



**An Roinn Iompair
Turasóireachta agus Spóirt
Department of Transport,
Tourism and Sport**

SPORTS CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2017 REVIEW

Sports Capital Programmes Division.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2017 Round of Sports Capital Programme (SCP)

1. Advance notice of the opening of the 2017 round was useful as it allowed clubs to start their application preparation. There was generally a good level of awareness of the programme and the regional seminars for potential applicants were well received and should be repeated for future rounds.
2. The increased level of funding for the 2017 round allowed a significantly higher number of worthwhile projects to receive a grant offer and a good spread of sports received funding.
3. The changes which were introduced for the 2017 round generally worked well and the reduction in the invalid rate (from a third of all applications to a fifth) represented real progress.
4. Having the scoring system published in advance of the assessment work commencing was welcomed and provided a greater level of transparency for the process.
5. The method used to decide individual grant amounts for the 2017 round worked well but may not be suitable for future rounds.
6. The appeals process introduced for the 2017 round was welcomed by applicants and, in the interests of equity and fairness, a similar opportunity to appeal decisions should be available for all future rounds of the SCP.
7. Inconsistencies arose in the assessment process in relation to “private” and/or “commercial” organisations. The relevant section of the guide to making an application will need to be amended in advance of the next round of the programme.

Considerations/Possible Improvements for Future Rounds of the SCP

1. Schools should continue to be eligible to apply so long as the proposed works benefit other sports clubs. While there should be no general restriction on “private” facilities, priority should be given to applications from disadvantaged areas and who demonstrate a real likelihood of increasing participation.
2. The rules around supporting documentation should be further examined.
3. The possibility of allowing all applicants the opportunity to submit corrected documentation during the assessment stage should be strongly considered. This should effectively eliminate invalid applications.
4. The possibility of expanding the appeals process to look at areas other than invalidity (such as scoring) should be considered.
5. The SCP Division should engage with the Department of Education & Science to ensure that schools are better informed of the opportunity to apply for funding. The issue of the title requirements for schools should also be looked at.

6. The possibility of further enhanced weighting for disadvantaged areas and greater efforts to raise awareness of the programme in disadvantaged areas should be considered.
7. In relation to the scoring system, the possibility of providing a broader scoring range should be looked at. The possibility of only funding projects that reached a minimum cut-off mark should also be considered.
8. The possibility of announcing certain categories of grants prior to the full assessment process being complete should be considered.

INTRODUCTION

After every recent round of the Sports Capital Programme (SCP) a review is undertaken by the Sports Capital Programmes Division of the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport with a view to making recommendations on how to improve the process for future calls.

This review of the 2017 SCP has been prepared to identify aspects of the 2017 SCP that worked well and those that can be further improved. It provides details of the applications received, the range of sports covered and how decisions on allocations were decided. A number of changes to the applications process were introduced in 2017 and the effectiveness of such measures is examined. A review process for invalid applications was also introduced for the 2017 round and an assessment of this new initiative is also included.

Challenges that arose for the division in relation to the treatment of some categories of applications during the assessment and appeals stage are also addressed. Such cases highlight the need to constantly review and amend the Department's own Guidelines for making an application to improve the process for future rounds. In this regard, it is anticipated that a new round of the SCP will open for applications later in 2018. This review identifies a number of issues that require consideration and amendment before the new round is launched.

The forthcoming National Sports Policy will provide the strategic direction for the provision of facilities into the future, including through the SCP.

BACKGROUND TO THE SCP

The Sports Capital Programme is the primary means of providing Government funding to sport and community organisations at local, regional and national level throughout the country. The Programme aims to foster an integrated and planned approach to the development of sports and physical recreation facilities and assists the purchase of non-personal sports equipment.

The Programme operated from 1998 on an annual basis up to and including 2008. It subsequently resumed in 2012 and there have been rounds in 2014, 2015 and 2017.

The stated objectives of the Sports Capital Programme are to:

- Assist voluntary and community organisations, national governing bodies (NGBs) of sport, local authorities and Education and Training Boards and schools to develop high quality, accessible, safe, well-designed, sustainable facilities in appropriate locations and to provide appropriate equipment to help maximise participation in sport and physical recreation.
- Prioritise the needs of disadvantaged areas and groups (such as people with disabilities) in the provision of sports facilities.
- Encourage the sharing of local, regional and national sports facilities by clubs, community organisations and national governing bodies of sport.

Grants are available to sports clubs, voluntary and community groups, National Governing Bodies of sport (NGBs) and local authorities. Third level colleges, Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and schools may only apply for funding jointly with sports clubs or organisations. The facilities that have been funded range from the smallest clubs to national centres of sporting excellence.

The programme funds:

- Natural grass sports pitches, tracks and courts (including pitch drainage)
- Floodlighting
- Artificial sports pitches, tracks, courts and multi-use games areas
- Security fencing, ball stop netting and goal posts
- Hurling walls / handball alleys
- Building or refurbishment of dressing rooms, showers and toilets
- Building or refurbishment of sports halls and gyms
- Any other capital projects that are clearly sporting in nature and that will increase participation in sport or improve performance

More than 10,000 projects have benefited from sports capital funding since 1998, bringing the total allocations in that time to approx. €1 billion. It is generally accepted that the

programme has transformed the sporting landscape of Ireland with improvements in the quality and quantity of sporting facilities in virtually every village, town and city.

