

2018 TUARASCÁIL



AN ARD-STIÚRTHÓRA



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REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR GENERAL





INTRODUCTION

I am sure that for many people the abiding GAA memory of 2018 will be of the summer's championships. Limerick's long-awaited title, and Dublin's four-in-a-row triumph certainly scaled the heights and both teams, indeed both competitions, gave us much to savour.

But behind those headlines the themes and stories of 2018 were many and varied.

The Allianz Leagues proved again to be of the highest standard. Both codes, and all divisions, provided keen contests between evenly matched teams and the drama intensified as the weeks progressed.

Kilkenny belied any hasty predictions of a phase on the margins with a strong defeat of Tipperary in the final.

No doubt that home venue at Nowlan Park provided extra incentive and the Kilkenny County Committee's presentation of the game and staging at the grounds more than matched the huge standard on the pitch. In Division 1B we saw what proved to be a portent of the All-Ireland outcome.

Limerick overcame Galway to finally move out of the second tier after a number of years of near misses.

The football league was won again by Dublin, but not without a few scares along the way. In particular, Monaghan registered a rare win in Croke Park which no doubt bolstered their ambitions for the summer to come. It was heartening to see Galway re-emerge as a force.

On final day they didn't quite manage to go one better than their draw with Dublin in Salthill. Again however, the feeling was that here were two teams who would have a big say in the summer's events... and so it proved.

The Allianz Football League season also proved fruitful for Roscommon, Armagh and Laois who prevailed in their respective divisions and will no doubt have big ambitions for 2019.

On the national club front the big winners of 2018 were Cuala, Corofin, Kanturk, Moy, Knocknagree and Ardmore. Congratulations to all. It was particularly fitting that Seán Cavanagh should conclude a storied association

with headquarters by winning an All-Ireland club title in Croke Park.

Both senior inter-county championships were notable for the new formats introduced in each code. The changes in each sparked much debate.

But more of that later. In hurling terms the fare served up by all teams was remarkable.

The action was front loaded somewhat towards two hectic provincial championships, neither of which disappointed.

A single semi-final weekend was a new departure and the two matches proved simply magnificent. An unprecedented 24 hours of hurling.

The semi-final replay and the final itself were also compelling and Limerick's great win will live long in the memory with Limerick people and neutrals alike.

The inaugural staging of the Joe McDonagh Cup proved to be another highlight, and Carlow's well-deserved win promoted them to the

Leinster Senior Championship this summer.

Dublin's progression to their fourth successive football crown may have seemed at times inexorable. But there was plenty of drama along the way. The new quarter-final format provided plenty of talking points, with visits to diverse venues nationwide proving very popular.

The last day of the quarter-final phase saw Monaghan, Galway and Kerry vying for two semi-final places, with the Kingdom losing out to Monaghan who advanced to a first semi-final in many years.

Their supporters lit up Croke Park on semi-final day, and the eventual disappointment was palpable as their team were bettered by a fine Tyrone side.

Tyrone mounted a serious challenge in the final, posting a significant early lead.

However, Dublin overhauled them with a concentrated effort and it was a privilege to see such a fine team register a historic fourth title. Whatever the coming years brings in terms of football titles or winners, the

Dublin team of 2018 is assured a place in GAA history.

Off the pitch 2018 was a year of significant change.

It began with our new Uachtarán, John Horan taking office at Congress in Croke Park in February following which I assumed my role as Ard-Stiúrthóir in April. I have already alluded to the new shape of the championship season in 2018; and the year concluded with proposals to vary the playing rules of Gaelic Football.

We had two new All-Ireland final dates, beginning in August, and of course the Association welcomed a number of significant guests and visitors, not least the historic visit of Pope Francis in August.

A widely varied year, then, and one which I sincerely hope proved enjoyable for players, officials, and supporters alike.

The challenges are still many of course, but the Association is in good standing for the coming year and beyond.



Gaelic Football PLAYING RULES

It behoves us all the time to be conscious of how our games are evolving, where they stand currently and where they may be going. Gaelic Football as played today varies greatly from that envisaged by previous generations.

The process of evolution is both natural and necessary, and is common to all sports. It is a process informed by many sources - by tactical thinking, athletic advancements, by influence of other games, and even by varying the playing rules.

Ideally the process should be organic, but from time to time some benign intervention is necessary to ensure that the game continues to evolve in the desired direction and to maintain its appeal.

It is important to pose questions at a time when any possible change will be discretionary and incremental. In other words, we don't wait until we reach a crisis point. Again 2018 invited such questions.

And finally, of course, we are somewhat restricted – rightly – in our capacity to change playing rules. That opportunity only presents itself to counties every five years, with 2020 being the next available window.

Thus evidence and logic suggest that 2019 is an ideal juncture to question ourselves and our rules.

The objective should be to enshrine rules which reward the skills of the game and preserve the fine balance between attack and defence and allow the best players and teams to flourish.

Please do not dismiss the current incarnation of Gaelic Football. It remains a truly great game which retains all of its capacity to enthral, to excite and to frustrate.

And long shall it remain so.

It did all of that and more in 2018. And if it is not changed it will still do that next year and beyond.

But there is nothing wrong with exploring the need for change and improvement.

To fail to do so would be a dereliction of duty.

So whether you agree or not with the specific experiments proposed, and whether or not any of them eventually materialise in the form of bona fide rules, in many respects one of the most important and valuable outcomes will be a validation of the process undertaken.

The debate has started, everybody has had a voice. And that is a good thing, something for which we owe the Standing Committee on Playing Rules, under chair David Hassan, a debt of gratitude.







DISCIPLINARY PROCESS

The purpose of the playing rules system is to provide an unobtrusive mechanism to allow the games to be played in a competitive and fair manner. When that breaks down the disciplinary process comes into its own.

Our system has proved over time to be entirely effective and is a testament of those who devised it and those who currently oversee it. That is not to say, of course, that it cannot be improved. Recent months have seen a number of regrettable incidents of violent indiscipline and misconduct at our games. I don't need to cite details – the incidents are well documented.

I know that such incidents are in the minority and that hundreds of matches are played without undue incident every week. But to glibly rely on that defence would be a mistake. Even one dangerous or unsightly melee is significant and is unacceptable.

The advent of smartphones and social media mean that incidents at the most obscure venue or competition can achieve prominence, and quickly.

Make no mistake, these things make uncomfortable viewing.

But ironically the widespread coverage may well prove the best means of eliminating this. Hiding things does us no credit and media spotlight, although uncomfortable, may well be in our best interest.

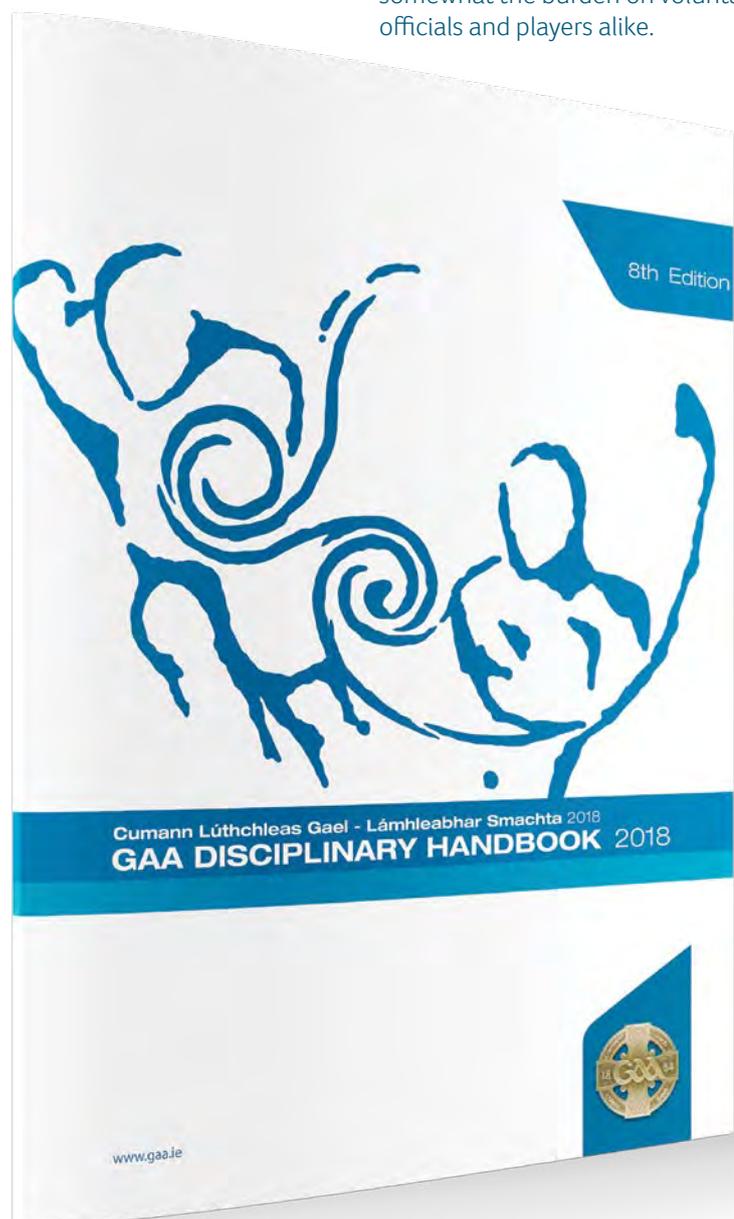
The remedy is more cultural than rule-based but there are a few measures we should look at. Should hearings committees be comprised of members from outside the county? Should

Central Council exercise more readily its powers to intervene in how a case is prosecuted? Should the definition of a melee be more precise, or indeed more broad?

On a more prosaic, but no less important note, the timetables associated with the hearings and appeals process,

particularly in the light of the newly concentrated senior inter-county schedules certainly highlighted the pressure on the process this year.

To that end proposals await delegates at this Congress to potentially recalibrate the timings with a view to arriving at a more streamlined process to ease somewhat the burden on voluntary officials and players alike.



REFEREE DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2018 – 2021

Following a detailed consultative process, the Referee Development Committee launched its Referee Development Plan 2018-2021, *Straitéis Réiteora in Páirc an Chrócaigh* in October.

The plan focuses on a number of refereeing areas; specifically, recruitment and retention, development, mentoring and advising, fitness and welfare, governance and administration.

Its stated overall vision is “to recruit, develop and inspire referees to reach their full potential and officiate at the highest level, and control our games, uniformly and consistently, in accordance with the playing rules.” It is a lofty target but refereeing and referees are such an important aspect of the Association that it is vital we are clear in what we are trying to achieve in this area.

I look forward to monitoring the progress of the plan over the next couple of years. It goes without saying that in addition to other work being carried out in the refereeing area, there should be a sharp focus from the Referee Development Committee on achieving the goals set out in the Development Plan over the next three years. Clearly, also, it will assist counties and provinces in their refereeing endeavours.





INTERNATIONAL VENTURES

The Association did not undertake an International Rules series in 2018 – preferring to take stock of possible future formats and venues and discuss options with the AFL. No doubt the series will return.

In its absence the Association undertook two other promotional international ventures – both hurling focused.

