

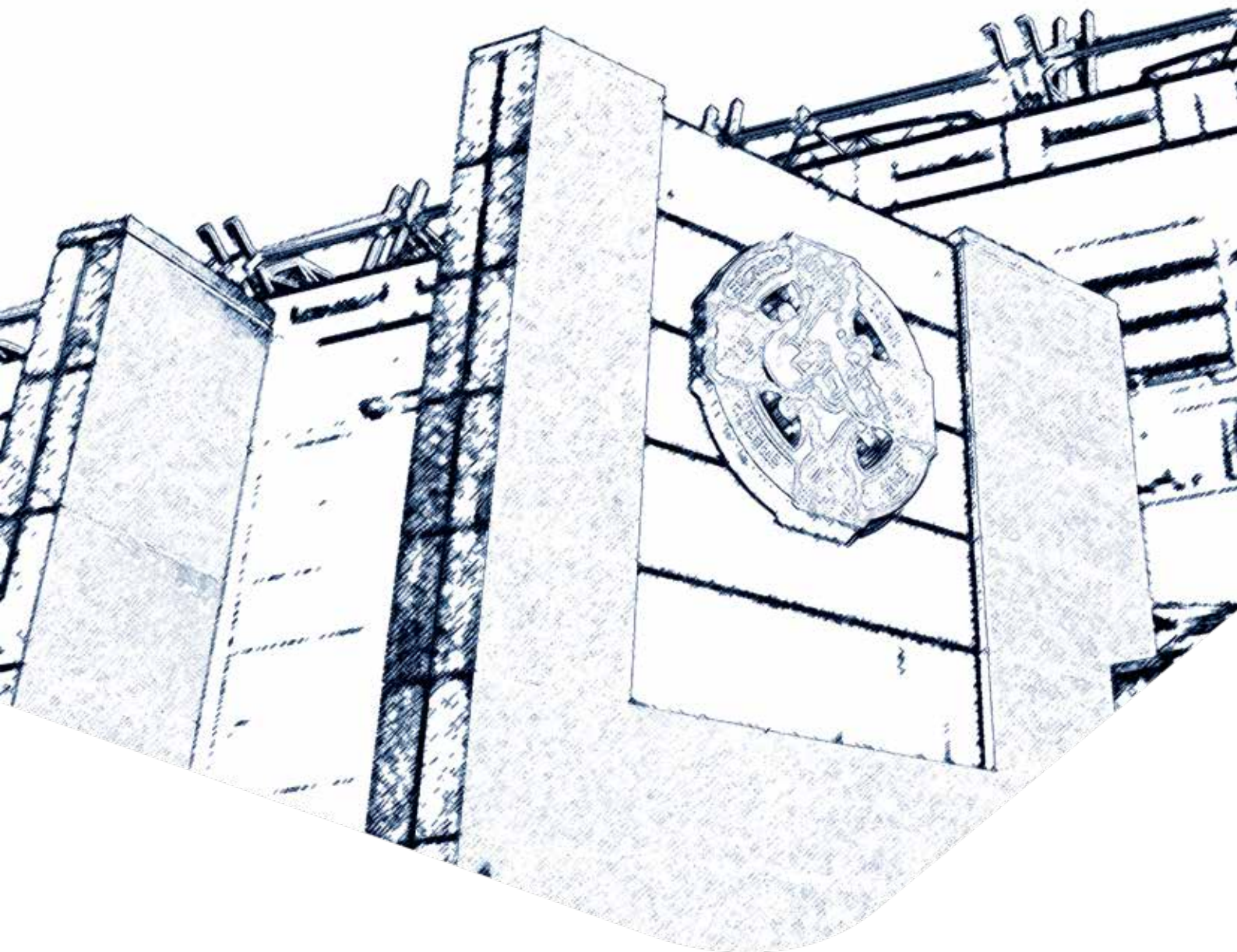


AN CHOMHDHÁIL BHLIANTÚIL 2020

2019 TUARASCÁIL AN ARD-STIÚRTHÓRA
AGUS CUNTAIS AIRGID







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**WE ALL BELONG HERE
IN THIS PLACE. AT THIS TIME**
WE BELONG NOT BECAUSE OF WHO WE ARE OR WHERE WE COME FROM
BEING HERE MEANS BELONGING
BELONGING MEANS KNOWING YOU'RE PART OF A COMMUNITY
A COMMUNITY THAT HAS A PLACE FOR ALL
WHERE POTENTIAL IS NURTURED
WHERE INDIVIDUALS BECOME TEAMS
WHO HONOUR THE LEGACY OF THOSE WHO WENT BEFORE
AND STRIVE TO BUILD A LEGACY OF THEIR OWN

**SOME OF US PLAY
SOME OF US USED TO PLAY. SOME OF US NEVER PLAYED**

**WE ALL BELONG.
BELONGING MEANS HAVING A VOICE
MEANS BEING ABLE TO SAY WHAT YOU THINK IS RIGHT**

**BEING LISTENED TO
BELONGING MEANS RESPECTING EACH OTHER
MEANS BEING THERE FOR EACH OTHER
ON THE PITCH. OFF THE PITCH**
BELONGING MEANS ROLLING OUR SLEEVES UP AND DOING WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE
WE ALL BELONG WHETHER IT'S OUR FIRST DAY OR OUR HUNDRETH YEAR
WE ALL BELONG HERE BECAUSE THIS PLACE BELONGS TO US ALL

**OUR GAA
WHERE WE ALL BELONG**

CONGRESS 2020

AN CLÁR

AN AOINE, 28 FEABHRA 2020

2.00pm	Delegate Registration opens
2.00pm	Ard-Chomhairle meeting
4.00pm	Workshops
6.15pm	Dinner
7.30pm	Opening of Congress Adoption of Minutes & Standing Orders
7.40pm	Distribution of ballot papers for election of Uachtarán-tofa
8.00pm	Tuarascáil an Ard-Stiúrthóra
8.30pm	Adoption of Accounts
9.00pm	Consideration of Motions
9.45pm	Announcement of result of ballot followed by Uachtarán-tofa address
10.00pm	Congress adjourns

AN SATHARN, 29 FEABHRA 2020

9.30am	Resumption of Congress Oral reports from Workshops
10.45am	Consideration of motions
12.10pm	YouthReps Report to Congress
12.30pm	Óráid an Uachtaráin
1.00pm	Lunch
2.00pm	Resumption of Congress/consideration of remaining Motions
5.00pm	Conclusion of Congress
5.15pm	Ard-Chomhairle meeting

UACHTARÁN-TOFA

Ainmniúcháin

Diarmuid Ó Súilleabháin	(Corcaigh)
Labhrás Mac Cárthaigh	(Nua Eabhrac)
Iarlaith Ó Broin	(Ard Mhacha)
Micheál Mac Conncarraigí	(Ros Comáin)
Séamus Ó Bolguir	(Ceatharlach)

STANDING ORDERS

In order that the proceedings of Annual Congress be carried out without delay, the following Standing Orders will be observed:

1. The Proposer of a Resolution or of an Amendment thereto may speak for five minutes, but not more than five minutes.
2. A delegate speaking to a Resolution or of an Amendment must not exceed three minutes. A maximum of two delegates from any one County shall speak on any one motion.
3. The Proposer of a Resolution or an Amendment may speak a second time for three minutes before a vote is taken, but no other delegate may speak a second time to the same Resolution or Amendment.
4. The Uachtarán may at any time he considers a matter has been sufficiently discussed call on the Proposer for a reply, and when that has been given a vote must be taken.
5. A delegate may, with the consent of the Uachtarán, move "that the question be now put", after which when the Proposer has spoken, a vote must be taken.
6. Where the Congress considers it appropriate, a vote may be by secret ballot.
7. A speaker to the Ard-Stiúrthóir's Report/ Workshop reports or to any other general discussion shall not exceed three minutes on any one topic.
8. Any motion seeking to amend a rule in the Official Guide must have a majority equal to three-fifths of those present, entitled to vote and voting.
9. Standing Orders shall not be suspended for the purpose of considering any matter not on the Agenda except by the consent of a majority equal to two-thirds of those present, entitled to vote and voting.
10. The Uachtarán may change the order of items on the agenda with the support of a simple majority of those present, entitled to vote and voting.

THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG

2019 will forever be recalled by members and supporters of the GAA as the year that history was made on the field of play, a history which many of us wondered would we ever witness. The famed 'five-in-a-row' attempts of a select number of teams of the past - in both codes - had long since captured the imagination creating their own niche in the story of the GAA.

Could and would this latest attempt by the footballers of Dublin be any different to those gallant but ultimately failed attempts to secure a fifth consecutive senior title in-a-row?

And if so, why and how?

When it came down to it, the excellence of this group of footballers and their management team was laid bare after being tested in the furnace of not one, but two All-Ireland finals.

Both of those games reminded us of the splendour of Gaelic football and the classic pairing of Dublin v Kerry seemed to add further to the intrigue in the fixture.

The tenacity shown by the eventual winners in the drawn game was admirable, keeping at bay a rampaging Kerry team who came of age on the back of an emerging group of talented young footballers.

That Dublin not only clung on, despite being a man short for more than 35 minutes of the game, but went closest to winning the game, underlined the leadership in their ranks that has served them so well in recent years.

The first half of the replay was breathtaking with unerring accuracy and sublime score-taking under the Croke Park floodlights and a picturesque capital sky.

The final whistle signalled the completion of a remarkable achievement, one that has reset the bar of excellence at an even higher level than that set by great teams of the past.

If hurling had grabbed the limelight and plaudits in recent years owing to the magnificence and frequency of classic encounters, it didn't disappear off the radar after another stellar season for the game.

The success of the provincial round-robin championship was once again impossible to ignore bringing as it does games into towns and cities across the country on such a regular basis.

The last day drama of the group stages of the Leinster Championship will never be forgotten as results in Wexford and Parnell Park sent the previous year's finalists Galway crashing out in mid-summer.

Tipperary's emergence thereafter, having seen off the challenge of Laois at the quarter-final stage, was the story of the remainder of the championship, arguably peaking with a memorable semi-final success over Wexford after a thrilling spectacle.

The second-half of their final encounter with Kilkenny allowed them to power home and seal another All-Ireland success for the county, rewarding in the process, some of the great stalwarts of the game in their team.

It goes without saying that the All-Ireland finals and the inter-county championships are in essence the tip of the iceberg that is the GAA.

They may be the days that more of us can connect with at the same time given the scale of the events they encompass and the reach they have.

But they don't and cannot happen if the GAA wheel beneath stops turning.

We all have our affiliations and allegiances accompanied by different colours and different accents.

We also all have our lesser known standout personal or communal highlights that might resonate with others but which aren't shared on a grand scale and therein lies the beauty and attraction of what lures us to the games and entices us to commit so strongly.

What was your Mullinalaghta moment in 2019?

We all have fond memories captured and secured away from the glare that reinvigorates a club and a community and the hope that over the course of 2020 we will experience more of the same is the fuel that powers the organisation. We have no reason to think that the year ahead will be any different.

“We all have our affiliations and allegiances accompanied by different colours and different accents.”



GOVERNANCE

The GAA's reputation and standing in Irish society is perhaps our greatest asset. We all have a responsibility to protect that reputation, and good governance is the means by which we can do this. There is no need to dwell here on the travails of other organisations other than to remark that there is no room at all for complacency in the GAA. There are many respects in which I know we can do better.

Governance can mean many things, but in simple GAA terms it means not just doing the right thing, but doing things right. We published a governance guide for the Association some three years ago in which we signalled the five characteristics of good governance as leadership, effectiveness, integrity, accountability, transparency. Those principles are still relevant today, and paramount among them is integrity. Any deficiencies in the other four pillars will be significantly mitigated if we operate with integrity. Conversely, even the very best controls and policies will be undermined by a failing in integrity.

In recent times we have worked hard to put governance to the forefront of peoples' thinking in the GAA. The aforementioned guide was the catalyst for nationwide training on the topic for county officers. That effort was redoubled this year at the County Officers Development Forum and at our previous Congress. The coming months will see the launch of a new programme of specific governance training for club officers. This will be deployed via a combination of regional workshops and remote e-learning, and all clubs will be required to take part.

At national level we have signed up to the Governance Code for Voluntary and Not for Profit Organisations, as overseen by Sport Ireland. We have mapped out a series of continuous improvements to be delivered throughout 2020 which will make us a more robust and better run organisation. We will also pause in 2020 to reflect on our structures and how

they might need to be modified to better serve us. The Uachtarán will speak in more detail about this when he addresses Congress.

We are a volunteer-led, not for-profit, community based organisation. Our structures and our ethos reflect this and inform how we operate. That ethos should not just be something we all trot out when prompted, but something we readily recognise and strive to carry out our GAA duties by.

One means by which we can up our game is by reinforcing our governance framework. That is the structure of rules, policies and oversight that determine how we operate and provide assurance. There is a proposal for your consideration this weekend that will significantly bolster our rules in this regard, allowing for national intervention in matters in a unit in certain circumstances. A further proposal provides for the appointment of independent persons to County Committees and Provincial Councils. I ask you to give these measures your consideration.

Rules alone are not the answer though. Rules should be observed – not for their own sake but because they reflect and express in practical terms what sort of an organisation we want to be. Not every situation is best governed by a rule. Sometimes issues arise which are best expressed in terms of principle or policy rather than a rule. There are a number of proposals on that theme for debate at Congress this year as well.

We will be pursuing the establishment of Audit and Risk Committees at county level in 2020 and we also hope to appoint a designated audit and compliance officer at national level this year to assist counties to raise standards and to further the governance agenda.

