

STRATEGIC PILLAR 1

# PERFORMANCE



# WINTER EUROPEAN YOUTH OLYMPIC FESTIVAL

The 2025 Winter European Youth Olympic Festival (EYOF) took place in Georgia from 9-16 February. The event was spread across three separate clusters - the main village was located in Bakuriani with two satellite villages in Batumi and Tbilisi. 900 athletes from 45 countries competed in eight sports.

Team Ireland was represented by four athletes - three competing in Alpine Skiing and one in Figure Skating.

Ireland was also represented on the figure skating judging panel by Odhran Allen.

Julia Deakins and Kyle Gump were the Team Ireland Allianz flag bearers at the opening ceremony and Finlay Wilson for the closing.

The focus for the EYOF is always on gaining experience within an elite performance environment and enhancing Games-time behaviours.

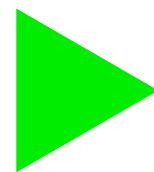
The event was very successful with all athletes performing well and utilising the opportunity in full to develop themselves for future senior Games events.

## Athletes:

Julia Deakins	Alpine Skiing – Slalom, Giant Slalom
Finlay Wilson	Alpine Skiing – Slalom, Giant Slalom
Kyle Gump	Alpine Skiing – Slalom, Giant Slalom
Allie Peterson	Figure Skating

## Support Staff:

Nancy Chillingworth	Chef de Mission
Linda O'Reilly	Deputy Chef de Mission
Heather Boyle	National Olympic Committee Media
Arjan Wanders	Alpine Head Coach
Geertje Derksen	Alpine Coach
Andrew Smith	Figure Skating Head Coach



# SUMMER EUROPEAN YOUTH OLYMPIC FESTIVAL

Team Ireland delivered one of its finest-ever performances at a Summer European Youth Olympic Festival, having sent 35 athletes representing eight sports to Skopje in North Macedonia in July 2025. The squad returned with one gold and five bronze medals and an outstanding 11 top-eight finishes, ensuring that the event was one of the most competitive and successful ever Team Ireland campaigns.

Gymnast Chester Enríquez was the standout performer for Team Ireland, claiming gold on vault and bronze on the floor to announce himself as one of Ireland's most exciting young talents. Athletics also excelled, delivering four medals including three personal bests and a national record, a testament to the quality of athletes coming through the pathway. The energy and competitiveness of the 3x3 Basketball team captured the hearts of all in the village but our athletes in all eight sports demonstrated that Team Ireland competes with pride, purpose, and belief.

The preparation for the Skopje Games was our most comprehensive in the Festival's history. A multi-disciplinary support team from the Sport Ireland Institute ensured world-class physiology, nutrition, and psychology were delivered and our athletes embraced every element, arriving ready, focused, and confident. A Team Day in July set the tone perfectly, bringing the squad together with energy and excitement. On and off the field of play, this was a group that supported one another, celebrated together, and represented Ireland with distinction.



# WINTER OLYMPIC GAMES

The 2026 Winter Olympic Games, held in Milano Cortina across Northern Italy during February 2026 came during an important consolidation phase for Team Ireland's Winter sports programme. Although the final team size was smaller than initially targeted, the overall performance was one of the strongest in our Winter Olympic history. The highlights were an historic top-10 finish as well as improved consistency across by competing athletes. This signals a shift toward a more performance-oriented approach within all programmes. However, as a small Winter nation, qualification continues typically to be achieved through ranking points at the end of the qualification period rather than through direct quota slots. This creates planning and financial challenges.

At the Games, Team Ireland competed in freestyle, alpine, and cross-country skiing. The standout result was delivered by Ben Lynch, who finished eighth in the men's halfpipe, becoming the first Irish skiing finalist and only the second top-10 finisher Winter Olympic history. Thomas Maloney Westgård delivered consistent performances in the endurance cross-country events, while Cormac Comerford and Anabelle Zurbay were competitive in their alpine disciplines.