2017 ROUND OF THE SCP

Overview

Sanction from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to open a new round of the Sports Capital Programme to the value of €30 million was received on the 8th December 2016. A Press Release issued later that month stating that a new round of the SCP would be open for applications in January 2017. This advance notice was designed to give organisations the opportunity to start preparatory work on their applications before the actual online application process opened. The online application process itself was open for applications from 23 January until 24 February 2017. The programme was publicised by way of advertisements in national newspapers and direct notification to all National Governing Bodies [NGBs] of sports. In addition, all Local Sports Partnership bodies were contacted directly and every organisation registered on the Department's online system (OSCAR) was notified (there are 5,000+ registered organisations).

For the first time the Department also held a series of seminars for potential applicants. These events were held at locations across the country (Limerick, Sligo, Cork, Athlone and Dublin) and over 1,300 people from sports clubs and organisations attended. Staff from SCP division gave presentations on how to complete the application form and invited any questions from the floor. The feedback both at the events themselves and subsequently was very positive and it is recommended that similar events should be repeated for any future rounds

By the deadline date, a record 2,320 applications were received seeking a total of €155m. The record number of applications generally suggests a good level of awareness of the programme.

With a total of over €150m sought, making total allocations of just €30m would have presented significant challenges for the Department and resulted in many worthwhile projects not receiving a grant offer. Following the conclusion of the budget discussions however, significant extra resources were secured enabling a total of €60m to be allocated at the end of 2017. In the case of local applications, the total amount of money available (€56m) was distributed on a per capita basis and every valid local application received a grant offer. As Dublin had insufficient valid applications to use all of its per-capita funding, every valid application in Dublin received the maximum possible grant. In all other counties, the exact amount allocated to each project was based on the assessment score obtained, the amount of funding sought and the total amount of funding available for that county. Allocations were made to over 50 different sports and to many multi use sports halls and community centres. In the case of regional applications, €4m was allocated with the top scoring two thirds of applications receiving a grant offer. Over 1,800 different applicants received a grant offer which was considerably higher than under any previous round. Unsurprisingly, this meant that general feedback to the division following the announcement of the grants was overwhelmingly positive with the vast majority of applicants delighted with

their grant offer. A statistical summary of the allocations by sport and by county is contained in Appendix 1.

In relation to invalid applications, a number of improvements were introduced for the 2017 SCP to try and reduce the proportion of applications deemed invalid:

- The application form was reduced from 14 pages to 6 pages.
- 7 regional seminars on how to make an application were organised.
- A detailed Guide to Completion of Application Form for the Programme, including a YouTube guide to application process and a sample application form, were posted on the Department's website.
- Users were able to print a copy of their application for checking prior to submitting it.
- More online validation of application information to prompt users to provide the correct information and to prevent them from submitting incomplete or invalid applications.

Furthermore officials of the SCP Division were available to take telephone enquiries right up to the closing date for applications. There was also a dedicated facility to direct eMail queries without delay to the relevant officer.

In general the measures were largely successful and should be extended for future rounds. Under the 2017 SCP, 20% or 463 applications were deemed to be invalid. This was the lowest rate of invalid applications ever under the SCP (the average for all previous programmes was 34%).

In relation to the assessment and scoring system, the Division was requested to implement a system that was as fair and transparent as possible. In this regard, for the first time the complete assessment procedures and scoring system for the 2017 SCP was published on the Department's website prior to any assessment commencing. This avoided any suggestion that the scoring system was amended in any way following initial assessments to favour any particular application or type of applications. Accordingly, it is recommended that the scoring system is also published in advance of assessment work for future rounds.

All applications were assessed according to these published criteria:

- Likelihood of increasing participation
- Sharing of facilities
- Level of socio-economic disadvantage in the area of the project (based on the Pobal index of deprivation)
- Technical merits of the project
- Level of own funding available
- Level of Sports capital funding allocated in the past 10 years

Following the conclusion of the assessment work, Ministers were presented with the final list of valid and invalid applications and a proposed monetary allocation for each valid application.

In relation to how individual grant amounts were decided, the overall amount for allocation was first distributed by county on a per-capita basis. If a county was not able to absorb its per-capita allocation, the surplus was also redistributed on a per-capita basis to those counties with a shortfall (Dublin was the only county with a surplus and some €3m was redistributed to other counties).

The following formula¹ was used to determine allocations:-

- The Maximum Grant for each valid application was multiplied by the Assessment Score for that application producing a weighted score (A).
- The total weighted scores (A's) for all applications in a county were added together to give a total (T).
- This total figure (T) was divided into the Per Capita County Funding (C) giving a Ratio of total weighted score to the available funding (T to C).
- The Ratio was then multiplied by A for each application to give the draft recommended allocation to each application.