This topic will be examined in detail at a workshop this weekend and will be a recurring theme throughout 2020 and beyond.

BREXIT

This time last year Brexit was a fear, an unknown, an uncertainty and a risk. Events since then have confirmed that Britain has left the EU. That process has now begun. However, much of the uncertainty still remains.

The GAA faces two specific threats. Like every other enterprise on the island our fortunes are linked to the financial health of the country. Of course our aims are not financial, but the likelihood of us achieving them, or at least financing them, depend somewhat on the economic landscape. The consensus is that the months and years ahead will pose economic challenges for us all.

Any shock to the economy which harms cross-border trade, damages enterprises operating north and south, and impacts on our collective prosperity as a nation will also harm the GAA.

The hope is that those challenges will be well managed at a macro level, and the target for ourselves is to ensure that we too respond where we can. That means currency management, keeping a weather eye on comparability of admission prices in both jurisdictions, supporting local businesses in cross border areas, and so on.

However, the financial and economic risks are really only secondary for the GAA. We are a 32-county organisation, and any type of enhanced border poses a threat to our day-to-day operations – both nationally and locally. It is absolutely essential that clubs and club members in the border region can continue to operate unfettered. Free movement of our members and supporters is essential.

We all hope fervently that border uncertainties do not precipitate a return to an era of security risk. Too much progress has been made since the Good Friday Agreement to allow that to happen.

I have to admit a certain dispirited resignation at the whole issue. I know it does not inspire confidence when the GAA's Brexit response is "wait and see". But how can it realistically be otherwise? It is very difficult to mitigate against a border regime of which we still – four years after the vote – have no detail.

I know the issue is bigger than just the GAA. The whole country faces uncertainty. It is up to our leaders to navigate a safe course through what lies ahead. The GAA can play its part too. We can reinforce and strengthen the communities at the front line, and the country as a whole.

We are a 32-county organisation, and any type of enhanced border poses a threat to our day-to-day operations – both nationally and locally

FIXTURES CALENDAR REVIEW

Fixture planning is a perennial issue in our Association. Last June the Uachtarán announced the appointment of the Fixtures Calendar Review Task Force to be chaired by Eddie Sullivan. The group was asked to consider significant issues affecting the national GAA Fixtures calendar, including the positioning and footprint of inter-county competitions and the time available for the club game.

The group embarked on a wide-ranging consultation process which included inviting written submissions from the GAA public, a questionnaire completed by roughly 1,300 respondents, and a literature review of the many previous reports produced by the Association which addressed the topic of the fixtures calendar and club fixtures generally. The committee also invited presentations from a wide number of interest groups and stakeholders.

The group delivered its findings in November. It is an impressive piece of work and I am grateful to all of the members for both the outcome and the process they employed.

We now have 32 recommendations for consideration, 10 of which are before you at Congress this weekend as we ask you to consider the establishment of new Governance and Oversight bodies for fixtures and redefine some competition dates and eligibility criteria.

A further 10 proposals constitute changes in policy rather than rule. As such they can, and will, be considered by Ard-Chomhairle in the near future.

The remaining 12 proposals demand considered thought on all our parts over the next few months as we assess significant potential reforms of the senior inter-county football and hurling championships. The hurling options are to stick with the current round-robin provincial championships or to revert to the knock-out provincial/back door qualifier system that was in place pre-2018.

In football, there are three options. An 8-team “provincial” football championship model; repositioning the Allianz League structure in the summer as a basis for the championship; or pursuing the round-robin quarter-final model currently in place. It is important to note that if none of these options find favour, the football championship will revert to straight knock-out in both the provincial competitions and the qualifiers.

We will hold a number of regional information evenings for county and club representatives in late spring/early summer to set out in detail the implications of each option.

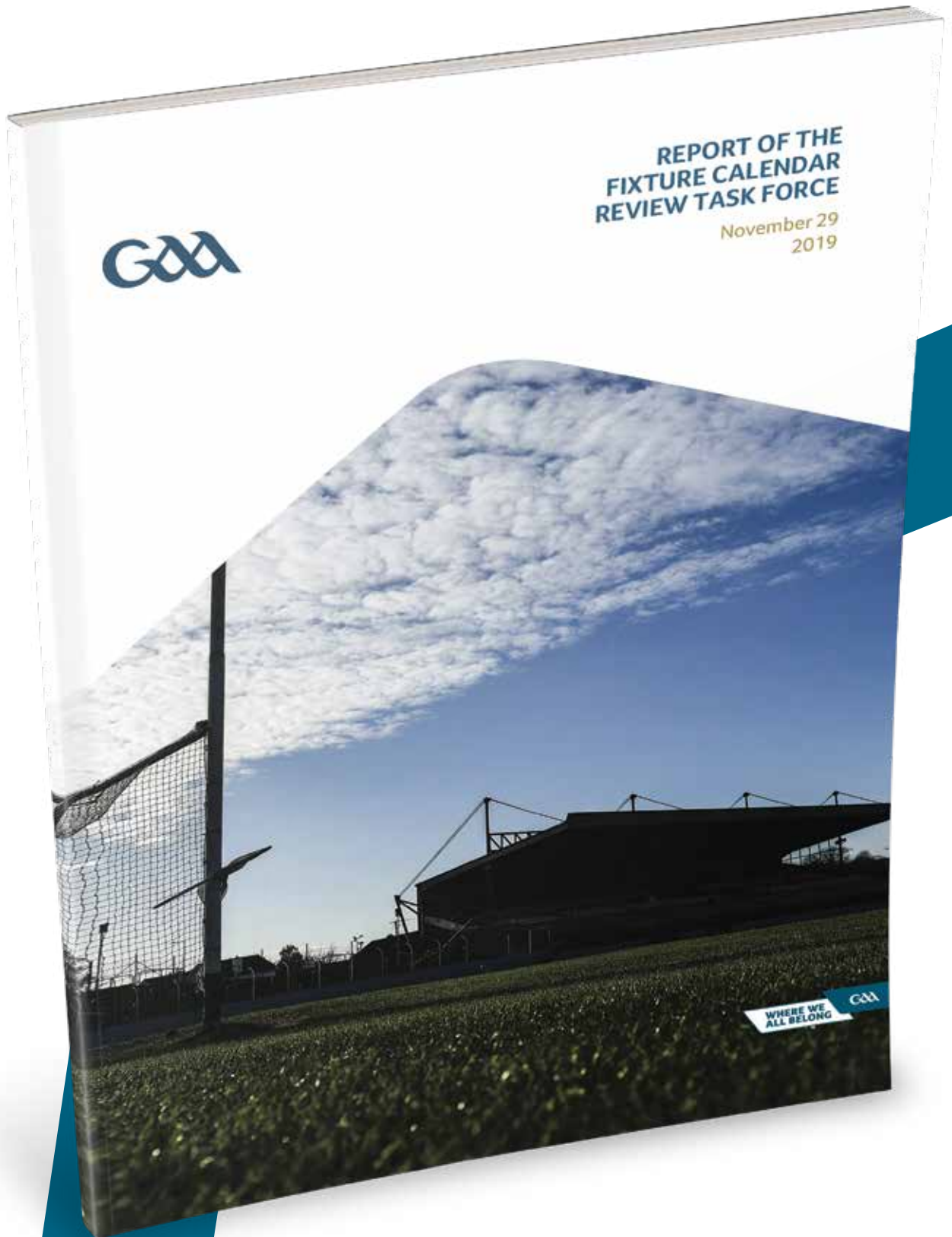
Please remember that the goal is twofold: to arrive at an optimal inter-county structure for its own sake of course, but also to deliver an increased number of weekends dedicated solely to the club game.

This will involve difficult choices.

Without change to the current structures and timings the space available for our clubs cannot be increased. These choices will be made at a Special Congress in September.

I hope that the report will stimulate debate among the membership and also focus minds within counties not just on inter-county structures but also on how to best use the club time that is available to them.

Please read the report of the Task Force and assess for yourself the options available to us. Come to the information sessions, get involved in the debate, and make sure that we make a well-informed decision.



OUR RULES

As we assemble this weekend to consider annual changes to our rule book, it is timely also to consider the place that rules play in our thinking in the Association, in our culture and in Congress itself.

Uniquely among the major sports in Ireland, we have ultimate control over our playing rules and can shape the characteristics of our own games. With that authority comes responsibility as well, of course. Responsibility to evolve as required without knee-jerk changes. On balance, I think we get that side of things right.

One consequence, though, is that our rulebook emphasises playing rules and associated disciplinary structures and is less prescriptive in other areas. So, a lot of what we do in other operational areas is governed by policy rather than rule. Rightly so. Except we don't put much store on policies. "If it's not in rule, then we don't have to observe it".

I saw this last year when reviewing potential motions proposed for Congress. A lot of really good ideas emerge which don't become rules because they are simply not appropriate to have in a rulebook. And implementing them as policies can seem a poor substitute.

We tend to focus on the motions as the fundamental business of Congress, and elections, of course. I don't subscribe to this idea. There is quite often more value in the workshops. The themes are an indicator of what is topical, and the ideas that emerge frequently shape our thinking and evolve into policies.

We need to move away from reliance purely on rules as a means of governing our affairs, and a culture of utilising them to best effect. We

need also to find a way to promote that policy and strategy aspect of Congress and make our gathering a forum for ideas and direction.

Take a look at the topics on offer this weekend and take the opportunity to get involved in the discussions.

Deviations from Rule

On the topic of rules, requests for deviations from rules have become a regular item on the agenda for meetings of An Coiste Bainistíochta and Ard-Chomhairle in recent years.

What started out as a means to permit an isolated one-year exception purely in the interest of the promotion of hurling/football has now become the first recourse in any difficult or inconvenient circumstance.

In response, this year, Ard-Chomhairle decided to apply more rigour to the process, and to refer all requests for deviation to the Rules Advisory Committee for scrutiny and offer guidance to Ard-Chomhairle. This process worked well, although deviations proved more difficult to secure. This will be the trend going forward.

Repeated requests on the same issue year after year, or multiple units seeking the same deviation, suggest that a change in the underlying rule is required. So, bring a motion to Congress instead. At least one proposal before you this weekend has its origins in this approach.

Club Constitution

The Rules Advisory Committee will undertake a welcome overhaul of the Club Constitution during 2020. It is accepted that some of the processes and procedures contained in the Club Constitution

need to be modernised. Not least to take on board societal changes in how we communicate. The Club Constitution has served the Association well and whatever guise it takes in 2020 it will still be at the centre of how we do our business.

AGM

On a similar theme, the Club Constitution currently requires that the AGM shall be held at such time as decided upon by the Executive Committee, but insofar as is practical shall be held before the end of November each year. It is vitally important that clubs meet this November deadline.

Otherwise you will not be in time to submit Motions to County Convention.

This oversight too frequently compromises the democratic rights of clubs. We all have a part to play in how the Association develops and the voice of the club is of vital importance in this process.

We need to move away from reliance purely on rules as a means of governing our affairs



A NEW FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

Oddly, our Association is often characterised as slow to change. Unfairly so. Any reasoned analysis of the GAA's trajectory in recent years will show an unprecedented willingness to question ourselves, our structures and our games.

We are good learners.

The newly minted second-tier football championship is one such example. I think all of the participating counties would uniformly endorse the success of the Ring, Rackard and Meagher Cups. And more latterly the Joe McDonagh Cup as well; competitions involving evenly matched teams playing well-contested matches.

All the runners start the year with a reasonable chance of success and you play your way up, or down the hierarchy via promotion or relegation – all of the ingredients we look for in a vibrant competition.

Furthermore, this is the stratified structure that applies all over the country in our local county championships.

Clearly there is a basis there to work on for inter-county football. The main counterargument was the principle of giving every county a shot at Sam Maguire at the start of the season. It's an argument that might not have had much logic to it, but I do think resonated with the romantic in all of us.

So, for that reason the new structure offers elements of both. A path through the provincial championship, and all the way, if you are good enough; but a second chance in a pool of similar ability.

I believe it will work. I hope we all give it a chance. The Association has obligations to deliver upon in terms of promotion and profile, and we will do so.

I hope in turn that we all give the competition a fair chance to succeed. I believe it will work.

A more pressing matter is a name for the cup. This weekend will bring news on that front, and we can henceforth drop that terrible "second-tier" tag.

GAELIC FOOTBALL PLAYING RULES

It has been a very eventful year in terms of football playing rules. This time last year we paused to examine the game and to ask if the rules were sufficiently rewarding the skills of the game, preserving the fine balance between attack and defence, and allowing the best players and teams to flourish. The consensus was that we were not.

Thus began a trial period of experimental rules during the Allianz League. The benefit of the measured approach was borne out in the fact that we started out with six proposals; that then became five trial rules; and in turn three permanent rule changes. The sin bin, the advanced mark, and the advanced kick out.

So these changes have not been introduced on a whim but after careful consideration and trial.

I am satisfied that no single rule change on its own will fundamentally alter the game or how it is played. But I believe too that all three combined will nudge the game in a more expansive direction. This is what was demanded of us in recent years.

2019 gave us a fine football championship, and a final for the ages. And I know that this was under the old rules regime. Nevertheless, just as one underwhelming summer never meant that football was at death's door, one great championship doesn't necessarily mean that's what will await us every year.

The changes in the rules are timely and valid. They applied for the majority of matches last year, and successfully so. This is not a leap into the unknown. We don't need to fear change.

CLUBS

Many of the topics and issues outlined elsewhere relate to clubs. It's nonetheless worthwhile to consider the state of the GAA club in the round.

