1. Physical Education and Education through Sport in Ireland

I. National general context (728 words)

1. Geographical/Economic Development framework

Ireland is situated on an island on the western coast of the European mainland. The country's total area is 84,412km² with a total coastline distance of 3,172km. The country has a relatively mild climate with average annual temperature of 9°C and has an average annual rainfall between 800-2800mm. Ireland's highest mountain is Carrantouhill, Co. Kerry at 1,041m, longest river, the Shannon at 340km and largest lake, Lough Neagh at 396km². Ireland has a population of 3,917,203, with Dublin, its capital city, having a population of 1,095,797. Of the total population, 1,140,606 (29%) is under the age of 20 and of this figure 584,447 are male and 556,159 female (Central Statistics Office, 2003).

Irish living standards have increased significantly over the last decade. Ireland’s gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (€36,737, 2004 estimate), based on current Purchasing Power Parities, is ranked 4th in the world with only the US, Norway and Luxembourg ranking higher. It is important to note the Economic and Social Research Institute’s (ESRI) observation that the use of the GDP measure ‘may not give the most accurate indication of living standards for Ireland’ (ESRI, 2006). This arises because GDP measures the total output produced by factors of production located in an economy. In the case of Ireland this figure would be influenced significantly by the large profits made by foreign multinational companies situated here, much of which are repatriated.

2. Political/institutional framework

The Constitution of Ireland is Bunreacht na hÉireann (1937), the basic law of the State defining Ireland as a sovereign, independent and democratic state. The national
parliament is called the Oireachtas and consists of the President and two houses. These are the Seanad (Upper House) and the Dáil (Lower House). The powers of the Oireachtas derive from the Constitution. The Government consists of not less than seven and not more than fifteen members. The Head of the Government is the Taoiseach, who is appointed by the President on the nomination of the Dáil. The Constitution sets out the administrative structure of the Government and defines the structure and principles of policy to guide the Oireachtas. Individual members of the Government are designated as the Ministers with sole responsibility for administration of and policy formulation within the various Departments of State. The Department of Education and Science (DES) exercises authority over all matters relating to education in Ireland. A key objective of the Department for Arts, Sports and Tourism (DAST) is to facilitate the use of public funds to promote increased participation in sporting activity (DAST, 2005).

3. Educational framework

Attendance at full-time education is compulsory for all children between six and sixteen years of age. Interestingly the State owns very few schools, a historical carryover from a time when religious interests were the principal providers of education and in particular of its physical infrastructure.

Although children in Ireland are not obliged to attend school until the age of six, almost all children begin school in the September following their fourth birthday. The number of primary schools funded by the DES in 2003/2004 was 3,278, catering for 446,029 students with an allocation of 26,039 teaching posts (DES, 2004). The curriculum for primary schools is presented in six curriculum areas – language, mathematics, social environmental and scientific education, arts education, social personal and health education and PE.

The post-primary education sector comprises secondary, vocational, community and comprehensive schools. The State funds the vast majority of schools, pays teachers and prescribes the syllabi included on the curriculum. The number of second level schools funded by the DES in 2003/2004 was 743, catering for 337,851 students and
24,811 teaching posts (DES, 2004). Post-primary education consists of a three-year junior cycle (12 to 15 years of age) followed by a two or three-year senior cycle that caters to the 16-19 year olds. Students may opt to take a non-examinable Transition Year after the Junior Certificate examination and before proceeding to senior cycle. Each cycle has at its end a State-administered certificate examination. The certificate obtained at the end of senior cycle, Leaving Certificate, regulates progression to further and higher education and as such constitutes a significant ‘presence’ in the education system. Post-primary schools offer PE as part of the curriculum. Statistics on the provision of PE in the DES funded 743 post-primary schools (DES, 2004) indicate that 651 provide PE at junior cycle and 516 at senior cycle.

II. PE/SE sector
A. PE/SE relating to the national educational system (1019 words)

Administrative and political structure
1.1 PE and SE key stakeholders

In their investigation of sport provision to Irish children Fahey, Delaney & Gannon (2005a) characterised them as resting on three ‘pillars’ - PE curriculum in schools, extra-curricular sport played in the school, and sport played outside the school in sports clubs or other organised contexts. PE is congruent with the first pillar while pillars two and three encompass SE. Fahey et al., (2005a) depict a system where responsibility for policy is at once both clear and indistinct and is useful for the purposes of discussing policy demarcation. PE and SE are the foci of two major public policy areas and two Departments of State who exercise authority over the formulation (and administration) of those policies, most frequently in isolation of each other.

In terms of the first pillar, PE, the principal stakeholder is the DES. It has ultimate responsibility for the entire education system and for the principal elements that influence the quality of PE as it is experienced by students in schools. The Department makes decisions centrally for schools which it controls through (a) the operation of a statutory
curriculum development agency called the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), (b) status of the subject (compulsory or not), (c) education (pre-service and in-service) of teachers and (d) provision/maintenance of learning/teaching facilities. The Department’s strategy in relation to PE is not articulated in any single document. Indeed in the most significant educational strategy document of recent times, a White Paper on Education (DES, 1995), PE scarcely merits a mention. Policy in relation to PE would appear to be confined to the statements and provisions contained in curriculum documents that will be discussed later.

In this predominately centralised system schools ironically retain a significant degree of freedom in deciding on the structure of the curriculum. Schools make decisions as to the amount of curricular time and funding made available to PE. Decisions made on these issues and others like the recruitment of specialist teachers for PE are informed, it must be presumed, by a school’s culture and policy relating to the subject. In a process of allocation that frequently sees subject areas in competition with each other PE may sometimes not get what might be regarded as adequate allocations.