The Hurling/Shinty international was played in Inverness. Once again the format and event proved very popular with our players, although on this occasion resulting in a narrow defeat for the Irish team led by Willie Maher and Conor Phelan.

Wexford, Limerick, Cork and Clare travelled to Boston for the Super 11's tournament, while Galway and Kilkenny travelled to Sydney.

The purpose of such games is twofold: first and foremost to promote the game to a wider international audience and, secondly to acknowledge and thank players who contributed to a remarkable summer of hurling. In these respects both events proved successful.

It is worth noting that such ventures rarely, if ever, provide a financial return, and so it proved again in 2018.

Although these games are not driven by a financial imperative our resources in this sphere are finite. So although each game or event in isolation presents a good argument, perhaps in future years we will need to cast a more critical eye and be a little more selective or modest in our ambitions.

The All-Stars tour this year took on a slightly different hue.

In recent years it has proved increasingly difficult for all of the award winners to travel.

So this year we chose not to invite replacements in order to play what had become a devalued exhibition game. Instead for 2018 the travelling party comprised solely award winners and the players undertook training sessions with local children in local clubs, much enjoyed by all.











CLUB FIXTURES

Our Club Fixtures strategy – which has been guiding policy in this area since 2016 – attracted a lot of attention in 2018 as it was the first year that the majority of changes brought in by Congress in 2016 and 2017 took effect. The relevant changes included:

- **Changing the eligibility requirement at Minor from U18 to U17 (and thereby de-coupling minor inter-county from adult club)**
- **U20 Football being played without county senior players and moved to predominantly mid-week competitions staged alongside the senior championships in the summer months**
- **The bringing forward of the senior All-Ireland finals**
- **The introduction of extra time in all championship games except the All-Ireland and provincial finals**
- **The passing of motions intended to increase the time available for club competitions such as the 10 day rule and Winner On The Day at Special Congress in 2017**

These changes, allied to earlier policy changes (such as the condensing of the time period over which the Allianz Leagues are played and the abolishing of semi-finals in the football leagues) were designed to generate two significant club windows in the calendar year – one in April before the commencement of the inter-county championships, and an enhancement

of the existing second post-championship window, by concluding inter-county activity earlier than had been the case heretofore.

It was also a year when we introduced significant changes to the formats of our main hurling and football championships and all of these changes, when taken together, meant it was a particularly challenging year for our fixture makers at all levels of the Association.

An interim report on the strategy and its operation in 2018 (carried out by the Central Fixtures Analysis Committee), which compared the time available to counties in 2018 versus 2015 (the year before the strategy began to be rolled out) recorded that an average of four extra weeks per county was generated for club fixtures from the end of the inter-county season to the end of October (121 weeks across the 32 counties where adult club games could be played). In addition it reported that the number of counties with less than 10 weeks available post their elimination from inter-county competition and the end of October had fallen from 47% to just 12% (just four counties) and that in overall terms 29 of 32 counties had benefited positively from the changes with regard to the amount of time made available for clubs in August, September and October. This was all in addition to the April window created for club activities.

Of course, creating additional time for club fixtures is one thing; ensuring it is used effectively by counties is the real challenge. In this context, some counties adopted really well and others struggled, which was as we would have expected. The changes to the

inter-county season were always going to take a couple of years to begin to make a real impact on the club game – those involved in administration understand instinctively that it takes time for counties to analyse the “new” time available for them and to establish how best to use it for their constituent clubs. It also takes time to design, propose and adopt new competition structures, not to mention trying to establish internal consensus on changes to the club scene.

And that is where we find ourselves as we prepare for 2019 – the focus in the context of club fixtures will essentially change for the next couple of years into how individual counties plan to use the time created to the benefit of their clubs. It is important that they are given the necessary time to do this and that internal competitions are redesigned taking cognisance of the time available to play them, the optimum number of teams that should be involved and that internal structures that ensure reasonable availability of county players to clubs are put in place.

It is worth noting too at this point, that our Central Fixtures Analysis Committee – whose job it is to analyse the overall picture across the 32 counties – are firmly of the view that the reversal of any of the policies or rules introduced since 2016 will ultimately have a negative impact on the amount of time that can be generated for the club game in any given year and will severely hamper fixture planners in counties.

A final word on this matter – some of us prematurely judged the April “club month” as a disappointment based on

the number of counties who staged club championships during the month. In doing so, we perhaps overlooked the purpose of clearing April of inter-county activity and the general increase in club activity that materialised (in league and other competitions).

Some counties did choose to play championship fixtures in April of course, but the majority – knowing they now had an extended window in August, September and October to play their championships – chose not to do so and thus, unlike in previous years, the issue of some clubs having their entire championship activity completed by the end of April was satisfactorily addressed.

Hopefully when analysing the benefits of giving April back to the clubs in 2019 and 2020, commentators will attempt a more balanced and rounded appraisal of the subject rather than rushing to judgement based on misunderstood objectives.

Remember too, that the changes to the inter-county structures in 2018 were year one of a committed three-year experiment.

That implicitly means an assessment and evaluation of how we have fared, and how we might fare better. That review process begins shortly and will be open and inclusive. The topic of fixture predictability for the club player is a priority in everybody's mind.

There is no apparent discrepancy in what we all want – but there are differing views on how we might achieve it. All of those views and voices will be considered.





GPA

The Association's annual investment in the GPA is considerable. In 2018 we were proud to distribute a total of €3.5m (although oddly enough, even higher amounts are frequently attributed to us) to fund a variety of programmes and assistances to our inter-county players.

Our relationship with the GPA needs to evolve beyond that of being purely a funder, and towards being a partner. That will require commitment on both our parts.

To that end, 2018 represented the second year of the new protocol with the GPA. It was also the year that saw the departure of Dermot Early as CEO of the Association and the arrival of Paul Flynn to the role.

Although Dermot's time at the helm was short, he was always a pleasure to deal with and the GPA benefited from his integrity and genuine concern for the welfare of inter-county players during his time as CEO.

Paul took over from him in September and has already stated his desire for the GPA to play a positive role in the development of core policy issues around the inter-county game by ensuring their views are known before major decisions that will ultimately affect inter-county players are taken.

This is to be welcomed and it was a positive in 2018 to see GPA involvement – via the Standing Committee on the Playing Rules – in the playing rule experiments as well as feeding into the CCCC as part of the review of the 2018 playing season and in their contributions to the debate on a potential second tier football championship among other things.

Their views may not always tally with those of other stakeholders involved, but it is hugely important that they are known and expressed in a constructive manner before any major changes to the inter-county game are considered.



AIB CLUB PLAYERS' AWARDS

The AIB All-Ireland Club Championships represent one of the real jewels in our crown where, every year, there are memorable and heroic stories of clubs making it to Croke Park and capturing a coveted All-Ireland title.

In 2018, and with the assistance of sponsors AIB, we were proud to initiate a new awards scheme to recognise the outstanding performers in the senior club championships across provincial and All-Ireland level.

The concept of these awards came as a result of a motion from the Killybegs club in Donegal. They take place again in April and we look forward to seeing them grow.





INTER-COUNTY GAME IN 2018

Players

As part of the new protocol with the Gaelic Players Association (GPA) in 2017, we committed to establish a joint working group comprised of players, administrators and others with a knowledge in the area to examine potential proposals to assist with the increasing demands experienced by inter-county players and ensure that the experience of playing inter-county hurling or football remains an enjoyable and appropriate experience for what are at the end of the day volunteers.

As a first step, it was agreed to commission the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) to examine the challenge of lifestyle balance in the lives of senior inter-county players. An extensive study, led by Dr. Elish Kelly, was carried out on those who had played inter-county in 2016 and its findings were presented in September last.

The main findings of the study probably came as no surprise to anyone closely involved with the inter-county game or indeed with inter-county players over the last number of years. They included:

- **The urgent need for a closed season (40% of players surveyed had no time off from Gaelic Games at all)**
- **A concerning increase in the time spent travelling for training**
- **A huge increase in sports conditioning training and gym work in recent years**
- **The continuing challenges posed by multi-team involvement**

with nearly 75% of players aged between 18 and 21 played with four or more teams annually

- **A lack of balance in the lives of inter-county players with less time being devoted to personal relationships and general downtime due to trying to maintain professional commitments in tandem with their inter-county careers**
- **Half of players did not get the eight to 10 hours sleep recommended for athletes training at that level.**

Not surprisingly given the above, the time commitment spent playing is viewed as the main downside of playing inter-county football and hurling.

However, it is also worth noting that the overwhelming majority of those involved in the survey stated that they were glad they made the choice to play inter-county, and neither a lack of enjoyment for the game nor the game being too demanding were seen as significant factors in why players cease playing.

So while on the one hand it is heartening to see that the inter-county experience continues to be a positive one for our players, the issues identified in the report show that this is not something we can afford to take for granted and unless we begin to address the time commitments and other matters highlighted, there is little doubt that we could pay a huge price in the years to come.

There is currently a joint GAA/GPA group working on appropriate proposals that can begin to address some of the issues highlighted and no doubt their findings will be keenly anticipated. In the interim,

we, as policy makers, must bear in mind the importance of this research and the warnings it highlights even to the extent of taking decisions that may appear counter-intuitive at first glance but which in the long run will help us to protect the inter-county game, those fortunate enough to play it and its status as a volunteer pursuit.

Overseas games

There is no doubt that the games we stage overseas are very attractive to the players involved and are also hugely important for the Irish communities in the host cities.

They add to the visibility of our games for those trying to promote the GAA and attract new members in those countries. From a cost perspective, we aim for a “break-even” model around such ventures and thus they are generally not a huge financial drain on the Association.

However, the message of the ESRI report in this context was very clear – a proper closed season is an urgent requirement for the inter-county game. Although such ventures ultimately only effect a small proportion of the overall inter-county playing population, it can be argued that they send a contradictory message in that on the one hand we are asking counties to observe a closed season and on the other we are organising games – albeit as an end of season reward – in the “shut down” period for the inter-county game. This dichotomy – added to the need to ensure as much of the playing season as possible is allocated to the club game – is certainly something that will need to be addressed sooner rather than later and if a solution for the timing of such events cannot be found, then we may need to reassess their overall value to the Association.





OFFICERS AND RESOURCES

Arising from feedback received at the County Officer Development Conference in January last year, it was decided that the time was right to examine in a meaningful and holistic way the challenges faced by our volunteer officers around managing inter-county teams and the inter-county game generally. In the interim we have carried out a lot of work with County officers – with both national and provincial seminars held in the Autumn – and a report in this context will be published in 2019.

It is clear – even at this stage – from the feedback we have received that there is a fear that the Association is becoming too focussed on the inter-county game and that this aspect of our activities is using up far too much of the resources – both human and financial – available to us.

There is a definite feeling that policy changes leading to a greater control of the inter-county game are required. The report itself should make for interesting reading once published and will doubtless pose some difficult questions and highlight challenges that must be faced by the Association in the coming years.







STRATEGIC PLAN

The Association's organisation-wide Strategic Plan until 2021 - Fís Shoiléir 2021 - was launched in June after a comprehensive strategy development process.

Since then, our focus has been on setting the foundation for the successful implementation of the plan over the next three years. An implementation committee chaired by Uachtarán, John Horan, has worked diligently to communicate the plan internally, delegate actions to staff and volunteers, develop operational plans and establish reporting protocols.