We often instinctively attest that “the club is at the centre of the GAA”. That is still a powerful statement, although to my mind it is sometimes more of an aspiration or statement of intent than an inalienable fact. Without the club there is nothing else in the GAA. Off field or on. Therefore, the best measure of the health of the GAA is the state of the club scene.

There are clearly challenges. The topic of rural versus urban has long been an issue in the Association. And we have not solved it. For every club that is struggling to field there is another that hasn't got enough pitches or hours in the day.

The other burning issue is voluntary capacity. Any club is only as strong as the efforts of its volunteers and members. The concept of volunteer burnout is a relatively new worry and one we have to be conscious of.

Of course the responsibilities are onerous, and many of them are statutory. The various supports and training that the Association provides for club officers are important in this regard. But the best way of ensuring that sufficient people are prepared to give their time is to make sure that the lot of the club volunteer is an enjoyable one.

I do believe that the club scene is in good health. That is borne out by the standard of play evident on the field. It's also evidenced in the sheer scale of facilities our clubs provide in parishes all over the country. That network is without parallel in Ireland.

The national Association devotes significant time, resource and attention to the club scene. Yet that is not always apparent. Quite often the clubs with whom we deal the most are either those in some kind of trouble who need assistance, or those who are very successful and don't.

If your club is one of the hundreds who prosper quietly from January to December then the chances

Any club is only as strong as the efforts of its volunteers and members. The concept of volunteer burnout is a relatively new worry and one we have to be conscious of

are that your progress is without a thought to the national GAA. I would like us to do two things about this; to increase what we do directly on the part of clubs; but also to establish direct communication with clubs and better forge that link.

So what are those things we do for clubs?

Coach education, officer training, club loans, club draw, IT and website solutions, insurance, club player awards, data protection...I could go on. In short, we provide the framework within which each club can operate and hopefully flourish.

In return what I would ask of clubs is to promote the concept of involvement with the county.

Particularly for those who haven't been involved before. Leave room for the next workers to emerge in the club. Move upwards in the Association and bring your ideas, thinking and perspective to bear at the next level.

That is one way to share the burden. We need to promote that idea in 2020.

ROUNDERS

Rounders is an important and valued member of the Gaelic games family and of the GAA itself. The potential for the game is significant and it is important that we give rounders the profile and resources it needs to deliver upon its potential.

2019 saw a lot of important work on competition structures and schools development with a view towards increasing participation levels in teams. There was a marked increase in the number of teams registered for our junior tournament, which is designed specifically for the younger and newer clubs.

49 senior teams took to the field this year – up from 32 last year.

A rounders-specific strategic development plan is in development. A plan to build and grow rounders as a non-contact all-inclusive Gaelic code; to increase participation and help build links to a wider playing demographic within the GAA Community. This will benefit all GAA clubs that choose to offer rounders and will offer 35-55 year olds a chance to participate in their club colours. The immediate goal for this year is to structure the championships a little differently

and to create an identity around them. We will introduce underage championships and transition the juvenile games from one-off tournaments to a regular format.

We also hope to launch intermediate and junior club championships to afford opportunities for more games and more evenly matched contests.

Given the right opportunities, rounders can deliver so many positives for the GAA in 2020 and hopefully herald a new stage in the development of the game.

GAELIC PLAYERS' ASSOCIATION

In 2009 the GAA and GPA first agreed a recognition protocol that provided for funding from the GAA to be given annually to the players' body to deliver welfare programmes for inter-county players.

An updated protocol – which sees 15% of the GAA's commercial revenue given to the GPA for this purpose annually – was agreed for the years 2017 to 2019 and the last 10 years have seen a significant increase in the services available to inter-county players through the GAA's funding of the players' association.

Discussions with the GPA towards a new agreement got underway in 2019. We have not yet concluded a new arrangement and thus the funding provisions outlined in the 2017 – 2019 agreement will pertain for 2020.

While there are clearly some differences in emphasis between the GPA and ourselves, the end goal for us all remains broadly the same.

That means an agreement that helps protect the amateur status into the future and allows for a well-funded players body to provide services for inter-county players.

It also means facilitating players to continue their volunteer commitment to their counties.

We are continuing dialogue with the GPA in this context and I am confident that progress will be made in the coming months.



CLONLIFFE COLLEGE

A hugely significant development for the Association, and one which will leave a legacy for generations to come, was the acquisition of Clonliffe College in Drumcondra, adjacent to Croke Park.

The property comprises 31.8 acres, including the college buildings and the protected structure known locally as the Red House. The intention is to utilise 12.8 acres for the development of two full-sized GAA pitches, a club house, and changing room facilities. This represented a very rare opportunity to acquire playing facilities in a densely populated area.

The proposed usage will be similar to that at our centre in Abbotstown, with clubs, schools and county teams locally and from all over the country using the facilities. Indeed the demand for Abbotstown is such that I expect the Clonliffe pitches to be continually in use.

We retain a further 1.1 acres for a potential hotel development, and we may also retain the Red House – that is currently under consideration.

We have already sold the remaining lands to the international property development company, Hines. The site will be developed for housing, including a stipulation of 10% affordable housing and 10% social housing.

The scheme will see the local area of Drumcondra and Ballybough significantly transformed and revitalised and will build a new and vibrant community on our doorstep.

The financial results of various transactions are not fully reflected in our accounts as the deal concluded after the year end. However the sale proceeds will be such as to

fully fund the acquisition and the pitch development, and to offer potential for a future income stream to the Association to further promote our aims.

Patrons can be reassured also that parking on match days will continue to be available.

The site will be developed for housing, including a stipulation of 10% affordable housing and 10% social housing



ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE

The first report of the ESRI – “Playing Senior Inter-County Gaelic Games: Experiences, Realities and Consequences” – was published in 2018 and its findings have been useful in helping to shape many of our policies in relation to inter-county players and the inter-county game. It is still too early to say that these policies are having a meaningful effect for our players, but I am confident that in time they will. This research was important and in time its value will be fully appreciated.

2019 saw a further expansion upon this theme. The second and final report from the ESRI in this context was published in December 2019. Entitled “Safeguarding Amateur Athletes: an examination of player welfare among senior inter-county GAA players”, it examined how the commitment levels required to play inter-county hurling and football affect players’ lives.

Among the key findings were that:

- Inter-county players are highly educated, with 61% having a university degree compared to 35% of the general male population of the same age.
- One in four players are choosing a career path after second-level education that facilitates playing inter-county.
- Roughly 80 per cent of players reported difficulty balancing the demands of studying and playing during their education course.
- The proportion of inter-county players who consume alcohol is similar to the general male population of the same age, but there is a tendency to consume higher amounts of alcohol when they do drink, and particularly in the pre-season and off-season.
- That almost nine out of 10 players consume supplements.

Many of the issues highlighted underpin the core welfare reasons behind our annual funding of the GPA and the necessity for the players’ body to continue to roll out initiatives that can help address these concerns.

The research noted that two key areas where players would like to receive more support were “professional career” and “how to keep their inter-county participation in perspective” – both areas in which the GPA currently provide meaningful services. While the information on supplement usage and alcohol consumption may be concerning, it signals a need for us to develop and deliver better education and awareness for our players on these matters. I have no doubt that we can achieve this.

Many of the issues highlighted underpin the core welfare reasons...and the necessity for the players’ body to continue to roll out initiatives that can help address these concerns



STRATEGIC PLAN

Shortly after starting my term as Ard-Stiúirthóir in 2018, I was pleased to launch Fís Shoiléir 2021 – a three-year strategic vision and action plan.

However, identifying priorities, drafting plans and knowing what must be done is not enough. We are measured by what we actually implement. So, I am pleased to report that significant progress was made on a number of planned fronts in 2019.

Some of the main highlights were:

- The completion of the work by the Fixtures Calendar Review Task Force.
- The introduction of the Tier 2 Football Championship.
- The publication of a revised policy on Talent Academy Squads and the start of its implementation.
- The review of administrative roles and organising structures across the Association.
- The alignment of club officer training across the GAA, LGFA and Camogie Association.
- The creation of an organisation-wide communications strategy.
- The development of a data-based tool to facilitate evidence-based planning and decision making regarding major demographic changes in our communities.

These are to highlight but a few of our current strategic projects. The progress is largely thanks to the tremendous dedication and commitment of the volunteer-led committees and dedicated staff.

All parties have worked closely to form ideas and decide on approaches for implementing them in conjunction with the network of volunteers and staff at club, county and provincial levels.

Work will continue in 2020 and we will seek to make the GAA better for members, players, supporters and the general public when they participate in or support our games.

I look forward to updating you on more progress in the year ahead.

*...PROGRESS
IS LARGELY
THANKS TO THE
TREMENDOUS
DEDICATION AND
COMMITMENT OF
THE VOLUNTEER-
LED COMMITTEES AND
DEDICATED STAFF*

FÍS SHOILÉIR



STRATEGIC PLAN 2018 - 20



CAMOGIE AND LADIES FOOTBALL

2019 was another very successful year for both Ladies Football and Camogie. Quite apart from celebrating matters on-field I sincerely hope that both organisations will reflect on ever-flourishing relations with the GAA as highlights.

The Memorandum of Understanding between the three organisations is the blueprint for how we plan to evolve and grow, both in our own rights and together. That blueprint dates from 2016 and progress since then has been steady.

Rather than preoccupying ourselves with hierarchies and territories we have consciously decided to focus on making alignment an everyday reality through the everyday things that affect members the most. So, this year's successes have been in the realm of venues, fixture alignment and facilities sharing.

This approach has also helped us to identify what we feel will be the biggest practical obstacles. This year we will put specific emphasis on memberships - calendar, rates, cross-organisation membership and so on. We will also conclude on insurance and player injury measures in common.

One very significant development was our invitation to both sister organisations to nominate an independent representative to each of Ard-Chomhairle and An Coiste Bainistíochta.

Those representatives took their places mid-year, and have already made a very valuable contribution. They bring an independent and outside perspective to our leadership.

At this stage I think we all agree that our eventual goal is not amalgamation or takeover. Instead it is likely that our ultimate shape will be something of a federal partnership, and a combination of equals.

The "One Club" model is now firmly established between GAA, Ladies Football and Camogie. 40% of GAA clubs currently operate on that basis; Another 40% have ambitions or plans to do so.

Our clubs have spoken on this and the combined future for all three bodies is brighter together.

...it is likely that our ultimate shape will be something of a federal partnership, and a combination of equals



PÁIRC UÍ CHAOIMH: AN ONGOING CHALLENGE

The costs associated with the redevelopment of Páirc Uí Chaoimh have been topical for some time. They pose a considerable challenge for Cork to overcome, and the assistance which Central Council has been required to give poses in turn a challenge for the Association. The costs and liabilities are reflected in Cork's financial statements. The financial statements of the Páirc Uí Chaoimh stadium itself are currently being audited and will be published in March. Nevertheless, I want to take the opportunity now to set out the full picture and what lies ahead.

The Financial Background

Early projections for the refurbishment of Páirc Uí Chaoimh put the estimated cost of the project at €78.5m. This cost was to be borne by GAA funds both locally and nationally and by state funding. And without any recourse to borrowings. Central Council's capital grant to the project was €20m.

However, project costs escalated and budgetary control proved inadequate. Costs also increased due to the emergence of elements that were never within the original scope but subsequently proved to be needed – the pitch being foremost among those. To exacerbate those problems, the income streams identified to fund the project failed to materialise. The sale of 10-year premium seats was undersubscribed and land that was earmarked to be sold to fund part of the build cost proved to be overvalued. That sale is now pending.

Several significant elements are still under negotiation. Hence the ultimate cost of the project is still not finalised, but an ultimate cost of €96m is reliably projected.

Borrowings

A bank facility was negotiated to allow the project to reach completion. This loan was cosigned by the

Cork County Board, the Páirc Uí Chaoimh Stadium company and the Croke Park Stadium company. In addition, a further round of financial support was required from Central GAA over the past 18 months. This was to fund critical stadium completion works, including the pitch. This additional funding took the form of a loan of €10m.

The Current Position

Bank borrowings for the project currently stand at €21.5m. There is also a debt owed to Croke Park of €10m. The anticipated resolution of various ongoing negotiations and the sale of assets will leave an underlying long-term debt in the region of €20m. These loans are recorded in the accounts of Cork County Board and the primary responsibility for repayment rests with Cork and the Páirc Uí Chaoimh stadium.

The Challenge Ahead

It must be acknowledged that debt repayment of this scale will prove to be very challenging for both the Cork County Committee and its Páirc Uí Chaoimh stadium company subsidiary. All avenues will have to be explored to resolve matters.

The wider Association expects and knows that Cork GAA and its proud club base fully respects the gravity of the financial problem now facing them. There is a clear and simple expectation that Cork will face this challenge head on and deal with it. I know that Cork does realise the scale of the issue and does accept its role in resolving it. I am encouraged to report that an eminent and capable board is in place in the stadium to guide it. A coordinated, forward-looking business plan to deal with the likely funding difficulties is in preparation. Restructuring of Cork's finances and fundraising has begun. Repayment schedules have been agreed and repayments have in fact commenced.

Other counties have faced similar challenges before.

They have all faced up to their responsibilities and, with guidance, have emerged to good financial standing. As Cork honour their commitments and meet their repayments, as I am sure they will, then the road ahead can be navigated safely. A healthy Cork GAA is vital for the wellbeing of the Association as a whole.

Future Projects

Páirc Uí Chaoimh is a magnificent stadium and will be an important asset to the Association, both locally and nationally for many years to come. It is a ground of which we should all be proud. A further important legacy of the project should be that crucial lessons are learned and that we change how future capital projects are managed.

