

# Irish Athletic Boxing Association (IABA) Governance Review

Final Report  
April 2022



# Table of Contents

1. Executive Summary .....	3
2. Introduction .....	6
3. Review Scope .....	13
4. Approach & Methodology .....	16
5. Observation & Identification of Issues .....	18
6. The Irish Sports Governance Landscape & Principles of Good Governance .....	26
7. Examples of Governance Reform in NGBs .....	32
9. Recommendations .....	40
10. Summary & Conclusion .....	66



# Section 1. Executive Summary

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# Executive Summary

In this review we have taken a comprehensive look at the governance structures of the IABA, engaging in detailed research and consultation at all levels of Irish amateur boxing to understand the current issues that are limiting the IABA in its aim of growing and developing amateur boxing Ireland to its full potential. Boxing is our most successful Olympic sport. We want that to continue by ensuring the structures and behaviours within the IABA enable continued long-term success in the ring.

At the same time we have also sought to understand the hugely significant role that the sport plays on this island, north and south. In doing so, this further emphasises the need for the IABA to have fit-for-purpose governance structures that serves everyone involved in Irish amateur boxing to fulfil their potential within their sport.

The IABA must support all of these constituents from children starting out for the first time, to experienced boxers, and the army of volunteers that keep clubs running on a day-to-day basis and the officials who give their time so freely in order to ensure that the sport continues to play that vital role in Irish society. These are the people the IABA governance structures exist to serve.

The sport reaches into communities in every county, often those experiencing social disadvantage, and helps to generate almost unlimited amount of social cohesion and capital. This is what makes it unique and critically important as part of the Irish sporting landscape.

Our research and consultation has shown that much of the good work that is being undertaken at grassroots level is being undermined by poor governance at regional and national level, something that is a mirror image of the governance issues that amateur boxing suffers at an international level, with the threat of exclusion from future Olympic Games continuing to hang over the sport. This has served to erode the faith and trust of Irish amateur boxing's key stakeholders – its members and units – as well as its funding partners and the general public, making it difficult for the sport to prosper and grow.

## **The governance issues fall into four broad categories:**

- Culture & Behaviours
- Governance Structure
- Link/Relationship to Members
- Oversight and Control

This review examines each category in detail, setting out the issues and how they have impinged on the IABA effectively maximising its potential.

The process also sets out the principles of good governance that sporting National Governing Bodies (NGBs) should adopt as well as involving extensive research of examples of governance review and reform that provide useful learnings and are relevant to the IABA, highlighting roadmaps that other NGBs have followed on their journey towards better, fit-for-purpose governance.

**This review sets out recommendations in seven key areas. They are as follows:**

- Governance Principles
- Culture & Behaviours
- Governance Structure;
- Grassroots Focus
- High Performance Matters
- Oversight & Control
- Other General Actions

The reasoning, rationale and intended outcome of each of the recommendations made in this review is explained in detail, showing how the adoption of each can have a positive impact on the IABA's governance structure. In total we have identified 63 recommendations – some of which will be easy to implement, others which will require people within the sport to commit to significant change.

Adopted as a whole these recommendations can have a transformative and sustainable effect on Irish amateur boxing and how it is run, with all of the myriad of trickle-down benefits that this will have at grassroots level.

We believe boxing can continue to Ireland's most successful Olympic sport. We are convinced of the powerful social contribution boxing makes to communities. We wish to see boxing invested in and supported to truly deliver the impact inside and outside of the ring.

This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the IABA to reform and revitalise itself. In the past similar reports such as this have been commissioned and then either ignored or then only partially implemented – this cannot be allowed to happen on this occasion.



# Section 2 Introduction

# Introduction

Irish amateur boxing may exist largely outside the public consciousness, only making headlines every four years when the public of Ireland are enthralled by the bravery and skill of our boxers, who have won 18 medals at Summer Games and helped to establish boxing as by far Ireland's most successful Olympic and international sport.

But just because the public only take notice every four years, this is by no means to say that Irish amateur boxing doesn't play an integral role in the daily life of communities all across the country. Those brilliant boxers that the public at large watch on their television during Olympic Games are only the very apex of the pyramid and below that the base spreads wide, out across the country, made up of thousands of volunteers, coaches, administrators and boxers, covering communities in every county and making a positive difference in lives every day.

There are few other sports in Ireland that have a greater positive societal impact than boxing and there is no other that helps to combat the ills of disadvantage or to aid cohesion in communities in the manner that boxing does. In terms of return on investment, no sport compares with boxing for social capital generated.

Boxing has the unparalleled ability to foster diversity, equality, and inclusion at a grassroots level, with the make-up of clubs mirroring the communities in which they live. Travellers, people from ethnic minorities and new Irish are all welcomed and prosper in boxing clubs, while in Northern Ireland many clubs help to create bonds across communities. There has also been an explosion of women and girls taking up to the sport thanks to the medal successes of Katie Taylor and Kellie Harrington.

The IABA's values are respect, trust, inclusion, excellence, teamwork, integrity, and leadership – all values that young boxers learn as they make their path through the sport and values that they take with them into their everyday lives, making for better people and better communities.

For this reason, it is vital that the IABA is run as a best-in-class organisation, with a fit-for-purpose governance model, to give everyone involved in boxing the chance to fulfil their potential within the sport.

On a daily basis boxing clubs the length and breadth of the island are making a positive difference to lives. It is important to remember why this sport is so important for the benefit of Irish society (North and South).

In this section we highlight just a tiny selection of the incredible work that boxing does in communities every day to shine a light on the vital role the sport plays.

## Monkstown Boxing Club, Antrim

Monkstown Boxing Club in North Belfast has changed the lives of literally thousands of young people in its local community since 2012, guiding them away from lives of anti-social behaviour, crime, and gang involvement. Founded in 1983, Monkstown was awarded national lottery funding in 2012 to deliver a pioneering education support programme for young people in danger of disengaging from mainstream education. It was called Box Clever, and it has since changed name to In Your Corner (IYC), helping 200 young people every week.

The mission statement for the project is to provide 'opportunities and support for young people to succeed and potentially change their lives'. It's no small ambition, but one that Monkstown Boxing Club has been achieving for a decade.

It started with a breakfast club, because many children were going to school hungry, and a homework club. Boxing is used as a gateway to get many of the children involved, particularly the young males, who may have anger issues or difficulty expressing their emotions. "We use boxing as a therapy, a mechanism to get them in the door," said Monkstown Boxing Club Project Coordinator, Paul Johnston.

Monkstown's social media hashtag is now #NotJustABoxingClub because, while they enjoy consistent success in the ring, with Tokyo 2020 Olympians Aidan and Michaela Walsh among their previous members, they are now so much more. They have full-and-part-time staff in the areas of youth work, family work and counselling.

The club rightly has an outstanding reputation as an organisation delivering bespoke youth personal development programmes and is the only boxing club in Ireland currently delivering young at-risk programmes, working with the Department of Health, Department of Justice and Department of Education of Northern Ireland. On a day-to-day basis the club gym is used as a classroom for pupils who have been excluded from school. "It is transformational for life outcomes," said Paul.

This work is carried out in areas seriously impacted by social disadvantage, where educational under-attainment is all too frequent and the legacy of the Troubles, which, for young males in particular, leads to the danger of exposure to paramilitary-linked violence, remains present. It's unlikely that any sports club or organisation other than a boxing club such as Monkstown could have reached into these communities and achieved such outstanding results.





## St Michael's, Athy

Boxing plays a role in society that few other sports can match in terms of integration and teaching different communities about each other and, most importantly, helping to show those communities that they have much more in common than what separates them apart.

A brilliant example of this is St Michael's, Athy, which has been bringing together members of the Traveller and settled communities for six decades. From the moment anyone walks through the door of the club they are treated just the same – no one is any better or worse or different from anyone else – and this has helped to turn Michael's into one of the most successful clubs in the country, producing 200 national titles, world and European medals and Olympians. "We make everyone welcome," says IABA President Dominic O'Rourke, one of the club's coaches and mainstays.

St Michael's, Athy is just one of many shining examples of the way in which boxing clubs reach into disadvantaged communities, aiding social cohesion and improving lives by instilling the virtues of boxing – hard work, discipline, respect, and commitment.

"Young people often stray, and they don't know what they're doing, but we pull them aside and talk to them and they realise that they're better off in the club than out of it. Boxing has a really big impact in this way," said O'Rourke.

In many areas boxing clubs are the only place where Traveller and settled communities meet, forming friendships and bonds that last lifetimes and help to break down the barriers that exist and contribute towards a more equal society.



## St Mary's, Tallaght

There can be little argument that Kellie Harrington is Ireland's most popular sports figure currently, with her brilliant performances in the ring and charming interviews outside of it on the way to her gold medal at the Tokyo Olympic Games.

It was far from a straightforward path for Kellie from her upbringing in Dublin City Centre, Portland Row to be exact, to gold in Japan. By her own admission was she headed down the wrong path. and credits boxing as the catalyst that turned her life around.

"When I was younger, I was going down a bumpy road. Luckily for me, I chose the right road in the end," she said in a recent media interview. "A lot of kids in the inner city have old heads on young shoulders, and I was like that. I was very street-smart - I'd buy and sell you - but academically, I wasn't the sharpest tool in the box. I started drinking at a very young age, but I knew that I needed to change.

"There are boxing clubs on every corner of the inner city, and I got into one. It's a different discipline in a boxing club. You are surrounded by people who have a goal and a plan. That got me hooked. Boxing gives me a great adrenaline rush. I love everything about it.

"Boxing saved my life. The volunteers in all the boxing clubs around Dublin saved my life because they put in endless hours of work."

Kellie's story, which started out Corinthians in the North Inner City and has taken her to St Mary's in Tallaght, is one shared by countless others around the country, who have had their lives improved and enriched immeasurably by their involvement in boxing and boxing clubs, steered away from a dangerous path and on to one that allows personal and sporting fulfilment.



## High Five – Additional Needs Programme

The High Five Boxing Academy began as a pilot project in four Dublin clubs in late 2021 and already it has helped upwards of 50 children with additional needs and their families. Led by Paddy Dingle, an active member of Drimnagh Boxing Club, the IABA hope to see it rolled out to clubs nationwide to help improve the lives of children and young people with additional needs, who are often excluded from many areas of society.

Services for children and young people with additional needs were severely curtailed during the pandemic and Paddy was keen to offer a safe and structured environment where they could have fun whilst being physically active, enjoy friendship and become part of a supportive community. The programme allows each individual to experience different levels of success, based upon their own level of ability – the success being greeted with a high five, hence the programme name.

“There are loads of benefits to this,” said Paddy. “The kids are getting one-to-one coaching, they’re doing exercise, they feel part of a community and it’s great for the boxing club to open their doors to these kids.”

The High Five Boxing Academy was launched as a pilot programme in Palmerston Boxing Club, St Catherine’s Boxing Club, Crumlin Boxing Club and Drimnagh Boxing Club with the long-term goal of seeing it go national and give participants an opportunity to experience participation and fitness in a fun and enjoyable way. Children with additional needs and their families are often excluded from certain areas of society, but Irish boxing is opening its doors and welcoming them to become part of a warm and inclusive community which can help the participants realise their full potential.

People with additional needs that live in working class communities often have poorer access to facilities and services than those from other communities, so this makes Hi Five all the more important – offering a valuable recreational outlet that can be a lifeline to some families.



## Hi Garda – Garda Community Outreach

In many working-class communities' the relationship between members of An Garda Síochána and members of the local community can sometimes be challenging and strained but through a special outreach programme run by the IABA, community gardaí are going in to boxing clubs, meeting young people where they feel comfortable and building bridges to form stronger, safer, and happier communities.

An Garda Síochána have been deeply embedded in Irish boxing for 100 years and last year they became involved in a new way with the launch of the Hi Garda initiative – a community engagement programme targeting hard-to-reach communities.

The aim of the programme is to act as a vehicle for early intervention, resulting in young people engaging with community gardaí in a positive manner. Hi Garda involves community gardaí visiting their local boxing club, talking to young boxers about the important role they play in local communities, as well as the great work that IABA carries out in their communities. This is also a role fulfilled on an informal basis by serving and retired gardaí who are members of boxing clubs.

The fact that the youngsters first come into contact with a community garda at their club, such a welcoming and familiar environment, helps to cement those relationships. In just the first few months of the scheme, Hi Garda had already visited more than 20 clubs around the country.