Full details of all allocations were published on the Department's website. <http://www.dttas.ie/sport/english/sports-capital-programme>.

In view of the extra resources secured, it is felt that the method outlined above represented a reasonable and transparent way of deciding grant amounts under the 2017 round. The system does raise some issues however as set out below:

- By giving every applicant some grant offer, lower scoring applications may have received a grant offer which was too low to make any part of their project feasible. The number of applicants which subsequently contacted the division in this regard has been minimal but some have indicated that they may seek more funding under the next round of the SCP. This may delay the drawdown of some grants.

¹ In some cases the formula generated slight anomalies such as draft recommended allocations being greater than the maximum grant (this only happened in 2 cases). The formula also resulted in some very small recommended grant allocations particularly where the maximum grant was very low and the application scored relatively poorly. Accordingly, some adjustments were made to ensure (i) that the maximum recommended grant did not exceed the maximum grants available and (ii) where recommended grant allocations were very low, they were adjusted upwards as appropriate to allow some feasible element of work to proceed. Some rounding was also undertaken.

- The scoring system rewards applications that seek higher amounts of funding and this could be seen to discriminate against clubs/organisations in disadvantaged areas and applications for equipment only grants.

It should be noted also that applying a similar system of allocating grants under future rounds may not be appropriate, as clubs are now aware that all valid local applications under the 2017 round got a grant offer and applicants seeking higher grants were awarded with more funding. This may encourage clubs to submit applications purely on the basis that they will receive some funding. Accordingly, it is recommended that when the next round is open for applications, it is made clear at the outset that not all applications will be offered a grant (this point is expanded upon in the later section of the review dealing with the next round of the SCP).

New Appeals Process

As already stated, the 2017 round of the programme marked the first time that every valid local application received a grant offer. This meant that any invalidation decision in itself certainly cost the applicants a grant offer. Furthermore, at the time the local grants were announced (November 2017), it was not possible to say when the next round of the programme would be open for new applications. Accordingly, following the announcement of the allocations, all applicants deemed invalid or partially invalid were invited to appeal the Department's decision if it was felt that an error had been made in the assessment process. The 2017 programme was the first time that an Appeals procedure has been available to unsuccessful applicants.

The introduction of the appeals process ensures that the SCP now accords with the Department's Customer Action Plan which commits to maintaining "*a formalised, well publicised, accessible, transparent and simple to use system of appeal/review for customers who are dissatisfied with decisions in relation to service*".

All organisations that submitted an invalid or partially invalid application were contacted offering them the opportunity to submit an appeal. Each appeal submitted was assessed by an official not involved in the original assessment of that application. All decisions on appeal were also reviewed by at least two more senior officials.

A total of 149 appeals were submitted and of these, 35 were upheld. Appeals were accepted where the appellant demonstrated that the Department erred in its decision to make the application invalid, or where it was agreed that the Department's own guide to making an application was not sufficiently clear, or where it was felt the original decision involved an overly strict interpretation of the SCP terms and conditions.

In relation to the 35 successful appeals, the total cost of the additional allocations was €2.3m. (5 of these allocations were to projects allocated some funding under the original round). While Ministers had no role in the assessment of individual appeals, approval to these recommended allocations was required. The additional funding required is being found from within existing resources and the individual grant amounts were calculated using the same method as the original grant allocations.

Full details of all appeals received and those who received a grant offer are published on the Department's website. <http://www.dttas.ie/sport/english/sports-capital-programme>.

Overall the appeals system was generally well received and in the interests of equity and fairness it is recommended that it should be maintained for all future rounds. It is hoped that the introduction of the opportunity to correct applications during the assessment process (a later section of this review refers) will considerably reduce the number of invalid applications anyway but the possibility of allowing applicants appeal other aspects of their application such as the scoring awarded should also be considered.

INCONSISTENCIES IDENTIFIED DURING 2017 ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Private Fee Paying Schools

The guide to making an application under the 2017 SCP contained the following text with regard to Private and/or commercial operations:

“SCP funding is focused on community sports where the maximum number of people can participate. The Department may deem any organisation that places excessive restrictions on membership or usage as a private organisation and therefore not eligible for SCP funding.

In considering if an applicant might be commercial the fee structure is examined, along with responses to the questions on page 2 of the application form: “what groups will use the facility” and “how do you plan to encourage disadvantaged groups and people to use the proposed facility”. Simply charging for use of a facility does not indicate that an organisation is commercial but the charges should not be prohibitively high.

If you are concerned that your application may be considered private or commercial please contact the Department for advice. The onus is on applicants to satisfy the Department in relation to these matters.”