We made considerable progress with further integrating the Strategic Plan into the management processes of the Association in 2018. For example, we established an online strategic management system which enables the tracking of progress against performance targets.

This is complemented by regular reviews of progress by the Implementation Committee, An Coiste Bainistíochta and the department heads in headquarters.

Furthermore, we carried out an external review of our strategy implementation processes and will be implementing several recommendations arising from this to ensure that Fís Shoiléir 2021 has the best possible chance of success.

In terms of actual results, solid early progress has been made across all aspects of the Strategic Plan with many individuals and teams working hard behind the scenes on projects that will make a difference in clubs and counties from 2019 onwards.

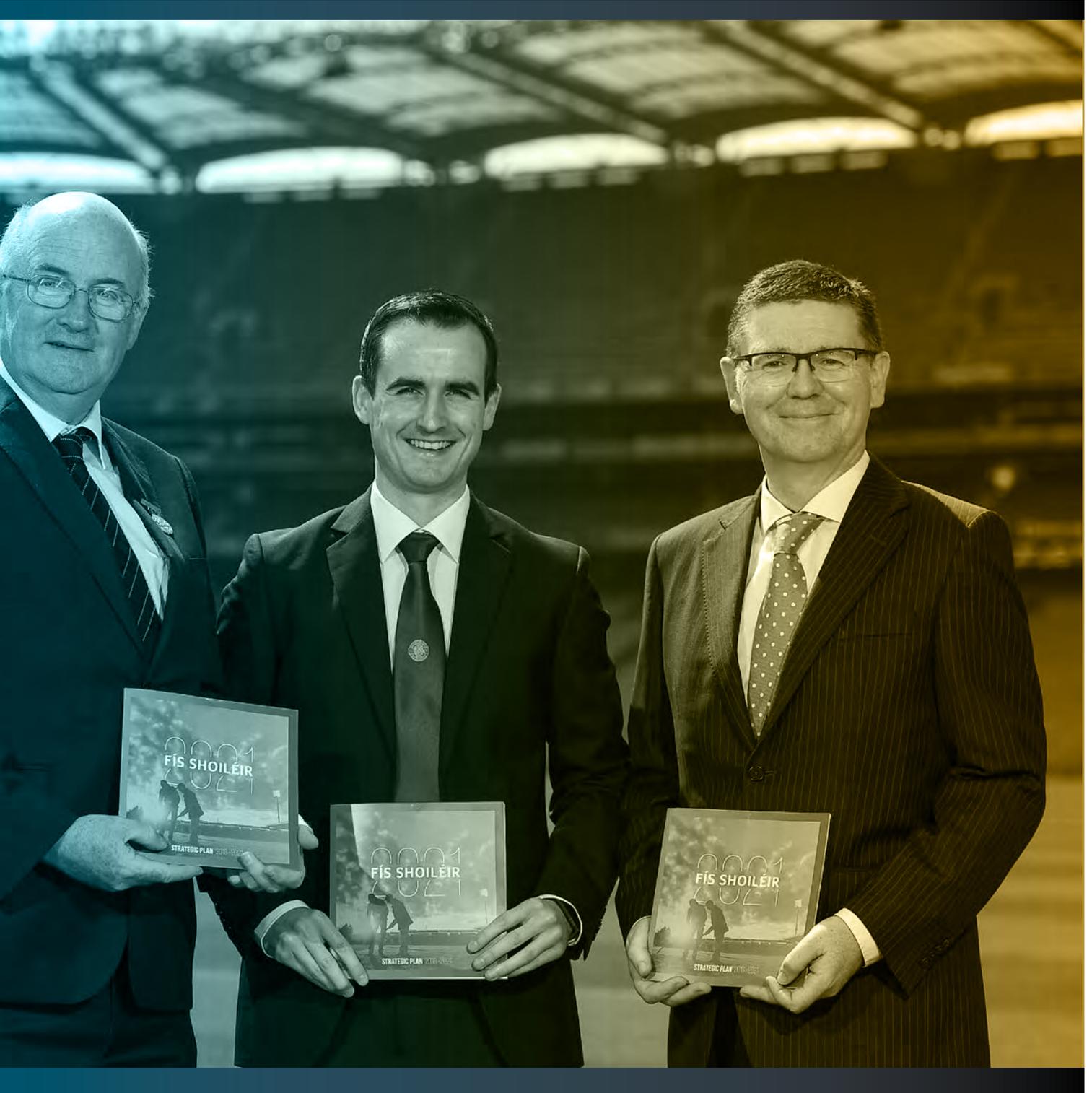
It is premature to showcase the impact of any particular strategic initiative and indeed there are too many to reference; however, I am excited about what is in the pipeline for this year.

The enhancement of our games development operations, our new communications strategy and a strengthened approach to the administration of inter-county games are three projects I look forward to updating you on throughout the year.

This Strategic Plan has proved to be a vital roadmap for staff within departments and central committees in Croke Park as they work closely together to further develop the Association. Whilst implementation of the plan is typically led at central level, most of our strategic efforts aim to create or improve initiatives and services designed to help clubs, counties and provinces to administer Gaelic Games in a more efficient manner.

I firmly believe that the implementation of our current strategic priorities will vastly improve the Association and result in an improved experience for players, volunteers, members and followers alike.







PÁIRC UÍ CHAOIMH

Páirc Uí Chaoimh was prominent in Association affairs again in the past year.

First and foremost it is important to note that the completed project is an outstanding facility and that it will prove an invaluable asset for the GAA in Cork, and nationally, for many years to come. It is entirely appropriate that a city of Cork's standing in the Association, and in the country should have a first class venue for showcasing our games. The completed stadium is a tribute to the county committee who oversaw its construction.

The cost of the stadium will prove to be significantly more than envisaged. There were a number of factors at play here, including variations in specification and complications encountered during construction.

Projects of this scale are notoriously difficult to deliver. With hindsight it could also be argued that the financial projections were overly ambitious.

The intention was to complete the stadium without debt, and this would have made Páirc Uí Chaoimh unique among GAA stadiums. In retrospect the projections proved too tight and that objective proved impossible.

The eventual cost remains to be determined – only because one or two high-value elements are the subject of ongoing negotiation. The numbers aired will prove to be at the outer limits of the cost, however there will be a significant debt to be discharged over the coming years. This will not, however, impact upon other counties or on funding for projects elsewhere.

Páirc Uí Chaoimh has been constituted separately from the county committee (although remaining 100% owned by the county) and a board has been established to oversee its operations.

Short-term funding and management expertise has been secured from Croke Park Stadium, and plans are well advanced to see the ground operate successfully in 2019 and beyond. Mention of infrastructure projects brings me to Casement Park. Progress has been slow, and the project remains embedded in the planning process. It is hoped that some clarity will emerge in 2019 which will allow us to progress with this vital facility.







LADIES FOOTBALL AND CAMOGIE

Despite misconceptions to the contrary the GAA has always proved to be eminently capable of adapting and changing. It has advanced to become Ireland's pre-eminent sporting and cultural organisation.

But there are areas in which we can achieve yet more.

Our two sister organisations, Ladies Football and Camogie are themselves currently enjoying unprecedented growth in popularity. Of course, as we all know, such environments are not without their own challenges too. So consider for a moment what the three organisations might achieve together?

That is the question each Association posed of itself, and of each other, back in 2016; leading to a broad agreement, or Memorandum of Understanding, signed in 2017 which envisages a route towards amalgamation.

We started work on the practical aspects of alignment this year. There is a long tradition of cooperation and harmony between the three bodies and that tradition has informed progress between us thus far. It is acknowledged that any eventual combined entity will be a coming together of equals and each group will bring its own identity and heritage. The process may prove a little slower than we each anticipated, but only because of a shared desire to do things assiduously and to proceed at a pace which brings everybody along comfortably.

No doubt there will be obstacles along the way but these can be overcome. There were two telling statistics in our

recent National Club Survey.

40% of GAA clubs currently operate as "One Club" effectively combined with Camogie and/or Ladies Football; and of those who do not currently operate on that basis some 60% expressed an interest in doing so.

Clearly this is a case where our clubs are taking the lead and the national body needs to follow.

It is important to signal our support for the "20x20" campaign recently initiated by the Federation of Irish Sport which aims to promote profile and participation in women's sport.

To that end there is one important milestone before Congress for consideration this weekend – a motion to afford LGFA and An Cumann Camogaíochta representation at GAA Ard Chomhairle and Coiste Bainistíochta. I trust delegates will give these measures their careful consideration and I encourage GAA members to watch progress closely and to play your part in the process.

I have no doubt that it will prove to be an exciting time for the Association.







ST CONLETH'S PARK

The GAA summer of 2018 proved memorable for many reasons. Some not so comfortable.

The draw for the fourth round of the Senior Football Championship saw Kildare paired with Mayo. Having been drawn out first, their expectation was of a home game. This expectation was founded in much of the discussion that had taken place around introducing the new championship format and our commitment given that we would use home venues wherever possible.

The Central Competitions Control Committee is charged with fixing venues. This is a skilled and experienced group upon whom the Association greatly relies. They were of the view – correctly as it turned out – the St Conleth's Park would not prove adequate for the number of people who would want to see the game. Their past experience (including Kildare) had always been that counties, supporters and players were happy to have occasion to play in Croke Park. Thus the game was fixed for headquarters.

As the day progressed it became clear that there were two quite reasonable, but directly opposing views. In the normal course of events such issues invariably get resolved quietly but such was the ire in Kildare that it quickly became a national headline. The speed at which things escalated was a salutary lesson for us regarding the influence of social media and how it can so quickly set the news agenda and tone.

There were a number of complicating

factors – none insurmountable – but complicated nonetheless.

For example tickets had already been sold for the fixture in Croke Park, safe capacities for Newbridge had to be established, Gardaí and local authorities had to be consulted, Mayo's view polled, and the GAA legalities weighed up. Having scoped out all the options and implications, we met with the County Committee and with the help of a few colleagues we worked out a plan.

Later, having put in place all of the necessary measures the CCCC undertook to deliberate again and first thing Wednesday morning a change of venue was announced.

It was done as quickly as a thorough process would permit, with a minimum of fuss and with evident goodwill on all parts. But against a backdrop of hype and speculation which belied all of that and created inordinate pressures and tensions.

It was a difficult two days and there were undoubtedly a few lessons learned along the way.

By way of footnote, this weekend Congress will consider a motion rewording the rule governing venues which will remove ambiguity around CCCC's remit; and proposals are at an advanced stage to considerably improve St Conleth's Park next year.

LIAM MILLER TRIBUTE GAME

The controversy surrounding the staging of the Liam Miller tribute game in Páirc Uí Chaoimh during the summer was similar to Newbridge in many ways, but not all. Newbridge was a GAA problem which was within our gift to fix and always felt capable of resolution. The Páirc Uí Chaoimh game was quite different.

I should preface my remarks with a reminder that the purpose of the game was charitable; all involved were doing things for the best of reasons and the main thing is that the Miller family benefited from the event. Everything else is secondary, and any reservations I have about the episode should be seen in that light.