Another key aim of Hi Garda is to help forge stronger links between the An Garda Síochána and boxing clubs in disadvantaged areas in order offer support and early intervention to help keep young people out of trouble.

These are just five examples of many that could be highlighted up and down the island. This is the heartbeat of the boxing community. This is why boxing matters and unfortunately this phenomenal work often gets lost amidst the governance related disputes and behavioural issues that arise within Irish Boxing. Indeed there is a strange paradox that exists within the sport. Even some of the people doing outstanding work within boxing clubs can also be part of the problem in terms of behavioural challenges. The best people within the sport should be applauded for the invaluable work they do in their communities. However, this cannot over-shadow any behavioural failings which fundamentally serve to undermine the sport.

Everyone involved in the administration of the sport has a responsibility to the people positively influenced by the clubs, projects, and initiatives in Ireland to behave appropriately in line with high standards of good governance practice and not let them down. That responsibility extends to ensuring that the sport that has delivered repeated success for Ireland on the Olympic/World stage and which delivers unparalleled social impact is administered with their interests to the fore.

The purpose of this report is to set out a series of recommendations that will ensure the governance structures and practices within the IABA are robust, fit for purpose, and serve the best interests of the boxing community the organisation serves.





# **Section 3** **Review Scope**

## Review Scope

The Board of the IABA through the Chairman requested that an independent review of the governance model of the IABA be carried out. The driver for this was an acknowledgement that whilst a considerable amount of work has been done to increasingly professionalise the approach of the IABA, there is more work needed to ensure the governance structures, processes and underlying behaviours & culture are fit for purpose and serve the sport and its' members to best effect.

### **Reflecting on some of the positive development in recent years it is worth noting the following:**

- The full implementation of the recommendations arising from the Rio 2016 Olympic Games Review;
- Adoption of a new Rule Book introducing terms of office and roles and responsibilities for all elected members;
- Rule changes adopted in 2017 with respect to selection of Senior National Elite teams and squads;
- Introduction of new Safeguarding Policy in line with Children's First legislation;
- Sport Northern Ireland financial audit health check with highest possible rating achieved.

In spite of this it is accepted that there is further work needed to improve the governance model. Ongoing issues arise in terms of clarity of roles/responsibilities, high standards in culture and behaviours and various issues relating to governance matters that continue to arise. With this in mind, the Board requested an independent review of the governance model with funding support from Sport Ireland. The core focus of the review will be on the Governance Model, Strategic Alignment, Operational Execution, and Culture & Behaviours.

### **The scope of the review was agreed in consultation with the IABA and Sport Ireland and included the following elements.**

1. Conduct an external assessment of the IABA's governance model (including skills matrix listed for board, terms of reference and make-up of the Nominations committee along with criteria for eligibility onto board & expectations/standards re behaviours) and identify suggestions for Board consideration. Specially, review the role, legal duties, and delegated responsibility for decision-making allocation between the IABA Board, Central Council and the Provincial Branches.
  - This will include interviewing identified Board, Central Council, Provincial Branches, IABA Executive staff members on the role of the Board's oversight and effectiveness of the Sport Ireland Governance Code's 5 Governance Principles and it's supporting recommended practices;
  - From this review, identify where conflicts might occur, where there is a risk of inconsistency or where coordinated or more strongly coordinated action could be beneficial;
  - Support the Board with defining the roles and responsibilities of the Chairman, CEO and Board Directors and recommend changes, if any, to ensure effective governance of the Board of the IABA going forward; and
  - Provide additional suggestions for improvement.

2. With consideration to the adoption of the Governance Code 'on paper' versus 'in practice', conduct an assessment of progress regarding implementation of the Governance Code and review of culture and behaviours within the IABA structures including Board, Council & Provincial structures:
  - Assess how positive changes in governance are being reflected in the actions and behaviours at:
    - Board and decision-making level across the IABA structures;
    - Operational level;
    - Internal relationships (Board, Council, Provincial, Club landscape);
    - External/stakeholder relationships;
    - Succession planning across decision making structures;
    - Progress on diversity.
3. Assess the extent to which the governance model supports the needs of boxing, its members and constituents including boxers, clubs, coaches, development officers etc. and make recommendations on how to ensure the governance model works effectively for members.
4. Identify any additional considerations to facilitate the effective governance of the IABA going forward and assess the resources (financial and human) and skillsets required to support the IABA going forward.



# **Section 4** **Approach & Methodology**



# Approach & Methodology

## **The methodology used to undertake this report consisted of,**

- Research and analysis of relevant national and international governance codes and guidance
- Review of and analysis of materials from the IABA and other sources
- One to one engagement with members of the IABA Board, Central Council, Provincial Boards, IABA Executive staff members, and key stakeholders including Sport Ireland executives
- Invitation for submissions from all member clubs, Country Boards, and Provincial Boards
- Direct engagement with individual members and/or clubs that requested one-to-one discussions
- Consolidation of themes identified through the various inputs outlined above
- Development of a draft and eventual final report for the IABA board and key Sport Ireland personnel detailing findings, recommendations, and proposed implementation plan



# **Section 5 Observation & Identification of Issues**

# Observation & Identification of Issues

## Overview

The scrutiny with respect to governance issues in boxing is intense both internationally and domestically. The decision by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) Executive Board in 2019 to suspend its recognition of the International Boxing Association (AIBA), the world governing body for the sport, was prompted by grave concerns regarding the governance, finances, and allegations of corruption regarding refereeing/judging of Olympic bouts. The recently published McLaren report confirmed widespread match-fixing and corruption at AIBA. These findings and a perceived reluctance to decisively address the underlying governance issues and concerns raised, jeopardises the future of boxing as an Olympic sport.

It is clear from our engagement with those within the sport that there is fantastic work being undertaken across boxing. In every club, up and down the island of Ireland, countless hours of volunteer time are going in to provide invaluable service to young men and women. The staff within the IABA care deeply about the sport, their role in supporting the organisation and in difficult circumstances are doing a great job day in, day out. The administrators at National, Regional, and County level equally devote endless hours to the sport in many cases with little or no recognition for their input.

However, much of this great work is overshadowed by the actions of some within the system. Domestically, the IABA has been embroiled in several high-profile disputes with respect to governance matters which undermine its standing with external stakeholders. The perception of a deeply divided body makes it very unattractive for sponsors and creates difficulties for funding partners to support.

As long as concerns regarding governance matters exists – both internationally and domestically – boxing will continually face an uphill battle in winning the hearts and minds of potential partners and key stakeholders. In this context, the future of boxing in Ireland faces a serious challenge in circumstances where confidence continues to erode, and if the IOC continue to suspend AIBA threatening the very future of boxing as an Olympic sport.

The IABA has a dedicated and talented cohort of staff. Many work long hours, with relatively low pay compared to other sectors, and at times under intense pressure and scrutiny from cohorts of the IABA structures. Yet they are doing outstanding work across many aspects of the IABA's functions. However, there is a culture of a lack of respect toward staff from some officers of the IABA and several examples of unacceptable behaviours towards staff. This can and is in some cases leading to burnout, low morale, staff feeling undermined, and the loss of highly talented individuals for the organisation.

**Through our consultation process with key figures from the IABA Board, Central Council, Provincial Branches, IABA Executive staff members, and other key stakeholders, we identified a number of common themes and issues relating to how the sport is governed in Ireland which were highlighted by many contributors. The common themes can broadly be categorised into the following areas:**

- Culture & Behaviours;
- Governance Structure;
- Link/Relationship to Members;
- Oversight and Control.

## **Common governance themes**

### **Culture & Behaviours**

The best governance structures in any organisation will be undermined by dysfunctional culture and poor behaviours. The regular public disputes within the sport are a symptom of what many have identified as a range of cultural and behavioural issues within the IABA.

#### **Some of the highlighted issues include:**

- Frequent leaking of confidential information and discussions at Board level. It is not uncommon for confidential Board matters to be widely reported on in the media. This can include details of Board discussions, voting patterns of Board members on key issues, and sharing of privileged information with parties outside of the Board. This undermines confidence and trust within the Board and creates a toxic environment for the Board to operate within
- Public distancing of Board decisions by individual Board members. A central tenet of good governance at Board level is the principle of 'collective responsibility'. In other words, once a decision is made by the Board, every member of the Board is duty bound to stand by that decision publicly regardless of their personal viewpoint on that decision when it was being made. It is not acceptable for individual Board members to brief outside the confines of the Boardroom that they do not agree with the decision of the Board
- Too much energy focused on internal disputes. Many interviewees characterised the IABA as being rife with internal politics and squabbling with too much time, energy, and in some cases, money wasted on disputes which seem to be more about perceived power and status rather than being about the best interests of the sports and its participants
- Potential conflicts of interest. At Board and Central Council level some people perceive that members are acting out of self-interest rather than in the best interests of the organisation and the sport. For example, attendance at Central Council can vary from meeting to meeting at times allowing some people attend meetings where matters that are pertinent to them are being discussed
- Lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities. At times there appears to be confusion around the remit of different entities within the governance structures. Some Board members may not understand fully the role and fiduciary responsibilities of a Board member in a National Governing body. The relationship between the Board and Central Council can be unclear in particular with respect to matters relating to the clubs and regions and this leads to conflict between members of the two bodies on occasion
- Active participation in the work of Board sub-committees. The role of a Board member is not simply to attend meetings of the Board. There is a reasonable expectation of Board members contributing actively to the work of Board sub-committees. This not currently the case and will need to change.

- Lack of respect for staff. Many staff members report feeling undermined by officers or Board members and describe an environment that is stressful. There appears to be a lack of respect for the role of some of the professional staff who are seeking to implement best practice and improve how the organisation is run. Treating people with respect (staff and volunteers alike) should be a cornerstone of behaviours across the governance model
- Poor meeting practices. Effective meetings are ones where agendas are planned in advance, people are well prepared, and relevant information is provided to enable better discussion and decision-making. It appears to be a regular occurrence for Board and/or Central Council members to raise matters not included on the agenda and discussions take place on an ad-hoc basis, in some cases on very important issues. This can lead to scenarios where ill-informed decisions are made or matters have to be re-visited sometimes on several occasions
- Mixed messaging on key policies/activities. An example of this was evident during the Covid pandemic. The initial level of take-up by clubs for Covid Resilience funding was impacted as a result of some members of Councils advising clubs not to engage or partake in funding schemes. Following a strong push from the Board and Executive overall numbers increased to an eventual point where approximately €725k was made available to clubs and Councils with over 98% of the funding being availed of. Nonetheless, this type of behaviour highlights a lack of trust across the organisation which led to hesitation on the part of some clubs in applying for much needed Covid support funding
- Playing politics (especially in election years). There is a suspicion expressed by many interviewees that individuals engineer 'grand-standing' opportunities to enhance their profile in the lead-up to elections. This is obviously difficult to confirm, however many people highlighted examples of what they regarded as examples of this behaviour. This serves to create an environment of mistrust, a sense of a lack of honesty amongst key people, and a suspicion that self-gain is a motivating factor more than serving the sport.

One specific issue which has caused considerable friction is the production and presentation of an anonymous document regarding the High-Performance Unit at a Board meeting several months before the Tokyo Olympic Games. The document purported to be a SWOT analysis of the HP unit and the HP Director. The document was not signed and to date nobody appears to have accepted responsibility for authoring the document. This document had no legitimacy or standing and the fact that it was tabled for discussion in the first instance was an extreme example of dysfunctional behaviour by those seeking to give it credence. It was quickly dismissed by the majority of the Board, however it had a very damaging impact on the morale of the staff within the HP Unit and was in flagrant disregard of the rights of the HP Director. This behaviour is utterly unacceptable.

Boxing prides itself as a sport which demonstrates discipline and respect in the ring. This needs to be mirrored outside the ring. Some of the behaviours highlighted above fall below this standard. The IABA must address culture and behavioural failings decisively and show that it is a sport that is capable of operating with the best standards of behaviours across all of its governance structures.

Many believe that the culture that pertained in the AIBA has cascaded down to several national boxing federations. The IABA cannot afford for this to be the case in Ireland. To do so, betrays the forgotten people in all of this – the boxers. They are the only people that matter and the ones that everyone is there to serve.

## Governance Structure

The IABA was founded in 1911 and is one of the oldest governing bodies in Irish sport. For nearly a century the governance structures did not change dramatically. In 2008 the IABA was incorporated as a Company Limited by Guarantee and became a legal entity in its own right. For many, from that moment there has been a tension between the role of the Board and Central Council in terms of responsibility for matters regarding the running of the organisation and the sport.