As a result of their geographical scale, the Milano Cortina Games presented significant logistical challenges due to its multi-cluster, multi-village structure, requiring a flexible and adaptive management approach. In order to ensure adequate support, the HQ team was split across multiple locations. Transport systems functioned well overall, though the significant travel distance between clusters was challenging. With athletes spread across multiple villages there was limited opportunity for full team interaction, and the availability of shared team spaces was reduced, requiring a greater emphasis on pre-games camps and webinars.





Performance support was a notable strength of our campaign. A centralised yet flexible model was adopted, combining in-person and virtual delivery of services across physiotherapy, medicine, and psychology. The most innovative aspect was an international physiotherapy collaboration with Denmark and Iceland which ensured that all athletes had access to high-quality support despite being spread across multiple locations. This model offers a template for future small-team Games. Educational workshops and webinars also provided cost-effective and impactful support to athletes and coaches in the lead-up to competition.

Media and communications services were significantly advanced compared to previous Winter Games. Enhanced ‘on-the-ground’ presence, expanded RTÉ coverage and an embedded journalist utilising National Olympic Committee ‘E’ accreditation contributed to increased visibility and stronger storytelling about Team Ireland athletes. Digital and social media engagement was also notably improved, supported by dedicated resources and initiative-taking content creation. These developments resulted in greater public awareness and engagement with Irish Winter sports.

Preparation for the Games was split between a Dublin camp in May 2025 and a final Team Day and camp in Bolzano just before the start the event. The decision do this rather than a full pre-games training camp resulted from the diverse needs of the sports in terms of training facilities. Each sport was allocated funding to run their own training camp in advance of the Games. The Team Day combined a reception hosted by the Italy’s Irish Ambassador and the Irish Consul in Milan and was attended by athletes and family members.

The team camp in Bolzano provided an opportunity for the athletes to come together as a team in advance of the Games. After the event we brought the Team back together to celebrate at the Closing Ceremony in the Arena di Verona. This was followed by a homecoming in Dublin hosted by the Minister for Sport in the newly refurbished Department of Sport.

Financially, Winter Sport Performance programme support continues to present challenges. Smaller team sizes limit economies of scale resulting in a very high cost per athlete, and outside of Games time, athletes operate within largely self-funded systems. While financial support from Sport Ireland as well as through IOC scholarships was welcome and critical, it plays only a small part in what is required and the overall funding landscape remains constrained. This reinforces the need for a more targeted investment approach to maximise performance outcomes in future cycles.

Looking ahead to the 2030 Winter Olympic Games, several strategic priorities have been identified. These include adopting a more focused performance strategy targeting athletes with top-10 or top-15 ambitions, expanding access to year-round performance support services, and continuing to strengthen collaboration between National Federations. Additionally, expanding pre-Games preparation opportunities and continuing international collaboration models are vital to overcoming logistical challenges.

The Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Olympic Games were a significant step forward for Team Ireland’s Winter sports programme. The combination of improved performance outcomes, strong athlete satisfaction and enhanced operational delivery demonstrates meaningful progress. Challenges remain, but these Games proved a strong foundation on which to build, with the potential for further advancement through targeted investment, strategic planning and continued focus on athlete support and development.



## TEAM IRELAND RESULTS – 2026 WINTER OLYMPIC GAMES

Athlete	Sport	Event
<b>Ben Lynch</b>	Freestyle Skiing	Halfpipe
<b>Thomas Maloney Westgård *</b>	Cross Country Skiing	10km Freestyle 20km Skiathlon 50km Classic
<b>Anabelle Zurbay *</b>	Alpine Skiing	Slalom Giant Slalom
<b>Cormac Comerford</b>	Alpine Skiing	Slalom Giant Slalom Super G Downhill

\* Flag Bearers

# LOS ANGELES 2028 PLANNING

Following the Paris Games, the most successful Olympics in Irish history, work is already well underway to ensure Team Ireland arrives in Los Angeles (LA) ready to compete at the very highest level once again.

