

# #GAAyouth Forum 2018



Summary Report to  
An Coiste Bainistíochta  
Éanair 2019

## #GAAyouth Forum 2018 – Summary Report

*This report has been prepared by the GAA YouthReps for the GAA Management Committee. The YouthReps are a representative group of young people, who are responsible for organising the Youth Forum annually and relaying the views of their peers to GAA Congress.*

### Introduction:

The 2018 #GAAyouth Forum took place on Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> October in Croke Park. Over 400 young people (aged 12 – 21) from all across Ireland attended the Forum, which provided a range of different workshops for three age cohorts (12/13 year olds; 14/15 year olds; 16 -21 year olds). The purpose of the workshops was both to educate and to empower young people ensuring that they had a say on GAA issues that matter to them in their everyday lives.

As part of the Forum the YouthReps led a Consultation with more than 180 14/15 year olds, who attended the day. The consultation was directly linked to Action 4.3 of the GAA Strategic Plan – “to engage better with youth members and young people”. The objective of the consultation was to improve understanding of how young players communicate and want to be communicated with in order to inform the future development of mechanisms for gathering young people’s thoughts on issues at all levels within the Association - Club, County and Nationally.

Furthermore, the YouthReps organised a ‘Youth Congress’ with more than 150 of the 16 – 21 year olds, who were at the Forum. The items discussed at the Youth Congress were directly linked to the questions submitted to the YouthReps by delegates at the Official GAA, LGFA and Camogie Congresses in 2018. The Youth Congress was chaired by Diarmuid Cahill (Chairperson, GAA Youth Committee) and attended by John Horan (Uachtarán CLG), Kathleen Woods (Uachtarán, An Cumann Camógaíochta) and Dominic Leech (Uachtarán Comhairle Laighean, Cumann Peile na mBan).



*From L- R: Dónal Fallon (Historian) delivers a Ted Talk to Group C on Gaelic Sunday 1918; A delegate prepares to vote using voting devices at the Youth Congress; David Curtin (former Dublin Hurler) speaks to Group B about overcoming challenges and his personal story of managing haemophilia while playing hurling at Club and County level.*

### What the young people said:

There was extensive discussion at both the Consultation and the Youth Congress and the results of voting as well as feedback transcribed from the round-table discussions is available in the Appendix to this Report. Voting was conducted using the same devices as are present at GAA Congress.

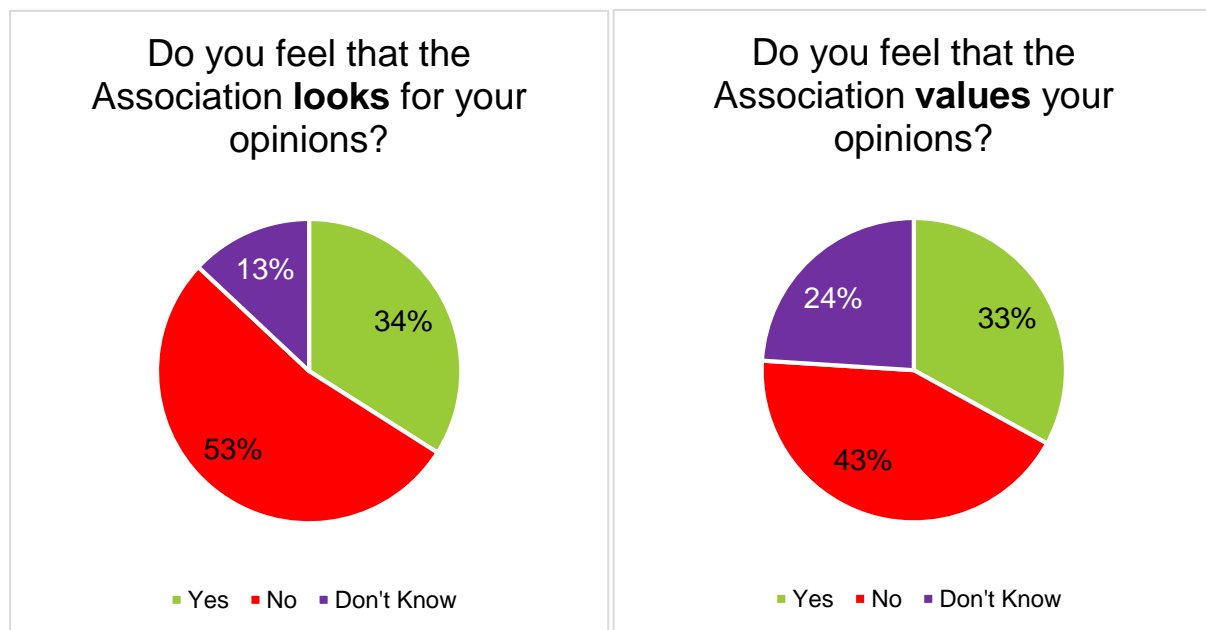
For the purposes of this Summary Report, the YouthReps identified three key themes that were particularly prominent on the day:

1. Promoting Meaningful Dialogue with Youth Members
2. Achieving a Better Balance for Young Players
3. Creating a Positive Culture for our Young People

The hierarchy of these themes is important as it was clear from discussions on the day and analysis of the feedback that a lot of the issues arising under the second and third theme would be ameliorated by creating a more meaningful dialogue with youth members.