During the initial assessment of 2017 applications, the above was interpreted in a manner that led to the exclusion of a private school and one private fee paying school was deemed invalid on the grounds that it was a private organisation. Two other private fee-paying schools in the same county were deemed valid however, and included in the original list of recommended allocation sent to Ministers in November 2017. When this inconsistency was noticed by Department officials, it was decided that all three schools in this category should be deemed invalid. In making this recommendation, SCP division stated that if private schools had contacted the Department during the application stage for this or previous rounds of the SCP, they would have been advised that they would be ineligible. The fact that one of the schools in question was funded previously was viewed as an oversight rather than a specific decision to fund a private school and it was suggested at that time that the Department should consider if any further action should be taken in respect of this previous grant. While most schools are “private” in some respects (with requirements around registration etc.,) the fact that the schools in question charged fees also raised a question as to whether they could be considered “commercial” in any way.

Following the submission of appeals from the three schools in question, SCP division undertook a detailed search of all applications from private schools under previous rounds of the programme. No records could be found of any private school actually being deemed invalid as a result of being considered either “private” or “commercial”. Furthermore, the search through all previous applications did identify at least one other fee paying school that received SCP funding in the past.

Detailed appeals were submitted in respect of each of the private schools deemed invalid following the original assessment. In these appeals, it was highlighted that the schools in question (and the associated clubs) all had designated charitable status.

One of the stated primary purposes of the SCP is to encourage the sharing of local sports facilities and in the cases of each of the “private” schools, it was clear that formal arrangements were in place for the facilities in question to benefit sports clubs and other organisations in the area.

The Department’s own guide to making an application for the 2017 round of the SCP contains no reference to excluding private schools. The Guide specifically states that third level institutions (which have associated fees for students) can apply. Furthermore, as already stated, some of the schools in question received funding in the past and no changes to the relevant terms and conditions of the SCP or to the guide to making an application were made in the interim.

For the reasons above and having fully considered the arguments set out in the detailed appeals submitted, it was decided that grants should be awarded to the schools in question. It is now clear that the section of the Department’s guide to making an applications dealing with “private/commercial” organisations needs to be amended to avoid any future ambiguity. In this regard it is recommended that the requirement that all schools should only be eligible to apply so long as the proposed works benefit other sports clubs should be retained. While private schools should remain eligible to apply, it is suggested however, that future funding of schools projects should include a greater weighting towards schools in disadvantaged areas (later section on funding future rounds refers).

Golf Clubs

In carrying out the original assessments of applications, some assessors within SCP division considered the membership rules of golf (and other) clubs published on their website and concluded that the requirement for new members to be proposed and seconded by current members could act as a barrier to membership and therefore these applications were deemed private and invalid. It should be noted however, that other officials took a different view and the original allocations as announced in November did include allocations to 66 golf clubs.

12 appeals were subsequently received from golf clubs and of these, 5 were from clubs that were ruled invalid as private operations due to membership being conditional on new members being proposed and seconded by current members.

It is accepted that the guide to making an application was not sufficiently clear on what membership rules would deem an application invalid (the terms used was “excessive restrictions on membership”). In terms of the appeals submitted, it was highlighted that it is standard practice for such clubs (and indeed many other sports and social clubs) to require new members to be proposed and seconded. Furthermore, having examined the clubs in

question, it was clear that all of the clubs were actively seeking new members. Accordingly, it was recommended that the appeals from these clubs be upheld.

97 different golf clubs have received funding since 2000 and there were no changes to the eligibility criteria relating to golf clubs in the interim. Many golf clubs provide a very useful sporting outlet at very modest rates to both younger and older participants and it is difficult from an administrative perspective to agree what might constitute a “reasonable” membership fee. Accordingly, it is recommended that golf clubs should continue to be eligible for funding under subsequent rounds of the programme.

It is accepted however, that the language used in the guide to making an application dealing with “private organisations” needs to be amended to avoid ambiguity. Furthermore, it is suggested that priority is given to clubs from disadvantaged areas, those with modest fees and whose proposed developments can demonstrate a real likelihood of increasing participation. In this regard, consideration will be given to amending the application process for clubs to require details of fee structures to be provided to the Department.

“Harsh” Interpretation of SCP Terms and Conditions

In relation to the vast majority of applications still considered invalid after the appeals process, it is clear that most of them could rectify the issues of concern if afforded the opportunity to submit corrected documentation. In relation to making judgement calls on borderline valid/invalid applications, a key consideration for SCP division has been the findings of an internal audit report in 2013. This report contained criticism of the unit for sometimes adopting an overly lenient approach to assessing applications. By allowing applicants through at validation stage that may not have correct title, own finance etc., it can result in a greater number of projects with provisional allocations but who will never ultimately be able to draw down funding (thus creating an even greater level of financial overhang for the division). The proposal set out later in this document to allow applicants to submit corrected documentation during application stage should rectify the vast majority of these cases. Furthermore, all remaining invalid applicants under the 2017 round have been informed that they will be given the opportunity of simply submitting corrected documentation when the next round of the programme opens without the requirement of submitting a full new application.