Paris 2024 set a new benchmark - 136 athletes, 15 sports, seven medals and 26 top-10 finishes. LA in 2029 is now firmly in our sights, and the central focus to date has been establishing an ideal pre-Games training base in California. A number of recce visits have taken place over the past 18 months throughout the greater Los Angeles region, with our staff evaluating facilities in 40 locations across the length of the coastline, from Santa Barbara to San Diego. These visits involved an assessment of everything from indoor and outdoor facilities to accommodation, dining, sport science support, as well as travel times to competition venues. In parallel to the facility search, sport-specific planning is also underway, with a full team camp plan due to be presented to all sports later in 2026.

A significant milestone on the LA journey was our participation in the first official IOC Open Days, including key competition venues as well as the athlete village housed within the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA).

Beyond performance, Team Ireland is committed to delivering an experience that matches the scale and ambition of the occasion. A LA Experience plan is currently being developed which will ensure that athletes, supporters, and the wider Irish community will be able to connect with the Games in a meaningful way. Central to this is the Team Ireland House, which will give athletes, partners, sponsors, and fans a vibrant base to celebrate Irish sport throughout the Games.

The Los Angeles 2028 Games is a remarkable opportunity, being held in one of the world's great cities, with Irish communities across North America ready to get behind the team. The ambition is clear - to build on Paris and deliver Team Ireland's greatest ever Olympic Games.



# ATHLETES' COMMISSION

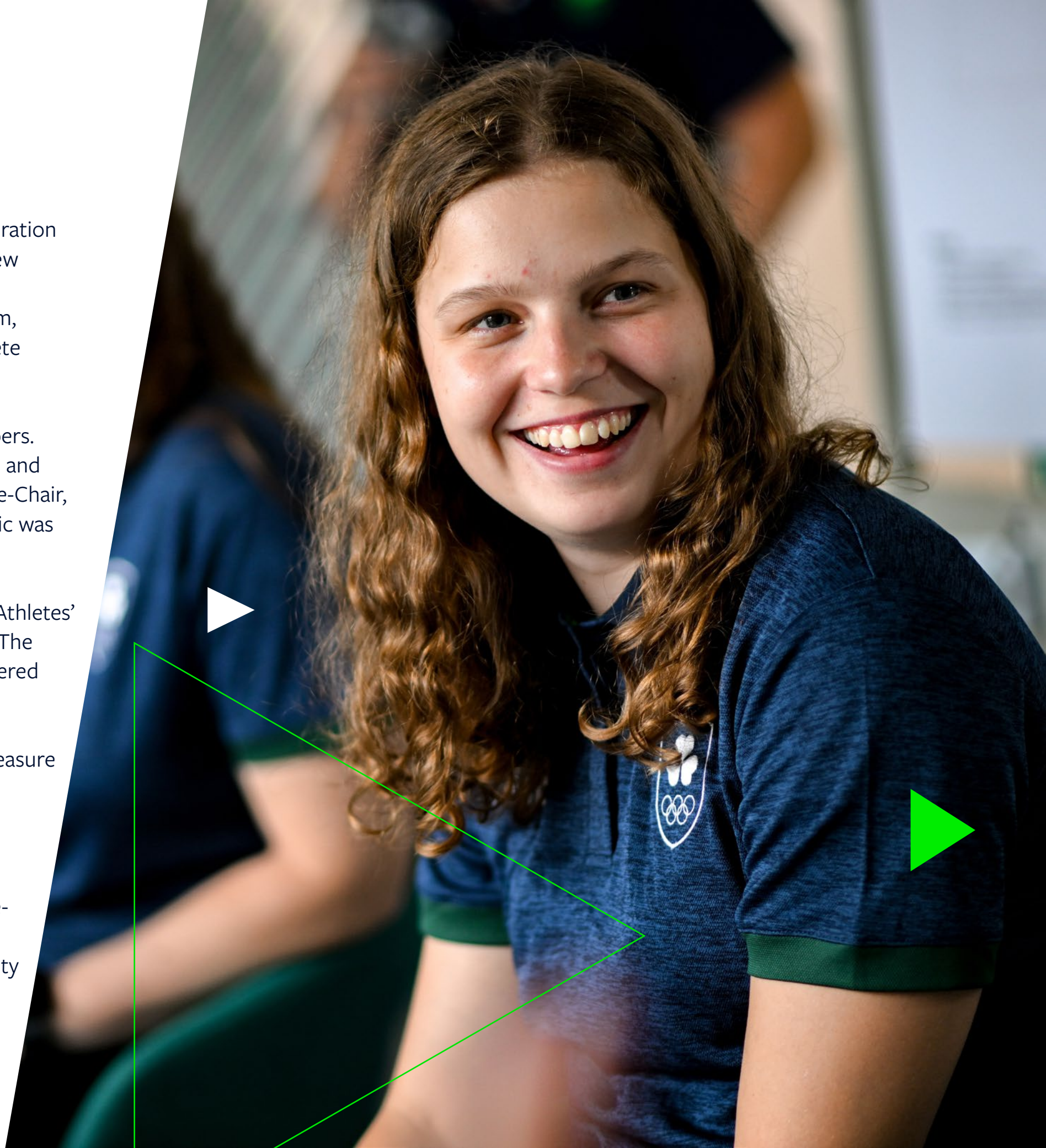
2025 and into 2026 was a phase of strategic development for the Olympic Federation of Ireland (OFI) Athletes' Commission. This period saw the appointment of a new Commission, as well as the development and launch of a new athlete-centred Commission strategy, strengthened engagement with athletes across the system, and meaningful progress on key advocacy issues, including tax reform and athlete representation.