### *Theme 1: Promoting Meaningful Dialogue with Youth Members*

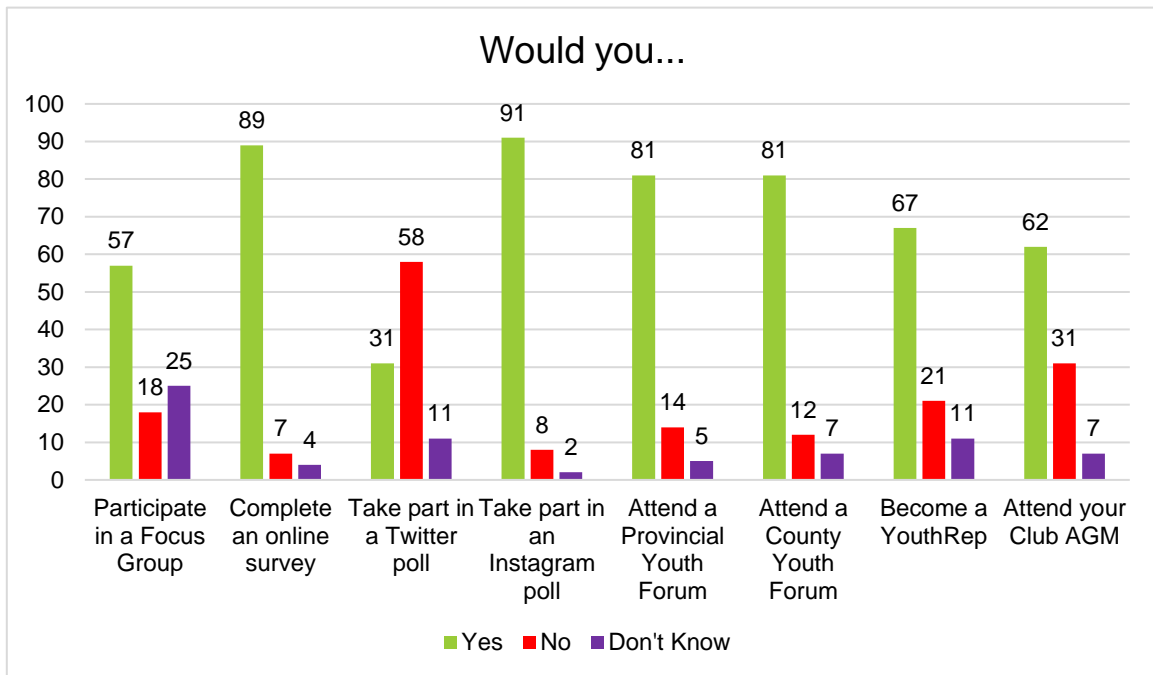
The need to create mechanisms for meaningful communication and engagement with youth members was a key reference point at the Forum and directly links to Action 4.3. of the GAA's Strategic Plan. At both the Consultation and the Youth Congress the attendees were invited to express their views on this matter through round-table discussions as well as via a voting system.



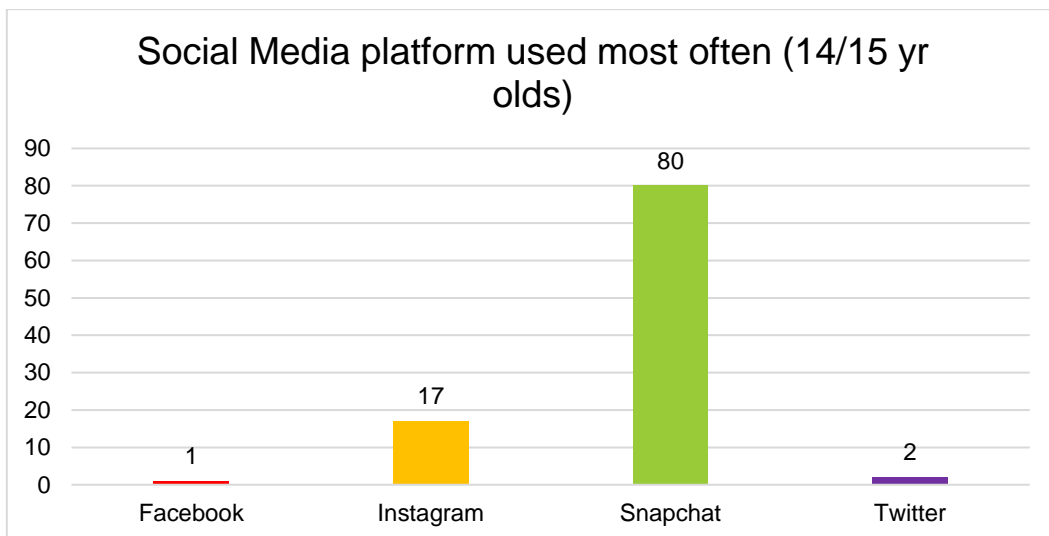
At the outset of the Consultation the attendees were asked whether they felt that the Association<sup>1</sup> looks for their opinions, 53% of the 14-15 year olds said 'no'. Furthermore, when asked whether they felt that the Association values their opinions, 43% said 'no'.