Future projects must be controlled centrally with appropriate oversight. We must engage professional project management expertise. Central Council funding must only be issued proportionately with progress, rather than up front. Projects can only be permitted to start when all the funding is in place, and not proceed contingent upon future income.

These measures, and more, are pertinent today as we contemplate improvements to a number of other grounds around the country.

The wider Association expects and knows that Cork GAA and its proud club base fully respects the gravity of the financial problem now facing them



CASEMENT PARK PROJECT

Progress over the past three years on the proposed new provincial stadium at Casement Park in Belfast has been frustrating. The project is currently in the midst of a second planning application. Undoubtedly the absence of government in the North, alongside a lack of clarity on decision-making during this political impasse, has added to the project's delay.

The restoration of the NI Assembly and NI Executive in early January 2020 was a welcome development, however. The agreement tabled jointly by the Irish and British Governments, signed up to by the local parties, provides a firm commitment to deliver a new Casement Park as part of the Regional Stadia Programme.

There are other positive signs too. I have been greatly encouraged by the recent visit of the Minister for Finance Conor Murphy, MLA and the Minister for Communities Deirdre Hargey, MLA to the stadium.

I am also encouraged by the resolute support from many quarters to deliver the project which will be transformational for the Association in Ulster, Antrim and Belfast. It is hoped that a positive planning decision for the 34,000-capacity stadium at the West Belfast site will be made within months.

Planning approval is not the only hurdle however. The NI Executive's budget approval dates from 2010/2011. The commitment was to deliver the strategic requirements of the three sports at a total budget of £110m at that time.

Almost a decade later the stadia for rugby and soccer have long since been built, and the cost of providing the originally planned GAA stadium have doubtless increased significantly. So, we will need to secure additional public funding to ensure delivery of the Casement Park stadium.

I must commend the Stadium Board under Chairman Tom Daly, and the entire Casement Park Project Team for their continued determination and resilience on this important project.

I also thank the Stormont officials for their ongoing support and I sincerely hope that 2020 will be the year when we will finally see physical works commence at the site.

It is hoped that a positive planning decision...will be made within months





OFFICER DEVELOPMENT

Volunteers and administrators are two of the most valuable resources we have in the Association. The difference we collectively make in clubs and communities across the world largely depends on the willingness of people to take on leadership positions, how well they are supported in their roles and whether or not they choose to stay with the GAA.

To optimise the support we can provide centrally, we redoubled our efforts in 2019 to inform, educate and assist volunteers and administrators at club and county levels to fulfil their roles in an assured manner.

At club level, I am delighted to report that we have partnered with the LGFA and Camogie Association to devise an integrated approach to the training of club officers through the Club Leadership Development Programme (CLDP).

The GAA launched this programme in 2016 and has delivered training to over 6,000 officers since then. Arising from a year-long process of planning from the three Gaelic games organisations, any new or experienced club officer – irrespective of code – can attend a range of workshops in their local counties and access online modules anywhere, anytime on any device.

What training is available, when it's available, and how it can be accessed is now much clearer for participants. I fully endorse the collaborative approach within the GAA and with our sister organisations. I passionately believe that we should continue to dedicate significant resources to make it work and intend to do so in 2020.

At county level, our County Officer Development Conference now attracts up to 250 attendees annually and in 2019 we expanded it to a two-day

format. We supplemented this event with several other briefings and workshops throughout the year. Most notably, a workshop on the future of GAA administration was delivered last April and one on running a productive County Convention in October.

One exciting new development in 2019 was the introduction of a team development initiative for County Executives. This is a facilitated 12-hour programme which pilots with six counties commencing in January 2020. I look forward to seeing how the initiative improves the effectiveness and efficiency of the participating counties and the aim is to expand the initiative to all counties if successful.

The aforementioned initiatives are to name but a few of the supports available to Club and County Officers. Doing things right through sound governance will be our top priority for officer education in 2020 and I look forward to introducing further ambitious plans in this area during the year ahead.

Evolving Officer Roles

The increasing complexity of the GAA volunteer's world is nowhere more apparent than at officer level. As you know, there is ongoing debate about the onerous requirements for certain roles and arguments for and against appointing people from specific backgrounds.

In its favour, direct appointment ensures a level of expertise. Against that however is our democratic ethos and the degree to which it has stood us in good stead for so long.

We have made some changes in this area in recent years and it is fair to say the results have been mixed. Specifically, we changed the remit of



Fergal McCormack, Cathaoirleach Choiste Náisiúnta

the County Development Officer – no longer to focus on playing facilities but instead to focus on developing the Association’s people.

In some counties the development officer has retained the old portfolio, in some the change has happened, and in some cases a single person has taken on responsibility for both areas. In some counties the arrangements work well, in others not so well.

So, this weekend sees a motion to regularise that situation. Give the idea some thought.

And give the office holders (whether the old arrangement survives or the proposed new one is approved) your support in their difficult role.

we redoubled our efforts in 2019 to inform, educate and assist volunteers and administrators at club and county levels to fulfil their roles in an assured manner

GAMES DEVELOPMENT

Games are at the heart of everything we do as an Association, and fittingly Coaching and Games Development was again at the forefront of everything that was good about 2019. The provision of meaningful games programmes remains central. The format of those games has to evolve in tandem with the demands of players.

Underage

On that theme, 2019 witnessed a huge upsurge in the organisation of Super Games nationwide. These are small-sided games that allow youth players from different clubs to play together on an informal ‘pop-up’ basis at times when formal fixtures aren’t organised.

There were over 5,000 Club Super Games Blitzes around the country during the year, with particular highlights in Connacht and in Down.

Other initiatives included the introduction of hurling’s Hibernia Shield to provide a balanced programme of games for Tier 2 counties from April through to August. 27 teams representing 21 counties took part and in total 69 games took place.

In Gaelic football, pre-existing U15 tournaments from across the four provinces were aligned to allow for cross-provincial activity. All counties took part with 59 teams entered and 157 games played.

Hurling continues to benefit from competitions such as the Táin Óg and the Celtic Challenge. The Táin Óg was extended to include U15 age-grade in 2019 and catered for 68 teams representing 46 clubs across 15 counties playing over 200 games. The Celtic Challenge saw an increase in the number of participating teams from 41 teams in 2018 to 44 teams in 2019. We aim to reach 48 teams for 2020.

These initiatives highlight the importance of thinking differently when it comes to competition structures.

They show the value of a consistent approach to age-grades at all levels within the Association and of having defined competition windows to maximise retention levels.

Cúl Camps

The Kellogg’s GAA Cúl Camps provide an interesting measure of the popularity and reach of the GAA. In 2019 1,250 camps were organised with a record 156,175 children taking part. This represented a 2% increase on 2018 and consolidates our position as operating the single biggest Child Sport Promotion in the world.

However, participation figures are only one measure.

The Association is committed to providing a quality experience to all camp goers. In this regard a specific Cúl Camp Coach Education Programme was rolled out nationally for coaches and workshops for Camp Coordinators and Head Coaches were delivered at provincial level. Over 600 camps were visited as part of the Cúl Camp mentoring programme.

We must also ensure that the camps are increasingly accessible to children with additional needs. This was a priority for 2019 and Cúl Camp Inclusion Training was delivered in all counties prior to summer 2019.

752 camps extended the activities on offer to cater for players with additional needs, while 11 Cúl Camps in a selection of counties were run exclusively for children with additional needs. We hope to expand upon this in the years ahead.

Securing the Presence of Gaelic Games in Schools

It is essential for the future of the GAA that children continue to have opportunities to play Gaelic games in primary and post-primary schools through blitz programmes and coaching sessions.

Our 5-Star Centre Initiative and the Future Leaders Transition Year Programme have both been established in recognition of the important role that teachers at both primary and post primary level play in this regard.

247 primary schools actively participated in the GAA 5-Star Centre Initiative during the 2018/2019 school year.

This means that 51,000 children received a minimum of 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity through Gaelic games each week. Almost 400 schools have registered to participate in 2020.

For older children the Future Leaders TY Programme has been hugely successful in engaging TY students in all aspects of Gaelic games from coaching to administration to event management.

The use of the GAA Learning e-Portfolio has contributed greatly to both the quality and innovative tone of the programme. This year 67% of post-primary schools that offer a TY Programme in the 26 counties will participate, and a parallel programme is being piloted with schools in the six counties.

Promoting Lifelong Learning

The National Games Development Conference is an annual highlight, and this year's event attracted over 800 grassroots coaches. Attendees heard from a wide range of impressive speakers discussing the theme 'Values, Behaviours & Culture – the Key to Sustaining Success'.

The capacity turnout was a testament to the interest and ambition that serves us so well among our volunteer coaches at all levels of the Association.



Prof. Niall Moyna, Health & Human Performance, DCU speaking at the Games Development Conference

We must also ensure that the camps are increasingly accessible to children with additional needs

2019 CLUB AND COUNTY FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

The GAA's financial landscape is becoming increasingly pressurised, and nowhere is that more apparent than at county level.

Our collective finances continue to grow. The number of people going through turnstiles all over the country is growing. Gate receipts remain the primary source of income at all levels, totalling €61m for our counties, provincial councils and Central Council in 2019. Significant advances have been made in recent years around gate controls and revenue assurance to ensure that all monies are accounted for correctly. Pre-sold tickets, Boscaí (a mobile match-day ticketing solution), sales through retail partners all help in this regard and also reduce the risks associated with handling large sums of cash at venues. Advance ticketing is our preferred method of admittance everywhere.

Sponsorship and fundraising now represent an increasing source of funding at club and county level. Such support is essential and is greatly appreciated. With such arrangements, however, come responsibilities. We owe a duty to sponsors and funders to discharge the monies for the purposes intended, and to provide appropriate financial reports which are fully audited and are in line with accounting standards.

Correspondingly, the funding needs to be routed through the correct county channels, with the appropriate controls and oversights, and the ultimate discretion for spending those funds must rest with the county committee.

Best practice dictates that properly constituted supporters' clubs should be central to fundraising in counties and that agreements with sponsors and funders should be documented fully to avoid any ambiguity.

A properly functioning Finance Committee is

essential in every county. But given the scale of monies involved at county level, I feel that counties should look to establish an Audit & Risk Committee to provide oversight of the financial controls and procedures that are in place and to bring a further degree of independent review, and objectivity to the county's operations.

My principle financial misgivings are not revenue related, however. The combined cost of preparing and fielding senior inter-county teams for the 32 counties came to €29.74m in 2019. This was an increase of 11.6% over the previous year, a trend that simply cannot continue.

Counties have largely managed to grow their incomes this year to keep pace with increasing costs. Indeed, the overwhelming majority of counties returned surpluses this year. But that is not the point. This is not sustainable in the long-term – or even in the short-term if we experience an economic reverse.

Quite apart from being sustainable, it is not desirable. Yes, counties will invariably secure the funds they need, but at the cost of immense pressure on the officers. This outlay represents a huge proportion of our collective resources. So, the other unseen cost is all of the other GAA plans in a county that are foregone or neglected – coaching, club support, facilities and so on.

The origins of these costs are many. The scale of professional expertise engaged with teams is ever increasing, and the size of panels similarly. There is a responsibility at national level too with the extent of the inter-county season.

The solution may well lie with rules and spending caps. I am hesitant only because our track record with similar rule-based enforcement around county teams is mixed. The solution has to start with a collective

recognition that we take collective responsibility and start to reverse the trend now.

Pressures abound too because of the imperative on us to provide playing facilities, and to maintain them. Financial planning is a critical part of a major infrastructure development or for the day-to-day operations of a county, and budgeting is an integral part of that.

County budgets are only beneficial if they are realistic. The budget should be approved by the county committee, distilled down to team level and performance tracked against it. Performance against budget will need to become one of the measures by which a county is assessed, and perhaps even funded.

The challenges are significant, but so too are the resources at our disposal. The greatest single asset we have is our officer cohort, and the value they place in the GAA reputation and the pride they take in their club or county, but the pressure on these people because of finance is huge. Clubs are well run. Counties are well run, but we need to get better.

Club Development

The only valuable measure of growth in the GAA, to my mind is participation, and the primary means by which we can deliver that is through our clubs. A healthy GAA means a healthy club scene. At national level, and in conjunction with the provincial councils, we are working to increase the grants available for the development of club facilities. The vision here is for a simple rate card of grants available and a simplified set of qualification criteria.

The GAA Development Fund accepts deposits from clubs and in turn lends those funds – together with Croke Park funds – to units needing loan finance. The interest rate on both funds deposited and borrowed is always equal, and currently stands at 1.9%.

A total of €18m is currently loaned out to clubs through this scheme. After a period at full capacity, further funds became available in 2019 and the scheme reopened. There will be further funding awards in 2020.

The GAA's investment in our grounds is without parallel in Ireland. It is vitally important to protect your club's primary asset. That includes ensuring your property is maintained to a standard, the title of the property is in order and that you are not hiring your property at undue risk. Insurance is a topic I turn to elsewhere but suffice to say here, please proceed with caution.

And so, to a financial theme for 2020?

Good financial management and good governance in all our units is of the utmost importance. Now more than ever. And costs of preparing teams simply must be curtailed. Any of us who have control in either of these spheres has responsibility.

The greatest single asset we have is our officer cohort, and the value they place in the GAA reputation and the pride they take in their club or county

BUILDING A SYSTEM FOR THE 99%

The Talent Academy and Player Development Report was launched in December having previously been adopted by Central Council in July and heralds a new Player Pathway Framework for Gaelic games. It focusses on building a system for the 99% of players who participate across the pathway without ever reaching inter-county senior representation.