SECTION 2 - AREAS FOR CONSIDERATION PRIOR TO OPENING NEW ROUND OF THE PROGRAMME

Having reviewed the 2017 round of the programme, the following section outlines a number of areas for consideration prior to the opening of a new round of the SCP. Obviously any significant changes to the terms and conditions of the programme will require formal approval of Ministers before introduction. It is already clear however, that some changes will be required to the Department's own guide to making an application to avoid certain ambiguities as previously outlined in this report. In this regard though, it must be accepted that it is not feasible to 'legislate' for every complex eventuality.

In the longer term, a full Value For Money Review of the Sports Capital Programme is underway and some provisional findings are expected later this year. The Department is also finalising a new Sports Policy Framework and future rounds of the SCP will need to reflect any relevant recommendations arising therein.

Invalid Applications/Second Chance/Appeal procedure

In relation to SCP applications, invalid applications represent fruitless work for the Department's largely volunteer customer base. It must also be accepted that it is unfair on invalid applicants to have to wait until the finalisation of the whole process to discover whether an application is invalid.

The table below shows the reasons 2017 applications were deemed to be invalid. In almost every case, applications were found to be invalid due to a problem with the accompanying supporting documentation. As the top three reasons for applications being deemed invalid account for 84% of all invalidations these will be the primary focus of efforts to reduce invalid applications for the next round of the Programme and the relevant sections of the department's guide to making an application will be reviewed to try to further clarify requirements.

Reason	Number invalid	%
Title/Access requirements of the Sports Capital Programme not satisfied	291	55%
Evidence of own funding not provided in prescribed format	110	21%
Insufficient own funding	44	8%
Other (organisation not eligible for SCP funding, project not eligible for SCP funding ie a pool)	22	4%
School/College/ETB application not made jointly with local club/community group	19	4%
Private/commercial organisation	14	3%
Insufficient quotations/estimates submitted	13	2%
Insufficient sporting content	10	2%
Routine maintenance	4	1%
Work on project already started	1	0%
Grand Total (greater than the total number of invalids as some applicants were invalid for more than one reason).	528	

As a first step the Department needs to further examine the necessity of requiring all of the documents currently sought to support an application. In some cases it may be possible to postpone the requirement for supporting documents until after any grant has been

allocated. Instead, applicants who supply the document at application stage could be rewarded with higher points at assessment stage. The need for documents to be recently dated should also be examined – as this was the reason many applications were deemed invalid – especially as the information can be checked again prior to the formal approval of any grant.

More generally it is recommended that a ‘second chance’ facility is introduced whereby any invalid applications identified during the initial assessment stage and applicants are given the opportunity to correct any shortcomings. A set deadline will be given for providing this information. While this may delay the overall time required to complete the full assessment process, on balance it is felt that this would represent a fairer system and improve the whole customer experience for applicants.

While this opportunity should significantly reduce the number of invalid applications, it is inevitable that some misunderstandings may still arise in relation to the terms and conditions of the scheme. This is why it is essential that a fair and transparent appeals system remains in place for all future rounds of the SCP. The new appeals system for the 2017 programme worked effectively and has been welcomed by stakeholders. The possibility of expanding the grounds of appeal to cover the scores obtained at assessment stage should also be considered for future rounds in the context of available resources and other work commitments.

A. Schools

The Sports Capital Programme was not conceived, promoted or conducted as a school sports funding programme and the funding of school facilities, including sports facilities, is primarily the responsibility of the Department of Education and Skills. However, the feedback in relation to allowing schools to apply has been overwhelmingly positive.

It is a stated objective of the SCP to promote the sharing of facilities. It represents an efficient use of resources for sports facilities in schools to be used by pupils during school hours and also be made available to the wider community in the evenings, at weekends and outside of school term. Access to SCP funding has acted as a strong incentive for schools to open up their facilities to the wider sporting community. In recent years the requirement for schools to submit licence agreements showing formal sharing arrangements, while causing some applications to be deemed invalid, has provided the Department with assurances that school facilities, funded with SCP assistance, will stay in sporting use.

Since the Sports Capital Programme began in 1998 €23.7m has been allocated to educational institutions [Education and Training Boards, School (primary and secondary), 3rd level colleges and diocesan trusts]. Educational facilities can apply for funding so long as the applications were made jointly with another sports club(s) and the proposed facilities would benefit the community as a whole rather than just the schools themselves. In 2017 alone, 83 grants, with a total value of €5.2m were allocated to schools, diocesan trusts and ETBs.

One of the criticisms to arise following the announcement of grants for Sports Capital Programme 2017 was that there had been a lack of awareness of the programme within the schools system. In this regard, the SCP Division will engage with the Department of Education & Science to ensure that schools are better informed of the opportunity to apply for funding prior to the next round of the programme. Furthermore, it is suggested that consideration should be given to designating a portion of the overall grant funding for schools with a strong weighting towards schools in disadvantaged areas.

Land ownership issues may well have discouraged many potential applications from schools. The land title requirements in respect of capital projects is set at a high threshold by the Department. This ensures the State's investment is secure and the investment can be charged on the property if required. The ownership of the land on which schools are located can sometimes be complex however for a variety of reasons. SCP division is currently engaged with colleagues in the Dept. of Education and Science to explore how these title issues for schools can be simplified to allow the maximum number of school to apply for SCP funding.