In relation to sport, DAST’s mandate is the (a) formulation, development and evaluation of public policy to support and influence increased participation in sport, (b) improvement in standards of performance in sport and (c) development of sports facilities at national, regional and local level though sports capital funding and funding of the Irish Sports Council.

The two main avenues for public funding of sport are the Sports Capital Programme administered by the DAST and the funding for current activities provided through the Irish Sports Council (ISC). The DAST appointed the ISC as a statutory body in 1999 to ensure the promotion of increased participation in sport and implementing better ways of promoting, planning and delivering sport. The three components of its strategy are participation (breaking down barriers and increasing participation in sport), performance (creating an environment so that individuals can develop their sporting abilities), and excellence (helping athletes achieve world class performance). The
provision of sport tends to fall to National Governing Bodies (NGBs) of sports, i.e., individual bodies responsible for the coaching and promotion of specific sports. The ISC supports the work of the NGBs with annual grants towards the costs associated with the development and promotion of their sport (ISC, 2000).

The practice of allocating discrete responsibilities for PE and some elements of SE has been built up over time and in many cases has a statutory basis. These policy fault lines lead to a situation where DES and DAST have respective primacy for PE and sport played outside of school. Extra-curricular school sport remains an area of uncertain authority where the education setting was colonised by sporting interests in what has been a largely policy-free zone.

1.2 Roles and influences of the stakeholders, relationships between the different levels

In the absence of a formal policy relationship between PE and extra-curricular sport, the three pillars have prospered to a greater or lesser degree. Each however has something to learn from the other. The connection between the PE and SE policy interests has been recognised more recently during the Irish contribution to the European Year of Education through Sport (EYES). A National Steering Committee was brought together with one of its aims being to ‘make educational and sporting institutions aware of the need for cooperation in order to develop education through sport’ (Léargas / DES, 2005, p. 7). The outcomes of the year, as presented in the final report, present a legacy so that the central themes identified throughout the year would be kept alive and addressed.

Education policy has predominantly focused on PE when it concerns itself with ‘physical activity’. There has been a recent departure from this position with the DES identifying extra-curricular activities as aspects on which its inspectors are to focus when evaluating schools. The relevant documentation describes co-curricular activities as ‘activities that enhance teaching and learning’ and extra curricular is defined as including inter alia ‘sporting activities in the school’ (DES, 2006). It might be concluded that the
DES is concerned to some extent about the extra-curricular sport being offered but ironically does not see it as necessarily enhancing the learning of students.

While education policymakers have not displayed any significant interest in shaping sports policy, even in relation to sport as practiced in schools, the interest shown by sports policy makers on school sport and PE is notable. Fahey et al., (2005a) note the manner in which ‘sports promotion programmes have also increasingly come to extend into the school, in regard to both PE and extra-curricular sport’ (p. 1). The ISC has sought over the last five years to shape the practice of sport coaching in primary schools by funding the Buntús programme. Buntús is designed to give children a fun but high quality introduction to fundamental sport skills and assist primary teachers in implementing the games component of the primary PE curriculum.

B. PE/SE systems (1423 words)

1. General orientation

   Historically, the relationship between PE and SE has been very limited with PE being the sole concern of teachers working within the formal framework of compulsory schooling and SE being delivered outside this framework by a wide variety of personnel, including PE teachers, coaches, parents and volunteers. More recently, there has been an emphasis on a more closely allied relationship between PE and SE (Léargas / DES, 2005; ISC, 2003; ISC/NCTC, 2005). There appears to be an increasing appreciation of the need to develop better integration between formal PE and SE and to adopt a holistic, developmental approach to children’s sport (Fahey et al., 2005a; ISC / NCTC, 2005).

2. PE in primary school current organisation

   PE is not provided in all primary schools and the quality and breadth of provision varies. Primary teachers are responsible for the teaching of PE within the primary school and are encouraged to pursue the revised primary school curriculum in PE (DES/NCCA, 1999a) and the corresponding teacher guidelines (DES/NCCA, 1999b). There is no compulsory level of PE provision however the suggested minimum weekly time
framework includes one hour per week for the subject. The Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO) policy is that primary class teachers deliver all curriculum areas and consequently there is limited scope for the employment of primary PE specialists. There is an increasing trend of NGBs providing coaches for particular sports within the school day and also providing resources and training to teachers. A number of organisations have produced materials to support primary teachers in delivering the primary PE curriculum, including the development of Buntús described earlier. The Irish Heart Foundation (IHF) has produced ‘Action For Life’ for Primary Schools Health Related Physical Activity’ programme that is a resource for primary school teachers of all classes. The resource includes lesson plans, a poster and teacher's notes and there is an opportunity for teachers to undertake training.

3. **PE in post-primary school current organisation**

PE is not provided in all post-primary schools and quality and breadth of provision varies. While the expectation may be that qualified PE teachers are responsible for the delivery of PE in post-primary schools, there is continued concern that personnel without any formal (PE) teaching qualifications are teaching within the school timetable (O’Sullivan, 1997; MacPhail, Halbert, McEvilly, Hutchinson & MacDonncha, 2005). It is recommended that teachers adhere to the revised junior cycle PE syllabus (DES/NCCA, 2003) in Years 1 to 3. The PE curriculum at junior cycle has been developed on the basis of a time allocation of two hours per week (DES/NCCA, 2003). The progressive reduction in time allocated to PE within the post-primary curriculum (an average of 75 minutes a week in Year 1 to 57 minutes a week in Year 6) is an international trend, although the increased time allocation to 101 minutes per week in Year 4 is particular to the Irish context where students have an opportunity to follow a non-examinable one-year ‘Transition Year’ programme (MacPhail & Halbert, 2005). Similar to the primary school, NGBs are providing coaches to deliver particular sports within the school day and also providing resources and training to interested teachers. An example is the Badminton Union of Ireland, who has compiled school programmes (for specific post-primary year groups) and offers training for teachers including a badminton information starter pack and kit bags. The IHF has extended their ‘Action for Life’ programme to post-primary
schools, providing over 600 PE teachers with a framework for teaching health-related activity and active lifestyles to post-primary students.