In 2019 an overhaul of the rulebook was approved by the members leading to further governance changes including the introduction of term limits and the establishment of a revised Board structure. As part of this review, we have solicited views and opinions from all interviewees on what is working and not working with the current structures.

### The following is a summary of the main areas raised by people regarding structures:

- **Boxing People vs. Non-Boxing People.** It is a challenge to get the right balance between independent directors and nominees from within the sport. The most recent changes to the rulebook have resulted in a split of 7:3 in favour of nominees from within the sport compared to independent directors. Many feel that this balance is not working well and needs to be re-visited. The recent resignation of independent directors highlighted their 'grave doubts as to whether the current model is workable'
- **Lack of diversity across the governance model.** The IABA governance structures are characterised by a lack of diversity. This is not just a gender diversity issue – although the challenges for the IABA to meet gender balance targets set by Sport Ireland are significant – but it is also an age and background issue. There are very few women, young people, and people from a range of backgrounds representative of the make-up of the boxing community involved in the sport. This needs to change dramatically into the future (and quickly!)
- **Concerns over understanding of the role of Board Member/Company Director.** It would appear that some Board members are not clear on some of the principles underpinning the role of a Board Director. The concepts of fiduciary role, collective responsibility, acting in the best interests of the organisation and other fundamental principles of good governance practice are at times lacking. The need for Board members to understand their duties, legal responsibilities, and expectations of how they act with diligence, due care, and skill need to be reinforced
- **Sub-committee structures can be ineffective.** Some of the Board sub-committees work well, others do not seem to function as well. The sub-committees would benefit from greater clarity in terms of reference, establishing clear workplans on an annual basis, setting KPIs, greater clarity on how they report to the Board, and ensuring that they are focused in delivering target outcomes rather than becoming 'talking shops' with little or no action and accountability;
- **Bloated size of Central Council.** Virtually all interviewees believe that Central Council is too big, has too much variability in terms of attendees, and at times there is confusion with respect to the overlap of roles between the Board and Central Council. This needs to be resolved

- Need for new blood, fresh thinking. Many of the people in key positions across the governance structures at National, Provincial, and County level have been in position for long periods of time. There is a need for new voices, perspective, and fresh thinking for any governance structure to be effective and the IABA is no different. In some cases, the long tenure of individuals acts as a barrier to entry for others. A combination of term limits and positive bias to attract new people into administrative positions is required to address this
- Communication across the governance model. More effective communication was identified as an area of improvement by many interviewees across all elements of the governance model. The need for improved communication is clear and increased transparency leads to increased levels of trust across the sport. However, we must be clear that this does not mean confidential information at Board level should be openly shared outside of the Board. This is unacceptable and appears to be a frequent occurrence.

## **Link/Relationship to Members**

Ultimately the core purpose of the various elements of the governance model is to serve the needs of the members. That is, the boxers, their clubs, and the volunteer base up and down the island that are at the heart of the sport. Sometimes, this seems to be missed by some across the structures of the IABA.

### **The following is a snapshot of some of the issues raised through our interviews and analysis:**

- Visibility of Board with membership. The Board is disconnected from the core membership base with many at grassroots not knowing what happens, who is involved, and how the Board supports their needs. This gap needs to be addressed and closed by having the Board communicate more directly to the grassroots;
- Lack of Transparency. The core boxing community need to be kept informed as to what is happening in terms of key decisions, updates on initiatives and projects, regular briefings, and IABA roadshows getting out to the boxing community more frequently;
- Role of Board in supporting Clubs/Members. The Board needs to articulate what supports are in place and how the IABA adds value in relation to development of facilities, provision of equipment, support of pathways from club to national squad pathways. There is a need to win the hearts and minds of grassroots members;
- Disconnect between what happens at executive and board level and what happens in clubs. Fundamentally, the clubs don't care about politics they care about providing for their boxers, preparing for competitions, supporting coaches, and surviving/thriving as clubs. Investing more time in supporting the clubs and less time on internal bickering and in-fighting across the governance model is what people at grassroots level want (and demand);
- HP Unit isolated from rest of the sport. Many people feel that the High-Performance Unit is isolated from the grassroots of the sport. The HP Unit is a fundamental part of the overall boxing community. The links between the clubs, regions, and HP Unit can and should be strengthened to provide a seamless pathway across the whole system. Connecting grassroots to HP can only benefit both everyone across the sport.

## Oversight/Control

In any governance model it is essential that there is adequate oversight and control across all of the components of the structure. Whilst the oversight and control at Board, Central Council and executive level is very robust - and this is supported by the outcomes of various audits/ongoing reviews through Sport Ireland and Sport Northern Ireland – the same cannot be guaranteed with respect to the Provincial and County Board structures.

There is a need for greater standardisation of reporting of financial and other matters from Provincial and County Boards with respect to certain items such as sales of medical books, records of entrance fees, takings at doors for events etc. The IABA is exposed to risk associated with a lack of formality of such arrangements in some of its entities.

It is essential that all entities at National, Regional, and County level have up to date and accurate account details, books of accounts, and fit for purpose controls and oversight mechanisms in place.



A photograph of three athletes, two women and one man, standing in a modern, brightly lit indoor space, possibly a sports arena or gymnasium. They are all wearing matching grey and white O'Neills tracksuits with the O'Neills logo and the Irish national crest. The man in the center is smiling and has his fist clenched in a celebratory gesture. The two women on either side of him are also smiling and have their fists clenched. The background shows a large, open space with a high ceiling and structural beams. The entire image has a blue color cast.

# **Section 6**

## **The Irish Sports Governance Landscape & Principles of Good Governance**

# The Irish Sports Governance Landscape & Principles of Good Governance

## Irish Sports Governance Landscape

Adherence to good governance principles is critically important in helping organisations achieve their objectives, engendering confidence amongst key stakeholders as well as supporting the fulfilment of its broader social ambitions. In the sporting context, it is generally acknowledged that sports organisations and governing bodies can have a significant and positive impact on society and within the Irish landscape the focus in recent years has been on implementing strong principles of governance within the Irish sports landscape.

For the majority of the history of the State, Irish sport was run on an amateur basis by volunteers with different motivations. The vast majority of those volunteers were keen to further the success of their sport or organisation and ensure as many people as possible had the chance to enjoy participation. This wasn't universally true, however and some people abused their positions of power within sport, leading to governance issues mainly as a result of a lack of expertise, internal conflict, self-interest and for other reasons.

Over the years, and particularly over the past two decades, the administration of sport at every level in Ireland has become more professional, though it is often still overseen by an army of hugely committed volunteers, with codes of best practice and governance being adopted. This has seen huge improvements in the way that sport is run, benefiting everyone involved in the Irish sporting ecosystem from grassroots participants through to executive level and also resulting in Irish sports being seen as a more attractive proposition for brands/ companies to partner with.

The Governance Code for Sport (the Code) in Ireland has been key in this regard, establishing a voluntary code of practice for good governance of sport organisations. The code offers organisations guidance on the principles of good governance and how to implement best practice in their respective organisations and builds on the work of the Code of Practice for Good Governance of Community, Voluntary and Charitable (CVC) Organisations in Ireland, which was taken over by Sport Ireland in June 2019

The Government's National Sports Policy, published in July 2018, tasks Sport Ireland with overseeing a process whereby all National Governing Bodies (NGBs) and Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs) adopt the Code by the end of 2021.

Former Sport Ireland CEO John Treacy established good governance in Irish sport a cornerstone of his tenure. In 2014, encouraging funded bodies to sign up to the Governance Code for Community and Voluntary Organisations he said: "We believe that the adoption of the Governance Code will provide multiple benefits for sporting funded bodies including enabling governing bodies to improve how they govern and manage their sports, assist the governing bodies to increase accountability to their members and supporting volunteers in performing their duties for the organisation". During his tenure as CEO Treacy was also prominent in calling for governance reform in bodies such as the FAI and the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA).

The reality is that in the world we now live amidst the level of political and social upheaval in recent years, expectations from society are high with organisations expected to promote a strong sense of purpose and show their value to society.

Sport is no longer seen as unique in this regard and if anything given its high profile, is subject to a higher degree of scrutiny and increasing analysis amongst key stakeholders with more accountability being demanded.

With significant broadcast and commercial revenue being channelled into sport alongside government funding, the way sports organisations behave is being brought into much sharper focus. This is a trend which has evolved both here in Ireland as well as internationally with several examples of sports organisations being the subject of front-page headlines and intense stakeholder focus.

Indeed, as we write this report, the invasion of Ukraine by Russia has shone a light on some of the world's largest sports rightsholders, as well as brands involved in sport and the need for these organisations to abide by their respective values, purpose and mission and adhere to high standards of governance.

In this context, good governance is now not only a key consideration for sports organisations in Ireland but rather is a fundamental operational imperative. In what is a challenging environment for sports administrators where competition between sports for share of audience and participation is greater than ever, sports organisations will rely on the support of brands and companies through commercial partnerships to help them tell their story and grow their sport. The Environmental, Social & Governance (ESG) agenda is now a critical consideration for brands in choosing new partners with recent research conducted by the Teneo Sports Advisory team amongst senior marketing and sponsorship professionals in Ireland highlighting that some 85 per cent agree that the ESG agenda is very important for their organisation when considering new/or existing sponsorship opportunities.

# Principles of Good Governance

## Overview

In this section of the report, we have set out at a high level the principles of good governance analysing several governance codes, documents and reports which outline best practice from a governance perspective. In particular we have focused on the recently refreshed UK Code for Sports Governance and the Sport Ireland Governance Code for Sport both of which have been key to our final recommendation for the IABA.

In particular, we believe that the UK Sports Governance Code is something that should be used as a guideline for the IABA as it is specifically written for sports bodies. For this reason we have used this as a key framework throughout our review process as well as the Sport Ireland Governance Code.

## The UK Sports Governance Code

The UK Sports Governance Code is a specific code developed for sporting organisations. In undertaking this review, we have analysed its five guiding principles in detail all of which we feel are extremely relevant for the IABA and ultimately support the eventual recommendations, we will make.

- **Structure:**  
Organisations shall have a clear and appropriate governance structure, led by a Board which is collectively responsible for the long-term success of the organisation and exclusively vested in the power to lead it.
- **People:**  
Organisations shall recruit and engage people with appropriate diversity, independence, skills, experience, and knowledge to take effective decisions that further the organisation's goals
- **Communication:**  
Organisations shall be transparent and accountable, engaging effectively with stakeholders and nurturing internal democracy
- **Standards and Conduct:**  
Organisations shall uphold high standards of integrity and engage in regular and effective evaluation to drive continuous improvement
- **Policies and Processes:**  
Organisations shall comply with all applicable laws and regulations, undertake responsible financial strategic planning, and have appropriate controls and risk management procedures

## Sport Ireland Governance Code for Sport

The Sport Ireland Governance Code for Sport is the definitive guide for Irish National Governing Bodies (NGBs) with respect to governance practice and has been adopted by most of the NGBs in full at this point. The Code references five principles all of which are relevant for Irish Boxing with particular elements suitable for implementation to support in resolving existing governance challenges.

### The five principles are as follows:

1. Leading our organisation
2. Exercising control over our organisation
3. Being transparent and accountable
4. Working effectively
5. Behaving with integrity

#### Principle 1. Leading our organisation

- Agreeing our vision, purpose, mission, values, and objectives making sure that they remain relevant
- Developing, resourcing, monitoring, and evaluating a plan so that our organisation achieves its stated purpose and objectives
- Managing, supporting, and holding to account staff, volunteers and all who act on behalf of the organisation

#### Principle 2. Exercising control over our organisation

- Identifying and complying with all relevant legal and regulatory requirements
- Making sure there are appropriate internal financial and management controls
- Identifying major risks for our organisation and deciding ways of managing the risks

#### Principle 3. Being transparent and accountable

- Identifying those who have a legitimate interest in the work of our organisation (stakeholders) and making sure there is regular and effective communication with them about our organisation
- Responding to stakeholders' questions or views about the work of our organisation and how we run
- Encouraging and enabling the engagement of those who benefit from our organisation in the planning and decision-making of the organisation

#### Principle 4. Working effectively

- Making sure that our governing body, individual board members, committees, staff, and volunteers understand their: role, legal duties, and delegated responsibility for decision-making
- Making sure that as a board we exercise our collective responsibility through board meetings that are efficient and effective
- Making sure that there is suitable board recruitment, development, and retirement processes

### **Principle 5. Behaving with integrity**

- We do this by: Being honest, fair, and independent
- Understanding, declaring, and managing conflicts of interest and conflicts of loyalties
- Protecting and promoting our organisation's reputation

### **The International Framework: Good Governance in the Public Sector documents the following as critical areas of focus,**

- Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law
- Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement
- Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits
- Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes
- Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it
- Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management
- Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability

A blue-tinted photograph of two boxers in a ring. One boxer is seen from the back, wearing a dark tank top and light-colored boxing trunks. The other boxer is facing him, smiling broadly, wearing a dark tank top and dark boxing trunks. They are embracing each other. The background is dark and out of focus.