Further discussion took place regarding the mechanisms through which the Association should or could most readily communicate and engage with youth member and it was evident that the attendees were willing to share their opinions if they were sought by the Association:

<sup>1</sup> The 'Association' was defined as including Club, County and National level.



In relation to online/social media platforms various methods such as online surveys, the use of platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and Snapchat were discussed. Interestingly, 80% of the 14-15 year olds chose Snapchat as their preferred method of engagement – a platform that the Association currently does not use.



At the Youth Congress, the 16+ age group discussed how the GAA and its sister organisations could involve more youth members in decision-making. Feedback included the following suggestions:

*Should be a Youth Forum in each County*

*Need more Youth Congresses in Province/County*

*YouthReps in each Club with responsibilities*

*Youth Council in each County - currently only adults and no meetings with young people*

*Set up small committees in Club or School*

*Junior County Board*

*Have reps from each Club and hold a County Congress – then we get a voice from each Club and their thoughts about each decision*

*Vote a rep for each team to attend the AGM and put forward points from each team.*

**Junior County Board**

Nationally more YouthReps

As identified by the 14-15 year olds, items that they wanted to be consulted and engaged with included:

@ Club Level	@ County Level	@ National Level
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The selection of coaches</li> <li>• Training: amount/schedule</li> <li>• Where funding goes in the Club</li> <li>• A say in the team kit</li> <li>• Getting more people to join</li> <li>• Fixtures</li> <li>• Better team management</li> <li>• Winter training</li> <li>• Vote for team captain</li> <li>• Design of new gear</li> <li>• Gender equality</li> <li>• Input to team bonding and celebrations</li> <li>• Have a say on entering competitions e.g. Leinster Leagues</li> <li>• When training is on</li> <li>• To have a say on coaches (if they are doing a good job or not)</li> <li>• More opportunities for courses – first aid, referee, defibrillator</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fixtures schedule</li> <li>• Having more things like Féile</li> <li>• Open trials for Development Squads</li> <li>• Equal priority for Hurling and Football</li> <li>• More training courses for coaches and referees</li> <li>• Fairness between boys and girls</li> <li>• Better referees – more qualified</li> <li>• More games during summertime</li> <li>• No politics – especially in picking development squads</li> <li>• Spread of fixtures</li> <li>• Even out the training between Club and County players</li> <li>• More team forums/small County forums</li> <li>• Workshops for all players e.g. nutrition, S&amp;C etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting in 'Football' Counties and vice versa</li> <li>• Changes in age-grades as it will effect us</li> <li>• Visiting schools and do these type of Forums for all</li> <li>• Letting girls play in the big stadiums</li> <li>• Letting the youth have more of a say</li> <li>• More promotion of Gaelic games overseas</li> <li>• More féiles at different age-grades</li> <li>• More juvenile competitions across counties</li> <li>• More promotion for underage games</li> <li>• U.18s should be free to games</li> <li>• Going global with Gaelic games</li> </ul>