Yes, the GAA has a rule restricting use of our pitches for other sports but that is a necessity borne not out of prejudice but practicality. The single biggest resource constraint we face all over the country is pitches. We don't have enough capacity to cater for our own needs, (including camogie and ladies football) let alone other sports.

Nevertheless, the Association has shown itself in the past to be very open to offering its facilities to other sports when the occasion arises. We have a well-observed, transparent and rational process to consider such events, and indeed deliver them. Our track record bears that out.

My problem with how events unfolded concerns not the playing of any particular match (or sport) in any GAA venue, but the blatant disregard that was shown for the Association's governance.

We try to conduct our affairs well. Much of the clamour that arose amounted to demands for us to just ignore our own standards, and indeed our decision makers. To ignore the rule, or find a loophole and host the game.

As a governing body charged with trying to uphold standards we should not be in the business of finding ways around our own rules. I personally should certainly not be. Nonetheless as the days progressed it became evident that to not "find a way" would only do the Association more reputational damage, however unjustified. So that is what we did – we found a way around our own rules. That is something I am still very uncomfortable with.

The mechanics involved identifying a legal route, establishing independently its validity, and convening at two days notice our voluntary Central Council from all around the country and overseas to a difficult meeting. I don't think any of us were enthusiastic about the outcome we reached. The overwhelming sentiment being that we felt we had been bullied into a course of action that we might well have taken anyway if given the chance.

I won't rake over the chronology here, but it merits recalling that the game had already been announced for another ground (with tickets on sale) before events turned. Central Council met and sanctioned the use of Páirc Uí Chaoimh some eight days after the story became an issue.

In hindsight we might have handled matters differently but I do believe that the GAA was very badly served by much of the comment at the time. It

consumed so much time and energy, and yet was not an issue of our making. That week at the height of championship season benefited hurling or football not one bit. Frustratingly I still don't quite know how things got to where they did. I know that the Liam Miller Organising Committee were certainly not making things difficult for us. Quite the opposite in fact. Events just seemed to take on a momentum of their own, with ever more influential people expressing ever more unhelpful and unsolicited views. The most disappointing aspect was that it should detract in any way from what was otherwise a very enjoyable GAA summer.

This little account is still relevant today for two reasons.

There was an inference at the time that the GAA should be under some moral, if not legal, compulsion to allow the use of our pitches for other sports because the Association, or the specific pitch, had received public funding. This is not factually correct and is not morally defensible. Any funding we receive is, and should continue to be, predicated solely on the intrinsic value of Gaelic Games. I am not aware of any other sporting organisation being assessed on the degree to which it promotes rival sports.

And nor should they be.

The process we undertook during the summer involved conceding that there was an ambiguity in our property rules, and asking Central Council to reach an interpretation. A necessary consequence of this is that we ask Congress to address that perceived ambiguity.

There is a motion before delegates to do precisely that this weekend.



CLUB FORUM

Threaded throughout this report I hope you will discern a recurring theme – support for clubs. Notwithstanding my attempts to address club issues and needs under various diverse topics, it is worth drawing attention to one important club-specific venture undertaken this year.

The National Club Committee was established this year under the chairmanship of Mick Rock to engage with clubs, identify and prioritise their needs and recommend resultant measures.

As a first step the committee surveyed every club in Ireland, posing very specific and detailed questions. It got a very positive response with 853 clubs, or over 50%, completing the survey. The findings make interesting, and somewhat disquieting reading.

The headline issues are volunteer burden, finances, fixtures and so on. The survey findings are published on our website and I would encourage you to read them. The challenge for us now is to come up with tangible help.

As a first step we hosted a National Club Forum in December where delegates from clubs all over Ireland discussed issues and shared ideas. A number of very specific actions have been identified and the Association will look to drive progress with these in 2019.

A quick reminder in passing...the National Club Draw proved very successful again this year. It is a risk-free and potentially lucrative source of fundraising for clubs and is entirely

operated and funded from Croke Park. Quite a large number of clubs still do not participate, so I would urge all clubs to consider taking up the opportunity.





CLUB SURVEY – FINDINGS



Development Grants

- 30% wanted to see an increase in the grants in terms of percentage of project cost or in an extension of the eligibility criteria.
- 23.5% suggested a greater need for support and advice and information around the entire process.
- 20% wanted an easier application process, with less "red tape".

Development Squads

- Overall view is that the Underage Development Squads are beneficial, there are some concerns in relation to elitism, selection process and club's access to players

GAA Club Forum 2018





GOVERNANCE

In recent years the GAA has placed an ever-increasing emphasis on governance. We have seen this manifested in the publication of our Governance Guide, widespread deployment of training modules for club and county officers, and in the ongoing work and influence of the National Audit and Risk Committee.

In the GAA there are five specific elements by which we should all measure ourselves – leadership, effectiveness, integrity, accountability and transparency.

Put simply, governance just means doing the right things in the right way. And the right way derives from our ethos and traditions, our structures and our rules, and our culture.

That is why ethos and rules are important. They are not academic, they should inform what we do every day. But there is a balance to be struck in the degree to which we depend on each. And I wonder have we got that balance right in the GAA?

Any organisation will encounter problems if its rules do not reflect its ethos. That is the reason the rules should be observed – not for their own sake but because they express in practical terms what sort of an organisation we want to be. I wonder if there are some things that the GAA can improve upon in this regard?

Congress is our ultimate decision-making body and is the means by which we enshrine and vary our rules. However sometimes that can mean that rule making becomes the main purpose of the assembly and that we

miss an opportunity at Congress to discuss policy or strategy.

Similarly, not every situation is best governed by a rule. Sometimes issues arise which are best gauged in terms of principle or policy rather than the confines of a rule. Even the best crafted rule cannot cover every nuance and sometimes interpretation is called for. There were one or two well documented such instances this year alone.

Our Treoir Oifigiúil is, of necessity, a complex and detailed tome. As a consequence it can appear daunting and sometimes requires specific skills to navigate and interpret.

I mention this not to underplay the importance of the rules – of course they are sacrosanct – but to assert that we need to have regard to our principles as well when it comes to governing the Association. It is a pity to operate in an environment where the rule book is our first line of defence or our best means of directing policy.

There are too many instances where we collectively decide upon a route we wish to take for the good of the Association.

We enshrine rules to effect this, and then we do our best to get around those rules. The result is wasted time, energy and goodwill, reputational damage to the Association and frustration for all involved.

Consider the case this year of counties disciplined for undertaking collective training trips in April.

The underlying principle was, and is, sound and (almost) universally

accepted. However, rules-based enforcement proved fractious. In the end self-policing proved to be the only realistic way of enforcing the rule, so we asked counties to assess themselves whether or not they had contravened the rule and to disclose their county panel schedules over the period.

The responses were varied. It turned out the only counties to be sanctioned were those three – Laois, Armagh and Waterford who were brave enough to concede that they had strayed and to put the Association's principles before their own self-interest.

There is every chance that they were not the only offenders. And so those three counties felt aggrieved, and the approach was derided in some quarters. I do believe, however, that we are entitled to trust our county boards and to expect integrity on their part. To do otherwise would be an indictment of our structures and ethos. If that trust is not respected then it is a great pity, but it doesn't reflect ill on the policy makers.

It would be great to arrive at a position where core values don't need to be manifested in rules, and don't need a disciplinary process to ensure that we observed them.

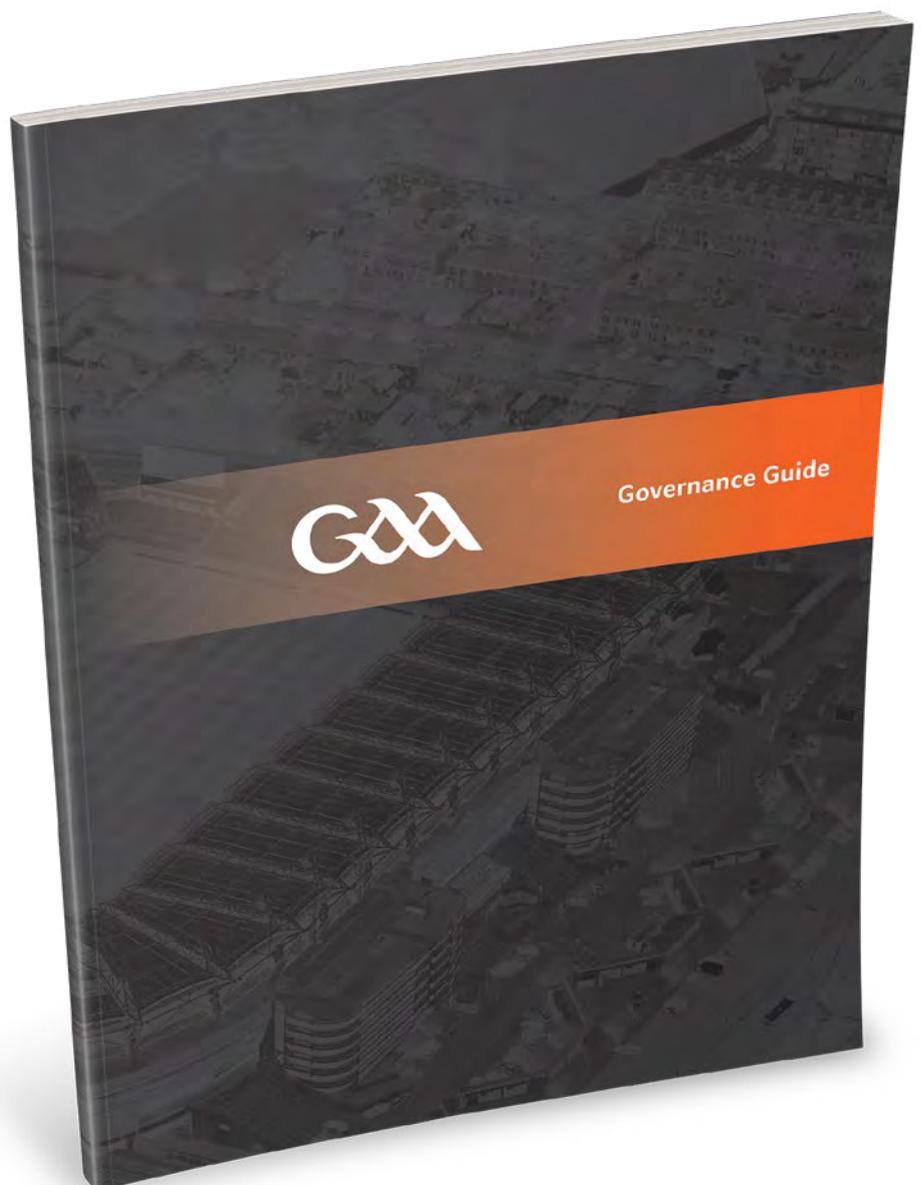
That might well require a re-validation on all our parts of what our priorities should be; what do we want to stand for and achieve? A first step this year in this regard was the regular forum with county chairpersons where the theme emerging was one of collective ownership and responsibility. These will be a more regular fixture in 2019.

Another strand will be some

refinements to Congress. Some of these will be evident this year and some will emerge when this weekend's governance workshop considers the topic.

One well-established tenet that will not change is the democratic nature of the organisation. Everybody will have a chance to air their views and perspectives.