4. **Extra-curricular physical activities**

There continues to be mixed feelings within the PE profession and within schools in relation to the role of PE teaching staff and/or coaches in delivering extra-curricular sport (MacPhail & Slattery, in press). Fahey et al., (2005a) report that 22 per cent of post-primary students from Year 2 to Year 6 take part in extra-curricular sport 4 or more days a week, 30 per cent take part between 2-3 days a week and 18 per cent take part 1 day a week. The most popular extra-curricular activities are soccer, Gaelic football and basketball. The need to develop better integration between formal PE and extra-curricular activities is acknowledged, with Fahey et al., (2005a) stating that such an integrated approach should seek to ‘develop synergies and complementarities between formal PE and extra-curricular sport, and thus enhance the potential for mutual support between the two that inheres in the wide range of activities and interests they share in common’ (p.vi).

Examples of extra-curricular activity within primary and post-primary schools include the introduction of a Junior Pilot Scheme by the Irish Ladies’ Golf Union (ILGU). The objective of the scheme was to introduce golf to young girls and over two months girls attended coaching, coordinated by a teacher from each school and the ILGU. The Irish Amateur Rowing Union propose to introduce rowing to secondary school female students through a ‘Dry Row’ programme, providing rowing machines and mentoring by local club athletes.

5. **Out of school physical activities**

The majority of NGBs provide out of school opportunities for involvement in sports via the established format of club training throughout the week and/or summer camps such as those run by the FAI. In an attempt to increase sporting opportunities for all, and particularly for school-aged children, the DAST has made available a special budget (through the ISC’s ‘Youth Field Sports Initiative’) to three NGBs for the encouragement of greater underage participation in the major field sports of football.
(soccer) (FAI), Gaelic games (GAA) and rugby (IRFU). Allocations in 2005 included
over €9 million to support the work of the GAA, FAI and IRFU in increasing
participation in sport by young people while a smaller proportion of funding (€7 million)
was allocated to over 55 NGBs to allow them to carry out the core activities required to
deliver quality sport in Ireland, including administration, coach education and hosting
and participating at international events (Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism, 2006). A
cconcern with prime funding targeting the three major sports is that it may only serve to
maintain the extent to which games is being taught in PE at the expense of other activity
areas (MacPhail et al., 2005) and this is borne out to some extent in recent reports (de
Roiste & Dineen, 2995; Fahey et al., 2005a).

The ISC has launched 18 local sports partnership (LSP’s) to create a national
structure to coordinate and promote the development of sport at local level. More than
€3.8 million is set aside annually for the LSP programme to increase participation in
sport and to ensure that local resources are used to best effect. Each LSP has a Local
Sports Strategy that includes the support of a wide variety of local agencies such as local
clubs, schools, health boards and voluntary organisations.

Community Games is a voluntary organisation providing opportunities for
children and young people (aged 6-16) to experience sport and cultural activities in a fun
and positive way. It operates through local communities with over 500,000 participants,
20,000 volunteers and over 1.3 million supporters and is participation based rather than
competitive. Participants have an opportunity to try out different activities like basketball,
tag-rugby, Irish dancing and volleyball.

6. **Partnerships**

There is a limited formal relationship between schools and community clubs
although teachers acknowledge the experience that students bring to the school from their
involvement in community sport. It has been suggested that the PE and extra-curricular
provision within a school is, in some instances, determined to a certain extent by the
experience (or lack of experience) young people bring in particular sporting activities
As discussed previously, the LSPs are central to the ISC’s strategy for the development of sport, coordinating the delivery of the Buntús programme in primary schools and supporting teachers in the delivery of both curricula in PE and extra-curricular sporting programmes. One particular LSP, Sligo Sport and Recreation Partnership, detail in their strategic plan for 2003-2005 how they intend to address and work with the major stakeholders including voluntary/community groups, sports clubs/organisations, the County and Borough Council and Health Board. The partnership continues to be involved in a project that strives to create an environment in which all children, regardless of their abilities, can become involved in sport. Through the EYES (2004) initiative, Limerick City Sports Partnership secured funding to coordinate the delivery and monitoring of a Sport Education programme in local primary schools (Léargas / DES, 2005).