# **Section 7**

## **Examples of Governance Reform in NGBs**

# Examples of Governance Reform in NGBs

In undertaking this review and considering our final set of recommendations, we have analysed and detailed a series of case studies which highlight the journey that other NGBs have taken as part of their governance maturation, and which may provide useful benchmarks to compare to the IABA model.

## Case Study One: Gymnastics Ireland

### Overview

Gymnastics Ireland (GI) is the official National Governing Body for the sport of gymnastics in Ireland with the organisation recognised by Sport Ireland, The Olympic Federation of Ireland, The International Gymnastics Federation, The European Union of Gymnastics and The Federation of Irish Sport. It operates a club-based membership system whereby individuals join member clubs and simultaneously become individual members of GI.

GI has recently restructured its organisation to ensure it is in-line with best practice standards of governance and policy development and in 2019, declared compliance with the Sport Ireland Governance Code as a 'Type C' organisation. This was independently verified by an external governance consultant.

The work undertaken has ensured that the appropriate structures, policies, and procedures are in place enabling GI to continue its strong development as well as bringing confidence to its membership and key stakeholders such as Sport Ireland, the OFI as well as commercial partners.

Of particular relevance to the governance challenges within Irish Boxing are the structure of the GI board, its board sub-committees and designated roles and responsibilities of the GI executive staff.

### The four key areas within the GI governance structure are,

1. The Board
2. Board Sub-Committees
3. Governance Review
4. Executive/Staff



## 1. The Board

The GI Board is elected/appointed every fourth AGM and is responsible for establishing vision, mission, and values; setting strategy and structure; delegation to manage and exercising accountability to members and responsibility to relevant stakeholders.

### *Summary of Board Structures and Norms*

- Minimum of seven, maximum of nine members with four elected members and five appointed via nominations panel
- Required competencies – Financial, Legal, PR & Communication, Commercial.
- Gender balance – must be minimum of two male and two female Board members
- Term duration three years with a maximum of three consecutive terms
- Targeted rotation: three new – three sitting – three exiting at an election AGM
- No more than two representatives from one club shall simultaneously occupy a place on the Board

## 2. Board Sub-Committees

*The GI Board has established a number of sub-committees which include:*

- The Membership Vetting Control Committee: Tasked with assessing vetting returns which may cause for consideration of acceptance/rejection of GI membership as per the Garda Vetting policy.
- The Membership Vetting Appeals Committee: Tasked with dealing with any appeals that may result from the non-acceptance of membership resulting from a decision of the MVCC as per the Garda Vetting/ Access NI Policy.
- The Hearings Panel: This panel consists of 10 members with targeted legal and GI based experience are convened usually into a committee of three members when necessary to hear any matters relating to a GI disciplinary matter as per the GI Discipline & Complaints policy managed by the Policy, Welfare & Compliance Manager.
- The Human Resources & Remuneration Committee: Tasked with HR matters including ensuring staffing structure is fit for purpose and in-line with company resources, annual staff review process, salary considerations and management of HR issues when escalated by CEO.
- The High-Performance Committee: Tasked with the ongoing development, implementation, and annual planning/management of the GI HP strategy.
- The Governance Committee: Tasked with the ongoing development, monitoring and implementation of good governance principals, policies, and structures to ensure GI is constantly operating to a high standard of corporate governance whereby the organisation is ensuring positive development of the sport for members, stakeholders, and partners. The committee is also responsible for the ongoing implementation of the Governance Code for Community and Voluntary Organisations as a Type C organisation.
- The Audit & Risk Committee: Tasked with monitoring and oversight where relevant and making recommendations to the Board on discharging of its responsibilities as they relate to financial reporting and external/internal audits ensuring that an effective system of internal controls are operated ensuring compliance and risk management is maintained.

### **3. Governance Review**

Alongside the ongoing annual work of the Governance and Audit & Risk Committees and led by an external consultant Gymnastics Ireland undertake a governance review in line with Board office terms being three years. In the latter part of the final year of a Boards term and before going into an election/nomination AGM, this review will be conducted, and its findings/recommendations will be presented to the incoming Board for consideration and action where relevant.

### **4. Executive/Staff**

The executive/staff team are responsible for the implementation of strategy/policy and day-to-day operation of the organisation.

The CEO acts as the link between the Board & the executive/staff, advising the Board in relation to strategy and policy development, in addition to directing/managing the staff in the day-to-day operation of the company.

The company employs staff across a number of departments via a combination of full-time & part-time contracts in addition to utilising external contractors where relevant to support work programmes.

*These departments include:*

- Operations & Finance
- Policy, Welfare & Compliance
- Marketing, PR & Events
- Digital Comms & Brand
- Education
- Participation
- Performance & Technical

## Case Study Two: Olympic Federation of Ireland

The Olympic Federation of Ireland has been selected as a case study for this review as it demonstrates an organisation which faced significant challenges from a governance perspective in the wake of Rio 2016 and in the intervening years has completely transformed its governance structures.

Good Governance is one of the five strategic pillars of the Olympic Federation of Ireland 2018-2024 Strategic Plan. In the aftermath of Rio 2016, the new Board of 2017 had a huge amount to do at all levels to put in place the structures, policies and sub-committees required to give the organisation the oversight and governance structures required of a modern, progressive, transparent, outward facing organisation.

During 2017 and 2018, the main Governance focus of the organisation was to bring its constitution into line with the 25 recommendations of the Deloitte report commissioned after the Rio Games fall-out and the IOC's Governance requirements based on the Olympic Charter. This transformation was driven across the organisation with the bulk of the oversight carried out by the Governance Committee of the OFI.

Alongside that, during the same period, a new culture and identity was instilled at the OFI, through new appointments, and a commitment from all staff and volunteers to work as an 'athlete's first' organisation, underpinned by a clarity of purpose set out in the 2018-2024 strategic plan.

At the same time in 2018, the organisation rebranded from the Olympic Council of Ireland to the Olympic Federation of Ireland with a new logo, new name, and a range of new partners and sponsors.

During 2018 and 2019 the organisation continued its work to ensure compliance with the Governance Code for the Community, Voluntary and Charitable Sector in Ireland which was achieved at the end of that year. The organisation continues to review all areas of its operation in this respect on a regular basis.

Significant changes were also made at this time to the Constitution of the organisation to bring about changes such as term limits, changes to board composition, the appointment of independent directors and the addition of Gender Balance reforms

As a result, with the election of a new Board for the Paris Olympic cycle in December 2020, the OFI welcomed a 50 / 50 gender balanced Board, a significant milestone in the OFI's organisational development.

More recently in 2020, the Olympic Federation of Ireland launched the book, Sports Governance: A Guide for Sporting Entities, written by governance expert Anne McFarland and published by Open Press. The book is intended as a useful resource for sport federations nationwide. It focuses on three main areas, the governance and organisation of sport in Ireland, becoming a board member and the considerations taken by both the person and the organisation before taking on the responsibility, as well as the key functions of a board – strategy, risk, accountability, and monitoring.

The general Governance led reforms and cultural transformation of the OFI have more broadly played a very significant role in bringing about major changes through increased government trust and investment, significantly increased sponsorship portfolio and significantly enhanced reputation among Irish sports sector and more broadly among the general public.

## Case Study Three: Football Association of Ireland (FAI)

In the context of this governance review, the following Football Association of Ireland (FAI) case study is being used as an example of an organisation in the midst of an ongoing governance journey and it is acknowledged that the challenges the FAI faced differ greatly from those facing the IABA. In particular, the FAI case demonstrated the consequences of a concentration of power in the role of CEO. This is not the case with respect to the IABA. However, there are some useful learnings from the FAI case study with respect to the wider governance structure reform which it is useful to reflect on.

The FAI is the body tasked with governing and developing football at all levels in the Republic of Ireland, recognised by Sport Ireland, UEFA, and FIFA. The FAI is a Type C organisation listed on the Register of Organisations in Compliance with the Governance Code for Sport.

For much of the last two decades the FAI faced challenges from a governance perspective which resulted in reduced trust and confidence in the organisation, which also found itself in financial difficulty due to mismanagement and a lack of oversight at Board level.

These issues culminated in 2019 following which the FAI and Sport Ireland established a governance review in a special joint-partnership. This review proposed a clear pathway for improved corporate governance and structures for the FAI which would support the organisation in fulfilling its overall purpose – the effective promotion and development of football in Ireland.

Some of the more relevant learning points from this review relate to the make-up and skillset of the FAI board, and general principles of good governance, including ethical behaviour and integrity.

### The review proposed six Governance Principles for the FAI:

#### 1. Good Governance

This is demonstrated by adherence to good governance norms and standards and regulatory compliance obligations

#### 2. Effective leadership

This is reflected in leadership style, in the tone and behaviour and in sustaining the right culture and ethos

#### 3. Accountability and Transparency

This is reflected in oversight and scrutiny arrangements and being as open as possible about the decisions and actions taken

#### 4. Ethical Behaviour and Integrity

Actions are done solely in the interests of the FAI and in the promotion, fostering and development of the game and in an honest, truthful, and impartial manner

#### 5. Stakeholder Engagement

Commitment to ensuring effective consultation, active involvement, participation, and clear communication with all stakeholders

#### 6. Professionalism

This is demonstrated in adherence to high standards across all aspects of activities and ensuring appropriate knowledge, skills and expertise are deployed as required.

## **Board**

The review recommended that Board of the FAI carries out a dual role; managing and overseeing both the business and football elements of the FAI and this dual role should be clearly defined and reflected in its stated remit.

### **The skills/experience which should be reflected on the Board are:**

- Football administration
- Financial
- Legal
- Governance
- Risk management
- Board experience
- Business management
- Human resources management

The Chairperson of the Board should be an independent director and it was recommended that a clear job description and role profile for the Chairperson of the Board should be developed.

### **The Board should consist of 12 members:**

- President
- Vice-President
- Six Representative of the football community
- Four independent directors (one of whom would be the Chairperson of the board)

In terms of clarity of roles and responsibilities and the pre-eminent role of the Board in directing and controlling the organisation, it was recommended that the Chief Executive Officer should not be a member of the Board. The limit for all members of the board should be eight years (4 x 2-year terms).

The findings and recommendations in the review pointed to the requirement for fundamental change and reform to facilitate better governance practices at all levels of the FAI. These recommendations were adopted and over the past three years have continued to be implemented by the FAI.

## Case Study Four: GB Boxing

GB Boxing manages the World Class Performance Programme for boxing in Great Britain, training and developing the best male and female boxers from England, Scotland, and Wales, aiming to give them the best possible opportunity to win medals at major international tournaments, including the Olympic Games.

Britain's boxers surpassed expectations at the Beijing Olympics in 2008, but in governance terms there were significant issues, with UK Sport taking emergency control of the elite programme shortly before the Games. UK Sport raised serious concerns about governance and the climate within the sport.

Up until the 2008 Olympics, the elite British programme was administered by the Amateur Boxing Association of England, the largest of the three unions that make up British boxing (England, Scotland, and Wales). In August 2008 control passed to GB Boxing, a dedicated organisation for elite amateur boxing in Great Britain. Since the establishment of GB Boxing, elite amateur boxing in the UK has enjoyed an unprecedented period of success.

### **The GB Boxing Board consists of the following members:**

- Independent Chairperson
- Four independent directors
- Two directors nominated by England Boxing
- Two directors nominated by Boxing Scotland
- Two directors nominated by Welsh Boxing
- The GB Boxing CEO (ex-officio)

The national governing bodies for boxing in England, Scotland and Wales are GB Boxing's principle stakeholders and have the right to nominate two Directors each on the 12 strong board.

The other members of the board are an independent chair, GB Boxing's serving Chief Executive Officer and four independent directors appointed for their particular expertise.