The new 2025-2028 OFI Athletes' Commission was constituted with nine members. Members were welcomed at the first meeting by OFI President Lochlann Walsh and CEO Peter Sherrard. Aifric Keogh was then elected as Chair and Billy Dardis Vice-Chair, and bi-monthly meetings were held for the remainder of the year. As Chair, Aifric was appointed to the Board of the OFI in April 2025.

A major focus of the past year has been the development of a strategy for the Athletes' Commission to govern their operations through to the LA Games and beyond. The 12 week process included workshops and consultations, with athlete input gathered through a system wide survey.

A survey was circulated to all Olympians from 2016 on. This was designed to measure athlete awareness of the Irish sport ecosystem and to track changes over time. The survey received 56 responses, and provided valuable insights for strategy development.

At the end of January 2026, the Athletes' Commission launched its new athlete-centred strategy and playbook, designed to support continuity across future Commissions. The launch coincided with the introduction of a new visual identity for the Commission, as well as the rollout of a dedicated Instagram channel to enhance communication with athletes.



During 2025, the Commission also built a strong working relationship with Rachael Mulligan, who is the Athlete Support Manager (ASM) for the Federation of Irish Sport. Regular meetings facilitated alignment between her role and the objectives of the Commission, and Aifric Keogh and Billy Dardis formed part of the ASM steering group.

The new Athletes' Commission has also played an active role in national and international athlete representation over the past year as follows:

- ▶ Aifric Keogh attended the IOC Athletes' Forum in Lausanne and reported back to the Commission.
- ▶ Billy Dardis and Paddy Barnes represented the AC at the EOC Athletes' Forum in November.
- ▶ Harry McNulty served on the judging panel for the Olympic Sport Awards.

The Commission also consulted with Sport Ireland regarding pregnancy policies and safe sport, and in partnership with Athlete365 and the Sport Ireland Institute Life Skills team, supported the delivery of a 'Self Discovery' Webinar for athletes.

Tax reform also continues to be a major area of focus for the Commission. The approach has been two-fold with the first objective to inform and educate athletes of their obligations regarding the current tax system, and the second to campaign for relevant change to afford greater recognition of the role and sacrifices of Olympic and elite athletes.



In that regard, the Commission partnered with Deloitte to deliver a webinar to athletes on their social welfare and taxation commitments. Following that, with the assistance of OFI Board Director John Menton, the Commission produced a detailed proposal outlining three targeted tax-change measures designed to support High Performance athletes. The Athletes' Commission recently met with Senator Evanne Ní Chuilinn, advisors to the Tánaiste, and tax officials to discuss the following proposals:

- 1** Making Carding grants tax-free.
- 2** An Extension of the Artists' Tax Credit to include High Performance athletes.
- 3** An update to the current sportspersons tax relief to include all Olympic sports and to extend it to athlete's commercial income.