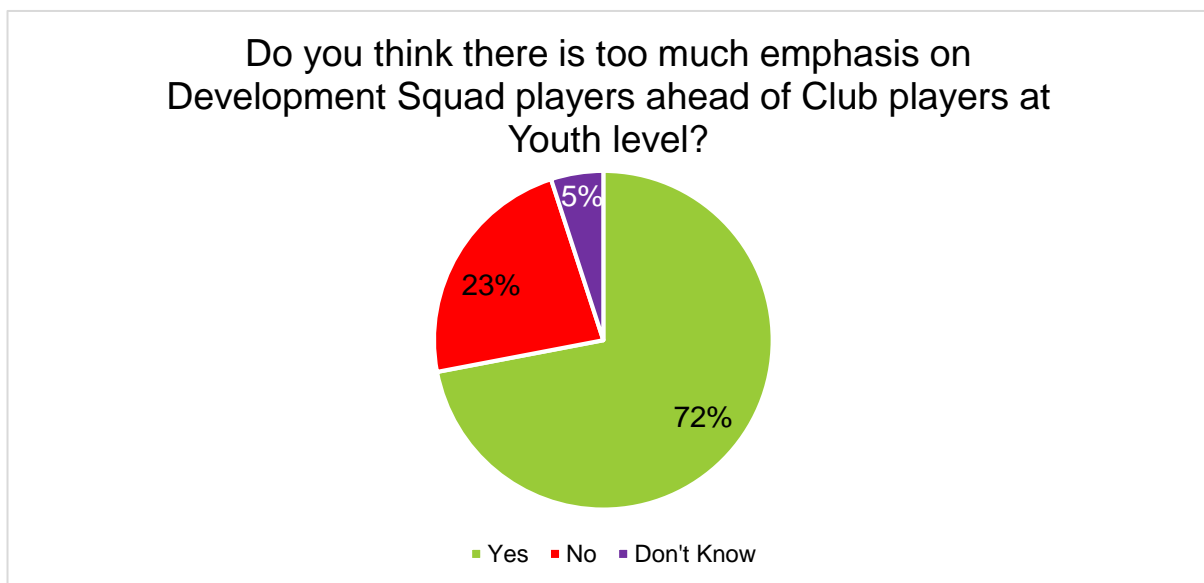
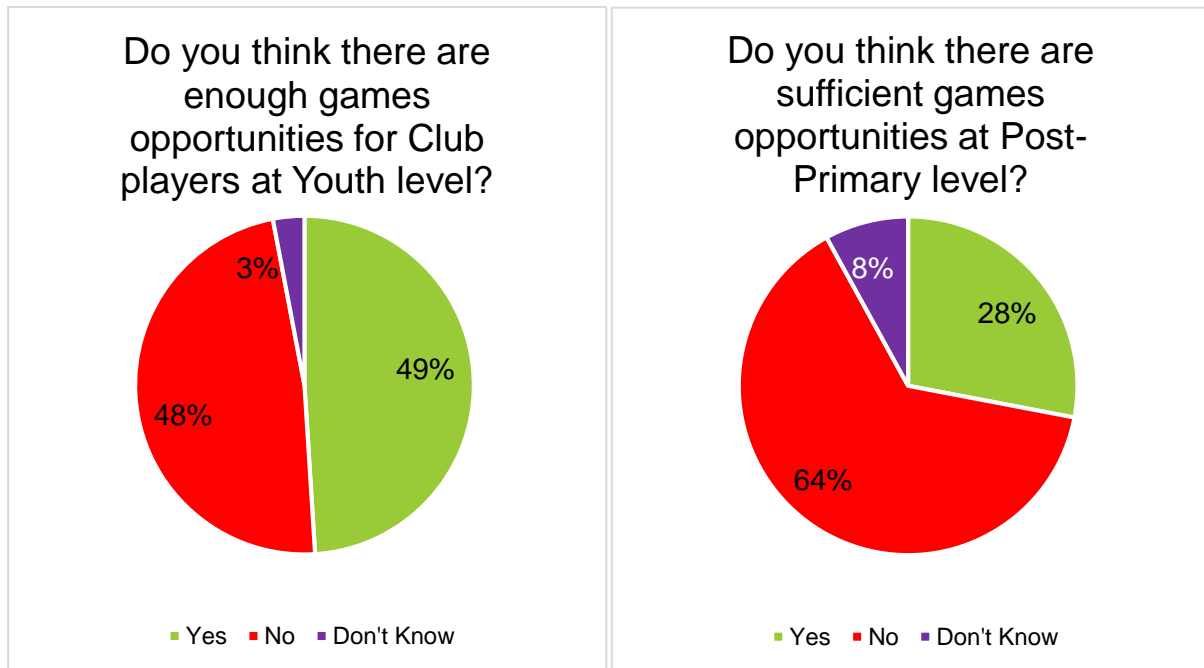


From L-R: A young delegate participates in the Consultation Workshop for Group B; Martina McMahon (World Handball Champion) speaks as part of the Q&A Panel for all attendees; David Coldrick (Referee) talks to the youngest age-group about the role of Match Officials on the Behind-the-Scenes Tour.

## Theme 2: Achieving a Better Balance for Young Players

The high rate of drop-off is of continued concern for the GAA and its sister organisations and was a hot topic of discussion at the Youth Congress.

A number of votes were taken, the results of which suggested that: there is inconsistency from County-to-County in terms of the current number of games opportunities being provided at Club level with almost 50% unhappy with the number of games opportunities being provided; broad dissatisfaction with the number of games opportunities being provided at Post-Primary school level; and the view that too much emphasis is placed on Development Squad players ahead of Club players<sup>2</sup>.