C. Role and point of view of collective actors / PE and SE (934 words)

1. Politicians

The DAST fulfils a major role in the execution of sport policy within Ireland and the DES has an expected role to pursue in matters relating to PE. Recent research within the Irish context is providing results that support strategies that specifically develop PE and SE together in an attempt to increase the likelihood of more adolescents becoming or remaining physically active (Fahey et al., 2005a; National Taskforce on Obesity, 2005; Connor, 2003). Duffy (1996) comprehensively lists the main developments in educational policy, sports policy and school physical education from pre 1900 to 1996. More recent SE policies include ‘Targeting Sporting Change in Ireland’ (Department of Education, 1997) – outlining six strategies (including sport for young people, recreational sport, high performance sport) to strengthen sport in Ireland, ‘Sport for Life’ (ISC, 2003) - the ISC’s statement of strategy for 2003-2005, ‘Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Children’s Sport’ (ISC / SCNI, 2000), ‘Building Pathways in Irish Sport’ (NCTC, 2003) – proposing a model of long-term player athlete development, ‘Lifelong Involvement in Sport and Physical Activity’ (LISPA) (ISC/NCTC, 2005) – outlining a proposed model of lifelong involvement in sport and physical activity and the DAST ‘Statement of Strategy 2005-
2007’ (DAST, 2005). Currently, while there are curriculum initiatives for PE there are no policy statements on PE from the DES.

2. **Experts and curriculum content official working groups**

   The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is a statutory agency with the remit to provide the Minister for Education and Science with advice on curriculum and assessment. The NCCA prepares all curriculum documents (including syllabi) and the DES has responsibility for their implementation in schools. The design of the physical education syllabi in Ireland are completed by course committees of the NCCA which are made up of teacher, school management, parent, higher education, and DES representatives. The NCCA have initiated a review of the proposed senior cycle PE syllabus and are supportive of pursuing a Leaving Certificate in PE.

3. **NGO (trade-unions, professional associations)**

   There are three teacher trade unions in Ireland who collectively represent the voice of over 55,000 individuals involved in teaching in either primary, post primary or third level. The Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO) is the largest teachers' trade union in Ireland, representing over 26,000 teachers at primary level in the Republic of Ireland. The Teachers’ Union of Ireland (TUI) is an organisation for approximately 12,000 teachers and lecturers in Ireland engaged in post-primary and third-level education. The Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland (ASTI) is Ireland's main post-primary teachers' union and represents approximately 17,000 teachers in community schools, community colleges, comprehensive schools and voluntary secondary schools attended by 80% of all post-primary students. While the unions currently operate as discrete organisations, discussions have mooted the possibility of the three unions merging.

   The Physical Education Association of Ireland (PEAI) was founded in 1968 for PE teachers in post-primary schools. The current role of the PEAI is to re-establish a strong organisational infrastructure, provide members with opportunities and materials for professional growth and be involved in developments that re-define the concept of PE
in line with changing needs of young people and the demands of Irish society. The Irish Primary Physical Education Association (IPPEA) was founded in 2002 for primary teachers who are particularly interested in the PE subject. The IPPEA is an association dedicated to heightening awareness of PE issues in primary schools, aiming to promote physical activity in an educational context. The current role of the IPPEA includes liasing with other organisations involved in the promotion of PE. Both professional associations have been involved in supporting the DES and the ISC’s ‘Active School Awards Scheme’ initiative that identifies, recognises and encourages quality PE and co-curricular physical activity programmes in schools.

4. Pupils, parents and population at large

The changing sporting context in Ireland has included the designation of sport as a full ministerial appointment in 1997, the ISC established as a statutory body in 1999 and the improvement of sporting / recreation facilities (Connor, 2003). The economic value of sport within Ireland has been analysed by Delaney & Fahey (2005) who report the four areas of volunteering, subscriptions to sports clubs, participation costs for sports events and attendance at sports events have a combined economic value of €1.4 billion. This sum rises to €1.86 billion with the inclusion of sport tourism into Ireland and the value of government expenditure on sport.

Despite the general trends of participation in PE declining as students move throughout the school years, curricular time being below the syllabus recommendation and a narrow range of sports being offered on the PE curriculum (MacPhail & Halbert, 2005; MacPhail et al., 2005), Irish school children still report an inherent desire to be involved in PE and SE (Connor, 2003; de Roiste & Dineen, 2005). The NCCA (2004) report students’ preference for subjects with a practical orientation such as PE.

The investment from the Irish population in sport is evident in the findings from a study examining the social and economic value of sport in Ireland (Delaney & Fahey, 2005). The report acknowledges the vast volunteer sector which service sport in Ireland, stating that approximately 400,000 adults (15% of the adult population) volunteer for
sport in some way during the sporting year, providing an annual labour input equivalent of 22,500 full-time workers. A recent survey reported that 40 per cent of all Irish adults are achieving the minimum standards of recommended physical activity, i.e., an accumulated 30 minutes of moderate intensity activity for five or more days per week (Fahey, Layte & Gannon, 2005).

D. **SE programmes** (4359 words)

1. **General Overview of the PE and SE Programmes**

   PE has been part of the school curriculum for primary and post-primary schools since the initiation of the Irish Free State in 1922. O’Donoghue’s (1989) brief history of PE and Duffy’s (1996) doctoral research on the policies of PE are the main scholarly sources on the history of developments in PE in Ireland. Scholarship on PE and SE in more recent years is growing (Connor, 2003; deRoiste & Dineen, 2005; Fahey et al., 2005a; McCarthy, 1994; MacPhail & Halbert, 2005; MacPhail et al., 2005; O’Sullivan & McCarthy, 1994).

   There have been a number of developments in school PE that have resulted in the revision and/or creation of new and revised curriculum documents in recent years. Primary school teachers teach PE in Ireland. A Primary School Physical Education Support Service was created to support teachers in the implementation of the revised curriculum. In recent years, all primary teachers in the country have been provided with a one-day in-service on the teaching and learning issues associated with this curriculum. The junior cycle programme at post-primary is for 12 to 15 year old children and the revised junior cycle PE syllabus was introduced in 2003 targeted at this group. The DES created a Junior Cycle Physical Education (JCPE) support service to support implementation of the syllabus in all 743 funded post-primary schools. A cohort of 110 schools participated in the first phase during 2003-2004. A further 132 schools participated in phase two and 153 schools participated in a third phase in 2005-2006, totaling 395 schools. The three-day in-service programme had teachers review the content, teaching and modes of assessment for the revised syllabus. At the time of writing
the DES has agreed to fund a fourth day of in-service to allow teachers who have received the in-service to focus on programme planning and assessment. A fourth phase of in-service has been sanctioned and will be available to those schools that have not yet availed of the service.

