



FG
FINE GAEL

The National Lottery has proved to be much more successful than was envisaged when the legislation proposed by the last Government was passed in 1986. At the time that legislation was passed, it was expected that the National Lottery would produce a distributable surplus in the region of £10 to £12 million in its first year and that its growth, while substantial, would be less than has turned out to be the case.

Use of Funds

At the time the legislation was passed, it was decided that the funds available for distribution should be allocated in the following proportions:

— youth and sport	55%
— arts, culture and Irish language	35%
— health (special projects)	10%

Since the scale of funds now available is greatly in excess of that originally envisaged, there is clearly a very strong case for reviewing the uses to which the funds are put, particularly with a view to identifying other areas where pressing but non-recurring needs can be identified and met. Furthermore, there is a case for reviewing the progress of the National Lottery periodically, with particular reference to the growth in the amount of funds becoming available. If the total amount of funds coming through the National Lottery continues to increase at anything like the rate we have seen so far, there would be a compelling case for reviewing its operation and the allocation of funds on a regular basis. Such reviews will be justifiable both on the basis of the attractiveness of the Lottery, the diversion of private expenditure from other uses and on the basis of the range of uses to which the funds can be put.

Fine Gael believes that the following additional uses would be justified:

- assistance to organisations catering for physically and mentally handicapped persons;
- Task Force for elderly;
- provision of educational equipment for primary and second level schools, to cater particularly for the teaching of language skills;
- grants for the provision of amenities to promote tourism, in both the private and the public sectors.

Method of Allocation

We believe also that changes are needed in the way in which funds are allocated. The system currently used (which is not the system originally envisaged) is excessively arbitrary, does not seem to be based on a clearly defined applications system and, in many cases, appears to attach little or no importance to the ability of groups which receive aid to follow through and manage the assisted projects. The following conditions must therefore be applied.

First, there must be a standard application procedure for each type of project. This must specify the information required.

Second, no capital grant should exceed 50% of the approved cost as a general rule; no current grant should exceed 50% of the cost of normal ongoing expenditure, and no current grant for a "once off" project should cover more than 75% of the approved cost.

Third, each application should, where appropriate, set out in detail the steps to be taken to ensure the continuing viability of the project in question (for example, provisions for maintenance and management of sports facilities).

Fourth, the allocations system must ensure the avoidance of duplication and wasteful expenditure. With this in view, it will clearly be necessary to have structures which can establish the relative merits of different applications and also set priorities between them.

Channels of Distribution

The Government should regularly review proportions of available funds to be allocated to each of the areas specified. In addition, it should allocate a proportion of the available funds to a reserve to finance special projects or needs, such as contributions for disaster relief.

Funds for the arts and culture sectors should be allocated by Arts Council, subject to the final approval of the Taoiseach.

Funds for the Irish language should be allocated by Bord na Gaeilge, subject to the final approval of the Minister for the Gaeltacht.

Funds for the provision of educational equipment should be allocated by the Minister for Education.

Assistance to organisations catering for physically and mentally handicapped persons should be allocated by the Minister for Health.

Funds for the provision of amenities to promote tourism should be allocated by Bord Failte, subject to the final approval of the Minister for Tourism and Transport.

Youth and Sports

A totally new approach is needed to the allocation of funds for youth and sports activities. We propose the following.

1. We must separate Youth activity support from Sports. While the development of a healthy approach to sports is an essential and integral part of a coherent Youth Policy, the association of Youth and Sports tends to place each of them in the wrong perspective. We believe that, in addition to a central core of support for youth activities, which should be a permanent part of public expenditure, there is every justification for using National Lottery funds as a further source of support for youth activities. The structure under which grants are currently made to Voluntary Youth Organisations is working satisfactorily, as is the Inter-Departmental Committee with responsibility for allocating funds for Disadvantaged Youth.

There is, however, no overall, coherent policy framework within which these activities can be undertaken and planned on a consistent basis. We believe, therefore, that there is a need for a National Youth Board, involving both the voluntary and the statutory agencies active in the field, which would provide a national policy framework and co-ordinate and support the work of those agencies. We refer to this in the context of the National Lottery because such a framework is needed to guide and inform the allocation of National Lottery funds to youth activities in a way that is consistent with an overall policy framework.

2. Cospoir should be replaced by a new Sports and Recreation Council, established by statute and responsible to the Minister for the Environment. This Council should identify national needs, establish standards, set out a national policy and provide advice and guidance for sports organisations and local authorities. Its activities should be funded by allocations from the National Lottery.
3. The Sports functions of the Department of Education should be transferred to the Department of the Environment.

4. Allocations to sporting organisations, associations, clubs or other relevant bodies to assist in the funding of their activities or by way of grant should be made by the new Sports and Recreation Council, using funds from the National Lottery. All applications to the National Sports and Recreation Council for assistance, whether capital or current, for sports and recreation activities should be referred to the local authorities, which would present a technical report on the feasibility of the projects, the need for the project in question, its location compared to other similar projects or facilities, the probable level of local contribution, and the ability of the promoters to manage and fund the project on an ongoing basis, and would rank projects in order of priority. The local authorities would also report on the location and availability of facilities in schools.

In this connection also, the under-utilisation of PE facilities in schools must be taken into account. It would make little sense, for example, for a community to duplicate a facility already provided at public expense in a school. It is clear that we need a much greater degree of co-ordination between public agencies in the provision of such facilities or in assistance to community groups for their provision.

Accountability

We believe that proper accountability in the application of National Lottery funds requires, first of all, that the Government make the decisions as to the proportions in which funds should be allocated to different uses. Next, it requires that the relevant Ministers have the power and the responsibility of final approval for the expenditure.

We reject proposals that a Committee of the Oireachtas should be given responsibility for deciding on the allocation of funds to individual projects. It is not the job of legislators to exercise executive functions in the disbursement of public monies..