<sup>2</sup> See Appendix for more details.

After these votes were taken the attendees at the Youth Congress (16+ age group) had an opportunity to discuss why there is such a high drop-off rate for players during their teenage years and to identify reasons for same.

Reasons cited included:

- **Limited Playing Opportunities**
  - Not enough teams
  - No games for players not making the first 15*
  - Sub all the time - you lose interest because you never play*
  - You could be a starting minor and then a sub with seniors
  - 16-17 age group getting no games*
  
- **Too Competitive/Fear of Injury**
  - GAA becomes too competitive
  - Take games too seriously and have no fun*
  - Lack of enjoyment - friends dropping out as well*
  - Too much expectation on players*
  - Fear of Injury
  - Constant injury*
  
- **Pressure**
  - Pressure from parents re. school/homework/exams
  - Exams, grinds, part-time jobs*
  - Matches played during exam time*
  
- **Dissatisfaction with Managers**
  - Favouritism by managers/selectors
  - Lack of equal development*
  - Not emphasising people's individual skills
  - Pressure from managers*
  - County players missing training and still getting played*
  
- **Playing Senior level too soon**
  - Young players playing up for teams too soon
  - LGFA U.15s afraid to play with Seniors/Adults*
  - Jump from Minor to Senior
  - Instead of just Senior, should have Junior or U.21 in between*
  - Minors playing with Seniors – scaring people off
  
- **Social life; loss of interest; peers**
  - Friends dropping out – not as fun
  - Want a better social life
  - Social life - drink and going out*
  - Need better social aspect within teams

➤ Other sports

Overall, it was apparent that balance was the key element that needs to be addressed to reduce the drop-off rate i.e.

- A better balance between sport, school, part-time jobs and social life;
- A better balance between exams and fixtures;
- A better balance between competition and fun;
- A better balance between playing at underage and Senior level;
- A better balance of games opportunities for those who do not make the starting 15 to enable them to continue to participate and/or develop further.

Fixtures was regarded as a major factor underpinning all of the above particularly in terms of timing – to minimise pressure arising from school/exams – and the type of fixture – to provide more games of a developmental nature where all players get a chance to participate.



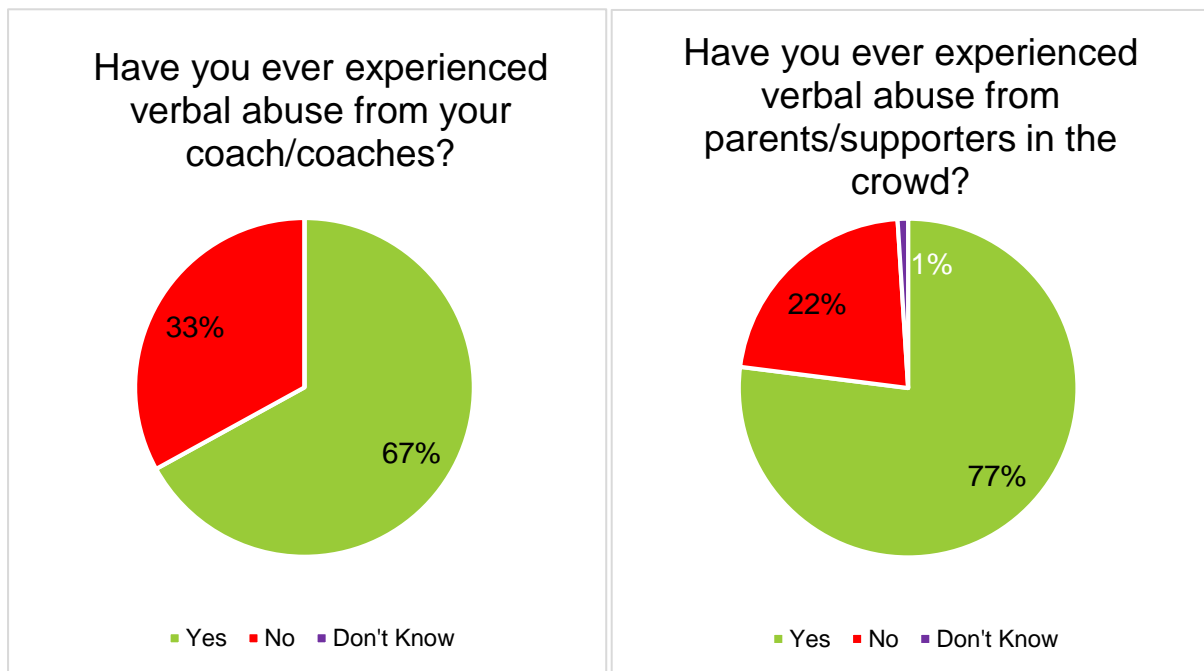
*From L- R: Tracey Kennedy (Chairperson, Cork GAA) delivers a Ted Talk to Group C about her pathway as a volunteer official; 5<sup>th</sup> Year students who participated in the Future Leaders Programme during Transition Year deliver an interactive workshop about Leadership – On and Off the Field; Muireann Nic Corcráin (YouthRep) leads a round-table discussion as part of the Consultation Workshop with Group B.*



### Theme 3: Creating a Positive Culture for our Young People

The Association needs to provide a positive culture and environment where young people feel that they are respected and are encouraged to develop and grow as a member of the organisation regardless of their playing ability.