The senior cycle PE syllabus has been revised (existing syllabus dates from 1984) and for the first time in Ireland ‘students are given the opportunity to study physical education as a subject in the Leaving Certificate examination’ (MacPhail & Halbert, 2005, p. 290). Neither of these syllabi has been introduced at the time of writing though recent NCCA documents suggest that its proposals for changing the senior cycle will prioritise, among other things, the introduction of Leaving Certificate PE and the generation of a related Sports Studies short course (NCCA, 2005).

The revised syllabi are presented by the DES as enabling structures within which a wide variety of PE courses can be developed and implemented as appropriate to the circumstances and resources of any particular school. Therefore, schools wishing to be involved in its implementation will be required to do so using the PE facilities and resources already available to them. Syllabi can be reviewed at the NCCA web site (www.ncca.ie/).

There is no national framework for SE in the Irish context. Fahey et al. (2005a) have described access and opportunity to organized sport and physical activity for children and young people in the Irish system as resting on the three main pillars mentioned previously. SE can be viewed as the second and third of these pillars, i.e., sport played after school and sport played outside the school in sports clubs and other organized contexts. Despite the absence of a framework for extra curricular sport in Irish schools many schools place a great deal of emphasis on after school sport. Many schools have developed a strong reputation for student involvement and excellence in a particular sport. Individual NGBs, not individual schools or the educational system, arrange the school level leagues and tournaments from local to regional to national level. While the previously mentioned ISC Youth Field Sports Initiative involves delivering coaching
sessions and introductory sport skill sessions to primary and post-primary students during the school day, the LSPs initiative is also designed to help students make connections with sports clubs of interest in their local areas and encourage their participation in one or more such sports.

The absence of a national framework for SE has created tensions between the three pillars of organized sport and physical activity for children and youth. Firstly, tensions develop between the school and local club coaches for the ‘services’ of some students playing the same sport in and out of school as highly skilled student/athletes can only play for school and club in some instances. A second tension can arise between NGBs with each implementing school initiatives and vying for the same students to play their sport at the school and/or club level. A third tension arises from efforts by the PE department to broaden the range of physical activity interests and options for student participation. This can be seen as a potential threat to a sporting organization (e.g., GAA) that traditionally has been the sole or primary outlet for physical activity after school or in the community for this group of students. With no national structure, these tensions are inevitable.

2. Objectives contents, models of PE and SE
2.1. PE Objectives

The general aim of PE across all levels of schooling in Ireland is to contribute to the preparation of the student for a life of autonomous well-being. This aim is pursued through the:

- enhancement of the student’s sense of self through the development of skilful and creative performance of practical activities
- development of the student’s understanding of physical activity and awareness of the links between physical education and other curricular areas
- motivation of the student to choose a lifestyle that is active, healthy, and meaningful
the personal enrichment of the student by developing personal and social skills, and encouraging positive attitudes and values in her/his interaction with others (DES/NCCA, 2003, p. 4).

PE at the primary school provides children with learning opportunities through the medium of movement and contributes to their overall development by helping them to lead full, active and healthy lives (DES/NCCA, 1999a, p. 8). A number of principles are to be considered when implementing a programme of PE and these include:

- the importance of enjoyment and play
- maximum participation by all children
- a balance between competitive and non-competitive activities
- providing activities equally suitable for girls and boys.

At the junior cycle the PE programme is intended to ‘support the physical and mental well being of students. Though this area of experience, students can develop and practise physical skills, participate in individual and team activities, and learn how to set and reach challenging goals’ (DES/NCCA, 2003, p.2). Some of the specific aims of the syllabus are to:

- provide the opportunity for students to develop personally, socially, and physically through participation in physical activities in a safe, challenging, and enjoyable environment
- provide an opportunity for students to critically reflect on physical activity through participation in a broad, well balanced programme
- develop in students an ability to make informed judgements in respect of physical activity.

The senior cycle PE curriculum builds on the junior cycle syllabus and encourages the student to learn about physical activity. MacPhail & Halbert (2005) noted that ‘The dual imperatives of promoting long-term learning and enrichment of the person underpin the aims of the Leaving Certificate physical education syllabus’ (p. 290). Students are encouraged to continue regular participation in physical activity and also to consider the
option of pursuing further study and/or career opportunities associated with PE. As stated previously, neither the revised senior cycle syllabus nor the Leaving Certificate syllabus have been introduced at the time of writing and thus most teachers are working without much attention to a national syllabus as the existing one is over 20 years old.

2.2. PE Contents

As stated before the DES / NCCA (1999a) policy recommends a minimum of one hour of PE per week for all primary school pupils but in reality many pupils do not receive the required amount of time. The DES stated that the curriculum has been structured to allow individual schools a high degree of flexibility and choice in the planning of a broad and balanced programme for pupils. Such a directive recognizes the diversity as well as the inadequacy of facilities in many primary schools. The PE curriculum at the primary level is divided into six strands. The strands are:

- Athletics
- Games
- Dance
- Gymnastics
- Outdoor and adventure activities
- Aquatics.