At a time when sport is being challenged and influenced by elitism, globalisation, commercialisation and professionalism, the GAA is committed to its values of Amateur Ethos, Community Identity and Inclusion. The reports reminds us of why we exist, who we are and our priorities – which is to keep as many players for as long as possible. Crucially the new player development framework placed the CLUB at the heart of the player development environment.

One of the largest consultation processes in the history of the GAA has found many good practices in place, but also a number of challenges to the development of our players. The committee surveyed over 1,000 stakeholders across all 32 counties as part of the process.

The outcome is a policy for youth development which aligns club, school, third-level and inter-county games programmes to address the current concerns with county talent academy squads and inter-county teams.

The report calls for a new player pathway framework, alignment with the education sector, building governance and management capacity, and a coordinated games programme.

Integrating the recommended changes will be a huge challenge for the Association, but success is crucial.

Provincial seminars are underway and I can already see an appetite for the report to be implemented.

We now have a blueprint for the Association that will guide our future decisions around player development, games programmes, coach education and governance.

This is how we can ensure that our young players receive the right support at the right time, and how we can ensure that the GAA will be sustained and will prosper for generations to come.

COUNTY HEALTH AND WELLBEING

The County Health & Wellbeing Committee (CHWC) national forum took place on November 23rd in Croke Park. Representatives from 24 counties attended.

As per the strategic plan, a major objective for the Community and Health department is to grow the capacity of these relatively new additions to the county sub-committee landscape. To this end in 2019, meetings were held on their home turf with 19 County Health & Wellbeing Committees (CHWCs) and representatives of their county executive.

It was evident that the best functioning CHWCs have close engagement with their county committee, and often speaking rights or representation at the top table.

To standardise this model in all counties, a proposal to Coiste Bainistíochta in December was approved, recommending that the chairperson of the County Health & Wellbeing Committee be made a member with reporting rights of the County Committee (if not already). This can be provided for by way of County Bye Law.

REFEREEING

The Referee Development Plan 2018 – 2021 was launched last year, and significant progress has been made in the implementation phase under the various focus areas - Recruitment and Retention, Development, Mentoring and Advising, Fitness and Welfare, Governance and Administration.

In the course of 2019 we reappraised our training courses, reviewed the Advisor model and changed our overall Governance structures.

It has become clear to me during this work that the role of the Referee Administrator and the Administration Committee at county level is vital to all aspects of the plan.

The importance of this appointment for County Chairpersons and County Committees cannot be understated and their role is fundamental to ensuring the delivery of quality refereeing standards in each of our counties.

The implementation of the new rules in football will bring challenges to our referees at all levels. It is important that when rule changes are proposed, consideration is given to the capacity of our officials to deliver on what is proposed, not just at inter-county level but also at all levels of the games.

On a similar note, the divergence in rules between hurling and football is beginning to pose a challenge for club referees. I know that some of the rules of hurling and football have to be quite different. Nevertheless, there is an unintended consequence.

Feedback from the substantial number of referees who officiate in both codes tells us that it is becoming increasingly difficult to switch from one code to the other and from one game to the next.

Whatever about the merits of rule changes in

their own right, we have to make sure that we do not compromise the recruitment and retention of referees.



NATIONAL HANDBALL CENTRE

The next 12 months promises to be a huge year for GAA Handball with the opening of the new National Handball and Community Centre.

Situated to the east of the Cusack Stand, the building marks the completion of phase one of the planned rejuvenation of Sackville Avenue in conjunction with DCC.

The centre comprises 3 x 4-Wall Courts, 1 x Softball Court, 2 x One Wall Courts, office space, changing rooms and associated facilities as well as a community centre and café/bar facilities. It will be a state-of-the-art home for GAA Handball and somewhere that future handball stars can aspire to play.

I am delighted that handballers and members will finally get the opportunity to have a home that befits a modern progressive sport and one that will portray a hugely positive image for GAA Handball.

I look forward to attending many games in the excellent facilities in the future.

The project is significant too because it epitomises our good relationships with our neighbours in the local community. The building also provides a defined community space in the facility for local use.

We owe a debt of gratitude to everybody who has been involved in completing this wonderful project.

GAA HANDBALL

The past year was a hugely positive one for GAA Handball. With the long-awaited state-of-the-art National Handball Centre due to open in 2020 it marks the beginning of what promises to be a very exciting period for the game.

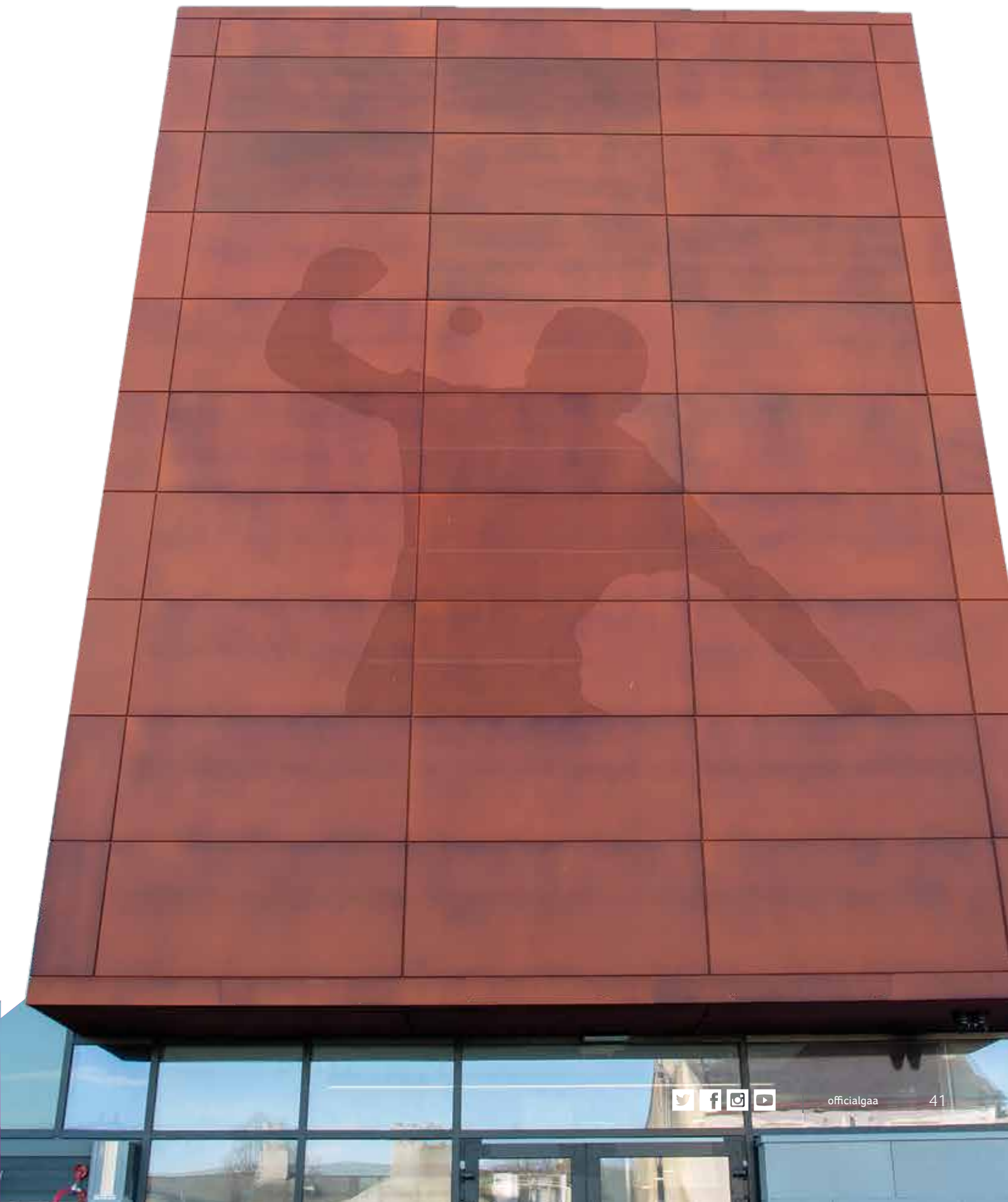
The One Wall game continues to be the biggest growth area for GAA Handball. It is a simple, cost-effective way to introduce handball and is an excellent addition to any GAA clubs' facilities. One Wall Handball offers an enjoyable recreational outlet for all members to use and can also help attract new members to the club who may not be interested in team sports but who can contribute in many other ways.

The benefits of playing handball in the off season are many as it can be used by teams to improve hand/eye

coordination, speed and reaction times, agility and footwork. It is a fantastic way to keep fit for players and members throughout the winter months. Plans are underway to incorporate One Wall Handball as part of the Healthy Club Project and it can be a very important tool in the efforts by clubs and counties to make GAA communities healthier.

I would encourage all GAA clubs to embrace the game and to consider installing a One Wall as part of your club's facilities and offer your members the full suite of GAA sports. Installing a One Wall is simple and cost effective and many clubs may already have the facilities there; it is just a case of marking it out.

Details of how to install a One Wall are available on www.gaahandball.ie



HUMAN RESOURCES

HR Audit

Our people, both volunteers and staff, are a significant resource. There were a number of initiatives and changes during 2019 which saw our Human Resources Department involved to the betterment of our units. And a number of projects are planned for 2020.

We developed a comprehensive online Employment Data Questionnaire for the purpose of obtaining essential data from GAA Units about their employment policies and practices, as well as details concerning their employees.

The resultant data is currently being analysed as part of a comprehensive and independent review of our employment structures, policies and practices across county and provincial levels of the GAA. Expect outcomes early in 2020.

Casual Staff

Following a Directive by the Revenue Commissioners in respect of casual employment in the GAA we formalised the employment of all casual workers within Croke

Park. This development will have to be replicated throughout the country in 2020.

Think particularly of match day turnstile operators, match stewards and Cúl Camp coaches. If their pay is not accounted for and processed properly it poses a risk to the unit and the Association.

We will need to review and improve the existing processes and procedures in place for the administration and management of these staff. The HR department in Croke Park will assist with this transition and manage the process for all units.

Payroll Support

Central Council can now operate the weekly or monthly payroll processing and accounting on a centralised basis for all counties. A number of counties are already availing of this service and I hope more will follow suit.

It eases administrative burdens on our counties and delivers cost and time savings. It will also allow us to streamline our payroll services across the Association.

COMMUNITY

Highlights of the 2019 year were many and varied across the wide-range of GAA initiatives and projects aimed at fostering better communities.

GAA For All - Diversity and Inclusion

The GAA is committed to providing game experiences and opportunities for persons of all abilities and needs – an objective that brings with it challenges to overcome but also opportunities.

The GAA's first international squad of wheelchair athletes travelled to represent us at the Para Games wheelchair tournament in Breda, Holland, in June. This helped shine a light on an under-recognised but ever growing element of the Association's ambition. The game is growing all over the country.

The annual Football for All event in Croke Park – run in conjunction with the Irish Special Schools Sports Council – once again offered in September the opportunity for almost 140 children with mild to moderate learning difficulties to play the game they love on the biggest sporting stage in the country.

Off the field, on June 29th, with David Gough and Valerie Mulcahy leading the group, the GAA participated for the first time in the Dublin Pride parade.

Numerous high-profile GAA members and personalities also turned out on the day to show their support for the GAA's LGBT+ community as the group departed from Croke Park.

IRELAND LIGHTS UP

The simple but impactful concept 'Ireland Lights Up', delivered in partnership with RTÉ's Operation Transformation and Get Ireland Walking, grew significantly in 2019.

The initiative saw 270 clubs across Ireland turn on their floodlights each week of the hit TV show (an increase of 120 clubs from its inaugural year in 2018), thereby offering their communities a safe environment in which to enjoy a collective weekly walk.

Over 60,000 walkers were registered over the six-week period resulting in great footage from clubs in the four provinces appearing each week on the show.

Participating clubs have reported significant

improvement in goodwill locally, with many people previously unknown to their local GAA club crossing the threshold for the first time.

The significance of this has been noted by many clubs struggling to maintain membership and player numbers, particularly in more rural communities.

*Karl Henry, Operation Transformation,
Uachtarán Chumann Lúthchleas Gael John Horan,
and Jason King, Get Ireland Walking*



CHILD SAFEGUARDING IN THE GAA

Consider for a moment the number of children and underage teams that participate in our games each week. These numbers are a huge achievement but they do test the viability of our codes, policies and practices and our adherence to statutory requirements.

In clubs up and down the country each week we reaffirm our continued commitment to the safeguarding of children who play our games. Child safeguarding is by its very nature challenging, but it can be a most fulfilling aspect of our work.

2019 was a good year for child safeguarding in the GAA. We delivered a record number of child safeguarding training workshops – over 1,000 in fact. We produced the first sports association on-line child safeguarding programme; we completed the drafting of the Designated Liaison Person Programme; we processed more than 30,000 vetting applications and successfully came through a statutory examination of our child safeguarding statement and risk assessment process.

Maintaining Safeguarding Standards

The GAA is now widely recognised for the manner in which we continue to develop and implement child safeguarding practices. The requirement of all coaches of underage players to be vetted, to attend child safeguarding training and to have a minimum coaching qualification all enhance the quality of coaching. They also contribute greatly to the confidence that parents and others have in our ‘underage’ coaches and our safeguarding procedures.

Regrettably however we still encounter non-adherence to policy and poor practice. There is a mechanism in place to assist any club or county who may require direction or assistance in these matters. Those of you involved in juvenile Gaelic games will be familiar with the risk assessment procedure and the GAA’s Child Safeguarding Statement. These have been, and can be, of major assistance to you in carrying out your role.