Of course having a voice does not mean having a veto, and while diverse views are to be encouraged they cannot always be reconciled. Nevertheless reasserting some fundamental principles and governing our affairs accordingly can only leave the Association in even better standing.





BREXIT

Current political and economic discourse is dominated by Brexit. The outcome could have very serious implications for the island of Ireland, and for the GAA.

The most obvious threat to the country is of course economic. Should we eventually be faced with a “no deal” Brexit or the return of a hard border we clearly risk a shock to the economy which would be extremely detrimental to cross-border trade, to enterprises operating north and south, and to our collective prosperity in general.

As a body which is based, indeed embedded, in both parts of the island the GAA nationally and locally is at risk. At national level, and in selected counties we have income streams and costs denominated in both euro and sterling.

Currency fluctuations are always a concern, and the worry is that Brexit will exacerbate things here. Income of all types and at all levels of the organisation are linked to the fortunes of the economy at large – be that club fundraising, availability of bank borrowings to counties, or national sponsorship.

Our financial wellbeing may need to be more carefully guarded than ever this year.

However, the financial and economic risks are really only secondary for the GAA. The most profound threat posed to us by a disorderly decoupling of Britain is social. The effective operation of countless clubs in the border region, and countless communities in which those clubs

are based, is our primary concern. We absolutely need free movement of our members and supporters.

Furthermore, we simply cannot countenance a return to the security environment that characterised the country before the Good Friday Agreement.

This is, of course, a national issue with more at stake than Gaelic Games...but as an organisation that suffered more than most when times were bad, and has contributed more than most to the social fabric of a better Ireland since then, our well-being and that of our members and units must be protected; by ourselves and by our political leaders.

OFFICER DEVELOPMENT

The professional development of officers and administrators continues to be a top strategic priority for the Association.

We are fortunate to be building from a position of strength as over 3,000 club officers completed our custom-built Club Leadership Development Programme (CLDP) over the past three years.

However, the programme grew to new levels last year in terms of content and attendances.

The CLDP provides us with an invaluable forum to liaise directly with club officers to ensure role clarity, deliver key information and enhance skills. We now offer counties an opportunity to choose from a range of 10 modules and empower them to organise a minimum of three events per year.

This allows us to meet ever-evolving needs in areas such as club administration, coaching and games development, finance, club development and communication.

In addition to the 800 officers from 16 counties who completed training between January to April of last year, another 650 officers across 27 counties engaged in a Club AGM course throughout the autumn.

Club officers have reported benefits such as more efficient AGMs, improved compliance with rules and increased attendances arising from better promotion.

The delivery of key support initiatives

locally is dependent on a strong network of support from the county, provincial and central levels. Perhaps the most important role is that of the County Development Officer. This is the person who recruits officers, organises quality venues and arranges logistics.

Congress 2018 passed a motion meaning that from 2019 onwards, the role of development officer is an appointed position with a focus on club officer education and club planning.

A clear role description has been established and communicated to county committees.

While it will take some time for the new role to become accepted by all and embedded into the Association, I believe that it represents a strong statement of the Association's commitment to supporting our officers and administrators in the precious work they do.

Our county officers and administrators have diverse knowledge and skill-sets, yet learning and development, and knowledge sharing are constant needs.

Therefore, I am pleased that major strides were made towards improving the learning and development experience of county officers in 2018. Several carefully planned, structured and evaluated events based on the needs of county officers took place throughout the year.

The County Officer Development Conference continues to be the centrepiece event for county officers, so it was encouraging to see it develop into a two-day event for the first time which was well-received by the 200 officers in attendance.

The strategy of the Officer Development Committee was to hold at least two additional role-specific events for each of the primary officers - namely, Chairperson, Secretary/Administrator, Treasurer, PRO and Development Officer - throughout the year and this was achieved for the first time in partnership with various departments and committees.

The events with chairpersons, secretaries and treasurers in April and September gave the Uachtarán and I an excellent opportunity to listen to the ideas and concerns of officers on topical issues and this is a forum which both of us wish to continue using in 2019.

It is also satisfying that the feedback gathered at these events has influenced our approach to issues such as the administration of inter-county teams.

The feasibility of new initiatives such as team effectiveness training for county executives, and the expansion of the Chairperson Mentoring Programme are currently being explored and I look forward to witnessing the impact of these and all other county officer development supports on the effectiveness and success of the GAA in the year ahead.



GAMES DEVELOPMENT

2018 was a significant year for GAA Games Development and our continued advancement in terms of participation, integration, innovation, transformation and change management.

The Kelloggs Cúl Camps continue to be our flagship project for the recruitment and retention of players. The last decade has seen remarkable year-on-year growth in participation. A record 154,000 children took part in 2018 making our camps the biggest child promotion venture of its kind in the world on a per capita basis.

On a similar theme, record numbers of children were catered for at the Hurling Féile which took place in Connacht in 2018 and its football counterpart which was hosted in Down, Louth and Meath. This reflects the recent philosophy for both tournaments which is based on inclusion rather than exclusivity.

Primary schools have always been a backbone of the Association, from both a recruitment and development perspective. It is most encouraging that over 400 primary schools - more than 10% of the total - have signed up for the new 5 Star Centre Programme. This aims to ensure that young people are provided with a minimum of 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity per week via Gaelic Games.

One of the foremost challenges facing our Association is to ensure that all youth players are provided with a programme of meaningful games appropriate to their needs and level of ability. Super Games are a key aspect of this, offering informal playing opportunities of a developmental

nature for players between the ages of U13 and U17. 2018 saw Football Blitzes organised at the Connacht Centre of Excellence last December and out of Hurling Super Games involving Leinster (Kilkenny & Wexford) and Munster (Waterford & Tipperary) - at the WIT Sports Campus throughout the year. This testifies to both the need, and potential, in this area.

Recent changes within the mainstream educational system mean that Junior Cycle Wellbeing, Transition Year and Leaving Certificate Physical Education (LCPE) are set to become cornerstones of the system. These present opportunities to the GAA to optimise the links between the community club and the post-primary school. The Association's commitment this year to ventures such as the Future Leader's/TY programme and the LCPE Learning resources represent excellent progress in this regard and I have no doubt that there is further potential for similar partnerships in the future.

The overwhelming feedback from the Games Development Workshop which took place at the GAA Congress last February was for national consistency of ages grades. To this end the Games Development Committee is submitting a motion to Congress this weekend for its consideration, and momentum in this area is to be welcomed.

The GAA Games Development Conference is now the longest running and best attended annual conference of its type in the world. 2018 marked the 20th staging of the event. This testifies to the insatiable desire that exists for learning in our Association. One of the themes this year was sustainability. Quite apart from the fundamental games related

benefits of such a philosophy, there are also considerable savings to be made from adhering to a home-grown philosophy. It works for players and administrators and there is no reason why it cannot also work for coaches.

A quality introduction to Gaelic Games for our young people is of paramount importance when it comes to recruitment and retention of young players.

Good awareness around Children's Rights is a fundamental part of this and serves to increase the likelihood of children opting to "Play and Stay with the GAA".

The Rights Awareness Programme which was launched in conjunction with the Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO) is a major step forward in this regard and a first for any sporting organisation in Ireland.

The emphasis placed by the GAA on safeguarding young people is referenced separately in this report and is a commitment shared by us all. Quite apart from the importance of the subject matter, the seamless joint contributions of the GAA, LGFA and Camogie Association to the Rights Awareness project testified also to the extent of what can be achieved by the three organisations working together.

As referred to previously, 2018 was an outstanding year for hurling. Thus it was fitting that the year concluded with the game being awarded Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) status by UNESCO at a meeting in Mauritius on November 30.

This was a lengthy project, which commenced with a recommendation in 2010 to the Hurling Development Committee (HDC) - under the then chairmanship of the now former GAA

President - Liam O'Neill - from Daniel McCarthy and Páraic Quinn (Clare).

We lobbied the Government to sign up for the relevant UNESCO Convention, which it did in 2013 and we staged a "Celebratory Night on Hurling" which was hosted at the Irish Embassy in Paris last October, setting out the indelible connections between hurling, Irish identity and heritage. I would like to pay a special word of thanks to the following people who contributed to the successful outcome of this project: Pat Daly, Louise Conlon, Daniel McCarthy, John Fenton, Aidan O'Sullivan, Claire Cave, Paul Rouse, Niall Austin and the Uachtarán - John Horan - who led the delegation on the night. A special word of thanks is also due to Josepha Madigan - Minister of Culture, Heritage and the Gaelteacht and her colleague Sinéad O'Hara.

Over the past number of years, the sustained level of growth of the games at International level has been nothing short of spectacular. 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. While the volunteer officers who populated the various International Committees have been very much to the fore in this, I would also like to recognise and thank the World Games Committee - under the chairmanship of Niall Erskine - for its work as well as acknowledging the Department of Foreign Affairs for its outstanding contribution to the Global Games Development Fund.

I would also, in this context, like to commend - and thank - the Department of Sport, Transport & Tourism and Sport Ireland for their funding contribution for the deployment of Games Development personnel throughout the Association, and in particular Minister Shane Ross and John Treacy (CEO, Sport Ireland).

Go Games
Go Games are small-sided games – of an informal nature – that are played at U7, U9 and U11 level where every participant gets “A Go” - that is, gets to play for the full game. Increased participation has been attributed to the Go Games as has the significant improvement in skill level since the Go Games were first introduced in 2004.

Super Games Centres
Super Games have been developed to ensure that youth players - aged 12 to 17 – are provided with informal playing opportunities, which are conducive to maximising participation and minimising dropout. They have been the subject of a PhD study that testifies to the positive impact which they have in this regard. In excess of 36,700 young people participated in Super Games in 2018.

Renault GAA World Games
The GAA World Games were established to provide players – Irish-born and native-born – with the opportunity to participate in hurling, football, and camogie and ladies tournaments. The inaugural event took place in Abu Dhabi in 2015 and the games were staged in Ireland in 2016 where a total of 56 teams – 27 of which were native-born, participated.

Kellogg's GAA Cúl Camps
Cúl Camps were introduced in 1988 – then known as Summer Camps – and there has been significant growth since coming under the Cúl Camp banner in 2006. This year 153,858 participated in the Kellogg's Cúl Camps representing an eight per cent year-on-year increase, which means that the camps are, on a per capita basis, the biggest child sport promotion in the world.

Féile na nGael
Nothing better reflects the requirements for adaptation and change than Féile na nGael (U14 hurling) and Féile na nÓg (U14 football). These have transformed into more inclusive competitions where the primary emphasis is placed on player development. This is reflected in the fact that there is now a national and regional dimension to the féile and in the fact that 696 teams participated in the féile in 2018.

Celtic Challenge
The Celtic Challenge is an U17 hurling competition that was introduced in 2016 as a replacement for what were then known as “Minor B and C competitions.” The competition has proved to be very successful and last year marked the first occasion ever where all 32 counties participated in the one underage hurling competition. The Celtic Challenge in 2018 was equally successful with an outstanding finals day in Tullamore.