The Chairperson and Independent Directors are recruited through an open process, in consultation with UK Sport. They are appointed for four years and are able to serve a maximum of two terms.

The role of the board of GB Boxing is to oversee the strategic direction of the organisation and the management of the World Class Performance Programme (WCPP) for boxing.

In effect this isolates the GB performance programme from the remainder of the boxing units in the UK. It has been suggested by some that this may be an option for the IABA High Performance Programme i.e. establish the HP Unit as a standalone programme with a dedicated structure outside of the rest of the IABA governance model. This would be a mistake in our view. Firstly, this is not the preferred model across the Irish sporting landscape. It would set a unique precedent and would not be favoured by Sport Ireland or other key stakeholders and funding partners. Secondly, it would create a fundamental schism within the Irish boxing pathway. It is important to maintain connection from top to bottom throughout the pathway and for both the grassroots to feel part of the performance journey and the HP Unit to play a role in adding value into the club, regional, and provincial pathways.



# Section 9 Recommendations

## Recommendations

Boxing in Ireland has a special place in our sporting consciousness. It is Ireland's most successful sport in terms of Olympic medals. It plays a critical role in the communities it serves. It instils lifelong lessons in character and confidence building, discipline, social skills, and respect. It creates positive role models. It supports disadvantaged areas. It can play a critical role in social inclusion. This all adds up to a very powerful case for investment in the sport and strong backing from various national stakeholders.

However, boxing and the IABA must make it easier for people to provide that investment and support. This can only happen if it has the confidence and trust of partners and stakeholders. To achieve this, it must be run with the highest standards of governance, and it requires a transformation in culture and behaviours to shift the public perception of the sport.

**We have identified a broad range of recommendations that reflect the issues identified above and which will address the underlying concerns expressed by many within the sport. Our recommendations are organised across seven areas as follows:**

- Governance Principles;
- Culture & Behaviours;
- Governance Structures;
- Grassroots Focus;
- High Performance Matters;
- Oversight & Control;
- Other General Actions.



## Governance Principles

A common feature of organisations with strong and effective governance models is that they operate to a set of explicit, well-defined, and aligned principles. The governance landscape is well populated with guides and examples of underlying principles at their heart.

Rather than set out a definition of principles on behalf of the IABA, our preference is for the organisation to set its own principles. In doing so, the Board should formulate a statement of purpose and establish a defining set of principles to be adopted across the governance model.

### Recommendation 1

Board to establish a statement of purpose and to define their role clearly defining how they will add value to the sport and the IABA's activities.

### Recommendation 2

Board to establish a defined set of governance principles to be adopted across the main governance structures (Board, Board Sub-Committees, Central Council).

It is essential that all parties involved across the IABA organisation including its entities at National, Regional, and County level understand the set of policies that are consistent with the principles adopted by the Board. This needs to be documented in a comprehensive governance manual which is made available to all people in roles within the IABA structures and which is widely available publicly for all to see.

### Recommendation 3

IABA to develop a governance manual setting out with clarity governance policies to be adopted across the organisation, in line with the governance principles adopted and defined by the Board.

One of the recurring themes through our consultations was a sense that there may be confusion with some people regarding roles and responsibilities across the various entities. Any potential confusion or misalignment will inevitably lead to problems where some misinterpret the remit of the body they are part of and/or over-extend the reach of their remit. To reduce the risk of this occurring it will be important for schedules of matters to be agreed, clarity of roles and responsibilities to be established, and regular review of effectiveness of the governance structures to be conducted, ideally with independent/external input.

### Recommendation 4

Schedule of matters to be updated for Board, CEO, and Central Council to ensure clarity of roles and responsibilities across the IABA governance model.

### Recommendation 5

IABA to establish clear, detailed role definitions for all key positions on the Board, Board Sub-Committees, and Central Council structures to ensure there is clear distinction of roles and understanding by all of key responsibilities.

### Recommendation 6

IABA to carry out an independent annual Board, Board Sub-Committees, and Central Council effectiveness review including assessments of culture & behaviours, structure, processes, communication, achievement of planned outcomes, and other relevant matters pertaining to the effectiveness of the governance structure.

A desire for more effective communication was a common theme arising from our consultations with various individuals throughout the review. In our experience, this is a regular complaint within NGBs especially as they grow in size and complexity. In this regard there are improvements that can be made with respect to the effectiveness of communication from the Board and Executive team within the IABA around the dissemination of relevant and appropriate information and communication of key decisions impacting the sport and those involved.

### Recommendation 7

IABA to ensure there is regular and effective communication of key, relevant and appropriate information, and decisions across the Governance Model to regional and club stakeholders. This may include the prompt publication of summary outcomes and decisions from Board and Central Council meetings (without breaching any issues of confidentiality or sharing of sensitive information), publication of regular newsletters, and other relevant updates of interest to members.

## Culture & Behaviours

As outlined above, the IABA has been beset by a series of cultural and behavioural issues which serve to damage the perception of the organisation in the eyes of key stakeholders and the public in general. As long as these issues persist the sport will always struggle to gain the support it deserves both financially and in terms of attracting and retaining people to get involved professionally and/or as volunteers.

The first element of addressing this is to ensure that there is no ambiguity on the expectations of behaviours of people involved in the governance structures within the sport. To this end it is essential to lay out - with absolute clarity for all Board, Sub-Committee, and Central Council members – the standards in this regard. This should be codified for and understood by all involved in these entities. There should be no room for people to misunderstand what is expected of them in terms of how they conduct themselves and how they treat others within the sport.

### Recommendation 8

All Board, Board Sub-Committee, and Central Council members to receive formal letters of appointment setting out in detail their role, responsibilities, code of conduct, governance principles and governance manual, standards of behaviours expected in dealing with others including IABA staff, and any other relevant information pertaining to their role.

The second element is to provide support to people in the form of formal training to all individuals in positions within the governance structures. This training should be practical in nature and not just be a tick-box exercise. It should be delivered with specific examples from various scenarios that have arisen and/or could be anticipated to arise and be unambiguous as to the dos and don'ts in terms of how people should behave. Every member of the key entities should receive this training in advance of taking up a position initially, as well as receiving refresher sessions annually. They should also receive relevant updates with respect to governance matters as necessary to ensure they are fully au fait with the latest thinking and standards expected from key stakeholders with regard to governance practice and behaviours.

### Recommendation 9

Formal induction training provided for all Board and Central Council members on appointment and refresher sessions provided annually for all Board and Central Council members addressing matters relating to roles & responsibilities, schedule of matters, annual plans, ethical standards, and behavioural standards.

### Recommendation 10

On a frequent basis, governance updates, briefings and updates delivered to Board, Board Sub-Committee, and Central Council members as necessary.

The role of Board Director is an onerous one with responsibility beyond simply attending Board meetings. Board Directors should play an active role in the workings of sub-committees as necessary including taking responsibility for the delivery of outcomes and actions through these sub-committees.

The third element is to ensure that meetings within the governance model are ran to very high standards and that they are managed and controlled appropriately to minimise the possibility of dysfunctional behaviours derailing the effectiveness of the meetings. The Chairs of these meetings play a key role in ensuring they operate effectively and therefore they should receive support as required to enable them to perform in that role.

### Recommendation 11

Board and Central Council meetings to be ran to high standards of governance in particular with respect to the planning of agendas (linked to planned annual work programmes and target outcomes), well prepared papers, and effective meeting principles. Meeting chairs to be provided with specific training, as necessary, to ensure that they understand best practice and can implement these standards in how they oversee the running of such meetings.

Finally, there needs to be an effective mechanism for dealing with issues in terms of poor culture and behaviour when they occur. It is inevitable, and currently happens far too frequently, that people will fall below the expected standards of behaviour. This cannot be allowed to happen without consequences. As long as these issues are not addressed they will continue to act as a toxin within the system. Unfortunately, the current structures for dealing with such matters seems to create significant bad feeling with things getting personal at times. These disputes regularly result in very public 'washing of dirty linen' with consequential reputational damage to the IABA and the sport.

An independent body would help prevent these matters becoming overly personal. For this reason, we believe the establishment of an independent Ethics Commission would enable the ongoing review and monitoring of such issues. The Commission, when established, needs to have the authority to investigate and to recommend appropriate action as required as events arise. This would obviously require an amendment to IABA rules to provide the appropriate authority to such a body.

### Recommendation 12

IABA to establish an independent Ethics Commission to review and oversee adherence to governance standards and principles across the Board, Board Sub-Committees, and Central Council and to have the powers to issue 'rulings' with respect to individuals or entities that fall below expected standards of behaviours. The make-up of such a body should have a balance of experienced sports administrators, governance expertise, people with mediation background and legal experience.

The code of conduct would lay out the various standards with respect to behaviours. The particular issue of confidentiality is very important. Breaches of confidentiality cause significant issues of mis-trust and unfortunately appear to occur with regular frequency. This cannot be tolerated. Everyone involved in the governance structures must understand their obligations in this regard. The Ethic Commission should have the authority to deal with these instances as and when they occur. This will need to be written into the rules/constitution as appropriate.

### Recommendation 13

IABA Governance structures to operate to high standards in particular with respect to confidentiality – which will be enshrined in the code of conduct - and any breaches of the code of conduct to be dealt with through the independent Ethics Commission.

## Governance Structures

The governance structure of the IABA has seen some change in recent years with the introduction of a new rule book and some structural amendments at Board level. However, further change is required both to address some of the issues outlined above and to ensure the IABA conforms to diversity targets set by government policy for NGBs for sport.

We have set out a number of recommendations at Board, Sub-Committee, and Central Council level. The changes are significant in terms of structure and make-up of the various entities within the IABA governance model. However, to be successful it is not just structural change that is required. This will require a mindset shift by people in boxing too. The IABA needs to transform into a more open, inclusive, and diverse organisation. It needs to proactively attract and encourage new people to get involved in its administrative structures. It needs to make them feel welcomed and valued. It needs to ensure that individual members – no matter how effective they are – do not occupy roles for too long and act as a barrier to new people joining the administrative ranks. These changes should be seen as an opportunity to inject fresh energy and thinking into the IABA. Failing to grasp that opportunity will further damage the IABA's reputation from a governance perspective.

### **The current Board structure as stipulated by the constitution is a board of 10 Directors made up as follows:**

- Seven elected Directors
  - One President (elected by members at a General Meeting);
  - Four Provincial Representatives (one elected from each Provincial Council);
  - Two Member representatives (elected by members at a General Meeting);
- Three appointed Directors
  - One Chair (appointed by the Nominations Committee);
  - Two Directors (appointed by the Nominations Committee).

There is a need to ensure Board members have sufficient experience and understanding of the responsibilities, duties, and behavioural expectations associated with the role. This is not always the case with those elected to the position. The recommendations in the sections above will help to address this in part. The introduction of additional 'independent' qualified Directors would also assist by ensuring there is a greater number of people with governance experience serving on the Board.

Many NGBs are moving to a model where the ratio of 'independent' directors and those elected by the membership is more evenly balanced. The recent resignations of the two directors appointed by the Nominations Committee highlighted the challenges associated with an imbalance weighted in favour of nominated versus appointed directors. Their resignation letters laid out these challenges in detail. We recommend a re-balancing to help address some of these issues.

Another driver of change in Board structure arises from the need for the IABA to meet government set targets for gender balance on NGB Boards in a relatively short timeframe. At present the IABA Board has no female members. Going from 0% to 40% in a couple of years will not be straightforward. This will require a number of actions to enable the IABA address this. Increasing the size of the Board is one step which will create opportunities for the introduction of female Board members with immediate effect.

There is no right or wrong answer to the optimum number of people to serve on a Board for an NGB such as the IABA. Experience elsewhere suggests that anything in excess of 12 starts to become inefficient and unwieldy. Equally a Board of 8 or less creates a risk of a lack of diversity in skillset and varying perspectives.

For all of these reasons we are recommending an increase of the Board from its current size of 10 to 12 members and specific recommendations as to how the make-up of the Board is determined.

#### Recommendation 14

The Board of the IABA to be increased to 12 members (from the current size of 10) with six Independent Directors (including an Independent Chair) and 6 Nominees from within the sport.

Currently, the President of the IABA is elected by the members at a General Meeting and becomes a member of the Board. The President also serves as an officer on Central Council and acts as the Chair of Central Council.