B. Disadvantaged Areas

Since 2003, over €200m or 36% of SCP grants have been allocated to projects in or serving designated disadvantaged areas. Under previous rounds of the SCP, disadvantage was defined as areas designated as such under Clar or Rapid². For 2017, the Pobal Deprivation Index was adopted as it was felt that this gave a more comprehensive indication of real disadvantage, including rural areas.

Under the 2017 Sports Capital Programme 1,000 allocations (of the 1,837 allocations) with a total value of €31m were made to projects from disadvantaged areas (as defined as having a Pobal deprivation index of below 0). Two of the six criteria under which applications are scored provided for preferential treatment of applications from areas of disadvantage.

The Pobal Index is an efficient method of verifying disadvantage status. However, it is accepted that this system does not recognise cases where a facility located in a non-disadvantaged under the Pobal index actually caters for disadvantaged communities. A consideration for the next round is the possibility of allocating additional marks to an application based on a short submission by the local authority of RAPID co-ordinators providing verifiable evidence as to how the project benefits disadvantaged participants. Furthermore, it is suggested that applicants should be able to see the disadvantage rating that they have been allocated at the application stage and have the opportunity to have this amended where an error has been made. It may also be possible for POBAL to provide details of the Pobal index for areas adjoining the project site.

When the RAPID and Clar designations were used it was possible to require applications from these areas to have lower levels of own funding at application stage. At drawdown stage these application also had their grants paid at a higher rate. For example, in 2015 if a club from a RAPID area submitted an invoice for €100,000 they were reimbursed €95,000; a club in a CLAR would be reimbursed €90,000 and a club in a non-disadvantaged area would be reimbursed €85,000. These 2 policies were seen as significant benefits for applications from disadvantaged areas.

With the Pobal index, as applicants did not know their "Pobal index score" at application stage, all applicants were required to have the same own funding (5% of the project cost).

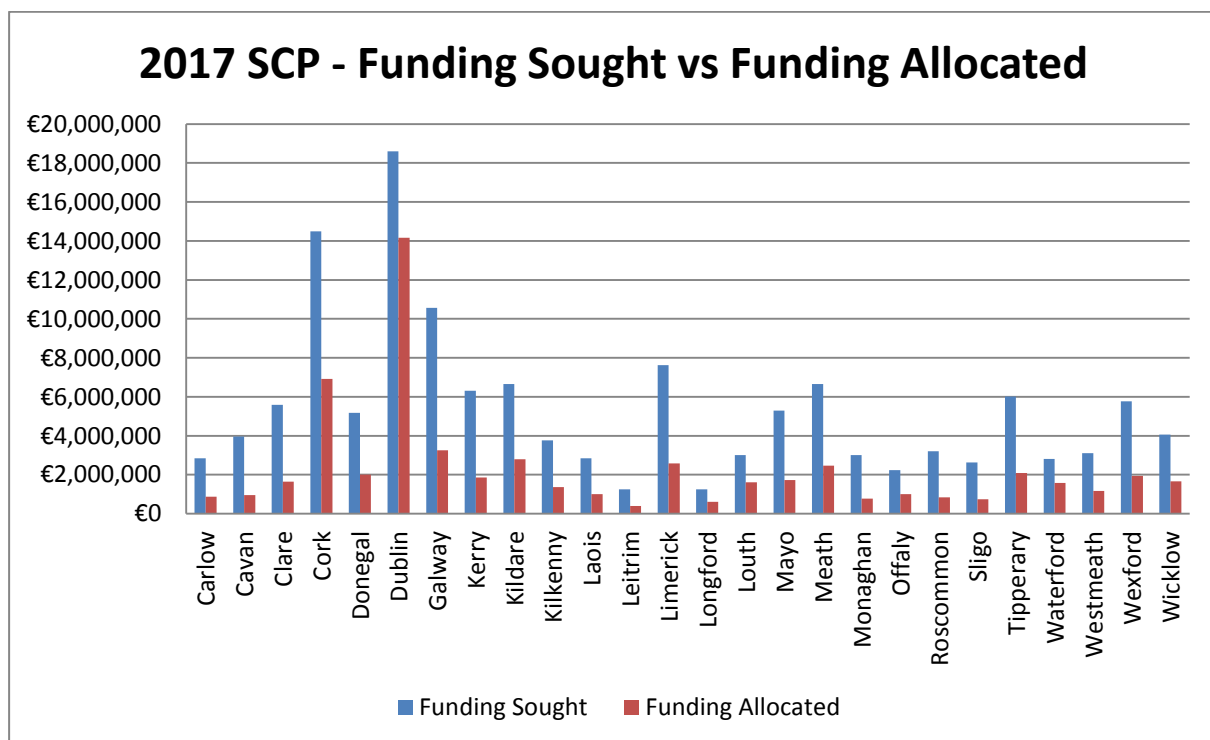
Also, the criterion for Disadvantage attracted the same level of marks as the criterion for Own Funding. So, while the system is designed "to level the playing pitch" the scheme may not be as effective in achieving this goal as desirable. Accordingly, for the next round of the programme it is recommended that the weighting of the scheme is amended to further favour projects in disadvantaged areas.

