**Press Release**



**Loss of a Legend**

**Joe McDonagh 1953 – 2016**

**21 May 2016**

It is with healtfelt sorrow that Foras na Gaeilge announces the death of its Chairman, Joe McDonagh (Seosamh Mac Donncha), who passed away on 20 May. Joe’s achievements on the sporting field and in his professional career on behalf of education and the Irish language made him a hero among the GAA and Irish language communities. Speaking today, Ferdie Mac an Fhailigh, Chief Executive of Foras na Gaeilge said that “we have lost a legend and a friend” and that Joe’s passing will “leave a huge void among the Irish language and Gaelic games communities”

Joe was Chief Executive of Foras na Gaeilge from February 2002 to March 2006. During his time as Chief Executive, he laid the foundation for the operation of Foras na Gaeilge as an all-Ireland crossborder body. He also served as a member of Foras na Gaeilge’s Board from 2011 to 2015. His appointment as Chairman of the Board was widely welcomed in December 2015.

Joe was born in Tuam, Co. Galway, but spent most of his youth in Baile an Doirín in south Galway, where his father was principal in the local national school. After receiving his secondary education in Coláiste Éinde, Galway, he attended University of Ireland, Galway, where he gained a B.A. degree in Celtic Studies.  He then qualified as a teacher and he spent 16 years as an Irish teacher in Coláiste Éinde before he was appointed as Irish Language Organiser (Officer) with Galway City and County Vocational Committees in 1994.

He was appointed Chief Executive Officer of Galway Vocational Committee in April 2006 and Chief Executive Officer of Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim Education Board in July 2013 until August 2015. He had a particular interest in education, Irish medium education and in cultural matters.

Joe became well known as a hurler with the Galway team and among his achievements on the field of play, he won the All-Ireland Senior Championship with the historic Galway team in 1980, the National League in 1975, 2 Railway Championships with Connacht in 1982 and 1983 and he was selected for the Irish Allstars team in 1976.

After he retired as an intercounty player, he immersed himself in GAA administration and he spent periods as a member and as a Chairperson on senior GAA committees. In 1996 he was elected as President elect of the Association at the historic London Conference and he acted as President of the GAA from 1997 to 2000. He was recognised as a excellent speech maker and pioneering leader of the Association.

Other roles filled by Joe include his appointment as Chairperson of TG4 in 2000 and he spent four years in that post. The Government appointed him as Chairperson of the first National Anti-racism Committee and he was active in that post for a term of three years between 2000 and 2003. He was appointed as Director of the Regulation Board of the Galway/Mayo Institute of Technology, on Comhar na nOileán Teo. and on the Sports Arena Regulation Board of the University of Limerick.

More recently, he completed a three year term as Chairperson on the GAA International Committee and he travelled widely all over the world promoting Gaelic games abroad. His other interests included music, sean-nós singing and drama.

The staff and Board of Foras na Gaeilge extend their deepest condolences to Joe’s wife, Peig, to his daughters Muireann and Éilis and to his son Eoin.

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam.

**Further information:**

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