Unfortunately, the feedback from the Youth Congress suggest that this is not the case for the majority of young players. At the Congress, the attendees (aged 16+) were asked to vote on whether they had every experienced verbal abuse from a) their coaches; b) parents/supporters in the crowd at a match. The results were stark:



Attendees discussed the practical measures that could be taken by the organisation to encourage greater levels of respect by all participants (players, coaches, referees, spectators) and comments included:

*Rules to be explained by ref in dressing room beforehand*

*Better training for referees*

Club should have an ethics statement like schools have

*Suspension for cursing at referees*

*Keep spectators off the pitch*

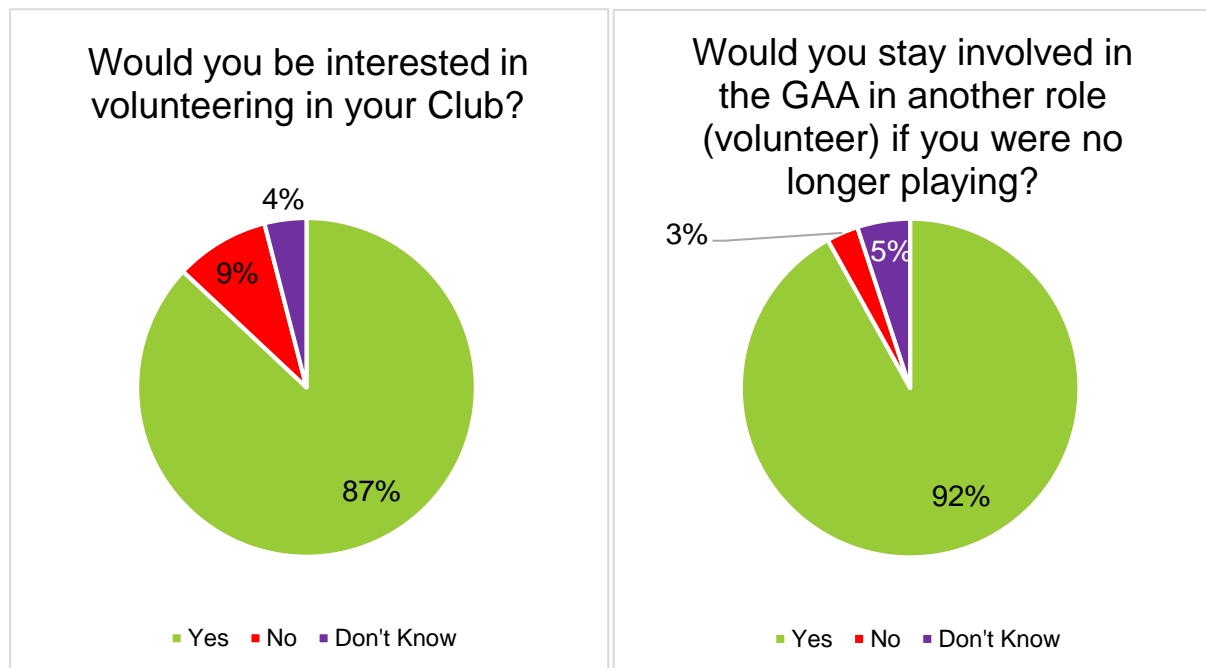
*Put rules up in the dressing rooms*

*Spectators to stop roaring at matches - especially underage*

The attendees were quite critical about referees and a perceived lack of respect from referees towards players. What was also evident was that the attendees were unaware that the Association has a code of behaviour, an issue that relates back to the effective communication of information to young players by the organisation.

Apart from creating a more positive culture of respect the discussions at the Consultation and the Youth Congress also highlighted the need for a more strategic approach to encouraging/developing young members as volunteers of the organisation and not just as players.

As part of the Consultation, 87% of the attendees (aged 14/15 years old) indicated that they would be interested in volunteering in their Club. Furthermore, 91% stated that they would like to stay involved in the GAA in another role even if they were no longer playing. The Association has a massive opportunity to capitalise upon this enthusiasm to increase volunteer numbers at grassroots level and encourage and develop new skill-sets to future-proof the organisation.