A lack of compliance is always regrettable, but experience tells us it can be resolved. It is completely unacceptable however to allow poor practice to persist, whether by design or otherwise.

Clubs that permit unqualified coaches or do not observe correct ratios of adults to children are not just in breach of child safeguarding directives, they are in breach of the law and may be putting children at risk. They are also threatening the credibility of the Association. If the need arises, please address this in your club or bring it to our attention.

Please also be aware of the positive impact the right approach by any one of us can make. From time to time you may hear somebody in your club bemoaning the work required to ensure the highest standards of safeguarding. It reflects poorly on us all when somebody questions the need to vet or train personnel who work with children, or the need for coaches to attend child safeguarding training. These are absolutely necessary. They make the GAA a safer place for children and coaches alike, and make our Association better.

We pride ourselves on having the greatest games in the world. We should also pride ourselves as being a leader in the field of child safeguarding in Ireland. That is the reputation we currently enjoy among our fellow sports associations and the relevant statutory agencies. That reputation was hard won. We must strive to maintain this position and to improve even further our daily practices.

Cooperation with LGFA and Camogie Association

A laudable aspect of our child safeguarding agenda has been the manner in which the GAA, LGFA and the Camogie Association work together to coordinate our efforts at both club and national level.

The anticipated publication of a new “*Guidance for Dealing with and Reporting Allegations and Concerns of Abuse*” will complete a suite of joint policy publications and deliver joint practise in our work with children.



THE HEALTHY CLUB PROJECT

The Healthy Club project continues to grow apace.

A total of 84 clubs completed Phase 3 of the Healthy Club Project (HCP) this year and were recognised for their efforts at the national conference in October 2019, attended by 400 delegates.

This brought to 142 the total number of clubs engaged in the project to date.

Their work in areas such as physical activity for non-playing members; mental health; healthy eating; gambling, drug, and alcohol education, including becoming smoke-free clubs; positive ageing (through the GAA Social Initiative); diversity and inclusion; and community development has benefitted the lives of tens of thousands of members.

None of this would be possible were it not for the ongoing support of our partners, including Healthy Ireland, the HSE, National Office for Suicide Prevention, the PHA, and Irish Life and the Tomar Trust.

...84 clubs completed Phase 3 of the Healthy Club Project (HCP) this year...



GAA SOCIAL INITIATIVE AND THE TILDA PROJECT

The GAA Social Initiative was instigated in 2009 at the behest of then President Mary McAleese to address isolation and loneliness, especially amongst older men, through renewed or new-found involvement in the GAA.

Seven GAA County Health & Wellbeing Committees in 2019 hosted free seminars on the topic of positive ageing, attracting almost 1,000 attendees.

The content touched on the importance to ageing

of exercise, diet, social connectedness, purpose, and location.

The partnership, supported by Irish Life, is set to grow in 2020.

It crucially is important that the GAA continues to offer its resources and network to our older generation. Both those who have served the GAA so well in the past and those who are newly discovered friends.

DRUG, ALCOHOL AND GAMBLING AWARENESS

Societal concerns regarding drug and alcohol consumption and harmful gambling will inevitably be reflected in the GAA and its membership.

Regrettably, in 2019 our staff in Croke Park reported an increase in the number of requests from clubs for support in relation to educating members about recreational drug use.

Feedback from young people at the GAA National Youth Forum included a perceived need to update our Alcohol & Substance Abuse Prevention (ASAP) Programme to facilitate sharing via social media. Work on this will commence in 2020.

The GAA's new Gambling Awareness Workshop 'Reduce the Odds' was initiated this year. We now have 34 tutors in 21 counties available to deliver a workshop to clubs and squads (as capacity allows).

The GAA alone cannot solve these social ills but we have a responsibility to our members – young and old – to promote positive messages. Our clubs should be safe environments and involvement in Gaelic Games should be a health-enhancing experience.

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GAA LIABILITY PROGRAMME

Escalating insurance costs are nearing national crisis levels. In 2019 a number of insurers left the Irish market, thus reducing the cover options available. Many other sporting organisations are curtailing their activities to manage spiralling premium costs.

The difficulties faced by other sporting clubs obtaining cover has been widely reported in the national media.

The GAA has always sought to protect all of our clubs and for that reason, we deploy a central insurance placement model. Otherwise many units would simply be unable to obtain standalone cover.

Alarming, the number and cost of personal injury claims taken against GAA units continued to increase in 2019. Annual claims costs now exceed €3m per annum. Without remedial action, and if premiums continue to escalate, the continued provision of the central placement scheme is at risk. These claims continue to arise from non-core Gaelic games activities, particularly use of GAA property by third parties.

Units continue to permit outsiders to use our property without adequate control and without ensuring that they have their own insurance. This puts your club, and the Association at risk, and it must stop.

Clubs continue to allow excluded activities at clubs events. Typically involving inflatables. The misconception is that if any accidents happen, Croke Park will bail the club out. And in the same breath clubs complain – justifiably so perhaps – about high insurance costs.

Please do not be under any illusion: Croke Park, or indeed county boards, generate no insurance claims. The entire cost of your premium is attributable to claims arising in clubs around the country. Many of these are either preventable or could have been better managed after the fact. We need to take responsibility in our own clubs to drive down this cost.

It is quite acceptable for your club to decline use of its facilities to uninsured outsiders. In fact, it is the club's responsibility to do so in the interest of its members.

INJURY BENEFIT FUND

The GAA Injury Fund, although little heralded, is one of the aspects of our Association of which I am most proud.

Over 6,000 players every year benefit from the fund. It's an arrangement no other sporting association offers. However, clubs had been telling us for a while that they were not happy with the claims system so in 2019 we undertook a full review of our claims administration service. DWF Claims were appointed as the new administrators and a completely new online claims system was launched. Feedback thus far is really favourable.

The benefits paid out this year again exceeded €9m – €3m coming directly from Central Council and €6m from subscriptions contributed by affiliated units. Rebalancing of fees against claims history continue and this year two-thirds of all affiliated units are receiving a 10% discount on their annual subscriptions. The new system is working.

We have to remember though that the fund is discretionary and supplemental. It can only provide benefits which cannot be claimed from other sources. Taking part in any contact sport involves risk of injury.

Players are not taking sufficient personal responsibility to arrange personal cover and are instead putting increasing demands on clubs to pay for surgeries.

Our clubs are under no obligation to pay for medical expenses or loss of wages that a player may incur. No other sport provides this and GAA clubs simply cannot be expected to fork out every time.

I am worried about the increasing numbers of hip surgeries required by players in the 20 – 26 age bracket. Over-training is widely reported to be a contributory factor, so continued education amongst players and mentors is clearly required in this area to safeguard payers.

INTERNATIONAL RULES

After a hiatus of three years, the International Rules will return in November 2020 when a two-game series will be staged on home soil between Ireland and Australia. We are also committed to a two-game series in Australia in 2022.

As ever, the long-term future of the game will be contingent on a number of factors. We need to present the event in such a way as to guarantee player and public interest. In addition, the series needs to cover its costs.

But first and foremost we need to prepare the team, and play the games without any negative impact on county or provincial club fixtures programmes. I do think these objectives can be achieved.

I think the series offers a valuable chance for our players to showcase their talents in a national jersey and I look forward to seeing them do that again this coming autumn. There are special plans for one of this year's games in particular, and I will return to that theme later.

*the series offers
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DERMOT EARLEY YOUTH LEADERSHIP INITIATIVE

September 2019 saw 120 young people commence the Dermot Earley Youth Leadership Initiative – run in partnership with Foróige and NUIG.

This initiative aims to foster the values and skills epitomised by Dermot Snr as a leader both on and off the field.

It explores and enhances attributes such as decision-making, resilience, communication, leadership, team building, critical thinking, and facilitation skills. Four-days NUIG-accredited training was provided to 15 GAA volunteers recruited to work with the young people on their eight-month journey.

The benefits of this programme will impact the young participants, the GAA, and our wider community for years to come.

The initiative aims to foster the values and skills epitomised by Dermot Snr as a leader both on and off the field.

RECREATIONAL GAMES

The GAA Strategic Plan cites as a major objective the development of recreational games. To this end a first national blitz for relapsed and retired players (aged 40+) was held in Abbotstown in November.

The working title of ‘Gaelic for Lads & Dads’ aims to recreate the success of the LGFA’s Gaelic for Mothers & Others initiative.

14 hurling squads and five football signed up with 160 players reeling in the years during what was a

hugely successful day of 9-aside recreational games.

The aim for 2020 is to expand participation through the Healthy Club Project and determine the capacity and demand for provincial blitzes.

A working group has been established to support the development of any recreational games programme, and to ensure alignment with coaching and games development and complimentary offerings already available through other GAA codes, such as One-Wall Handball or Recreational Rounders.

GAEILGE

Tá cur chun cinn na Gaeilge fíorthábhachtach don Chumann agus is cúis mhór áthais dom a thuairisciú go raibh bliain an-rathúil againn maidir le ról na Gaeilge sa Chumann i mbliana.

Ar cheann de na rudaí is tábhachtaí a rinne muid le bliain anuas, sheol muid Straitéis CLG don Ghaeilge ag Comórtas Peile na Gaeltachta i mí an Mheithimh.

Leagann sé seo síos fíis an Chumainn don Ghaeilge. Ba mhaith liom tréaslú le baill Choiste Náisiúnta na Gaeilge as an obair seo a chur i gcrích.

Tá an Ghaeilge le feiceáil ar ardáin chumarsáide Chumann Lúthchleas Gael, agus ar mheáin shóisialta an Chumainn ach go háirithe, ar bhonn laethúil anois agus tá forbairt mhór tar éis teacht ar líon na n-altanna a bhíonn le feiceáil ar rannóg Ghaeilge an tsuimh idirlín.

Bhí an Ghaeilge lárnach i bhfeachtas nua margaíochta an Chumainn i mbliana agus rinneadh leagan Gaeilge den fhógra teilifíse mar chuid den fheachtas ‘Tá Áit Dúinn Uilig Ann’ nó ‘Where We All Belong’. Bhí mír Ghaeilge san fhógra teilifíse a rinneadh do Chraobhchomórtais na gClubanna freisin. Chonaic na milliúin daoine na fógraí seo.

I mí Lúnasa, bhí Lá na Gaeilge againn i bPáirc an Chrócaigh ag Cluiche Leathcheannais Peile na hÉireann idir Ciarraí agus Tír Eoghain agus bhí an Ghaeilge le coisteáil agus le feiceáil go forleathan ó thus go deireadh an lae. Ceiliúradh a bhí ann ar ár dteanga. Chuir muid fáilte roimh 600 dalta bunscoile Gaeltachta agus Gaelscoile mí ina dhiaidh sin ag na GAAgaeilge Go Games i bPáirc an Chrócaigh i mí Mheán Fómhair.

Seoladh feachtas CLG don fháinne thiar i mí an Mhárta agus leanfaidh muid ar aghaidh leis an bhfeachtas seo i 2020. Déanann na mílte daoine a bhfuil Gaeilge acu freastal ar ár gcuid cluichí ó cheann ceann na bliana, seachtain i ndiaidh seachtaine, agus tá muid go láidir

den tuairim gur bealach dearfach agus praiticiúil é cur chun an fháinne le daoine a chur ag Gaeilgeoireacht.

D’éirigh linn an iliomad rudaí eile a bhaint amach don Ghaeilge le linn 2019 agus tá muid ag súil go mór le bliain ghnóthach eile arís i 2020. Is gné fhíorthábhachtach í an Ghaeilge de Chumann Lúthchleas Gael.

Scór

Bhí bliain an-ghnóthach ann do Scór, freisin. Ní hamháin go raibh Craobh Scór na nÓg agus Craobh Scór Sinsir le heagrú i Maigh Eo i mbliana ach rinneadh comóradh ar 50 bliain de Scór a bheith ar an bhfód freisin. Eagraíodh ceolchoirmeacha sna ceithre chúigí ag tosú le ceolchoirm mhór i bPáirc Uí Chaoimh i mí Eanáir.

The Jubilee celebration seemed to have invigorated our members interest in Scór and the two Scór finals – Scór na nÓg and Scór Sinsir – both had crowds of up to 1,400 in the TF Theatre in Castlebar. I am glad to report that the increase seen last year has been maintained in 2020 with over 1,700 attending the Scór na nÓg All-Ireland finals in the INEC Killarney in January.

During 2019 Coiste Náisiúnta Scór oversaw a review of all Scór rules, in all disciplines. This was not an easy task but all interested parties from members, to clubs, to counties and to provinces contributed positively and diligently to give us the new rules. I would like to congratulate all who took part in this process for the positive outcomes achieved.

Coiste Náisiúnta Scór will be composing a 10 year strategy for Scór this year, ‘I dTreo 2030’ and I wish them all the best with this.

Is cuid an-tábhachtach an cultúr Gaelach de Chumann Lúthchleas Gael agus tá sé iontach go dtugann Scór deis dár gcuid ball fud fad na tíre teacht le chéile chun an ceol, an drámaíocht, an damhsa agus an amhránaíocht Ghaelach a cheiliúradh.

SUSTAINABLE CLUBS AND COMMUNITIES

There are many ways that the GAA can contribute to the broader community and I have alluded to some of them elsewhere in this report. One further very topical and important area is the matter of our climate and sustainability.

In 2019 the GAA was awarded Sustainable Development Goal 'Champion Status' by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment (DCCAE). We are now one of 12 Champion Organisations in Ireland promoting awareness of sustainability.

We have entered a partnership with the Local Authority sector to lead our communities in promoting sustainability and climate action. We also plan to engage with relevant authorities in the six counties to ensure an All-Island approach.