Fun & Run
Fun and Run is a new game which has been developed with a view to maximising participation in Gaelic games across all age cohorts – able-bodied and disabled – and is structured to overcome any problems that might arise from ethnic and/or socio economic issues. Fun and Run is basically an adaptation of rounders and is proving very popular at both national and international level.

Coach 10
The Coach10 model is a key ingredient in this regard in that it identifies that 10 human capacities that facilitate the development and Wellbeing and Lifelong Learning (Well), engender life-skills and enhance character-building across the four core – communal, occupational, recreational and educational – domains. The Coach10 model has been the subject of international acclaim and will underpin GAA inputs into ground-breaking initiatives within mainstream education.

GAA COACHING CONFERENCE
The GAA Coaching Conference in partnership with Sky Sports was initiated in 2007 and is now the biggest and longest-running event of this nature in Ireland. A total of 859 delegates and 27 speakers attended the conference.







CHILD SAFEGUARDING

2018 was a challenging year for Child Safeguarding in the GAA during which many questions were asked of us with regard to our policies, procedures and practices.

Despite these challenges it is gratifying to report that, in the face of adversity at times, the Association stood firm in ensuring that the safeguarding of children was paramount.

It is most important that we as an Association stand firm and insist on the full compliance with rule and legislation whenever and wherever we are working with children.

The Association's Child Safeguarding Policies and Codes are now fully enshrined in rule and under the guidance of the National Child Safeguarding Committee. Three levels of child safeguarding training have now been devised and are currently being delivered to appropriate personnel in the GAA. Our training programmes cater for coaches and managers, for children's officers and our latest training programme is provided for designated liaison persons.

The training attendances reached a new high in 2018 as did the numbers of members who submitted vetting applications under the National (Garda) Vetting Bureau via Croke Park or through AccessNI as administered on our behalf by Ulster GAA.

The Association recently launched its new Code of Behaviour (Underage), highlighting the levels of behaviour that the GAA seeks from those who are playing, coaching, officiating or attending our underage games. The Code of Behaviour (Underage) will be complemented later in 2019 by the publication of a new GAA Child Protection

Policy and by the adoption of new guidance on dealing with allegations of abuse.

The interest shown by other sports NGBs, by youth and community groups and by a number of statutory bodies in the GAA reflects greatly on our structures and services and in the spirit of resource sharing in sport we have gladly assisted these groups and permitted them to replicate our procedures and structures.

Much has been reported in 2018 about the need to ensure that all sections and units of the Association are fully compliant with both our own GAA child safeguarding requirements and that which is prescribed under legislation. Whether such procedures apply to a club team, a county board or to individuals who on our behalf work with children, any dilution or eroding of compliance will no longer suffice.

Compulsory child safeguarding training, the vetting of those who work with children and the necessity to have a coaching qualification were all introduced by the GAA as minimum requirement for those working with children at underage level long before they became a mandatory requirement under the Children First legislation almost a year ago.

The GAA Child Safeguarding Committee will apply those standards to all jurisdictions and integrate the requirements of the act into our child safeguarding codes and policies.

Almost 30,000 new vetting applications and more than 17,000 people attended child safeguarding training under the direction of the GAA in 2018. These numbers surpass by a considerable margin all previous levels of vetting or training carried out in recent years.

None of this could be achieved were it not for the unrelenting commitment of Children's Officers at club and county level

who at times under fierce pressure still delivered on our child safeguarding targets so as to ensure we had the necessary levels of child protection in place for those who work with children in the GAA.

We are very pleased to report that an online refresher programme, targeted at coaches of underage teams who have previously attended Safeguarding 1 training, will roll out in 2019. This online programme will enable people who have previously attended to take an online version of their training programme thus eliminating the need for them to attend the face-to-face retraining on a regular basis.

Perhaps, in paraphrasing the Children First Act we would do no harm to reflect on this adapted quotation. 'While it is not possible to remove all risk, organisations shall put in place policies and procedures to manage and reduce risk to the greatest possible extent'. (Children First 2017).

The National Youth GAA Forum took place in Croke Park in October 2018. It proved to be a most worthwhile day for over 500 delegates and speakers alike, and a number of important themes emerged. We saw evidence of the huge enthusiasm on the part of young people to get involved in the GAA beyond the pitch, and our challenge is to harness this spirit both locally and nationally. We learned too that the way that we communicate with our young members must be improved. Most worryingly, some two thirds of delegates reported having experienced verbal abuse from the sideline during matches. This is clearly not acceptable.

One immediate output from the forum was a desire among young members to have a representative delegation attend Congress. I am very pleased to welcome such a group here this weekend. We have much to learn from them.

FINANCIAL CONTROL AND SUPPORT

A club, county, provincial or national unit of the GAA should not shy away from being seen, treated and governed in a manner akin to a small enterprise.

It is with this vision and platform that our “off the field” success will be judged, through the implementation of ongoing oversight and proper financial procedures and controls.

Each unit’s executive should be able to report accurately, and regularly to all its members the true financial position at any given point throughout the year. An audit or indeed the auditor should not be viewed as the year-end problem solver for any unit and it is remiss of anyone to assume the annual audit will be the only required health check that will highlight financial issues or challenges that exist within a unit.

Central Council Resource Support; Central Council can play a greater role for units in achieving this level of assurance. We will enhance and expand the shared services we can offer to units in 2019. We can provide additional training, support and knowledge and I encourage all units to fully avail of our resources and ease the burden at local level.

A qualified financial accountant can be assigned to your unit to assist on an interim or short term basis with month and year end financial reporting. All required training and support services for the appointed Microsoft Dynamics financial accounting package are available through headquarters.

The National Finance Management Committee are currently in the

process of nominating a preferred partner for a related but smaller club accounts package and this partner will be communicated through the club newsletter on its selection.

Our in-house ticketing and accounts staff are always available and willing to arrange both onsite and phone support training sessions to ensure all ticket sale queries and related ticket reconciliation reports are clearly understood and available for integration into the financial ledgers. It needs to be remembered that a sold ticket is not tangible revenue until the cash is collected and banked. With the introduction of PAYE modernisation by the Irish Revenue on January 1 2019 any personnel engaged on a casual basis must now be treated as effective employees of the unit and all related taxes applied, deducted and remitted in the appropriate manner. We will provide all the resources and supports necessary to deliver compliance for units as required.

A good budget always provides the eyes and ears for a unit to gauge and measure actual performance against expectation. I would encourage all units to continue to complete the ground work and detail to build a budget from the ground up and not just to use last year’s numbers. With a well built and defined budget, variances are easily explainable and understood and allow corrective or remedial action to be taken in a more measured fashion.

Financial Support; Cumann Lúthchleas Gael annually aims to distribute over 83% of its direct revenue intake back through the Association’s units through the hosting of match days, coaching, games development, capital projects and grant funding.

Three significant channels of annual support will be enhanced in 2019. The “Club Development Fund” reopened in October 2018 and submissions for the first round of new loan funding are now being accepted.

This loan fund is available to support approved club projects and initiatives up to the value of €100k per club and is open to all clubs. Equally any clubs or units with surplus funds on hand are encouraged to deposit these surplus funds securely with CLG while in turn also earning a return. It is with these independent deposits that the overall development fund base increases. All deposits lodged to the fund are redeemable on request and within 14 days.

The annual “Club Grounds Grant Fund” is being increased from €2m to €4m over a four-year period. €500k was added to this fund in 2018 and an additional €500k in annual increments are budgeted over the coming three years.

A new ring-fenced support fund of €200k for overseas units has also been established for 2019 and again this will seek to support approved projects and initiatives in parallel with the funding required to ensure the successful hosting of the 2019 World Games in Ireland.

To meet these ambitious additional financial support targets and with all current revenue streams allocated to active and budgeted projects it will be a requirement to raise new or additional revenues over the coming years to ensure these additional funding targets are delivered.

This will hopefully prove to be only a small price to pay to ensure the delivery of the greater gain for the bed rock of our Association, our clubs.



GAA HANDBALL

The past year was a very positive one for GAA Handball on many fronts. National finals were successfully staged in Kingscourt, Croke Park and in Castlebar where the number of entries and the standard of play were all hugely encouraging.

In international terms the standout event was the 2018 World Handball Championships in Minnesota. Team Ireland performed exceptionally well, winning a total of 22 medals and showcasing the strength of Irish handball at the moment. Martina McMahon captured a remarkable three Open Ladies titles including a first senior singles title won on the same day as her native Limerick's All-Ireland hurling final success.

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 school or GAA club facility. I would encourage all GAA clubs to embrace the game and to consider installing a One Wall as part of your club's facilities. Details of how to install a One Wall are available on www.gaahandball.ie. It offers an enjoyable recreational outlet for all members to use and can also help attract new members to the club.

2019 promises to be a huge year for GAA Handball with the scheduled completion of the new National Handball and Community Centre at Croke Park. The centre will provide a much needed, state of the art home for GAA Handball and somewhere where future handball stars can aspire to play. This will mark the beginning of what promises to be a very exciting era for the game.



GAA ROUNDERS

2018 was a year of progress for GAA Rounders with competitions organised for U13 Girls and Boys, U14 Mixed, U15 Girls and Boys, U16 Mixed, Minor Boys, Girls and Mixed and Adult Ladies, Men and Mixed. Entries to all competitions were up.

The season kicked off in late March in the Regional Sports Complex in Athlone with our revived Interprovincial competition. This was a mixed competition. Leinster were crowned champions after winning their semi-final against Ulster and going on to beat Connacht in the final.

Our Senior Ladies, Men and Mixed competitions started the following weekend and continued right throughout the summer culminating in our senior All-Ireland finals at the National Games Development Centre in Abbotstown on the 17th of August 2018. Glynn/Barntown (Wexford) became Senior Ladies Champions for the third year in-a-row, Erne Eagles from Mullahoran in Cavan reclaimed the Senior Men's title and The Heath from Laois won the Senior Mixed All-Ireland title for the second year in-a-row.

Our minor and junior finals were played in Tymon Park in Dublin in early August. Athenry from Galway won the Minor Ladies, The Harps from Laois won the Minor Men and Limekiln from Dublin won the Minor Mixed final. The junior All-Ireland title went to Michael Glaveys from Roscommon in Ladies, Sporting Limerick in the Junior Men and Ballinagore from Westmeath in the Junior Mixed.

Amongst the 2018 underage title winners were the Heath, Emo, Athenry and Breaffy and the season concluded with the All-Star Awards which took place in the Green Isle Hotel in Dublin in September.





INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

The GAA IT Strategy was published in early 2018 and it sets out the vision for how information technology will be used to support core activities within the GAA.

This strategy describes how the core principles of the Association will continue to be supported by the technologies available and highlights the additional developments planned to further the overall goals of the Association.

Fundamental to the strategy is the need to apply technology to appropriately support volunteers in the delivery of their individual roles.

Advances in IT support for clubs were many and varied in 2018. Foremost among these was the GAA Membership App which will revolutionise the membership renewal and payment process and will see full implementation this year.

An online system has been developed to assist with the management of expenses for inter-county players. Players can submit claims through an online form and officers can approve electronically and better manage and track costs.

The system is available for counties to use in the coming season. 2018 was the second year of the

national GAA Membership Card and Rewards Programme known as grma (Go Raibh Maith Agat) and saw membership reach 14,000.