² Clar areas are rural areas that have suffered the greatest levels of population decline. RAPID (Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development) areas are the 51 most urban disadvantaged areas in the country. The designation of RAPID areas was based largely on the Pobal Index.

Since the announcement of allocations there has also been some commentary suggesting that there may not be the same level of awareness of the SCP in disadvantaged areas. Accordingly, SCP Division will look at measures (with Local Sports Partnership and other relevant stakeholders) to increase the awareness of the programme in disadvantaged areas prior to the programme being open for applications.

C. Treatment of Dublin applications

As with all of the most recent rounds of the SCP, the overall money available for local projects was first allocated by counties on a per-capita basis. This was considered a fair and transparent manner of dividing the overall funding available and countering any suggestions that certain counties received preferential treatment. The overall amount sought by all valid projects in Dublin under the 2017 round was significantly less than the entitled per-capita amount however. Accordingly, every valid application in Dublin was allocated the full amount applied for and the excess amount was reallocated to the rest of the country (again on a per capita basis). This was also the case for the 2012, 2014 and 2015 rounds of the programme. Since 2012 over €35m has been allocated to local projects in Dublin, with many clubs receiving multiple large allocations.



The level of funding available for Dublin effectively removed the element of discernment in the distribution of grants within the county. While it is very unlikely that the same level of overall funding will be available for the upcoming rounds of the SCP, the experience of the 2017 programme and the high levels of recent funding invested in the capital, shows that it may not, in fact, be desirable to fund all applications from a particular county (and certainly not to fund the total maximum grant). Accordingly, for the next round of the programme, consideration could be given to alternative methods of distributing funding such as:

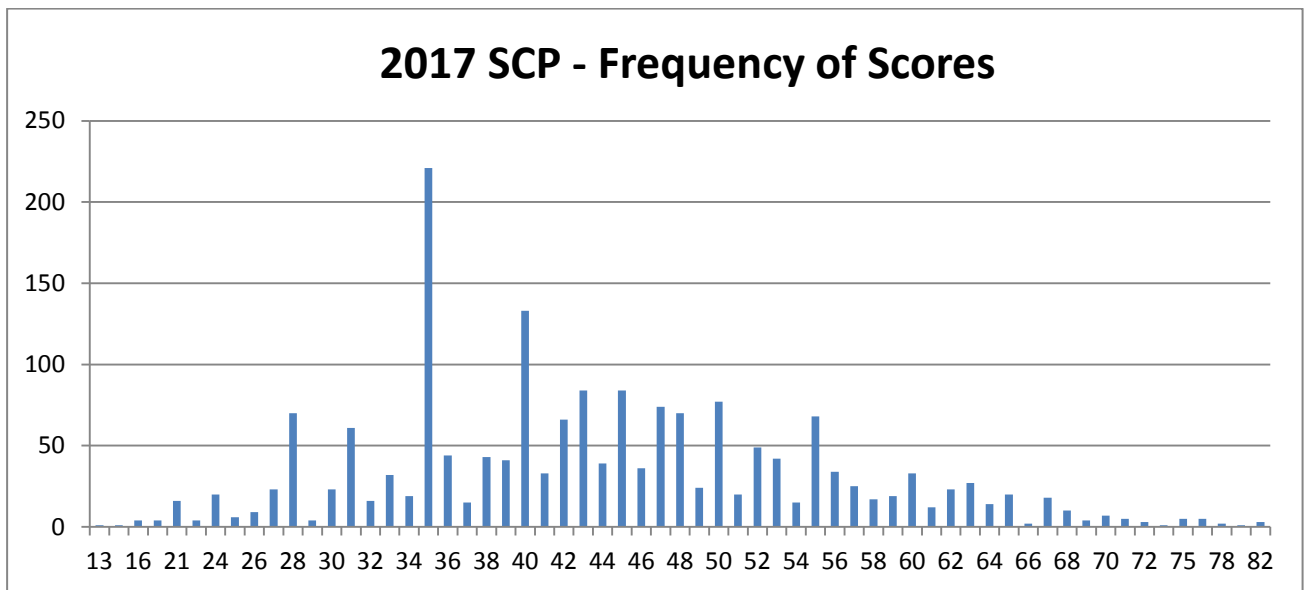
- a distribution of funding that provided that the total allocation for any county should not exceed a stipulated percentage of the total sought in that county.

- having a minimum “pass” score for applications and any application that did not reach that threshold (regardless of which county the application was from) would not qualify for a grant.
- allocating funding on a whole new basis e.g. 50% per capita/50% number of valid applications.
- A distribution of funding to favour disadvantaged areas, such as ring-fencing money for disadvantaged areas or the level of affluence/disadvantage determining the level of funding allocated to a project – i.e. more generous grants for disadvantaged areas.

More detailed options in this regard will be prepared for Ministers in advance of the new round being announced.