A steering group, composed of representatives from the Local Authority sector, the GAA, LGFA and Camogie Association, have begun work on the development of a Green Club toolkit, which will be piloted in 2020 ahead of the roll-out of a National Green Club Support Plan in 2021.

This Green Club toolkit will be focused on the key action areas of Energy & Water Efficiency, Biodiversity, Waste Management & Plastic Use and Transport.

Sustainable Club and Community Partnership projects include:

- Development of a Sustainable Club Toolkit
- Sustainable Club Workshops
- Promotion and Support of Sustainable Energy Communities
- A Sustainable Development Goal Action Module in the GAA/PDST TY Future Leaders Programme, with contributions across GAA/LGFA/Camogie Association input at all levels of the Mainstream Education System (with the Department of Education and Skills)
- Green Procurement Guidelines and Support
- Further Developing Croke Park as a World Exemplar Stadium in Sustainable Development
- Alignment to Statutory Funding Streams

Our clubs have been innovators in addressing many of Ireland's social concerns and are already rising to the challenge of supporting sustainability.

To engage with the initiative clubs are asked to email: greenclubs@gaa.ie

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ASH DIEBACK DISEASE

In 2014 we had a national expectation of self-sufficiency of ash supply from within Ireland by 2020.

Then Ash Dieback Disease reached Ireland and it has since become rampant. The GAA responded to the threat initially by establishing the Irish Ash Tree Society, which includes representatives from other stakeholders such as the Department of Agriculture, Irish Guild of Ash Hurley Makers (IGAM), Coillte and Teagasc.

That group has been working on two fronts.

Research indicates that one tree in every 100 has resistance qualities. Thus it may be possible to identify ash trees that have shown resistance to the disease and to breed from these. While this is a long-term project, all of the indications to date are positive.

The level of cooperation and support provided by similar agencies in places like Britain, Belgium and Lithuania has been a big contributory factor.

The second strand of work involves developing a “Reinforced Hurley” whereby ash cuttings are taken from above root stock and reinforced through a process of jointing and the use of glue.

Indications thus far are that the reinforced hurls are just as robust as their ash counterparts.

However there are issues to be resolved. Any cost savings on the use of ash are likely to be offset by increased labour intensity. Similarly quality control could be problematic.

The Irish Guild of Ash Hurley Makers (IGAM) is considering an appropriate approval system.

This issue has not had much profile up to now, but the disease poses a threat and has to be addressed if we are to continue to develop and grow hurling.



SLIOTAR RESEARCH AND DIGITAL SLIOTAR

Believe it or not, work on standardising the sliotar actually started back in 1998 along with research work on potential score detection systems.

The score detection research culminated in the introduction of the HawkEye system in June of 2013. The sliotar work continues.

Some years back a set of performance criteria were determined in collaboration with the Sports Science Department in Dublin City University (DCU) with a view to standardised sliotar performance and establishing a process whereby people could be accredited as “Approved Sliotar Suppliers”.

In the interim the sliotar core has changed from a mix of cork and yarn to polyurethane and sliotars are now predominantly produced outside of Ireland.

This has resulted in issues around quality control, ethical sourcing, and questions about whether the distance the sliotar is travelling has implications for the actual game itself.

Thus work has begun on the development of a “digital sliotar” – in other words embedding a “chip” in the core of the sliotar and using a mobile app to authenticate its origin and standard.

One further aspect under consideration is a potential colour change from white to yellow in order to enhance visibility.

Proof of concept tests are currently underway and you can expect to see some proposals for change to emerge in 2020.



*...work on
STANDARDISING the
SLIOTAR ACTUALLY
STARTED back in 1998*

COMMUNICATIONS

The communication landscape continues to evolve year on year with new patterns of consumption and in how we use and interact with our members and supporters on digital channels.

It is crucial that we are aware of these changes and in tune with the impact that they have on the promotion of our games and how we engage with our members and the wider public.

To that end, our digital engagement is an important priority for us, an assertion underpinned by our commitment to and the success of GAAGO and GAANOW, our on-demand match day, midweek and social video content channel.

There were 72 million views of GAA videos over last year, more than 68 million of them on GAANOW. While its origins are in near-live match highlights and archive content, the GAANOW offering has evolved to deliver an increasing number of in-house produced content such as GAANOWLive. More in-house content series have been shortlisted for 2020 delivery.

In addition, we published 35 mobile journalism videos which were watched 2.15 million times as the Communications team continues to embrace multi-media journalism. As well as offering more than 2,000 articles on GAA, ie, our social presence

continues to grow. We are active on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and on our fastest growing channel, Instagram. The GAA's social following grew by 15% in 2019.

Two major developments this year for the GAA will be the completion of a new Communications Strategy and the construction of an in-house studio to support the ambition the Association has to create more and more of its own content, such as GAANOWLive.

The strategy will attempt to equip us to face the evolving challenges we face in continuing to get the right messaging and information to the right people across a wide range of issues related to our activities and the Association as a whole.

Additionally, we plan to review how team information is announced in advance of games and also access to our players as part of efforts to enhance the promotion of our games.



BLOODY SUNDAY 1920-2020

This year marks an incredibly important date in the history of the Association, 100 years on from the tragic event that was Bloody Sunday - a landmark occasion for the GAA and for the nation as a whole when 14 people who attended a football match at Croke Park never went home.

It had a profound impact on public opinion and events of the time and had a lasting legacy on the Association, conferring upon Croke Park a very special status, not just as a sporting arena but as a venue of national historical importance that holds through to this very day.

We have worked with the families of those who were killed that day to repair, replace and in some cases erect for the first time gravestones to honour those who were lost that day.

Last November, the GAA marked the 99th anniversary at Glasnevin Cemetery where three of the Croke Park victims: Jerome O'Leary (10), Michael Feery (40) and Patrick O'Dowd (57) had headstones erected for the very first time and which bring respect and dignity to their final resting places.

The decade of commemorations has focused the mind on this period of Irish history but the stand out element to the event we are planning for Croke Park next November is that it is GAA history and we have a responsibility to mark it in the right way.

A working group has been in place for some time and liaising with our History Committee they have been charged with organising a series of fitting events to mark the events of that tragic day.

We see it as an opportunity to honour those who died and their families but also to educate new generations of GAA supporters about the happenings of that fatal day.

Our organisation is very much about moving ahead and looking to the future to safeguard our relevance and role in society but never at the expense of where we have come from and how we got here.

I would encourage everyone with an interest in the GAA and in our history in particular, to engage with our plans in the coming months in the build-up to November.

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INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

One of the fundamental strands of GAA Strategy 2018-2021 is the need to appropriately support volunteers. That means, among other things, making their jobs simpler. Effective use of technology is an important enabler of this goal and we worked hard to do this in 2019.

GAA Games Management System

The Games Management System is the system at the core of our operations. We suffered a significant setback when the company providing the system ceased trading during the year.

Having identified the risk in advance we were able to minimise disruption and provide an identical system which will remain in use in the short term for the 2020 season.

In parallel we have begun the process to procure a new Games Management System. Development is now under way and delivery is scheduled on a phased basis during 2020. The new system will improve functionality and will deliver more efficient processes in a number of important spheres including membership, fixtures and discipline.

Cyber Security

The trend of increased spam emails and cyber fraud attempts has continued in 2019, posing a significant risk to GAA Units. Unfortunately a small number of clubs fell victim to such crime. To help manage your risk we now actively monitor our systems. However, the best defence against cybercrime is user awareness. We provided cyber security training to County IT Officers and we published awareness material on our website.

All GAA members are urged to be careful when using online technologies and to consider the risks before clicking on links, opening attachments or

providing information, particularly passwords of bank details, online. Help or advice on dealing with cyber threats is available by contacting the IT Department (itsupport@gaa.ie).

Data Protection

Since the advent of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in 2018, and the subsequent Irish Data Protection Act, the GAA at all levels has had to adopt changes to how personal information is processed by the Association and its members.

The GAA's Data Protection Officer, Kelly Cunningham, has been leading the Association's initiatives to comply with GDPR and has been providing support and assistance to volunteers, clubs, county boards and provincial councils as required.

Support will continue to be made available through 2020 and it is important that all personal information held by the GAA is managed in compliance with the legislation.

The initial media focus on GDPR may have passed but the obligation to comply with the legislation remains.

IT Infrastructure

Ensuring that adequate IT infrastructure is in place in key stadia around the country is critical to the operations of our venues on match days. Supporting key services, like ticket scanning, health and safety systems (Public Address, CCTV etc.) and press / media facilities, are especially important.

A review of existing facilities and investment in additional infrastructure has been ongoing for a number of years and further progress was made in this regard in 2019. Key stadia have been assessed and recommendations made regarding suggested investments.

Online Expenses

Initially scoped in 2018, the online system for managing expenses for inter-county players was further developed in the past year. Delivered through an online form where players can submit claims, and supporting receipts, for mileage, allowable expenses and nutritional allowances, the system has been used on a pilot basis in a number of counties.

Claims are verified by a member of the management team, approved by the county board and paid in a transparent and measurable process. The system is available for counties to use in the coming season.

Supporting LGFA, Camogie and Handball Associations

As has been the case for a number of years, continued support to our sister organisations, the Handball, Camogie and Ladies Gaelic Football Associations was provided in 2019. This included provision of Microsoft Office365 licences, assistance with membership and registration, data protection support, eVetting support and general IT services.

Support and assistance has also been provided to the Handball Association in relation to the new Handball Centre.

GRMA

The third year of the national GAA Membership Card and Rewards Programme known as grma (Go Raibh Maith Agat) was a big success. Providing a practical mechanism for the GAA to say 'thank you' or 'go raibh maith agat' to GAA members and supporters for participating in GAA activities, grma has over 18,000 registered members availing of rewards including footballs, sliotars, jerseys, match tickets, vouchers and special offers.

GAA club members who register for the scheme receive a personalised GAA Membership Card and

access to an online account where they can avail of rewards and special offers in exchange for 'points' earned for GAA related activities, such as buying tickets for matches.

National Parents Council Post Primary

For the second successive year, the GAA IT Department was delighted to be able to facilitate the National Parents Council (Post Primary) to deliver its Leaving Cert Help Desk in Croke Park. The NPC(PP) provides advice and counselling services to Leaving Cert students, and their parents, during the Leaving Cert results and college offers period, on a voluntary basis.

These services were delivered from the Croke Park media suite in 2019.

Gaelic Games Television Archive

The outputs of a three year collaboration between the GAA Museum and the Broadcast Authority of Ireland (BAI) known as the Gaelic Games Television Archive (GGTVA) was launched in 2019.

This archive contains full digital videos of approximately 500 inter-county and club games, dating from 1961 onward, which can be accessed in the GAA museum, and edited highlights of All-Ireland finals which are available to view on the GAA's website.

The year ahead

From an IT perspective, the number one goal for 2020 is to deliver the new Games Management System.

This will be a 'digital transformation' for the Association and will provide the means to manage our games, and all of the associated administrative tasks, in one consolidated system.

I believe that efficiencies introduced, and the insight that will be available through analytics, will prove critical to how the Association is managed into the future.

BROADCASTING

Our broadcast partner relationships continue to be the most effective means of engagement with those interested in our games en masse. RTÉ, BBC, TG4, Sky, eir Sport, Premier Sports, Premium Sports, Newstalk and Today FM all contribute to what is now a 12-month broadcast schedule, ensuring that the GAA is in the public eye throughout the year.

The year ahead will see more than 200 GAA matches covered in either a live or deferred TV format.

That number grows even further when LGFA and Camogie coverage is factored in.

On occasions when our members cannot, for one reason or another, attend or watch full match broadcasts they can avail of a range of highlight shows on Sunday, Monday and Wednesday evenings.

These arrangements are in place until the middle of 2022 and includes a strong connection to local IBI radio stations who relentlessly serve our messaging to regional areas for which we are truly thankful.

Quite often the opportunity presents itself to provide coverage at other times that do not clash with national arrangements. I must acknowledge the growing interest in live streaming practices among our own county boards.

2019 also saw a series of inaugural live match streams produced and distributed by our own official GAA channels and included competitions such as the Joe McDonagh Cup group games that would not ordinarily receive live broadcast attention.

The new arrangement between eir Sport and RTÉ for Allianz League matches, as well as the latter's coverage of club championship action, significantly increased the Association's TV exposure in the early

and latter part of 2019. Indeed, having three of the top five most watched programmes in Ireland this year affirmed the audience pulling power that the GAA possesses.

In addition to traditional broadcasting media, our own GAAGO (international live streaming) and GAANOW (domestic + international match clips and feature videos) channels continue to grow at a rapid pace. GAAGO has firmly established itself as the 'go-to' source for GAA programming while living or working overseas, and 2019 was its biggest year to date.

It is very pleasing that we continue to offer our GAANOW proposition to a global audience on any connected device free of charge. The decision to retain and develop our own rights to in-game match highlights exclusively has been more than validated as we have amassed nearly 70m views over the past 12 months.

Of course we do not merely judge our broadcasts by numbers but also by the quality and professionalism of the output – something we constantly strive to enhance in close partnership with all our media partners. We are very grateful to them all for their support in 2019.

The decision to retain and develop our own rights to in-game match highlights exclusively has been more than validated

SPONSORSHIP

2019 was a particularly satisfying year for the GAA in matters sponsorship. We had a very high number of existing sponsors who chose to renew their ties with the Association.

The senior sponsorship programme was boosted by renewals with eir for the Senior Football Championship and in the Senior Hurling Championships both Bord Gáis Energy and Littlewoods Ireland extended their agreements.