During 2018, the GAA IT Department was delighted to be able to facilitate the National Parents Council (Post Primary) in the delivery of its Leaving Cert Help Desk in Croke Park. The NPC 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 2018.

With the assistance of the Club Officer Development Programme, a process to deliver specific training on the use of IT systems, and in particular Microsoft Office 365, has been implemented.

IT tutors have been trained and provide classroom training to delegates as part of the overall Officer Development Programme. The range of IT training delivered in this manner will be expanded in 2019. Delivery of training, both online and classroom, has been progressed with the National Officer Development programme and specific IT modules have been delivered through IT tutors in each province.

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.

This means 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 2018.

Key stadia, including O'Moore Park, Bord na Móna O'Connor Park, Walsh Park, Innovate Wexford Park, Nowlan Park, Pearse Stadium, Elverys MacHale Park, Healy Park, Kingspan Breffni Park, The Athletic Grounds, Páirc Esler, St. Tiarnach's Park and Hyde Park have been assessed and recommendations made to the Infrastructure Committee regarding suggested investments.

The GAA IT Department has also provided assistance to the local project management team in Cork with the deployment and operation of technology in the redeveloped Páirc Uí Chaoimh.

Last year also saw the culmination of a three-year collaboration between the GAA Museum and the Broadcast Authority of Ireland (BAI) resulting in The Gaelic Games Television Archive (GGTVA). The completed archive contains full digital videos of approximately 500 inter-county and club games, dating from 1961 onward, which can be now accessed in the GAA museum, and edited highlights of

All-Ireland finals which are available to view on the GAA website.

As well as presenting numerous opportunities, technology can also sometimes pose challenges and threats to the Association.

Without question the new GDPR regime is one such challenge, and cybercrime is one such risk.

Significant changes to Irish and EU Data Protection legislation came into effect on May 25th 2018, with the advent of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Irish Data Protection Act, and, as a result, GAA clubs, county boards and provincial councils have had to adapt changes to how personal information is processed by the Association and its members. In order to provide assistance and guidance to various units, officials and volunteers on matters relating to data protection, a Data Protection Officer, Kelly Cunningham, was appointed.

Kelly has been leading the Association's initiatives to comply with GDPR and a number of practical measures have been implemented to facilitate compliance.

Relevant documents, including the official GAA membership forms in the club constitution, have been amended to include the appropriate data protection clauses, online and classroom training has been delivered,

information and guidance has been provided through direct emails and the GAA Club Newsletter and a variety of tools and templates have been developed and made available through the GAA website and Microsoft Office 365.

These supports will continue to be made available through 2019 and it is important that all personal information held by the GAA is managed in compliance with the new legislation.

There has been a significant increase in the number of cyber fraud attempts recently and this has led to some difficulties for GAA units in 2018.

To help manage the risk of cybercrime, active monitoring of systems and proactive training regarding cyber risks have been introduced.

However, the best defence against cybercrime is user awareness. All GAA members are encouraged to be prudent when using online technologies and to consider the risks before clicking on links, opening attachments or providing information, particularly passwords of bank details, online.

I ask units to be particularly vigilant against 'Invoice Re-direction' whereby cybercriminals attempt to get payment for legitimate invoices made to their bank accounts, rather than the bank

accounts of the relevant supplier. They do this by sending the 'victim' an email that appears to be legitimate and requesting that payment is made to a different bank account.

It is imperative that any requests of this type are verified by phoning the relevant person to confirm that it's a legitimate request.

If there is any doubt whatsoever, do not make the payment.

Help or advice on dealing with cyber threats is available by contacting the IT Department (itsupport@gaa.ie).



COMMUNICATIONS

As an organisation we are currently working on a new Communications Plan to review our activities in this area and to plan for the future.

To be devised at national level, it will provide a template and guidance about how we can foster best practice in our daily communications at every level of the Association.

Effective communication is not the preserve of those whose primary responsibility lies in this area.

It has to permeate every strand of the GAA making sure our games and activities run smoothly and that those who need to know about them, do so. It also portrays an image of our games and those who play them and we are mindful of equipping our members and units with the skills to make the most of modern technology that offers new opportunities in this space.

Without pre-empting what the strategy will outline, there is sure to be a discussion around more direct communication with our members as advances such as the Official GAA App make this process easier.

As part of this work we have recently completed our new social media guidelines and they will be shared right across the Association. With the new aforementioned opportunities come challenges however and the need to be safe, secure and responsible in our

communications is paramount.

Digital continues on a strong upward trajectory for us. GAANOW was in its second year in 2018 and its growth in that year has been exponential, both in terms of content and viewership.

GAANOW now delivers in-game and on-demand match clips, the best of our archive's golden moments and very strong live social programming without any barriers. These videos were viewed over 30 million times in 2018.

GAANOW is naturally an asset for our domestic audience but the role it plays for our World GAA community is also of growing importance. It doesn't matter where, when or with what device; once you have connection to the internet you can be connected to GAANOW content. It is hoped that the planned enhancement of facilities in Croke Park will lead to greater outputs in the year ahead and complement the training that has been provided for members of the communications team in the area of mobile journalism.

Club Newsletter

It is vital that there is a clear line of communication between our clubs and club members with the work being done on their behalf by the staff in Croke Park and on our various national committees.

To this end, the monthly GAA Club Newsletter is an invaluable information resource and should be essential reading for all of us involved in the Association.







GAA COMMUNITY & HEALTH INITIATIVES

The Association's commitment to the health and wellbeing of our members remained to the fore in 2018 thanks to the tireless work of the volunteers responsible for our health and wellbeing structures, supported by the Community & Health department in Croke Park.

A successful pilot of GAA Recreational Games involving small-sided games with modified rules targeting lapsed and recently retired players aged 35 plus, was organised in Páirc Uí Chaoimh in late 2018. Further pilots will commence in 2019 targeting clubs and third level institutes and will explore a mixed gender game.

Opening Gaelic Games to as broad and diverse an audience as possible brings with it some challenges but also great opportunities. Everyone should be able to access the social, physical, and emotional benefits associated with being part of something meaningful, of being part of the GAA tribe. Great leadership has already been shown by many units. Of note in 2018 was the success of three GAA clubs in the National Sports Inclusion Awards. The Clonakilty Club won Sport and Physical Activity Camp of the year for their inclusive summer camp, Cúl Eile; Órla Reck of Kilmacud Crokes GAA club won Volunteer of the Year; while the Raheny Club was shortlisted for Sports Club of the Year. All three clubs participate in the GAA Healthy Club Project.

The Healthy Club Project (HCP) made significant strides in 2018. Over 200 clubs applied in January to participate in Phase 3 of the project, with capacity allowing for the selection of 92 to join

the 58 clubs that successfully completed Phase 2 in November 2017. It is intended that this will be the last closed phase of the project, and that all interested clubs will be invited to join in January 2020. The growing interest in the area was highlighted by the attendance of 400 delegates at the largest to date national Healthy Club Conference in Croke Park in October.

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, whose backing of the Healthy Club Project has facilitated its accelerated and continued growth.

The Association launched a new 'Ireland Lights Up' partnership in 2018 with RTÉ's Operation Transformation and Get Ireland Walking with 150 clubs offering their communities a safe environment in which to enjoy a collective weekly walk. This proved phenomenally successful with over 6,000 walkers participating and will be replicated in 2019 with an aim to have a club in every county participate.

The Community & Health Department at Croke Park offered "critical incident" support to clubs in over 50 cases this year. Every incident is unique and requires its own response. However, universal guidelines and protocols exist that can help ease the burden and impact of such tragedies, both for those affected and those trying to assist. The Community & Health department worked with professional experts – including the HSE, National Office for Suicide Prevention, the PHA, the Defence Forces, and counties and clubs that have experienced incidents in the recent past – to devise the 'GAA Critical

Incident Response resource'. Training in this resource was delivered to 54 delegates of the National County Officer Development Conference, covering 22 counties, in January 2018.

The Association also promoted The Dermot Earley Youth Leadership Initiative which saw 121 young GAA members aged 15 to 18 years (both male and female) graduate from NUIG with a Foundation Certificate in Youth Leadership and Community Action. This followed their completion of the Dermot Earley Youth Leadership Initiative, delivered in partnership with Foróige and NUIG. The initiative aims to foster the leadership and life skills epitomised by Dermot Snr as a leader both on and off the field and will stand participants in good stead both as athletes and as future leaders within the GAA and their communities.

Of course the solid foundations of the GAA were laid by the previous generations, and so it was fitting too that GAA's Social Initiative continued apace in 2018. The GAA's County Health & Wellbeing Committees supported numerous activities responding to the social needs and interests of older people all over the country during the year.





HERITAGE

Bloody Sunday Commemoration

On the 98th anniversary of Bloody Sunday last November, we held yet another headstone unveiling in Glasnevin Cemetery to one of the victims who had previously been in an unmarked grave. John William Scott was a 14 year-old schoolboy who had grown up in Fitzroy Avenue in the shadow of Croke Park, and was among the 14 tragically killed as a result of the attack on the crowd that day. The GAA's Bloody Sunday Graves Project is well advanced at ensuring all of the GAA people murdered in 1920 are appropriately remembered in their final resting place. We plan to have further headstone unveilings in 2019.

In addition, we have begun formulating plans around a centenary commemorative event at Croke Park on the weekend of November 21, 2020 where the footballers of Dublin and Tipperary will again take the field.

Gaelic Sunday Centenary

In the summer of 1918 an attempt was made by the authorities of the time to suppress and suffocate the activities of the GAA. Our Association's response was swift and decisive and led to a call from then Secretary-General Luke O'Toole for a national day of action and defiance. The result was the phenomenally successful Gaelic Sunday staged on August 4, 1918 when clubs in every county took part in specially arranged games at 3pm in open defiance of a demand for GAA activities to require a British permit.

The GAA never looked back from the success of Gaelic Sunday - but the significance of that day had faded from memory and so, it was a very welcome development to see this landmark moment in our history revised and celebrated and commemorated with special events at Croke Park and nationwide 100 years on last August.

An Ghaeilge / Scór

Bhí an-rath ar obair Chumann Lúthchleas Gael maidir le cur chun cinn na Gaeilge i 2018. Eagraíodh seimineár mór i bPáirc an Chrócaigh i mí Feabhra ina raibh an Ghaeilge agus Cumann Lúthchleas Gael faoi chaibidil. I measc na n-aíonna speisialta a bhí linn ar an lá bhí Gráinne McElwain, TG4, Ríona Ní Bhuachalla, Dara Ó Cinnéide, Aoife Ní Chasaide, Micheál Ó Muircheartaigh agus go leor eile. D'éirigh go hiontach leis an lá.

Thacaigh an Cumann go mór le Bliain na Gaeilge. Reáchtáladh 'Lá na Gaeilge' i bPáirc an Chrócaigh ag cluiche leathcheannais iomána na hÉireann ar 29 Iúil agus bhí 70,000 duine i láthair ann. Cuireadh imeachtaí, agallaimh agus físeáin Ghaeilge i láthair an tslua ar an lá. Eagraíodh Comórtas Peile na Gaeltachta le linn dheireadh seachtaine na Cincise agus d'éirigh go hiontach le Craobhacha Scór le linn 2018. Beidh Comórtas Peile na Gaeltachta agus Scór 50 bliain ar an bhfód i 2019 agus tá rudaí móra beartaithe le comóradh agus ceiliúradh a dhéanamh orthu.

