addressed.

Terry, you were shouting for Carrickfergus, so let me shout for Ards Football Club. You will know who I am talking about.

Mr Shaw:

Absolutely.

Mr McClarty:

Who?

Mr McCarthy:

After Ards Football Club being in dire straits in for years, we are heading for success in due course, I hope. If you are in Ballyclare this weekend, you can support Ards. My question is on

the inequality between Linfield and the smaller teams, because of the agreement on the use of Windsor Park.

Mr Shaw:

As we said earlier, that has become circumstantial. In the 1980s, when we got a new north stand, we were forced to sign up to a very long-term agreement. No one in this room signed it, even though we have been involved with the IFA for around 40 years. As an association, we have done the best that we can to redress that. In an ideal world, it would be different. We always look for help, so if anyone or any organisation can help us to put that right, we will be very willing to listen. We have done the best that we can. Since the process started five years ago, it has been long and drawn out.

If the Maze had been the solution, it would have created an even bigger problem because we would have had to have honoured the agreement. We have found ourselves in a dilemma that is not of our making. You might well say that it was football's making, but it happened many years ago. I am even led to believe that, at the time, there was government input to say that there must be a long-term lease, although there is no written evidence to support that. If any organisation, including from government, can help us to solve the so-called inequality problem, we will be more than willing to work with it. It probably takes funding to do that.

Mr McCarthy:

In conclusion, I pay tribute to the work of Michael Boyd. A fantastic change has come about, and I wish you every success.

The Chairperson:

We move from Strangford to the north-west to hear from one of our Coleraine champions and a Milk Cup man.

Mr McClarty:

Thank you for your presentation, and congratulations on your elevation to your posts. It is confession time. Ken has confessed to being probably the only Glentoran supporter, and Kieran has confessed to being an Ards supporter, and I have to confess that I am a Coleraine supporter. I

am wee bit nervous, because I am not used to crowds like this. *[Laughter.]*

The Chairperson:

What about climbing over the wall, David?

Mr McClarty:

Nevertheless, I am delighted to be here. My question is about revenue for the senior, or professional, clubs. As Thomas said earlier, the GAA is run on an amateur basis. I remind him that, not so long ago, rugby union was run on an amateur basis and was forced to go down the professional route, as I think GAA will eventually. The professional clubs in Northern Ireland, perhaps with the exception of Linfield, struggle hugely for finance. The lifeblood of most football clubs in Northern Ireland is their social clubs, which are dependent on supporters going there to enjoy themselves, particularly on match days. That revenue stream is in real danger under the Justice Bill. I want to know your views on that. I honestly fear that if supporters are not allowed to enjoy a little drink two hours prior to a football game and two hours afterwards, it will sound the death knell for the professional game in Northern Ireland.

The Chairperson:

I believe that the proposal is two hours before a game and one hour afterwards.

Mr Shaw:

We have consulted — for lack of a better term — on that. I have not been involved directly. Of the four of us, Patrick has, probably, been most closely involved. Perhaps he wants to respond.

Mr Nelson:

OK. I understand that the Committee is to see Department of Justice officials after the meeting to discuss that particular subject. My understanding, David, is that the situation is, perhaps, not as bleak as you paint it. Recently, we presented to the Committee for Justice. I believe that the provision regarding drinking two hours before a game and one hour afterwards is particularly about people doing so in sight of the football pitch. If football clubs have social clubs that are in sight of the football pitch, they can solve that issue by ensuring that patrons are members of the club, which, I believe, they would be anyway if it is a social club. Therefore, the general public is

not admitted to that area. The legislation is more onerous than that which is currently in place. However, my understanding, from having presented to the Committee for Justice recently, is that there are ways to manage it so that the income streams that you have mentioned would not be affected too detrimentally.

Mr McClarty:

Of course, Patrick, the difficulty with that relates to large football events. One that comes to mind is the Northern Ireland Milk Cup. The lifeblood of that event is its corporate hospitality. People who are invited for corporate hospitality are not club members. Will that be affected?

Mr Nelson:

No. The Milk Cup is not a designated event under the legislation. I believe that only premier league and championship matches are classed as designated events. Therefore, the Milk Cup would be exempt from that.

Mr Shaw:

Furthermore, it appears that social clubs must be in view of the pitch, rather than in its proximity. Therefore, you must be able to see the pitch from the social facility.

Mr McClarty:

You can in Coleraine.

Mr Shaw:

Yes. However, in most Irish League grounds, you cannot.

Mr McClarty:

Thanks. So, club members should be OK.

Lord Browne:

Thank you for your presentation. Congratulations to all of you who hold new posts. Everyone seems to have declared something here today, Chairman. I declare that I am from east Belfast and I am regular spectator at football matches. I go to watch Dundela Football Club and Harland

and Wolff Welders Football Club. Sometimes, I support the other major team in Belfast. I will not declare which one. It is Linfield Football Club. *[Laughter.]*

I welcome the progress that the IFA has made over the years. Over the past 10 years, the culture at football matches has improved considerably. Basically, sectarianism and antisocial behaviour is, on the whole, no longer a major problem. That is why I do not believe that all of the Justice Bill's provisions for sports spectators need necessarily be introduced. However, that is for the Justice Committee to consider. I declare that I am a member of that Committee.

The lifeblood of the sport must start with children in primary schools. I am pleased that you have schemes that get into primary schools and create interest there. Can you tell me more about them? As a Committee, we believe that those schemes not only improve children's football skills, they are useful in teaching them about health, improving their social skills, and so on. I am sure that the Committee would like to hear more about schemes that are on offer.

Mr Shaw:

Patrick is probably best equipped to do that because he has all of the details.

Mr Nelson:

We must pay tribute to the Education Minister for helping us to be involved in a project that allows us to put 30 primary school coaches in IFA tracksuits throughout Northern Ireland. A similar GAA project has 30 coaches going out to schools. That scheme has been going for the past couple of years. We are in 270 primary schools across Northern Ireland. GAA coaches hit another 270 or so. Between us, we are in well over half the primary schools in Northern Ireland. Our coaches see nearly 15,000 children a week in P3 and P4. They teach them the basics of how sport can be fun and enjoyable, and little bits about teamwork and healthy eating. It makes a huge difference that the primary school coaches can go out there wearing either a GAA or an IFA tracksuit. With all due respect to the Department of Education Northern Ireland (DENI), if they went out wearing a DENI tracksuit, it would not have quite the same impact. I pay tribute to the Department of Education for allowing that to happen. It is an enormously successful programme and we hope to continue it.

Mr K Robinson:

On a point of clarification, as a former principal of Cavehill Primary School in Belfast, I had Ian Stewart as one of those coaches some 14 or 15 years ago. The scheme has been going for quite some time. There is no doubt that the scheme is very beneficial.

The Chairperson:

Ken was ahead of his time.

Mr Shaw:

It started as mini-soccer, if I remember rightly.

Mr K Robinson:

That is the one.

The Chairperson:

I conclude this session. We have played a few minutes of additional time. My first 11 played very well, I thought. You played the 4-4-2 formation, with a formidable midfield. Patrick, are you a midfielder?

Mr Nelson:

I used to be.

The Chairperson:

Thank you very much for a very good engagement. We will continue this dialogue. Members will reflect on what you have said, and we may take action such as asking questions of the Department or Sport Northern Ireland.

Mr Shaw:

Thank you for hearing us. We will look forward to further interaction as appropriate.