Other significant sponsorships were also renewed in 2019 with EirGrid continuing as title sponsor of the Football U20 All-Ireland Championships. Sure enters a renewed term as the official sponsors of GAA statistics, Specsavers agreed to renew its sponsorship of GAA Hawkeye and John West have signed up to retain their position as the title sponsor of Féile.

The newest addition to the GAA's commercial programme was Renault who sponsored the GAA World Games and are also partnering with the GPA. County sponsors similarly deserve to be acknowledged.

The contribution of the sponsors to the GAA goes way beyond the financial investment and plays a significant role in promoting our games to the widest possible audience.

This is borne out in the numerous awards that GAA sponsors have accumulated in recent years both in Ireland and internationally.

Thank you to each and all of our sponsors both nationally and locally.

The contribution of the sponsors to the GAA goes way beyond the financial investment



WHERE WE ALL BELONG

In a break from traditional competition-specific and indeed general Irish sports marketing practices, I was delighted to see the warmth and positive feedback emanate from our own members and other admirers regarding the GAA brand campaign launched in early 2019.

The celebratory campaign, grounded in research and underpinned by the line 'Where We All Belong / Tá Áit Dúinn Uilig Ann', intimately captures the unifying purpose and passion that we all share for our games at home or abroad, in a way that other parties simply cannot convey.

TV, Radio, Print, Outdoor and Digital media showcased genuine GAA member stories within this campaign that will be added to in 2020 and, I felt, struck a very honest and authentic tone.

I attend many GAA events around the country but was particularly proud to play a part in the unveiling of the new GAA manifesto at St. Colmcille's GAA club in County Meath in April of last year. The displaying of the bi-lingual manifesto is a very simple but practical way to celebrate our shared values and the people who make our Association what it is today.

While visiting clubs since then, I note many who have already installed permanent manifesto signs on the site of their playing facilities and it clearly has a strong resonance among our network. I would encourage all clubs to embrace and champion it - whether it is a permanent gable-end sign or even a simple print out pinned onto a noticeboard - in their facility.

...displaying the bi-lingual manifesto is a very simple but practical way to celebrate our shared values

**WE ALL BELONG HERE
IN THIS PLACE. AT THIS TIME**

WE BELONG NOT BECAUSE OF WHO WE ARE OR WHERE WE COME FROM
BEING HERE MEANS BELONGING
BELONGING MEANS KNOWING YOU'RE PART OF A COMMUNITY
A COMMUNITY THAT HAS A PLACE FOR ALL
WHERE POTENTIAL IS NURTURED
WHERE INDIVIDUALS BECOME TEAMS
WHO HONOUR THE LEGACY OF THOSE WHO WENT BEFORE
AND STRIVE TO BUILD A LEGACY OF THEIR OWN

SOME OF US PLAY

SOME OF US USED TO PLAY. SOME OF US NEVER PLAYED

WE ALL BELONG

BELONGING MEANS HAVING A VOICE
MEANS BEING ABLE TO SAY WHAT YOU THINK IS RIGHT

BEING LISTENED TO

BELONGING MEANS RESPECTING EACH OTHER
MEANS BEING THERE FOR EACH OTHER

ON THE PITCH. OFF THE PITCH

BELONGING MEANS ROLLING OUR SLEEVES UP AND DOING WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE
WE ALL BELONG WHETHER IT'S OUR FIRST DAY OR OUR HUNDREDDTH YEAR
WE ALL BELONG HERE BECAUSE THIS PLACE BELONGS TO US ALL

OUR GAA

WHERE WE ALL BELONG



WORLD GAA

The continued growth of Gaelic games internationally is nothing short of phenomenal. It is a huge source of pride to us all to see the extent to which the games are growing in popularity in Britain, Europe, North America, Australia and Asia. 2019 saw further expansion in the promotion, playing and development of all our four codes across each of the eight International board areas which make up World GAA.

New clubs continue to be formed but perhaps more importantly, participation levels at underage levels have continued to grow at an increasing rate.

In 2018 we set about examining how we might better provide for World GAA and its individual boards within our structures and rules. Those proposals are on the clár for Congress this weekend. If passed they should place World GAA on a much clearer and firmer footing within the Association generally.

The Renault GAA World games were a huge success, one that is recounted elsewhere in these pages. The year was characterised by many more low key but no less significant highlights. Take for instance the Canadian Board bringing their convention to Montreal. The very first time it was held outside of Toronto. I could list many more.

In 2020 the International Boards will utilise for the first time the new direct operational funding provided to them by Central Council and they have each responded by formulating very ambitious games development plans. Their work in this regard will continue to be greatly assisted by their provincial council twinning partners and the Games Department personnel in Croke Park.

2020 will also see the 25th Anniversary of the formation of the Asian GAA board and I wish them well in their landmark year.

The outlook in general for 2020 in respect of the playing of our games is extremely positive given the quality of

the personnel on our international boards allied to the plans and finance now in place. I thank the World GAA Committee and all our international boards for their valuable efforts. I also thank the Department of Foreign Affairs for their continued support through the Global Development Fund and their assistance to our units in many other ways.

GAA World Games

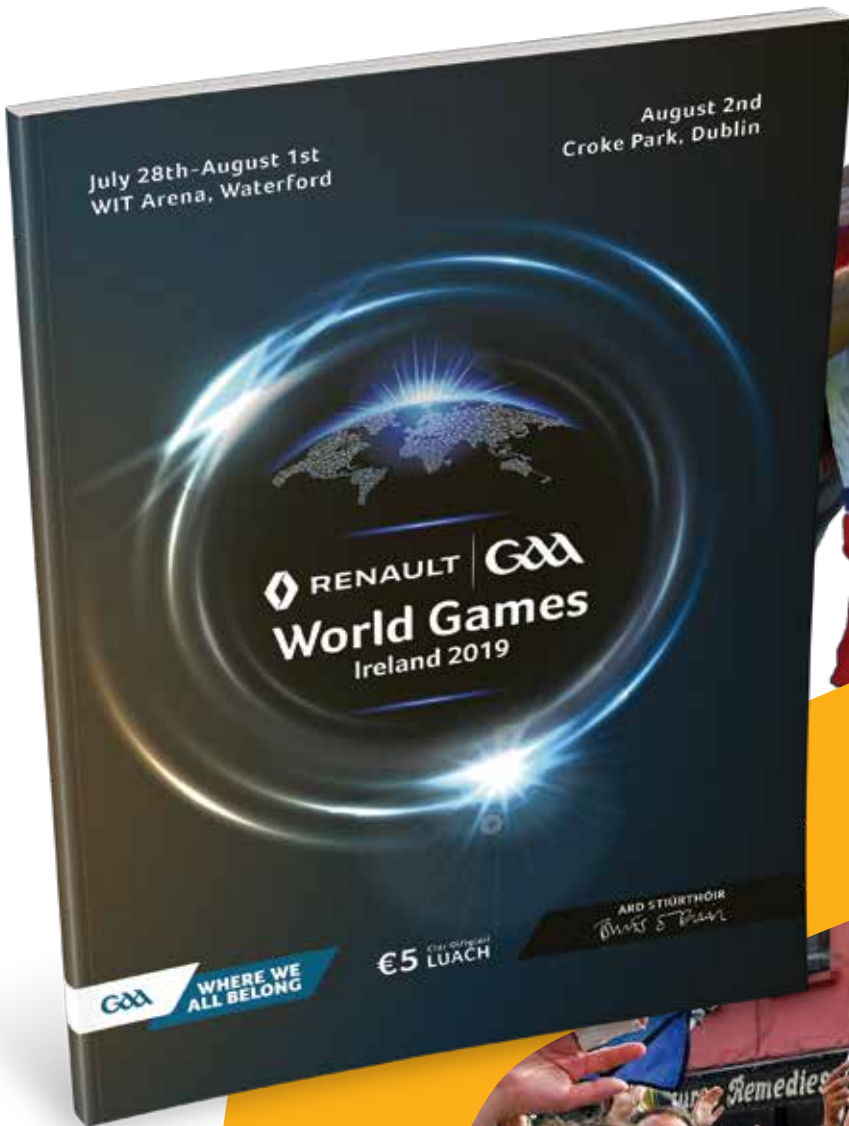
The inaugural GAA World Games took place on March 5/6, 2015 in Zayed Sports Stadium, Abu Dhabi with a total of 28 participating football teams - male and female. We have travelled a long way since then, both figuratively and literally.

This year's event was held in Waterford and the choice of venue proved to be an inspired one because of the excellent facilities at the WIT Sports Campus and the manner in which the concept was embraced by the clubs and communities throughout the Déise and beyond. All players and guests enjoyed a real GAA welcome in the South East.

A total of 1,100 players from all over the world took part, representing 84 teams. That meant 361 games played over an intense five-day period, culminating with the finals - 4 Irish-born and 4 Native-Born - taking place in Croke Park on August 2. Approximately 60% of the players who took part were non-Irish.

The tournament epitomised the positivity, passion and perseverance of the GAA community worldwide and bore testimony to the huge progress that has been made in relation to the promotion of the GAA footprint across the world.

The GAA World Games take place on a three-year rotating cycle - the next series is scheduled for Ireland in 2022 - and all of the indications are that the promotion of Gaelic games will go from strength-to-strength, at international level, in the intervening period.



A SUSTAINABLE GAA

The GAA today faces many dilemmas and is under pressure on a number of fronts. I am not altogether sure that we are adequately addressing them.

We will spend a lot of time this weekend debating the merits of black cards, of transfer protocols, player gradings and more.

Fixtures too, of course.

These are all very worthy and important in their own right. They have a major bearing on where we go next year and beyond. But whatever the particular outcomes, whatever rule modifications we sanction, I have no doubt that this year's difficulties will be resolved.

The year churns on. New topics will crop up to exercise us (and some perennials too I'm sure) and this time next year we'll do it all again.

Incrementally all of these measures are improvements. But we need to take care that the accumulation of these individual steps is taking us where we want to go.

I have touched elsewhere in these pages on the topic of sustainability.

That was in the broad environmental sense that we are belatedly becoming familiar with. Sustainability in a different sense is something very relevant to the GAA. A few key elements of our world are a bit out of balance at the moment.

So what could a more sustainable GAA look like?

Consider for example:

The year is demarcated more clearly, with defined rest periods.

The burden on county players' time is lessened, with a lower proportion of training to games. Thus the county players' lot is more balanced.

County players field regularly for their clubs. Clubs retain a higher proportion of juveniles making it through to adult grades.

Clubs are self-sustaining in terms of coaches and team managers, with outside managers the exception.

All of these mean the financial cycle changes, lessening the financial pressure on counties – and clubs – and lessening the stress on officers.

Similarly the pressure centrally to fund the game is lessened as well, relaxing our commercial focus and allowing us to provide more for the future.

We have revamped organisational structures that better reflect the needs of the modern organisation and that better equip counties to manage the scale and complexity of issues they face.

A less onerous burden for volunteers means more enjoyment, more ambition; and more (and new) people attracted to offer up their time.

To me that's not revolutionary.

Quite the opposite...that looks like a GAA holding true to the ideals and values that have served us so well, while at the same time seeking to renew itself for a vibrant and relevant future. All of the other objectives...growth in numbers, social impact, playing standards and so on...they should all follow.

It's not radical, but it's not easy either. Nor is it something that is ever really completed.

I'm sure similar issues will still be vexing Gaels when somebody else is penning this report in future.

Problematic I know too, that wiser heads than mine will have different ideas of what that sustainable GAA should be. I would like to hear those views and I would like to start assembling a consensus, agreeing a direction and working towards that sustainable future.

*Sustainability in
a different sense
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A few key elements
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CONCLUSION

The year just ended saw the GAA continue to enjoy a pivotal place at the centre of Irish social and sporting life.

It was a year of great scores, great matches, and great teams. It was also a year of challenges, of some setbacks and a lot of hard work.

Many of you know first-hand the hard work that you put into your own team, your committee, your club, your county. It is the accumulation of all of that work that comprises the GAA year.

High profile matches and teams dominate the headlines. These are the events and occasions that provide the biggest talking points and the collective memories. But if your personal 2019 was a bit more low key, then your contribution was no less valuable.

Without collective effort, those days – big and small – just do not happen. It is important to acknowledge that effort and to try to make the burden a bit lighter. I know that there were difficulties and challenges this year too. I've broached some of those in the preceding pages. But they did not define the year. Our year is defined on pitches all over the country. All over the world. And our year was a good one.

That is not to say that we can't do things better. The GAA did not reach its current status by being complacent. So what will 2020 hold and what do we have to do better?

I think a new fixture calendar and landscape

will emerge. I expect the new football rules and championship structure to make a real impact. I have no doubt that there will be contention and controversy. Too many people care too much about the GAA for that not to be the case.

I expect many of those tensions will boil down to a test or examination of our core values. Our values are under pressure on a number of fronts and it is essential that in 2020 we reaffirm these and get better not just at what we do, but how we do it.

As I finalise this report which covers the events of the last 12 months I am mindful of the many outstanding people who sadly are no longer with us as we head into 2020. The passing of so many great GAA members, from national figures on and off the field to local heroes and volunteers of renown, fills us with a genuine sense of loss. We keep them in our thoughts as we look to continue the work of making the GAA that they loved something they would be proud of.

I wish to thank sincerely everybody who gave their time to the GAA in the past year. Your efforts make our Association stronger, and your community a better place.

I hope that we can rely upon your renewed involvement in 2020 and that the year ahead is successful and fulfilling for the Association and all of its members.

Ar aghaidh leis an obair.



Tom Ryan

Tom Ryan
Ard-Stiúrthóir
Cumann Lúthchleas Gael