Post-primary PE is not a mandatory subject though it is recommended that it form part of the curriculum. It is the only subject among 28 subjects at the junior cycle that does not have a formal examination requirement. It is expected that the PE programme at each school be based on a national approved syllabus and the teaching hours registered on the school timetable. While not mandatory, the time recommended for PE is two hours per week and a minimum time allocation of two periods a week, timetabled together, is recommended to facilitate the implementation of the syllabus. It is ‘widely believed that when allocating time schools favour subjects which are part of the state examination system’ (Halbert & MacPhail, 2005, p. 386)
The junior cycle PE curriculum is divided into eight strands. The content strands are the same as for the primary syllabus though games are sub-divided into two strands: invasion games and net and fielding games. An additional eighth strand is health related activity. This aspect of the curriculum is distinctive in that it attempts to draw together other physical education activities ‘to provide students with the opportunity to develop an understanding of health related fitness and to apply its principles to actual participation’ (DES/NCCA, 2003, p. 9). It is viewed as an important means of developing and maintaining healthy lifestyles.

2.3. PE Models

The general aim of Irish PE is ‘to contribute to the preparation of the student for a life of autonomous well being’ (DES/NCCA, 2003, p. 4). It is believed PE ‘plays a foundational role in developing pathways for physical activity participation on a day to day basis and in the future’ (DES/NCCA, 2003, p. 5). Although there has been no systematic study of PE teaching practices in Irish schools, most reports speak of the prevalence of direct teaching styles among many PE teachers. Teaching Games for Understanding has been a popular approach to games teaching over the last decade. More recently a small number of teachers have been experimenting with the Sport Education curriculum model (Siedentop, 1994) that encourages greater student responsibility for their own learning and experience different roles (i.e. coach, manager, statistician, referee) during a sport education season (e.g., volleyball, athletics, dance). A national ‘Digital Video Project in Physical Education’ has sought to establish a place for the applied use of Information and Communication Technology in PE looking at its potential role as a teaching and learning aid across a range of PE activities (National Centre for Technology in Education, 2006). Recent developments have seen explicit efforts to see a greater range of instructional and assessment approaches to ensure greater student engagement in, and responsibility for, their own learning.

2.4. PE Evaluation

Assessment is considered an integral part of teaching and learning in PE. The curriculum advises a variety of forms of assessment be used to ensure a full range of
abilities in PE is assessed and to allow for individual learning styles. The specific forms of assessment suggested for primary school PE include:

- Teacher-designed tasks: the wide range of tasks which the teacher sets for the child to complete which can be assessed as the children are learning
- Curriculum Profiles. The child’s progress can be assessed and recorded using indicators. No national profiles have been developed though schools are encouraged to devise profiles to meet their students’ needs (DES/NCCA, 1999a, p.22).

In relation to post-primary, the DES position is that ‘there will be no Junior Certificate examination in this subject [and] school based assessment on a continuous basis should be carried out’ (McManus, 2005, p.1). The curriculum recommends that four activities be taught each year in the junior cycle and that at least one formal assessment take place each year. Assessment is presented to teachers as a strategy that informs future learning, motivates the student, and contributes directly to the formative development of the learner. It is expected that the assessment modes and methods devised will reflect the practical nature of PE at this level. It is recommended that all assessment material be compiled and stored in the form of a student portfolio. The portfolio should be of value to the student as a record of their personal achievement. The modes of assessments suggested for the junior cycle include:

- informal assessment by the teachers where he/she makes judgements as to the progress and performance of the student in the lesson. The teacher, where appropriate and practical record a number of these informal evaluations
- peer assessment facilitates student analysis of their performance in the physical education lesson. Such assessment proceeds on the basis of parameters and criteria agreed by both teacher and student.
- evidence of formal achievement in physical activity outside the classroom should be recorded as evidence of achievement in the student portfolio (DES/NCCA, 2003, p. 56).
In September 2005, the NCCA, in conjunction with the JCPE support service, initiated a pilot project in schools to investigate issues relating to PE assessment. The pilot involved the generation of a PE assessment-planning framework with various assessment instruments for use by teachers in association with the revised junior cycle PE syllabus. The work of the project focused on engaging a number of teachers in the development of assessment materials, the trial of these in school settings and their subsequent refinement based on the feedback received from the teaching and learning setting. The project has set out to:

- report on the effectiveness of Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies
- examine the use of a variety of assessment instruments
- identify, in particular, an approach to the use of portfolio assessment
- explore the elements of effective recording and reporting
- provide frameworks for planning (NCCA, 2006, p. 4).

2.5. Extra-curricular physical activities

While the DES oversees the provision of PE in Irish schools, out of school sport comes under the remit of the DAST. However extra curricular physical activity and sport falls between the cracks in terms of oversight by any national agency or department. Neither the DES nor the DAST has direct responsibility for after school sport and physical activity. In reality the promotion of after-school sport in schools is quite fragmented. Three main groups provide some level of support for after school sport. First, schools see the value of sport and physical activity for students and provide organized, as well as informal, activities for their pupils. Much of the teaching, coaching, and supervision of these activities has been done on a voluntary basis by teachers of the school. More recently a few PE teachers noted that part of their workload is now devoted to organising and/or coaching these activities and in some schools coaches are hired for a specific sport (O’Sullivan, in press). Second, some NGBs of sport have a schools section and devote specific personnel and other resources to support the development of their sport in schools nationwide. This support can take many forms such as providing equipment to schools, sport development officers providing coaching sessions in schools, or local club coaches going to schools introducing the fundamentals of the sport to
students. This results in individual NGBs promoting their own sport in local primary and post-primary schools. A third level of support for after school sport is via the LSPs (where they exist) encouraging young people to be more actively engaged with physical activity in and out of school and helping students make connections between PE, after school and out of school physical activity and sport. Ireland’s recent involvement in the European Year of Education through Sport (Léargas / DES, 2004) was in part focused on connecting all three levels and supporting schools to get more students more active in physical activity of all kinds in and out of school time. The provision of after school physical activity is mostly done by volunteers with the exception of the paid sport development officer or the few schools who pay a coach to work with a school team. Many of these coaches and tutors have no formal coach education for their sport (they may be former elite athletes) and may have little knowledge of the physical, social, or emotional development of young people. The adults run these coaching sessions, and in some cases, providing little opportunity for students to develop their coaching or leadership skills.