At the Youth Congress, attendees identified the current barriers to young people becoming involved in roles other than as a player and also listed a series of solutions to same:

**Current Barriers**

Age/Lack of Respect:

- “Made feel like we’re too young”
- “As a young coach you are not taken seriously”
- “Age difference – look down at you because they think your point isn’t valid because of your age”
- “Not taken seriously especially if you weren’t/aren’t a good player”
- “No trust”
- “Parents don’t respect younger coaches”

Lack of Role Models:

- “Nobody sets an example - everyone in admin positions is way older”
- “Politics – management/committees would question everything you do”
- “Same people in Club/County do everything”

Lack of opportunities/lack of communication about existing opportunities

- “Not enough opportunities to train/upskill in these roles”
- “No training for it”
- “Not enough training opportunities for young people”

- “Lack of opportunities to get involved – not asked”
- “Not accessible for us, not advertised to us”
- “Garda vetting”

### Potential Solutions

Adult support for young volunteers:

- “Have club meetings with committees and youths”
- “Club actively encouraging young players to get involved as volunteers”
- “Some clubs very good e.g. lucan, all given chance to coach”

Training, youth-friendly and well-promoted:

- “More coaching courses designed specifically for younger coaches”
- “Set up special courses for young teens to become coaches”
- “More coaching courses in clubs, get young adults coaching in local primary school, coach at nursery on Saturday mornings”

Clubs and Counties need to be supported to actively recruit as well as train young members in an age-appropriate manner. Providing youth members with these opportunities as well as a level of autonomy – based on trust – would further enhance a positive and vibrant culture at all levels of the organisation.



From L- R: Conor Lehane (Cork Hurler) and Conor McManus (Monaghan Footballer) speak to all attendees as part of the Q&A panel; Young delegates pose at the start of the day with the Brendan Martin, Liam MacCarthy and Sam Maguire Cups as the ‘selfie-spot’ in the Exhibition Village; A young delegate captures a snapchat video of the Q&A panel.

## Recommendations:

Based upon the feedback from the #GAAYouth Forum – in particular the Consultation Workshop and the Youth Congress – the YouthReps have prepared a number of recommendations for An Coiste Bainistíochta and Ard Chomhairle.

### *Recommendation 1: Communication of the #GAAYouth Forum Report*

That this report be circulated by An Coiste Bainistíochta/Ard Chomhairle to every County for consideration and discussion at a meeting of the County Management Committee.

### *Recommendation 2: Engagement with Central Committees*

That the YouthReps be provided with an opportunity to present this report and relevant findings to the following Central Committees: Communications Committee; All Ireland Post-Primary Schools Council; National Club Committee.

### *Recommendation 3: YouthReps at Congress*

That the YouthReps (current) be invited as observers to GAA Congress 2019 so that they can report on this subsequently at the #GAAYouth Forum 2019.

### *Recommendation 4: Development of an Action Plan*

That the YouthReps – in conjunction with the Youth Committee – be provided with an opportunity to develop an Action Plan arising from the feedback from the 2018 #GAAYouth Forum and present proposals from the Action Plan to An Coiste Bainistíochta/Ard Chomhairle at a later date. The Action Plan to include reference to:

- Development and communication of a youth-friendly version of the Code of Behaviour;
- Pilot of a Youth Forum at Provincial level;
- Development of a national programme/initiative to recognise the efforts of youth volunteers and to encourage youth volunteering;
- Identification of steps that Counties/Clubs can take to raise awareness amongst young players of opportunities to volunteer/upskill as a volunteer;
- Examination of how technology and social media can be used effectively to gather the views of young people on matters of strategic importance.

## Conclusion

We would like to thank John Horan, Uachtarán CLG and Tom Ryan, Ard Stiúrthóir CLG, for the support that they have provided so far and the opportunity to present this report to An Coiste Bainistíochta and Ard Chomhairle. Many thanks also to the current and former Youth Committee for their continued advice and guidance. A particular thank you as well to all the speakers who have given so graciously of their time to present at the #GAAYouth Forum both in 2018 and prior to this. Finally, mile buíochas to Caoimhe Ní Néill (Runaí, GAA Youth Committee) for her guidance and support since the YouthReps were established over three years ago.

The #GAAYouth Forum has become a fantastic addition to the GAA calendar with continued demand for it on an annual basis. However, there is a lot more to be done in order to ensure that young members of the Association feel valued, respected and listened to at Club, County and National level. The YouthReps look forward to building on what has been learned to date and making further impact in the future.

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GAA YouthReps: Áine McParland (Ard Mhacha), Áine O'Neill (Corcaigh); Brian Rogers (Aontroim); Christina Bradshaw (Ceatharlach); Eoghan Gately (BÁC); Leanne Hanafin (Ciarraí); Muireann Nic Corcráin (Loch Garman).