#### Recommendation 15

The six nominees from within the sport to be made up of

- A. Four nominees (chosen from nominees put forward from each Provincial Council);
- B. One former International/Olympic athlete (nominated from the Athlete Commission see below);
- C. One qualified coach (chosen from nominees selected by the members at a General Meeting).

The President of the IABA (as elected by the members at a General Meeting) will no longer be a voting member of the Board however will be entitled to attend Board meetings as an observer and contributor to Board discussions.

The challenge of meeting gender diversity targets is significant as outlined above. The gender balance requirements can only be met by a concerted effort to attract and identify female administrators within the sport. Unless this is mandated it will not happen at the pace required to meet the targets set. As a result, we recommend the nominees from within the sport provide a choice of both male and female nominees. The gender balance challenge can then be considered in the final appointment of these nominees to the Board.

#### Recommendation 16

For each of the six nominee positions on the Board two nominees are to be put forward for consideration – one male and one female. This will enable gender balance considerations to be taken into account when making final decisions as to which nominee is appointed to the Board.

At present, the rule book refers to Provincial Representatives to be elected by each of the Provincial Councils. This language can potentially create a misinterpretation of the role of a Board Director. Each Director has a responsibility to act in the best interests of the organisation and not to serve merely as a 'representative' of the province that elected them. Whilst this may seem a minor semantic point, it is actually significant in ensuring the role of the Director is properly understood by all. Therefore, the language should be amended to reference 'nominees' and not 'representatives'.

### Recommendation 17

Nominees put forward from within the sport should not be referred to as Provincial 'Representatives' as they are nominees to serve on the Board and as such are duty bound to act in the best interests of the IABA if appointed not to act as a representative of a particular region.

The role of Chair is critical to oversee the functioning of the Board. It requires someone with appropriate skills and experience of governance models. To assure this continues to be the case, it is recommended that an independent body oversees the appointment process.

### Recommendation 18

Independent Chair to be appointed through a formal process managed by an independent body.

There is no room for NGBs to delay the introduction of gender balance on their Boards. Some NGBs in Ireland are already conforming to the mandated government targets, others are well below them. The IABA have to go from 0% to 40% in a couple of years. The scale of the challenge cannot be used as an excuse for missing this deadline. The IABA need to confirm that they will meet this target and take the necessary steps recommended in this report to enable them to achieve this.

### Recommendation 19

The IABA Board to meet the Government/Sport Ireland mandated policy of a minimum 40% gender balance representation within 2 years.

The solution to achieving gender balance cannot exclusively be delivered through the appointment of independent directors. Whilst this can be a source of experienced female candidates, it is essential that the sport plays its part too. Both in the short-term to meet the targets within the timeframe set out and equally importantly over the long-term to ensure there is a culture of female involvement in the running of the sport.

### Recommendation 20

Board gender balance target to be delivered through both independent director appointments and nominees from within the sport (i.e. not one or the other exclusively).

The IABA is an increasingly complex 'business'. The Board requires a broad set of skillsets to ensure it has sufficient expertise to address the various areas of operations associated with its activities. The selection of Directors to serve on the Board should reflect this. The Board should regularly review its requirements and set out the key skills needed on an ongoing basis.

### Recommendation 21

The IABA Board to establish a skillset register to ensure a broad range of key skills are represented on the Board and which may include the following key skills (Sport/Boxing Administration, Finance, Legal, Governance, Risk Management, Commercial/Marketing, High Performance, Human Resource Management, Communications/PR, Diversity & Inclusion).

The Board needs effective sub-committees to ensure it can delegate particular tasks in core areas of focus. In doing so, the Board will continue to maintain accountability and responsibility whilst setting out schedules of annual workplans for these sub-committees.

The IABA executive staff will provide support to ensure the work of these sub-committees delivers against agreed target outcomes. The members of the sub-committees, including Board Directors, should be active participants in driving the agenda of work set out in their committee. These are active roles not just 'talking shops' and require focused input.

### Recommendation 22

The IABA Board to establish sub-committees to address key areas including Finance, Strategy, Audit & Risk, Governance & Nominations, High Performance, Grass Roots (Coaching, Competitions, & Participation), Facilities & Club Supports.

### Recommendation 23

All Board Sub-Committees Chairs to be appointed by the Board and report directly to the Board (in some cases a Board Sub-Committee Chair may not be a Board member in which case the Board Sub-Committee Chair could be invited to present to the Board on relevant Sub-Committee matters as necessary).

### Recommendation 24

All Board Sub-Committees to ensure that members understand they require active participation and a commitment to work to agreed outputs and all such committees are supported as needed by IABA executive staff.

Where required, the Board sub-committees should co-opt individuals with relevant skillsets to ensure that they have the expertise and experience needed to deliver effectively on their remit. The IABA should seek to attract high calibre individuals from a broader range of backgrounds to their working committees. It is essential for the IABA to seek a new cohort of volunteers with an emphasis on encouraging younger people with more diversity and a broader range of skills and experiences. This can add much needed energy and fresh perspective to the administrative ranks of the IABA.



### Recommendation 25

The IABA Board, through its Nominations Committee, to have the remit to appoint or co-opt external and qualified people as members of Board Sub-Committees as needed to broaden the skillset and range of people working in key roles within its structures.

It is critical that the work of the Board sub-committees is set out with clarity and aligned to strategic objectives set by the Board. There needs to be clear remits provided to these committees in the form of well crafted, unambiguous Terms of Reference and agreed annual programmes of work set by the Board which are updated continually to reflect the strategic priorities for the IABA.

In all cases, the sub-committees should have their Terms of Reference and annual programmes of work formally documented and all members briefed accordingly with regular reports provided to the Board on the activities of the committees.

### Recommendation 26

All Board Sub-Committees to have clear Terms of Reference and an annual programme of work, updated as required on an ongoing basis. The work of these sub-committees will be reported regularly to the Board with updates on key initiatives and status reviews of the agreed plans of work.

The Nominations Committee will play a critical role in ensuring that the 'talent pool' for administrative roles is expanded in line with a more diverse, younger cohort of volunteers as outlined above. For too long, the IABA has fished in the same small pool of people when looking to fill roles across its governance structures. This committee should have a strong focus on changing this going forward. It should be chaired by an independent person with a clear remit to broaden the base of volunteer input and to attract a new generation of volunteers within the sport.

### Recommendation 27

The Nominations Committee to be chaired by an Independent chair and this committee will have a specific remit to expand the range of people serving in administrative roles across the IABA structures with an emphasis on attracting and retaining younger people with more diverse backgrounds.

The changes outlined above alter the manner in which Board members are appointed. It expands the number of independent directors and also stipulates that nominees from within the sport are put forward on the basis of providing two choices (one male, one female) for each nominated position. This is to enable a more flexible approach to the appointment process to ensure greater gender balance and skillset range in these appointments.

There is a danger that this process can be politicised unless it is overseen by an independent body with relevant expertise in Board recruitment, selection, and appointments. There are a number of such bodies that exist within the voluntary sector. For example, the Federation of Irish Sport provides a service to NGBs around Board recruitment. Other bodies such as the Board Match, The Carmicheal Centre etc also provide relevant advisory services to the voluntary sector. It is recommended to utilise an independent body of this nature to assist in the appointment process to ensure it provides objectivity and adherence to the principles of creating a more balanced, diverse make-up to the Board. Such an independent body will support the work and role of the Nominations Committee and certain matters will be delegated to this body as agreed to ensure independence in appointment processes.

### Recommendation 28

Independent body with relevant expertise to play role in overseeing the appointment process for Board recruitment, selection and appointments.

The recent changes to the rule book stipulated the introduction of term limits to Board appointments. This is to be welcomed and is good practice to encourage turnover in Board appointees. The current model provides for terms of two years at a time and a maximum of three consecutive terms following which a break of at least two years shall be required to entitle any person to become re-eligible for election and/or re-appointment for one and only one final two-year term.

There is a balance to be struck between continuity of Directors and regular turnover to ensure fresh thinking and energy as well as catering for different needs in terms of skillsets. Two-year terms are relatively short for Board directors and consideration should be given to extending terms to three years whilst reducing the number of terms a Director can serve to a maximum of two terms. This in effect, would reduce the total number of years to a maximum of six compared to the current eight.

### Recommendation 29

The introduction of term limits for Board Director is a positive move and should be continued. Consideration should be given to altering the term limits to enable Board members to serve a maximum of 6 years in three year term blocks (i.e. 2 x 3 year terms).

The challenge of encouraging and securing 'new blood' into the governance structures at Board (and Central Council) level is very significant and should not be underestimated. It will require strong will, focused planning, and deliberate action to achieve. As challenging as it may be, it is equally critical for the future success of the IABA. Without an influx of new, young administrators the governance model proposed here will not be as effective as it could or should be.

Central Council plays an influential role in the current governance structures. Many observers, including serving officers of Central Council, identified the need for some changes to be adopted to the current structures.

The current role of the Central Council is set out in the rule book. As currently set out it is broad and, in some cases, covers areas of responsibility which create some level of overlap with the role and function of the Board. This can lead to confusion over the respective role of each entity. It is important to ensure that there is clarity of role definition across both Board and Central Council. This should be clarified, and any changes reflected in an updated role definition for Central Council.

### Recommendation 30

Central Council to agree with the IABA Board a statement of purpose and clarity of role definition in line with the schedule of matters reserved for the Board and an agreed statement of purpose for Central Council. In principle, the primary focus of Central Council should relate to boxing matters (i.e. the organisation and running of competitions etc.) with the Board focused on organisational matters (including strategic direction, financial oversight, executive functions, member relations etc.) .

The current structure of Central Council is unwieldy and bloated. Virtually all contributors to this report identified the need to reduce the size of Central Council and to introduce a more streamlined working model to enable it to deliver on its core remit around boxing related matters. They also identified the need for working groups to be established with a focus on core functions. This would enable the work associated with the remit of Central Council to be conducted through dedicated working groups rather than in lengthy meetings.

### Recommendation 31

Central Council to establish working groups to address key matters related to its' role  
(e.g. Competitions, Rules etc.)

**The current Central Council structure as set out in the rule book is a body with as many as 37 members made up as follows:**

*5 person Officer Board, including:*

- President;
- Vice President;
- Honorary Secretary;
- Registrar;
- Treasurer;

*Ordinary Members, including:*

- 4 Provincial Presidents;
- 3 representatives from each of the Provincial Councils;
- The President of any County Board with 35 clubs or more plus 1 representative from each of these;
- 8 members elected at the Annual General Meeting
- One representative from each of the State Services Associations.

This structure is far too big to be effective. It leads to long meetings which can lack focus and which many describe as frustrating and lacking in clear outcomes. A more streamlined Central Council is essential for this entity to be effective within the governance model.

The Officer Board needs to be re-defined to reflect the core remit of Central Council. If the core focus is on boxing matters including competitions and rules then this should be mirrored in the roles set out in the officer board. Given the nature of the focus, Central Council would benefit from the input and perspective of athletes and coaches which is not explicitly catered for in the current structure. This can and should be rectified to ensure there is provision for the appointment of people with this background within Central Council make up.

We believe a refined structure of 15 people will be more efficient, whilst maintaining an Officer Board, Provincial nominees, state body input, and providing for the introduction of athlete and coaching expertise and perspectives.

### Recommendation 32

Central Council to be reduced in size from current 37 (approximately) to 15 with the following make up:

- A. 5 officers (including President, Finance Officer, Rules & Compliance Officer, Competitions Officer, Secretary);
- B. 6 nominees – one each from the 4 Provincial Councils and Dublin and Antrim County Boards (Note: This is not necessarily the President in each case but a nominee from each entity);
- C. 1 nominees from across the State Bodies;
- D. 3 nominees from former Olympic Athletes/National Champions/Level 2 or higher coaches.

The Dublin and Antrim County Boards are the largest such boards across the IABA structures. Between them they account for a significant number of the affiliated clubs within the IABA. For this reason, both county boards have been accorded specific representation on Central Council and in the election process for roles across the IABA governance model. Whilst the recommendation above preserves the recognition of both the Dublin and Antrim County Boards in the proposed revision of the make-up of Central Council, the anomaly of both Boards effectively being involved in two separate election/nomination processes should be addressed.

### Recommendation 33

Remove the anomaly of Dublin and Antrim County Boards being involved in two nomination processes (i.e. Provincial and County level). Both Boards should be restricted to participating in one single nomination process at Provincial level.