Seoladh pacáistí comharthaíochta, a scaipeadh ar chlubanna fud fad na tíre, i mí Dheireadh Fómhair agus rinneadh forbairt mhór ar Fhondúireacht Sheosaimh Mhic Dhonncha. Tá an scéim seo, a eagraítear i gcomhar le Glór na nGael, ag gabháil ó neart go neart.

Ceapadh an chéad 'Oifigeach Fobhartha Gaeilge' lánaimseartha i stair an Chumainn i mí Mheán Fómhair. Ba é Jamie Ó Tuama a ceapadh agus guíonn muid gach rath air agus clár leathan oibre le cur i gcrích aige sna blianta atá le teacht, i gcomhar le Coiste Náisiúnta na Gaeilge agus Coiste Náisiúnta Scór.

Rinneadh forbairt mhór ar an leathanach Gaeilge ar shuíomh Idirlín an Chumainn agus bíonn ailt faoi gach gné de chuid an Chumainn le fáil ann go rialta anois. Bíonn an Ghaeilge le feiceáil ar mheáin shóisialta an Chumainn ar bhonn laethúil anois, freisin.

Tá an Ghaeilge agus cultúr na Gaeilge fite fuaite i gCumann Lúthchleas Gael agus is fearde sinn mar chumann dá bharr sin.

In Memory Of
John William Scott
15 Fitzroy Avenue
Aged 14 Years
Shot And Killed At Croke Park
On Bloody Sunday
21st November 1920







INSURANCES AND INJURY FUND

The playing of our national games involves the risk of injury. It is our responsibility as an Association to make provision to help injured players. We can be proud of the fact that over the last year more than 6,000 players benefited from the Injury Fund to a total value of €9m.

We should be aware, though, of the precise scope and remit of the scheme. The fund is only intended to supplement other covers that players may have.

It is each individual registered player's responsibility to ensure that they have their own personal insurance as well.

Please be aware also that the benefits of the fund apply only to registered members of the Association. Obviously, we will only cover injuries sustained playing Gaelic Games.

I realise that the documentation and process required to validate claims may appear quite strict, but given the scale of funding involved it is entirely appropriate.

The claims loading \ discount programme introduced in 2017 to rebalance premiums was further refined in 2018. Two thirds of all registered units received a discount last year.

Based on feedback from units, the online registration system was re-launched in the last year and is now the compulsory means for all Injury Benefit Fund claims to be notified.

The system will aid clubs in managing

claims and supporting injured players. Further development and enhancements of the system are planned for 2019.

GAA Insurance Programme

In many cases insurance is the single biggest cost facing GAA clubs. It is worth noting that 65% of the total GAA property insurance claims paid out by our insurers over the last five years has been attributed to storm and weather events. Unfortunately, the arrival of Storm Emma and Storm Ali posed similar problems in 2018.

Given the forecasted recurrence of such weather events in future years it is expected that this trend will continue, and the renewal of the property insurance programme is going to prove challenging in the years ahead.

Worryingly also, the number of personal injury claims taken against GAA clubs continues to increase each year, with annual claims costs running at over €3m last year.

In this respect the GAA club is no different to many local based organisations, voluntary groups and so forth who are facing increased insurance costs and a growing claims culture. However, the trend of personal injury claims arising from non-GAA activities such as slips and trips at social events continue to outweigh the claims in relation to GAA activities. Concerns regarding this and the ability of the Association to continue to provide its insurance programme in its current format were expressed to the Oireachtas Finance Committee on Insurance Reform in May 2018.

There are measures we can take to mitigate this problem. Improved

maintenance and upkeep at our premises will make a difference. We should also endeavour to keep records of maintenance and cleaning rotas and record and notify incidents as soon as possible. These simple measures will help us to prevent claims arising and defend ourselves when they do occur. Increased support from Croke Park and continued education of our officers in relation to this is a key focus for 2019.

I am very aware that such measures only serve to increase the burden on voluntary officers, however it is essential that we reduce our insurance costs if we wish to continue to make our facilities available to other community groups and organisations and for non-core GAA events.

On a sad note, the chairperson of the Insurance and Risk Committee, Sheamus Howlin, passed away in 2018. He served the GAA with great commitment and distinction in a wide variety of roles both local and nationally. Sheamus was a great friend to very many people in the GAA throughout Ireland and further afield and he will be fondly remembered and sorely missed.

CROKE PARK STADIUM

Croke Park Stadium enjoyed a very successful year in 2018.

Almost 900,000 people attended GAA matches at the venue, and almost 30,000 children took part in Go Games and Cumann na mBunscol matches during the year. Other significant events included matches staged for the Irish Defence Forces, and the remarkable Gaelic Sunday commemoration in August. We were also delighted to welcome 40 new stewards to the team.

There were four concerts in the stadium during the summer with almost 250,000 attendees, and we were also privileged to welcome a number of very distinguished guests during the year, most notably Pope Francis to the World Meeting of Families – Festival of Families event in August – with 54,000 people in attendance.

Weather during the year was particularly difficult for the pitch. A harsh winter with heavy snowfall was followed by a very dry summer – both disastrous climatic conditions for pitch maintenance. Our pitch team overcame this and maintained a first-class playing surface for our matches.

The pitch staff at Croke Park Stadium and the National Pitch Committee were pleased to extend their help and expertise to club and county pitches all over Ireland during the year. They also promoted the County Pitch of the Year Awards, won this year by Nowlan Park, Kilkenny.

We continue to forge strong links

with our local community. Two town hall meetings took place during the year attended by the GAA as well as by many local residents from the stadium's community area.

The stadium made numerous contributions to its neighbourhood during the year: €100,000 was allocated to 68 local voluntary groups during the year. In addition over 30% of the stadium's catering & hospitality staff are now employed from the local community area. Nearly 1,000 local residents enjoyed complimentary tours of the stadium during the stadium's special 'Community Night' in April 2018 and 650 elderly neighbours were invited to enjoy Christmas dinner in the stadium in December. And of course Croke Park's community cúl camp took place for 250 children in July.

All of these initiatives are an important means of building and maintaining good relations with our neighbours and playing our part in making our community a better place.







BROADCASTING OF GAA MATCHES

The broadcasting of our games is quite simply the quickest and most impactful way to showcase our most lauded assets - the players and the games. It serves the demands of members, supporters and viewers far and wide and helps to attract new audiences. It is also a very significant source of revenue to the Association.

There were approximately 200 games broadcast throughout 2018. Evidently a constant GAA viewing offering is demanded from our patrons in a live, highlights, deferred, repeat and on-demand environment. Increased LGFA and Camogie coverage is also great to see.

It is important to acknowledge the professionalism and quality of all of our official broadcast partners throughout the year.

High quality on-screen production and presentation delivery, as well as general in-game enhancements such as live statistics, picture in picture display and behind the goal aerial shots always make for a more compelling viewing spectacle. All our partners constantly strive for innovation in these areas.

We also enjoyed significant non-match day promotion of upcoming match broadcasts, and broadcasters' own marketing campaigns bolstered our own in-house promotion plan. This represented a considerable investment on their part.

Additional documentary shows such as TG4's 'Laochra Gael' series, RTE's 'Jayo', 'Player's of the Faithful' and much lauded 'The Game' were met with

huge enthusiasm and again showed the strong connection with our GAA heritage.

Against that positive background it is important to note that championship TV viewing numbers actually declined during the year. This is disappointing. One single cause is difficult to discern. The volume of games broadcast, specific games not shown, scheduling, choice of channel, competing events can all have a bearing. As well of course as the attractiveness of the fixtures on offer. Clearly this is a note of caution and needs to be evaluated.

Internationally GAAGO streamed 120 matches last year, allied to which our GAANOW clips channel reached 21m views during the championship. Clearly these represent valuable future communications tools as we plot our way forward in the broadcast sphere.

As our broadcast contracts fall due for renewal we will have clear regard for the number of matches we want to see broadcast, and the optimal routes. The priority is always to encourage patrons to attend matches and our broadcast strategy should be a means to grow attendances not replace them.

PÁRAIC Ó DUFAIGH

Páraic Duffy vacated the position of Ard-Stiúrthóir in March 2018 as only the fourth person to fill the role since 1924. Over the course of his 10 year tenure he oversaw considerable change and progress, not least with the team working on behalf of the Association based at Croke Park.

His integrity and commitment to the position were beyond reproach and every decision taken and initiative launched was done so with the betterment of the GAA in mind.

To that end I think it is beyond doubt that

he helped to guide the Association successfully over the course of his time in the role as the GAA evolved and developed reflecting the changes in Irish society over the same period.

The route he took within the GAA before eventually assuming the role of Director General provided him with unique insights and a window into the challenges facing both clubs and counties on a daily basis. This experience was never far from his thinking.

Seeing Páraic on the sidelines as a senior selector with Scotstown – and successful reserve team manager – over the course

of the club's march to an Ulster final, will have surprised no one and he is sure to remain involved there for many years to come.

To speak personally for a moment, I enjoyed greatly my 10 years working with Páraic. I learned a great deal from him and I hope I can live up to the extremely high standards he set throughout his time in the role.

We all owe Páraic a debt of gratitude and wish him, Vera and the Duffy family every best wish in a full and active involvement with the GAA, albeit at a different level.





CONCLUSION

The world of GAA in 2018 continued to be a source of excitement and joy for very many people. That is what we should be about.

A lot of hard work and dedication went into making that the case. All of the work that goes on behind the scenes on planning, finance, IT, committee work and so on is vital. Members will no doubt be aware of the volume of work necessary to make a club function; and will hopefully have a bit of a sense of something similar of their national Association.

A lot has to be done before teams even take the field. But as to what sets the pulse racing...that's the games.

There were difficulties and there were challenges this year – some off-field, some on-field. I've alluded to these already.

But it would be a mistake to dwell upon the negative. A good year for the GAA is one where the games themselves are flourishing. In that regard 2018 was positive and memorable.

Our challenges for the year ahead? To reaffirm some of our values, to iron-out fixture scheduling, to assess the championship experiments, and to give some thought and attention to making football even better. Among (many) other things. There are tensions to be resolved...urbanisation and the difficulties in rural Ireland, club and county balance, fair allocation of resources, the pressures of the elite games.

But first and foremost the challenge – as it is every year – it is to recruit more young people to play the games and to keep them playing. And no organisation does this better.

The dedication and hard work of voluntary members all over the country, and beyond, make this so. Those are the people who make 2019 a great GAA year as well.

I wish to thank sincerely everybody who gave their time to the GAA in the past year, to whatever extent and in whatever capacity. Your voluntary effort is what sets us apart. I hope that you will continue those efforts in 2019.

I hope that you know that what you do makes a big difference. I hope that you feel that your work is appreciated and acknowledged. And most of all I hope that your involvement in the GAA proves for you to be a continued source of enjoyment.

Ar aghaidh leis an obair.

Tom Ryan
Ard-Stiúrthóir
Cumann Lúthchleas Gael











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