## Appendix: Voting Results from the Consultation and Youth Congress

### Communication Consultation

A Consultation was held with 180 fourteen and fifteen-year olds. The consultation was designed and hosted by the YouthReps with input from the Committee. The purpose of the consultation was to explore young players' perceptions of how the Association currently communicates with them and how this might be improved going forward.

Question 1. Do you feel that the Association looks for your opinions?

- Yes: 34%; No: 53%; Don't Know: 13%

Question 2. Do you feel that the Association values your opinions?

- Yes: 33%; No: 43%; Don't Know: 24%

Question 3. Would you participate in a Focus Group?

- Yes: 57%; No: 18%; Don't Know: 25%

Question 4. Would you complete an Online Survey?

- Yes: 89%; No: 7%; Don't Know: 4%

Question 5. Would you take part in a Twitter Poll?

- Yes: 31%; No: 58%; Don't Know: 11%

Question 6. Would you take part in an Instagram Poll?

- Yes: 91%; No: 8%; Don't Know: 1%

Question 7. Would you attend a Provincial Youth Forum?

- Yes: 81%; No: 14%; Don't Know: 5%

Question 8. Would you attend a County Youth Forum?

- Yes: 81%; No: 12%; Don't Know: 7%

Question 9. Would you become a YouthRep?

- Yes: 67%; No: 21%; Don't Know: 11%

Question 10. Would you go to your Club AGM?

- Yes: 62%; No: 31%; Don't Know: 8%

Question 11. Would you stay involved in the GAA in another role if you were no longer playing?

- Yes: 91%; No: 3%; Don't Know: 6%

Question 12. Would you volunteer in you Club?

- Yes: 87%; No: 9%; Don't Know: 4%

Question 13. Which of these do you use most often?

- Facebook - 1%
- Instagram – 17%
- Snapchat – 80%
- Twitter – 2%

## Youth Congress

A new and innovative aspect of the Forum was the introduction of a 'Youth Congress' for 150 of the young players in the 16 – 21 age group. The items discussed at the Youth Congress were directly linked to the questions submitted to the YouthReps by delegates at the Official GAA, LGFA and Camogie Congresses in 2018. The Youth Congress was attended by John Horan (Uachtarán CLG), Kathleen Woods (Uachtarán, An Cumann Camógaíochta) and Dominic Leech (Uachtarán Comhairle Laighean, Cumann Peile na mBan). As well as discussion items the attendees were given an opportunity to vote on a range of topics. The outcomes of the votes were as follows:

Question 1. Are there currently enough games opportunities for Club players at Youth level?

- Yes: 49%; No: 48%; Don't Know: 3%

Question 2. Do you think there are sufficient competitive games opportunities at Post-Primary level?

- Yes: 28%; No: 64%; Don't Know: 8%

Question 3. Do you think there is too much emphasis on Development Squad players ahead of Club players at Youth level?

- Yes 72%; No 23%; Don't Know 5%

Question 4. Should the Féile competition:

- Stay as is at U.14? 81%; Move to U.15 age-grade? 19%; Move to U.13 age-grade? 0%

Question 5. For Hurling and Gaelic Football should the Minor age-grade be the same for both Club and County level i.e. U.17 age-grade?

- Yes 55%; No 35%; Don't Know 9%

Question 6. For Hurling and Gaelic Football should the Minor Inter-County Hurling and Gaelic Football Finals continue to be played as curtain-raisers to the Senior Inter-County Finals?

- Yes 82%; No 11%; Don't Know 7%

Question 7. Do you think that there should be a tiered Championship Competition for Inter-County Minor Football?

- Yes 80%; No 12%; Don't Know 9%

Question 8. Do you think that there should be a tiered Championship Competition for Inter-County Senior Football?

- Yes 91%; No 7%; Don't Know 2%

Question 9. Should all three organisations – GAA, LGFA and Camogie be the one organisation?

- Yes 62%; No 24%; Don't Know 7%

Question 10. With growing levels of rural depopulation should the age that boys and girls are allowed play on the same team move from U.12 age-grade to U.13?

- Yes 22%; No 67%; Don't Know 10%

Question 11. Taking the Playing Rules as a whole, do you know the rules of the game (s) you play?

- Yes 73%; No 22%; Don't Know 6%

Question 12. As part of your regular training sessions, do your coaches/ managers explain the Playing Rules of the games to you?

- Yes 28%; No 70%; Don't Know 2%

Question 13. Have you ever experienced verbal abuse from your coach/es?

- Yes 67%; No 33%; Don't Know 0%

Question 14. Have you ever experienced verbal abuse from parents/supporters in the crowd?

- Yes 77%; No 22%; Don't Know 1%

Question 15. Do you think there is too much of an emphasis on 'winning' at Youth level?

- Yes 48%; No 50%; Don't Know 4%