2.6. Out-of-school physical activities

The ISC support almost 60 NGBs of sport who administer most of the organized sport in Ireland. Every NGB is expected to develop and implement a programme for young people in sport, building on the principles of an agreed national programme. There is an NGB Support Unit within the ISC to build NGBs’ capacities to deliver on their goals. The creation of the Sport HQ unit by the ISC provides a business home for Irish sport and houses head offices for over 20 of the national sport organizations. The ISC also supports the National Coaching and Training Centre (NCTC) whose mission is to provide ‘a world-class range of services to coaches, athletes and National Governing Bodies’ of sport (NCTC, 2006). These services include coach education, tutor training, sports science and medical support, training camps and facilities, and technical advice. NCTC’s main task is working with coaches and athletes with a view to improving the standards of coaching and performance and they cooperate extensively with over 60 national governing bodies of sport. An important initiative of NCTC has been the National Coaching Development Plan (NCDP) that provides an education structure for
coaches and the development of coaching systems within the country. A four level coaching ladder has been set up and provides education and recognition for coaches from introductory to international level. The structure has taken account of EU developments concerning the mutual recognition of qualifications and the free movement of labour. The Federation of Irish Sport, a voluntary organization promoting collaboration among NGBs on issues affecting Irish sport, also liaises with the ISC and lobbies on behalf of the NGBs.

3. Training of Intervention Agents

3.1 Physical Education Teacher Education

Beginning in 1973 until 2006, only one teacher preparation programme in the Republic of Ireland (situated at the University of Limerick) was available for those wishing to teach PE in Irish post-primary schools. Recently, the Teacher’s Registration Council approved two additional programmes at the undergraduate level and a one-year postgraduate teacher education programme. The Colleges of Education who prepare teachers for primary schools are responsible for also preparing them to teach PE. The time devoted to this preparation varies across the five institutions and some offer students the option to gain additional expertise in the subject. The primary and post-primary support teams for PE provide a limited amount of continuous professional development to practicing teachers. This training is a significant improvement on the situation before 2000 when there were almost no professional development opportunities for the teaching of PE.

3.2 Extra-curricular Physical Activity

It is predominantly teachers with an interest in a specific sport who volunteer their time to promote sport in the school and work with students in extra curricular activities (Fahey et al., 2005a). Many have no training in teaching a sport to children. However a number of these personnel would be the schools’ PE teachers. There is no formal system of training and mentoring for these sport personnel. A small few of the non-PE trained coaches would be sport development officers employed by NGBs and some would have completed the coaching credential for that organization.
3.3 Out of school Physical Activity

According to a recent study sport is by far the most important arena for volunteering in Irish society (Delaney & Fahey, 2005). Approximately 400,000 adults volunteer to support sport in some way. The majority are non-players and former players rather than currently active participants. Men more than women seem to be more involved in the coaching and acting as club officials while more than half of women’s volunteer work is in providing ‘transportation and kit maintenance’ (Delaney & Fahey, 2005, p.5). The GAA (which promotes the national games of Gaelic football, hurling, and camogie) is the dominant sport for which adults volunteer. Many of these people are not trained formally to work with young people. There have been two major efforts in recent years to provide training for these volunteers. In 1996 the NCTC assisted the then Minister for Sport and Youth Affairs in developing a Code of Ethics for children’s sport in Ireland that was subsequently published by the ISC (2005). The National Coaching Development Plan was implemented to provide an education structure for coaches and to progressively work on coaching systems within the country (NCTC, 2006). A coaching ladder has been set up and includes four levels, which provides education and recognition for coaches from introductory to international level.

4. Practice

4.1 Physical Education

As noted earlier, class teachers deliver primary school physical education. In recent years schools have begun contracting the provision of PE to outside personnel. A study of 1300 primary school principals noted that coaches from the NGBs of sport (27%), outside instructors (22%), and PE teachers (5%) are providing some aspect of the primary school PE programme (Deenihan, 2005). A survey of 137 primary school principals highlighted that 62% of schools provided PE classes one a week and 31% provide PE classes twice or three times a week (Fahey et al., 2005a).

At the primary school level the three main barriers to provision of PE reported by principals were inadequate facilities/equipment (59%), shortage of time on the
curriculum (19%), and inadequate training (14%) (Deenihan, 2005). A 2004 survey by the Irish National Teachers Organization (INTO, 2004) noted that 80% of one rural county in Ireland did not have an indoor sport hall in primary schools while 86% of Dublin primary schools (urban county) had a hall for PE. The recent ESRI reported concluded that ‘sport facilities in schools, and perhaps especially in primary schools, needs to be improved, particularly in regard to facilities needed for indoor activities’ (Fahey et al, 2005a, p.90).