Central Council attendees can vary from meeting to meeting. The current practice appears to be that depending on what matters may be tabled for discussion different nominees from the entities that are entitled to send representatives may attend. This practice should be discontinued. It leads to a lack of continuity in attendees, the likelihood of poorly prepared and informed participants without knowledge of previous meetings and decisions, and significant risks in terms of potential conflicts of interest arising.

The proposed new structure of 15 people should be set ensuring that the same people attend each meeting and not having interchangeable attendees from meeting to meeting.

### Recommendation 34

The practice of sending different people as representatives from meeting to meeting is to be discontinued. Central Council attendees cannot be interchanged from meeting to meeting – those appointed to the relevant positions are the members of the Central Council.

At present the rule book stipulates that Central Council shall meet quarterly. However, in practice Central Council seems to meet on a more frequent basis (i.e. monthly for the most part). The frequency of meeting (combined with the bloated structure) can lead to inefficiency with matters regularly being re-visited, the same discussions taking place from meeting to meeting, and meeting fatigue setting in for members. With a more clearly focused role for Central Council and a more streamlined structure, the level of frequency of meeting should be managed in line with the current suggestion within the rule book – i.e. quarterly. Should exceptional matters necessitate additional meetings over and above this, then so be it. However, this should be very much an exception rather than the norm.

### Recommendation 35

Central Council to meet a maximum of 4 times per annum i.e. once every quarter, unless there is an exceptional matter that necessitates additional meetings over and above the planned quarterly meeting.

The gender balance requirements for NGBs are targeted at Board level. However, it is important that all NGBs, including the IABA, extend this principle to all of its decision-making structures including Central Council. The IABA should set a specific target within a tight timeframe to ensure that a minimum of one third of its make-up is gender balanced.

### Recommendation 36

Central Council to adopt a plan to ensure that within two years (by 2024), but preferably sooner, there is a minimum of 1/3 gender balance in the Central Council structure. This means, if the revised structure of 15 members is adopted, at least 5 of these are gender balanced (i.e. a minimum of 5 male/female members of Central Council).

In the same way the recent rule book changes introduced term limits for Board members, it also set out term limits for Central Council members. This is a positive and welcome change. The term limits set out in the rule book stipulate each member of Central Council shall serve a two year term and no person can serve more than three terms consecutively (i.e. 3 x 2 years = 6 years) following which a break of at least two years shall be required to entitle any person to become eligible for election and/or appointment for one and only one final two year term. This amounts to a maximum 8 years in service as a member of Central Council. We advocate for the continuation of this term limit policy.

### Recommendation 37

Term limits should continue to be set for Central Council members – the term limits should be a maximum of 8 years (4 x 2 year terms) as currently stipulated in the rule book.

The rule book also addressed the issue of Central Council members that have already served the maximum of eight years as a member of Central Council. It sets out that from the adoption of the new rules around term limits, that any previous service is not counted in terms of the maximum eight-year service limit stipulated in the rule book. This should be amended to ensure that no individual serves for too long as a member of Central Council.

### Recommendation 38

Any member with more than 8 years' service currently should cease service on Central Council when the next set of appointments are made to Central Council.

The athlete voice is not currently represented in the IABA governance model. This should be rectified. The establishment of an Athlete Commission is something that is being introduced in other NGBs. The Olympic Federation of Ireland has introduced such a structure to its governance model, and this provides athletes with a platform to engage on matters that are relevant to them and to provide input into the decision-making structures of the organisation. The IABA should establish an Athlete Commission to provide a similar voice to its athletes. The Athlete Commission should have a direct reporting link to the Board and have a nominee on the Board (as outlined in Recommendation 15 above).

### Recommendation 39

IABA to establish an Athletes Commission with a link to the Board to give a voice to athletes within the system.

### Recommendation 40

Athletes Commission to nominate candidates for consideration for appointment to the Board (athlete nominee) and Central Council.

One of the great strengths of boxing as a sport is that it caters for diverse communities that are under-represented in other sports. It is important that there are dedicated initiatives and programmes in place to target these communities and to provide for an inclusive environment across the boxing landscape north and south. The IABA should establish a dedicated commission to focus on this area. This will ensure that this work will be given the focused attention and priority it requires to deliver against agreed target outcomes set by the Board.

### Recommendation 41

IABA to establish a Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) Commission reporting to the Board to identify initiatives and programmes to address issues relating to D&I. This will further support the work of the recently appointed Diversity & Inclusion Officer.

The role of Company Secretary is an important one in terms of ensuring that the organisation complies with all relevant statutory and regulatory requirements as well as assuring that the Board, Central Council, and other entities within the governance structure operate within their respective powers of delegated authority. This requires specialist skills and dedicated focus. At present, the role is fulfilled by a member of staff with an already heavy workload. To ensure that this role is given due prominence and focus it is recommended that the IABA appoint an independent and qualified Company Secretary (likely to be on a part-time/consultancy basis).

### Recommendation 42

IABA to appoint an independent and qualified Company Secretary.

### Recommendation 43

Independent Company Secretary role to include overseeing compliance standards across the governance structures including Board, Central Council, and other Provincial and County Board entities.

## Grassroots Focus

At the outset of this report we shared a number of stories highlighting the work carried out in a small sample of clubs. These clubs, and hundreds like them, are the core fabric of the sport. The governance model is there to support them, understand their needs, and to work on their behalf to enable them to do what they do best.

The IABA was incorporated in 2008 necessitating the need for a Board structure to be put in place. It is evident, that some elements of the IABA structures have never fully embraced the existence and role of the Board. Indeed, it seems in certain quarters there is a continual undermining of the Board. In spite of this the Board has achieved much since incorporation. However the continual challenging of the Board authority creates an environment that diminishes the respect for the Board as the principal decision-making body within the governance structures.

As a result, at present, it seems as if there is somewhat of a disconnect between the IABA Board and the membership base. This should be addressed through a number of simple, but important measures to ensure that the IABA Board becomes more relevant and connected to the grassroots of the sport.

The IABA Board is responsible for setting strategy on behalf of the organisation and its members. This strategy should reflect the needs of the members and set clear target outcomes across all areas of activities. The Board should regularly review progress against these target outcomes and align strategic initiatives accordingly.

### Recommendation 44

The IABA Board to conduct regular (minimum annually) review of strategy and progress against target outcomes.

It is essential that the work being carried out by the IABA is clearly communicated to its relevant stakeholders. At present, much of the communication to members comes through Central Council and/or Provincial & County Boards. As a result, the IABA Board seems more remote and distant from the core membership. Yet, the Board and executive team are doing excellent work on behalf of the members. The IABA Board and Executive Team should set about connecting with the membership base more directly. This would include the development of a framework for engagement and consultation combined with regular sessions with clubs in each of the regions. The focus of these sessions should be to provide a two-way communication platform between the IABA Board & Executives and the clubs.

### Recommendation 45

IABA to develop a stakeholder engagement and consultation process framework and policy to be approved by the Board.

### Recommendation 46

Board & IABA Executive to conduct Regional Club forum meetings/roadshows at least twice a year to ensure there is a direct communication link to clubs on a regular basis.



**In assessing the needs of the members the three most common areas of focus are:**

1. Development of facilities;
2. Provision of equipment;
3. Access to competition pathways.

The IABA Board should reflect these needs in the provision of supports to clubs. The competition pathways element will be addressed in the next section, however the facilities and equipment needs are something that the Board should play an active role in. To this end, we recommend the establishment of a dedicated fund to provide supports to clubs regarding facilities and equipment. This fund should be made available to support projects and initiatives within clubs in each province. By establishing such a fund, it will force a focus on the facility and equipment needs of the clubs and ensure that the Board is setting clear direction in how these needs can be addressed.

Once such a fund is established, a process can be agreed as to how clubs can apply for supports and the decision-making process around the allocation of resources can be agreed. It will ensure that there is a more direct link between the Board and the clubs, it will serve to highlight infrastructure needs, and it will be a practical demonstration of how the IABA can add value to the work of clubs up and down the island.

One point worth noting is the IABA will require support in establishing such a fund and key to success in this regard will be the commitment to and progress made in transforming the current governance model within Irish boxing.

#### Recommendation 47

The IABA Board to establish a dedicated fund, with assistance from Sport Ireland if possible, to support clubs in the development of facilities and provision of equipment. The fund will be directly administered by the Board and will focus on supporting identified needs aligned to the strategic objectives and target outcomes set by the Board.

## High Performance Matters

The High Performance (HP) programme is a major focal point for the IABA given the history and ambition for success within Irish boxing. The establishment of the HP Unit in 2003 with the support of Sport Ireland provided a centralised structure for the development of elite boxers. In the period since its foundation the success rate at European, World and Olympic levels has been impressive. In the last four Olympic Games Irish boxing has won nine medals including two gold medals. In the period from 2008-2021 Irish boxing has won 92 medals in World and European championships at all levels. This success at senior elite level is mirrored by success in the junior ranks. On a consistent basis Irish boxers at underage level compete with the best internationally and the talent pipeline continues to be strong. Indeed in the last few weeks, the Under 22 European Championship saw Ireland come home with 5 medals including 3 Gold and the women's team finishing second in the medal table. This all points to a healthy system which is functioning well.

In spite of this there is some debate within the sport regarding the HP Unit and progression pathways from junior to senior ranks and the linkages from club to provincial to national and international squads. There is no question that the introduction of the HP Unit and the ongoing development of the programme is central to the success enjoyed since 2008. The programme is well established, well structured, and delivers success. It needs to be supported and further developed to maintain that record of success.

The criticisms from some quarters regarding the HP Unit appear to be largely based on an unfounded believe that Irish boxing would enjoy the same level of success whether the programme was there or not. This is not backed up by historic evidence nor consistent with high performance system approaches adopted by other consistently successful programmes in multiple sports.

Largely driven by a small number of 'loud' dissenting voices within the IABA structures, the HP Unit has increasingly adopted a more isolated approach seeking to avoid engagement with elements of the structure as a result of the lack of support from certain quarters. The recent episode regarding the circulation of an anonymous 'SWOT' analysis document regarding the HP Director is a very tangible example of this. This has created a toxic and unsustainable environment for the HP Unit to operate within. This must change.

Many of the recommendations outlined above regarding governance principles, structures, culture, and behaviours are designed to improve the environment within which the HP Unit can operate. As long as it operates in isolation to the rest of the pathway these tensions will persist. Along with changes recommended above, the HP Unit should also seek to develop stronger connections to the pathway in a way that provides a more seamless progression pathway and where the HP Unit can increase its influence over the development of boxers and coaches at junior and regional level.

This would provide a potentially win-win scenario. The HP Unit can help share the design and direction of the pathway from top to bottom, whilst the provincial structures can feel more aligned to the programme and its objectives.

### Recommendation 48

IABA to establish stronger connections between the High Performance Unit and the Regional Pathways through a range of initiatives including:

- A. The establishment of Regional Squads and training centres & programmes;
- B. Running of regular national and regional camps;
- C. Design of long-term development programmes (including technical, tactical, lifestyle, nutrition, sports science elements);
- D. Coach enhancement programmes with targeted upskilling of coaches at regional and club level;
- E. Regular opportunities for exposure of regional and club coaches to HP training camps & methodologies;
- F. Regular sharing of best practice ideas across pathways.

These initiatives should fall under the remit and responsibility of the HP Director in terms of design and oversight working with the relevant personnel to deliver at National and Regional level.

There is a wealth of expertise within the HP Unit which can add significant value to the programmes delivered within the regional structures. The current environment is not conducive to this happening. The HP Unit can and should play a stronger role in supporting the regional structures and ensuring the extensive knowledge is shared for the benefit of all in the pathways below the HP squads. Everyone in the system – especially the young boxers and regional coaches – would benefit greatly from a more aligned working relationship between HP and Regional structures.

### Recommendation 49

HPU to assist in the design and development of specific initiatives in partnership with the regional structures to provide:

- A. Fundamental skills and movement programme for 14-16 year old athletes;
- B. Building physical and mental capacity skills programme for 16-18 year olds to prepare them for national and international competition;
- C. Annual provincial assessments to assess and identify athletes outside of the current national programme for consideration and ongoing review;
- D. Pre-elite training camps and programmes for athletes identified with potential to take step up to HP programme and to provide them with tailored programmes to enhance their development.

To further reinforce the link between the HP Unit and the grassroots of the sport, there should be regular communication and updates provided to the members through appropriate mechanisms. The HP Unit should share details of its vision, plans, and ongoing progress with clubs and members and engage to establish greater understanding of and buy-in to the aims and methods of the programme. The whole of boxing can and should feel pride and shared ownership in the HP Programme and its achievements.

