

Job Title: Director of Sport

Location: Dublin / Hybrid

Reports to: CEO, Special Olympics Ireland

Contract Type: Full-time, Permanent

We have an exciting opportunity for a Director of Sport. Reporting to the Chief Executive Officer, the person appointed will be responsible for the strategic planning, sport development and delivery of Special Olympics Ireland's programmes. The appointee will build on current and emerging sports programmes, partnerships and sports volunteer teams, and will include liaison and collaboration with other National Governing Bodies, Sport Ireland and Sport NI, and with the European and global Special Olympics International bodies.

A highly motivated and skilled professional with an understanding of the Irish sports sector plus an excellent knowledge and understanding of sports administration and management is required to fulfil this role. A strong commitment to learning and development and continuous improvement and to the achievement of standards of excellence in sport is required. Excellent interpersonal skills, communications and relationship management skills are essential. Must have strong leadership skills, ability to drive and manage growth, build effective teams, and achieve results through others.

The position will be based in our office at the Sport Ireland Campus. The role will involve evening and weekend work with some travel including the regional programmes, representing Special Olympics and occasional international travel.

Overview:

Special Olympics Ireland is a sports organisation for people with an intellectual disability, providing year-round sports training and competition across 15 Olympic-type sports. Our mission is to enrich the lives of people with intellectual disabilities through sport and to foster inclusion and respect within communities across Ireland. We currently support over 6,500 athletes and work with a network of 250+ clubs and thousands of volunteers across the island of Ireland.

This role requires a high-performing individual with experience in inclusive sports administration, athlete development pathways, programme management, team leadership, and strategic grant management.

We are seeking a visionary and strategic leader to take on the role of Director of Sport, responsible for overseeing and advancing all aspects of sports development, competition pathways, and programme delivery. This role will suit a candidate who has a passion for inclusion through sport.

Key Responsibilities

Strategic Leadership

- Lead the development and implementation of the organisation's overall sports strategy, ensuring alignment with the mission, values, and long-term goals of Special Olympics Ireland.
- Provide visionary leadership in growing the sports programme and enhancing athlete participation, opportunities, and experience.
- Represent Special Olympics Ireland locally and internationally at sport-specific forums, meetings, and events.
- Work and collaborate with Special Olympics Europe/Eurasia and Special Olympics International to further the development of the Special Olympics Ireland programme.
- Oversee and enhance the sport and competition pathways, ensuring inclusive, athlete-centred opportunities and progression from grassroots to international levels.
- Promote best practice in inclusive sport and community engagement including our Inclusive Clubs programme to ensure that all athletes can participate meaningfully.

Programme Management

Provide strategic leadership and oversight across the full suite of sport-related programmes, ensuring alignment, quality, and measurable impact:

- **Sports Development & Competition Pathways:**
Design and oversee structured, progressive, and inclusive athlete development and competition pathways. Ensure they are accessible, sustainable, and consistent with Special Olympics sport rules.
- **Clubs Programme & Inclusive Clubs:**
Strengthen the Clubs Programme, supporting volunteer-led clubs to provide structured sport with an excellence in governance standards.
- Expand and promote the Inclusive Clubs model where NGB partner with Special Olympics Ireland to open their community club network to athletes with intellectual disabilities, fostering community integration and sustainable participation.
- **Coach Education:**
Oversee the development and delivery of a robust coach education framework. Ensure high-quality training, ongoing support, and clear pathways and accessibility for coaching excellence.
- **Women in Sport:**
Drive initiatives that increase female participation, leadership, and visibility in all aspects of Special Olympics sport

- **Athlete Leadership:**
Lead the continued development of the Athlete Leadership programme, empowering athletes to take on leadership roles within sport and the wider community.
- **Young Athletes:**
Grow and enhance the Young Athletes programme to support physical and social development in children aged 4–12 years through inclusive play-based activities that build fundamental movement skills.
- **Health & Wellbeing:**
Champion inclusive health initiatives and wellbeing campaigns that promote healthy lifestyles and access to screening for all athletes.

Team Leadership

- Lead and manage the Sports Department staff and volunteers, promoting a culture of collaboration, high performance, and continuous learning.
- Foster strong relationships with national governing bodies (NGBs), coaching bodies, and disability sport organisations.

Athlete and Coach Development

- Oversee the design and implementation of initiatives to recruit, train, and support athletes, coaches, and sports volunteers.
- Drive innovation in athlete development and opportunities, including pathways for Young Athletes and Youth Sports programmes.
- Promote and support inclusive coach education.

Governance & Compliance

- Ensure all sports clubs comply with relevant safeguarding and governance standards.
- Oversee risk management practices related to sports delivery, including event planning and risk assessment and insurance.

Impact Measurement Oversight

- Lead the design and implementation of monitoring, evaluation, and learning systems across all sport programmes.
- Establish KPIs and impact metrics to assess the effectiveness, reach, and quality of initiatives.
- Analyse data and generate insights to inform strategic planning, continuous improvement, and reporting to stakeholders.
- Ensure impact reporting meets the requirements of Sport Ireland, Sport Northern Ireland, and other statutory and funding bodies.
- Embed a culture of learning and evidence-based decision-making.

World Games (Winter & Summer) Leadership

- Oversee all aspects of planning and delivery to ensure athletes and management teams are fully supported and well prepared for international competition.
- Appoint and manage World Games Management Teams, including Head of Delegation, coaches, medical, and support personnel.
- Ensure all planning, training, and operational support are in place to prepare athletes and volunteers for international competition.
- Oversee pre-Games preparation, including selection, training sessions, uniforms, logistics, and wellbeing supports.
- Ensure that Team Ireland is fully supported to achieve optimal athlete performance, wellbeing, and an overall positive experience when competing at the Special Olympics World Games.

Stakeholder Engagement & Grant Management

- Build and maintain strong relationships with key funding and regulatory bodies, including:
 - Sport Ireland
 - Sport Northern Ireland
 - Relevant Government Departments
 - Statutory Agencies and Local Authorities
- Lead aspects of grant management and compliance, including:
 - Funding applications and reporting
 - Budget oversight
 - Outcome measurement and evaluation
 - Alignment of grants with strategic goals
- Advocate for greater inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in sport and physical activity.

Skills, Qualifications and Experience

Essential:

- Minimum of five years' experience in a senior leadership role, including direct line management responsibility.
- Demonstrated expertise in leading, managing, and developing teams, with strong people management skills and a collaborative leadership style.
- Proven success in strategic planning and operational delivery of large-scale sports programmes.
- Demonstrated experience working in disability sport or inclusive sport environments.
- Strong understanding of the Irish sports landscape, including governance, funding, and development systems.
- Exceptional communication, interpersonal, and stakeholder management skills.
- Experience in leading and developing diverse teams and managing cross-functional collaboration.

Desirable:

- Relevant third-level qualification in Sport Management, Physical Education, or related discipline.
- Knowledge of Special Olympics movement, its mission, and global framework.

Key Competencies

- Strategic thinking and execution
- Inclusive leadership and people management
- Athlete-centred programme design and delivery
- Results-oriented and innovative
- Relationship building and influencing
- Passion for social inclusion and advocacy

How to Apply

Please submit your CV and a cover letter outlining your suitability for the role to careers@specialolympics.ie

The closing date for applications is 5pm on Friday, 15th August 2025.