Specialist teachers teach physical education at the post-primary level. The major constraints on post-primary provision in Ireland, as identified by principals and teachers, are similar to other countries and include inadequate facilities and equipment, ineffective allocation or time, and inappropriate staffing levels (MacPhail et al, 2005). These variables are compounded by an overcrowded curriculum and a lack of sufficient and appropriate professional development for teachers. All of these factors interact and experience has shown that improving the situation of PE is a complex process, as addressing one constraint in isolation will not lead to enduring change.

4.2 Extra Curricular PA and/or Out of School PA

Extra-curricular physical activity is an important part of school life particularly for many post-primary schools. ‘In many schools sport is intensively focused on a particular sport rather than a broad PE approach’ (Fahey et al., 2005a, p. 13). Extra-curricular sport is not part of a teacher’s contractual agreement (in most cases at least) though many teachers coach or supervise school teams as part of a voluntary commitment to the school and to a particular sport. Many of these teachers have no formal training in sport coaching. The ESRI report cautioned about the ‘limited range of team-based competitive sports in extra-curricular sport’ (Fahey et al., 2005a, p. 13).

Physical activity provision after school is a major source of sport participation for Irish children. Over 60% of post-primary students participate in after school sport at least once a week and 52% participate 2-4 days a week. There are significant gender differences in levels of participation with 42% of girls and 62% of boys participating 2-4
days a week. Almost 30% of girls and 16% of boys indicated no participation in extra curricular sport on a weekly basis (Fahey et al., 2005a). Rates of extra-curricular participation decline as students move up through post-primary with 61% of 2nd year pupils and 41% of 6th year pupils participating 2 or more days a week. The rate of non-participation in extra curricular sport doubles from 15% in year 2 to 30% in year 6. The fall off in some sports however is less pronounced but these are sports played mainly by boys (hurling and Gaelic football) while the largest declines are in sports played more by girls (basketball and hockey) (Fahey et al., 2005a).

Over half (52%) of the students in the ESRI study reported they participated in non-school sports at least 2 or more days a week. The differences in participation rates out of school for boys (64%) and girls (41%) were as dramatic as the data reported for extra curricular sport participation. Gaelic football (14%) and dance (13%) were the most popular out of school activities for girls with swimming and camogie (9%) a joint third. Boys preferred soccer (31%) and Gaelic football (29%) with hurling (18%) a distant third. More students have access to physical activity sessions per week in non-PE settings than they have for PE classes. While Fahey and colleagues (2005a) note that participation rates are higher overall for adolescents in after-school sport than in either PE or for extra-curricular activity in school, the differentiated rates of participation between boys and girls is most noticeable here. It appears that 15 years after the report on stereotyping in sport (PEAI, 1991) suggested much more work was needed to achieve a balance between boys and girls in regard to sport, Ireland is struggling with the issue. While media coverage of sport and physical activity continues to increase, the recommendation of the ‘Girls and Boys Come Out to Play Report’ (PEAI, 1991) that media coverage be ‘less male oriented and dominated and more quality coverage of female sport should occur’ (p.4) has not been acted upon in any substantive way.

Conclusions / General current and future challenges (493 words)

There is a lack of an integrated system of policies to support and coordinate the development of PE and SE. This may in part have led to the inclusion in the Irish final report of the European Year of Education through Sport for a recommendation that a
Task Force on Physical Activity, Physical Education and Sport for Young People be set up to develop a coordinated approach to the issue of sport and education in Ireland. This task force would comprise key policy makers and appropriate experts from the relevant Departments and state agencies (Léargas / DES, 2005). The proposal for the setting up of this group had, at the time of the publication of the report, been submitted to the DAST, which is consulting with the DES on this issue. The suggestion of an alliance that represents the interests of those involved in the promotion and delivery of PE and SE has since been supported by the report of the National Taskforce on Obesity (2005), as an outcome from the 8th National Forum ‘Physical Activity. Common Goals and Different Roles’ held at the University of Limerick in 2005 and through the Lifelong Involvement in Sport and Physical Activity (LISPA) consultation document (ISC / NCTC, 2005).

There are developments between numerous agencies working towards supportive partnerships between PE and SE, resulting in a time of exciting and unprecedented change. Recent and imminent curricular developments at primary and post-primary convey the interest and support of the NCCA and the DES in respect to PE. The ISC has been proactive in widening its remit to be involved in and coordinate a number of SE-related initiatives. The Chief Executive Officer of the ISC chaired the National Taskforce on Obesity (1995), which conveys acknowledgement from those involved in the Taskforce of the important role the ISC can play in addressing the sedentary behaviour and lifestyles that are currently contributing to the increased levels of obesity. Furthermore, the ISC has committed funding to a Women in Sport initiative aimed at promoting increased participation of women of all ages in sport.

Interestingly, data suggests that Irish youth sport and physical activity participation does not follow current commentaries on international trends where participation levels of a critically low level are repeatedly reported. Irish young people appear to maintain relatively high levels of participation in sport and physical activity, with sport playing a pervasive role in the lives of Irish children who enjoy and participate in a variety of sport and physical activities (Collier, O’Sullivan, MacPhail & O’Connor, 2005).
The lack of an integrated system of PE and SE has led many agencies and organizations to take a strategic decision to become involved in the promotion and delivery of PE and SE. The task ahead is how best to inform and convince those responsible for education and sport that an integrated system is the best option to communicate a shared investment to provide better, and complementary, provision for PE and SE.

References

*Bunreacht na hEireann*: Constitution of Ireland (1937)