### Recommendation 50

The HP Unit to engage regularly with the members and clubs to share details of the programme vision, plans, methodologies, and progress to help build a sense of shared ownership of the programme across the entire boxing community.

The competition models at Regional and National level have seen minimal change in format and structure over the years. There is a great opportunity to revamp and re-energise these competition structures to provide better opportunities for athlete and coach development and to raise the profile of what are high quality competitions and championships.

The National Championships are the showcase for some of the best talent in amateur boxing. Consideration should be given to looking at revitalising these championships with innovative ideas to increase the profile of Irish boxing and the IABA.

### Recommendation 51

IABA to consider raising the profile of the National Championships through innovations to structure and format. It is recommended that high performance seeks to ensure where possible top boxers to enter the Championships.

## Oversight & Control

The IABA Board are ultimately responsible for the financial affairs of the organisation including the various Provincial and County entities within the governance structures. Central Council has a defined role, as set out in the rule book, with respect to financial oversight of these entities. Specifically one element of their defined role relates to 'ensuring Provincial Councils, County Boards and their Clubs are acting in accordance with the Rules and Constitution and are managing their affairs correctly' and to 'inquire into and examine the finances, operations and working of any Provincial Council, County Board or Club with the approval of the Board and assistance of the CEO and Chief Financial Officer.'

This creates a potential overlap of responsibility and confusion in terms of financial and regulatory oversight. The IABA Board should take responsibility for this and ensure that it sets out appropriate structures to assure the probity of financial management across all the entities within the IABA and that they are acting in accordance with their delegated authorities as set out by the rules and constitution of the IABA. In addition, the IABA Board need to be able to verify that all IABA entities are full compliant with legislative and regulatory obligations.

### Recommendation 52

The IABA Board to review and approve all financial accounts of IABA entities including Central Council, Provincial Councils, and County Boards. The Board should establish appropriate structures to enable this to be carried out effectively with the Audit and Risk sub-committee playing a key role on behalf of the Board to ensure such structures are in place and operating effectively.

### Recommendation 53

IABA to develop a reporting template for all Provincial and County Boards to provide an annual report on financial activities to include accurate reporting of revenues (e.g. entrance fees to competitions, attendance takings and records, sale of medical books etc.) and expenditure.

### Recommendation 54

The IABA Board to produce an annual statement of accounts and statement of conformance to appropriate financial oversight, policies and practices across all IABA entities.

## Other General

The IABA and its constituent members do incredible work on behalf the people it serves. It also produces a host of outstanding role models admired by many. The IABA should leverage these role models to help shine a light on the great work done across the sport. For too long, the public portrayal of boxing in Ireland is one of dysfunction and political infighting. The focus has not been on the positive aspects of what boxing delivers on behalf of society. The IABA need to be more proactive in bringing the positive role it plays to the fore.

### Recommendation 55

IABA to appoint ambassador(s) to promote the sport as part of an outreach programme highlighting the positive societal impact boxing can have and shining a light on the many examples of programmes and initiatives across the network of clubs within the IABA structures.

One of the key challenges facing the IABA is to regenerate the cohort of people serving across the governance structures. The gender balance targets necessitate this, however notwithstanding this the organisation will also benefit from younger and more diverse people with fresh perspectives taking on administrative roles. For various reasons it is currently unattractive for these people to get involved. The fact that many of the current administrators at Board, Central Council, and Provincial Council & County Board level have been in situ for long periods acts as a barrier for new people to get involved. Equally there has not been a culture of younger people and women actively getting involved. There is a lack of role models or peers that they can relate to and in some respects it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy further reinforcing the demographic of typical administrators within the IABA.

To break this cycle requires innovative solutions. The IABA should establish a tailored programme targeted at the profile of people that they would like to attract – younger men and women, people from diverse ethnic backgrounds, performance coaches, and former elite athletes – which develops their capabilities in the areas of governance and leadership.

Such a programme could have a major influence in encouraging new people to get involved in the IABA governance structures. By combining such a programme with a positive bias in nomination policy, this could in a relatively short period of time create a new generation of future leaders for the IABA. This would help ensure there is a succession strategy over the medium to long-term with a much more extensive choice of qualified and appropriate candidates to fill key positions across the IABA structures.

### Recommendation 56

IABA to establish a Governance and Leadership Academy Programme to train and develop future generations of leaders for key roles across the IABA Governance structures. The programme would be a comprehensive programme delivered over a 12 month period covering key areas including corporate governance, ethics and behaviours, strategic planning, leadership skills, and other relevant matters. Programme participants would have access to mentors' post programmes to enable them to put the key principles and skills into practice and to encourage them into governance roles within the IABA. The design and delivery of the Academy Programme could be developed by external parties appointed by the IABA Board.

The Governance and+ Leadership Academy Programme should be targeted to as many people of the right profile as possible. It is feasible to run such a programme with up to 16 participants for each version of the programme. On the assumption that this is run at least once a year that would ensure that very quickly a large number of people will be developed through the programme in a short period of time.

### Recommendation 57

IABA to seek applications for up to 16 places on an annual basis on the Governance and Leadership Academy Programme. The nominations for candidates to the programme would be open to all member clubs within the IABA.

The selection process for the Governance and Leadership Academy Programme should ensure that the target profile of individuals is achieved. In particular, the programme should ensure a high proportion of female participants to enable the IABA to proactively develop the potential candidates to deliver on the gender targets set out above for Board and Central Council positions and to future proof the supply of capable, qualified, and motivated female leaders across the IABA structures.

In addition, the programme should also place a heavy emphasis on younger people to bring fresh energy and thinking into the governance roles. The Nominations Committee should play a role in overseeing this policy and making decisions re the selection of candidates for the programme.

### Recommendation 58

IABA Board to establish selection process for placement of applicants onto the Governance and Leadership Academy Programme with a bias towards female applicants and/or Under 40s. The Nominations Committee to oversee the selection process to ensure that it is creating a pipeline of potential future leaders that fit the target profile for the IABA Governance structures.

The morale of staff currently is impacted by the underlying culture and behaviour issues outlined in this review. This has led to the loss of some valued staff members and the possibility of further losses of experienced and capable staff in the future. It is essential that staff feel valued and respected both from those within the sport and in terms of fair reward for the roles and contributions they make on behalf of the organisation. A benchmarking review should be carried out of staff pay rates to determine how IABA staff compare with comparable NGBs and other similar organisations and based on the outcome of this review the Board should consider appropriate recommendations.

### Recommendation 59

The IABA Board to conduct a benchmarking review of staff pay rates to determine how IABA staff compare with comparable organisations and to make appropriate recommendations on foot of such a review.

The IABA has a proud and successful history of Olympic success. The planning and preparation of athletes for the Games is the culmination of many years of investment by clubs, coaches and the IABA high performance unit. However, there is a perception by many that the lead-in to an Olympic Games can be used as a political tool by those seeking to position themselves for roles in upcoming elections. This was evident in the lead in to the re-arranged 2020 Tokyo Games. This cannot be allowed to happen. To avoid such scenarios occurring, the IABA should ensure that elections are not held in the year of an Olympic Games.

### Recommendation 60

Central Council elections/nominations should not be carried out in the year of an Olympic Games to ensure the Games are not used as a political vehicle in election campaigning.

For all the great work that is done by the IABA, and its members combined with the major successes enjoyed at youth and senior level in European, World and Olympic competitions the brand has been damaged by the regular and very public spats in the Council and Board rooms. This has made it very difficult to secure partnership and sponsorship support. A revamped culture and structure, in line with the recommendations outlined in this review, would signal a major change. Assuming this is delivered then it would also be appropriate for the organisation to consider a rebranding. This should not be merely a cosmetic exercise, rather a genuine rebirth of the organisation and how it operates. We have seen similar examples of this being effective, for example with the re-branding of the Olympic Federation of Ireland which has genuinely signalled a renewed, refreshed organisation in every sense since the crisis point it reached at the Rio Games in 2016.

### Recommendation 61

IABA to consider renaming to Boxing Ireland and a rebranding of the organisation aligned to the cultural and structural changes to be delivered on foot of this review.

This review has identified a wide range of recommendations to set up the IABA for future success. A number of these will require changes to the rule book which has only recently been ratified by the membership. The IABA Board, Central Council and Executive will need to review the set of recommendations and identify the changes needed to implement the review. This may meet resistance from some quarters and the case for change needs to be clearly articulated to ensure members understand why these rule changes need to be enacted.

### Recommendation 62

IABA to review the rule book and constitution to assess any changes required to support the implementation of recommendations included within this review.

Too often reviews of this nature do not get delivered fully. In 2006, Genesis carried out a thorough organisation review of the IABA. Whilst many elements of the review were implemented – albeit many years later – much of the analysis and commentary in that report is still relevant to the IABA today.

The IABA cannot afford to allow this review to sit on a shelf and gather dust. To do so would be a dereliction of duty by the leaders of the IABA at Board, Central Council, and Executive level. The IABA Board should drive the implementation with a sense of purpose and urgency. An implementation taskforce should be established by the Board to oversee the rollout roadmap with the CEO taking executive lead with respect to the implementation plan.



### Recommendation 63

The IABA Board to establish an Implementation Taskforce to plan and oversee the full implementation of the recommendations included within this review.

### Recommendation 64

CEO to take Executive Lead responsibility for the implementation of the review recommendations.

The consequences of not fully implementing this review will run deep within the sport. The sport is heavily reliant on funding from Sport Ireland and elsewhere to survive. That is not just funding to pay staff salaries or fund the High Performance programme, it is funding which supports programmes, initiatives, and capital spend at club level too. It is supports like the €725k Covid resilience funding or the current €259k in capital grant support to clubs all over the country. This is what is at jeopardy if the IABA fails to see through the reforms that will instil confidence in external stakeholders to invest in the sport.



**Section 10  
Summary & Conclusion**

## Summary & Conclusion

The events of the past two years have had a significant impact not only on boxing, or on sport but on our society as a whole, however as we emerge from the pandemic and begin to resume a semblance of normality, there is renewed optimism and excitement at what the future holds.

This new dawn for the country must also represent a new beginning for Irish boxing because the reality is that Ireland needs boxing to succeed – for its people, for its communities and to continue its story on the international stage.

Those of a certain age will remember Michael Carruth bouncing on the canvas in Barcelona in '92. 20 years later in London, people wept as Katie Taylor claimed gold, and almost a decade later, Kellie Harrington lit up a darker Irish summer amidst the challenges of Covid-19 as she took gold in Tokyo. These are the moments that capture a nation in the palm of its hand and unite us like nothing else.

This is only one piece of the jigsaw however and behind these phenomenal achievements, there is a boxing community fuelling this ambition. It is this ambition that paves the way for the next Katie Taylor, Kellie Harrington, Wayne McCullough, or Kenneth Egan.

Those involved in boxing understand what it can do particularly in lower socio-economic and working-class communities. The sport can help lift people out of challenging circumstances, improve health and fitness and support education and character development amongst other benefits. It has a fundamental and tangible societal impact.

But just because boxing needs to succeed, it doesn't mean it automatically has the right to succeed. This has to be earned on an ongoing basis and built on a high level of trust and confidence between boxing and its key stakeholders.

The benefits of investment in boxing are there for everyone to see which is why it has become Ireland's most successful Olympic sport. But with investment comes responsibility for everyone involved in boxing at all levels to create the very best environment driven by a strong culture and good behaviours to enable the sport to thrive. At this very moment in time some €259,000 is being invested in clubs across the island as part of the capital funding from Sport Ireland which will have a significant and tangible impact. Boxing risks losing critical supports like this if it cannot demonstrate a willingness to change its ways.

Boxing has reached a key moment in its journey. The sport, like all others, will always have its critics but boxing needs to take control of the narrative that surrounds it and change the perception. It will require a fundamental shift in overall approach the foundations of which are built upon a firm and lasting commitment to best practice from a governance perspective. This is crucial in enhancing the reputation of the sport, building trust amongst key stakeholders, performing well commercially, attracting, and retaining executive talent and crucially inspiring the next generation of boxers and volunteers. The opportunity is for Irish boxing to be recognised for its achievements outside the ring as well as inside.

There is a significant opportunity to act now to ensure Irish boxing succeeds into the future. The journey won't be easy, and it will require patience, resilience, hard-work and above all unity.

But it is a fight worth fighting.