D. Broader Marking Scheme

As already stated, the full scoring system for the 2017 SCP was published on the Department's website prior to assessments of applications commencing. While the scoring system is fully transparent and simple to operate having a relatively tight scale of marks for various categories may not always reflect the relative difference between the applications under various criteria. The marking scheme also results in some bunching of scores (see table below) which can make it difficult to differentiate between applications at allocation stage.



This can be accentuated by the weighting (multiplier) system. For example, under the marking for "Previous Funding" in the 2017 Scheme an applicant who had received €100,000 in grants in the past 10 years would have received only 4 more marks than an applicant that has received €500,000 in the same time period.

These anomalies could be reduced if a broader scale of marks was introduced. This should also result in a broader spread of scores which would allow better decision making around the selection of suitable projects for funding.

Adjustments to the IT system to allow for more automation of the marking scheme could also lead to a more streamlined assessment process.

More detailed options in this regard will be prepared for Ministers in advance of the new round being announced.

E. Duration of Process

As already outlined, the 2017 SCP was launched on 21 December 2016 with online applications accepted from the 23 January to the 24 February, 2017. Local allocations were announced on 30 November 2017 and regional allocations in December. Allocations on foot of appeals were not made until February 2018. Accordingly, there was some frustration for clubs that had prepared projects over the Christmas period 2016 and did not find out whether they had been successful until over a year later. In the meantime work could not commence on any aspect of their project as to do so would have invalidated their project. For future rounds, consideration could be given to allocating certain classes of grants more quickly (e.g equipment only) and SCP division will also consider if there are other efficiencies which can be introduced to expedite the assessment process e.g. if a “second chance” is introduced for applicants is it necessary for two officials to undertake the original assessment of applications?

APPENDIX I – BACKGROUND STATISTICS

Amount sought and allocated per county (local grants including successful appeals)

County	Sought	Allocated
Carlow	€2,590,388	€717,768
Cavan	€4,005,307	€960,289
Clare	€5,726,747	€1,627,585
Cork	€14,486,134	€6,920,670
Donegal	€5,179,547	€2,014,005
Dublin	€18,578,284	€14,038,119
Galway	€10,531,392	€3,285,753
Kerry	€6,313,602	€1,862,147
Kildare	€7,033,586	€2,878,804
Kilkenny	€3,751,568	€1,341,379
Laois	€2,948,081	€1,069,327
Leitrim	€1,257,891	€403,490
Limerick	€7,563,416	€2,626,929
Longford	€1,263,104	€565,926
Louth	€3,005,782	€1,620,106
Mayo	€5,173,589	€1,660,277
Meath	€6,651,597	€2,465,388
Monaghan	€2,977,831	€773,272
Offaly	€2,188,032	€984,406
Roscommon	€3,143,310	€813,189
Sligo	€2,788,407	€824,812
Tipperary	€5,963,735	€2,076,181
Waterford	€3,099,514	€1,580,892
Westmeath	€3,212,951	€1,213,467
Wexford	€5,477,749	€1,946,031
Wicklow	€3,851,788	€1,796,244
Grand Total	€138,763,335	€58,066,456

Allocations by sport (including successful appeals, local and regional grants)

County	Allocated
American Football	€43,228
Angling/Fishing	€47,602
Archery	€48,800
Athletics	€1,132,745
Badminton	€88,100
Baseball	€12,800
Basketball	€225,456
Billiards & Snooker	€31,000
Bowls	€116,153
Boxing	€1,122,006
Camogie	€308,779
Canoeing / Kayaking	€225,944
Clay Pigeon Shooting	€64,500
Community Games	€124,300
Cricket	€309,008
Cycling	€67,250
Diving/Snorkelling	€451,361
Equestrian Sports	€138,100
Fencing	€15,400
Gaelic Football	€5,929,793
Gaelic Games	€16,732,841
Golf	€2,432,990
Gymnastics	€270,500
Handball	€585,820
Hillwalking	€145,000
Hockey	€680,662
Hurling	€2,094,108
Judo	€4,778
Ladies Gaelic Football	€11,800
Martial Arts	€141,231
Modern Pentathlon	€8,000
Motorcycling	€6,097
Mountaineering	€19,300
Multi-sport	€10,848,390
Orienteering	€1,000
Pitch and Putt	€241,962
Rock Climbing	€800
Rowing	€1,271,401
Rugby	€3,339,680
Sailing	€1,289,885
Shooting Sports	€45,729
Skateboarding	€2,000
Skydiving	€50,000
Soccer	€7,755,829
Special Olympics	€13,300
Squash	€62,500

County	Allocated
Surfing	€5,500
Swimming	€502,956
Table Tennis	€25,000
Taekwondo	€43,307
Tennis	€2,848,590
Tenpin bowling	€5,000
Triathlon	€90,775
Tug of War	€5,500
Water-skiing & Wakeboarding	€48,000
Weightlifting	€19,000
Wheelchair Sport	€10,000
Wrestling	€6,500
Grand Total	€62,168,056