

TALENT ACADEMY AND PLAYER DEVELOPMENT REVIEW COMMITTEE REPORT

2019





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FOREWORD

by **Talent Development Review Committee**

The GAA is an integral part of the cultural fabric of Ireland. It is central to our identity, our sense of belonging and place. Over the last century, the GAA has played a dominant role in promoting our culture, developing an understanding of who we are and progressing a social value system rooted in altruism and volunteerism. Presently, there exists an awareness in Irish people of the uniqueness of the GAA and the role it has played in shaping our distinctiveness as a people. We would question if such an awareness is innate or if it is nurtured from early childhood. For decades, homes all over the country have positioned our organisation and our games as integral facets of their daily lives. This is testament to the passion we, as a people, possess for Gaelic Games and the inferred values attributed to involvement with the association.

Such passion is dominated and supported by the inherent connection between one's sense of place and the playing of our games. The GAA is very much rooted in the community and successfully provides within Irish society, the development of a distinct appreciation between self and place. This emphasis on the local is what drives our association; our members have in the past and will in the future, work on behalf of the GAA for the betterment of their communities. Our local club, schools and our counties bestow on us all, a sense of responsibility and action which is very much scaffolded by tradition and rivalry. Myths, stories and legends, allied to this understanding of place, promote the deep-rooted rivalries that exist at club, school and county level all over this country. In our opinion, these rivalries are very much part of our culture and play a pre-eminent role in sustaining the GAA. Such rivalries have as a by-product the desire to better our neighbours and stoically defend one's own place. This phenomenon, when aligned to the professionalization of sport in general, manifests itself in success simply being determined by many stakeholders as winning or losing competitions. Meanings and consequences associated with winning therefore are multi-layered and it is somewhat understandable why we cherish victory so dearly.

It is in this context that this report is written. It is very much based on the reality of the challenge we face in developing youth players within the culture outlined previously. We are hugely cognisant of our particular culture and the dominant role it plays in the organisation of our player pathway and the playing of our games. Our culture is unique to us and we should not make apologies about what it represents. Our culture, within the appropriate environment, acts as a beacon in terms of supporting good practice in developing players. Heretofore, our best coaches have always managed to appropriately frame winning and development simultaneously. Within this review process, there were many examples of such, whereby culture acted as a support for nuanced and creative development approaches from stakeholders. However, these examples were in the minority and it is clear that the uniqueness of our culture posed many issues within the domain of player development. There is a belief by all committee members that extracting a best practice approach from a different sport in another jurisdiction will offer little in solving such issues and furthering an approach to player development. Thus, the greatest challenge we faced was to deliver to our stakeholders, guidelines that are rooted in best practice but more importantly, founded in the context of the culture of the GAA.

As a means to deliver such an approach, we examined previous research attempts at aligning our culture with games and player development. In doing so, we discovered a commonality in findings across all of these reports. Such commonality relates to issues with games structures, stakeholder communication, governance, curriculum and integration across strands of the organisation. Yet despite this large body of evidence, these findings have not been developed and change has not occurred within the organisation. This review corroborates this previous research and involved a level of consultation heretofore not seen in the GAA. On analysis of gathered data and from listening to our members, it is obvious that our stakeholders want change; they desire direction and support. The



**...a comprehensive qualitative
data gathering process
involving over 1,000
youth development stakeholders...**

complexity of the development environment is daunting for many. Without leadership, direction and support, our findings suggest that we will continue to struggle in providing a developmental approach for our youth that is holistic, balanced and coherent.

Most particularly, we found at ground level, many stakeholders who are passionate and willing, who are resourceful and clever, who positively represent the GAA and its values in all of their actions and behaviours. However, our stakeholders (professional, volunteers as well as players) require both support and intervention. We must envision this period as an opportunity to provide such support and shape our future. Within the organisation, we believe that the time has come for a new approach to player development. This will encompass the various strands of science and coaching appropriate to our context delivered by people who are adequately supported and educated. It will also encompass a player pathway that is more reflective of the realities and complexities of the various avenues in achieving potential. What follows is an attempt to provide such a framework.

In conclusion, we would like to thank all who have contributed to this report. To all who attended workshops and meetings with committee members, we hope you can recognise your contributions within this framework. We have endeavoured to represent as best as we possibly could your experiences, frustrations and recommendations. We hope that this review process has afforded all stakeholder types an opportunity to be heard and a voice within the policy formulation of the GAA. We have enjoyed this process immensely and marvel at your commitment to your clubs, schools and counties. Both individually and collectively, we simply say mile buíochas. We, as GAA men and women, have had much learning in this journey. We, like you, want the very best for our wonderful association and most especially for the future generations of young players who are attracted to our games. We know conclusively now, that we have much to do in ensuring that we nurture and retain our youth so that they enjoy a lifelong, positive and enjoyable experience within the GAA.

DOES THE GAA ACTUALLY NEED ACADEMY SQUADS?

The above question is central to this whole review process. Anecdotally, many GAA people question their value, most especially when their county is not winning competitions or performing below expectations. Conversely, others extol their worth and attribute the set-up of the 'squads' as the main precursor to success at adult level for their county.

As of yet, there is little by the way of research so as to inform the debate. Talent development science tells us that there is limited connection between underage and senior success in sport. It also informs us that across numerous sports, later entry into academies gives players a greater chance of becoming an elite senior athlete. Despite such evidence, within the context of the GAA, we generally associate success with performance in underage competition. Stakeholders simply believe that winning underage competitions is a good barometer at where they are at. We also attempt to select players as early as we possibly can and expose them to an 'academy experience'. The question must be asked, why?

Such actions are completely understandable and the answer in our opinion is multifaceted. Our consultation process unveiled an allegiance to and a positivity for the squad system from most stakeholders. 'Good players need to be challenged, 'we need to expose them to the next level' were some of the responses to the 'why question'. It was also felt that we are in competition with other sports and we must provide an outlet for our best players in a similar fashion to these organisations. Stakeholders spoke of a 'professionalised approach' alluding to the 'level up from club activities' that counties believed their squads to be. It was also felt that squad involvement broadened the base of good club players within counties. These are all logical and reasonable viewpoints centred on the premise that squad involvement at youth level is an important stepping stone to an elite senior inter-county career.

It is probably true that most senior inter-county squads are now populated with players who have come through the 'system' within their own county. Our context

(amateur ethos, represent your county of birth/residence, no transfer market, limited pools of players) ensures that this is more probable than is the norm in other elite sporting contexts. Again, this alone is compelling evidence to support the existence of academies in individual counties.

Therefore, it seems that our culture and context conquer science and it would be illogical to suggest that academies are not necessary and counties would be best served focusing on other facets of player development such as clubs and schools. Instead, at this juncture, it may be more apt to ensure that squads are adding value to player development instead of questioning the merits of their existence. The why question should therefore be replaced with a 'what' and a 'where' question.

This is exactly what the recommendations within this document attempt to do. The Review Committee have attempted to develop and promote development environments that are heavily weighted towards

positive youth development and contain a developmental vision that could better serve the current and future needs of the clubs, schools and academies within our Association. These key recommendations also point towards greater levels of synergy and support within our player pathway that in turn will provide our players with the right support, at the right time and in the right place.

Central to such synergy and support is the positioning of the youth player at the core of the developmental environment. In doing so, our focus switches from matches and training to the advancement of key relationships between the player, his coaches, his parents and other significant people involved in his development. Such a focus will be mirrored within our Coach Education modules and in time will become fundamental to the behaviours of those working at the Foundation, Talent and Elite stages of our Games. Only then will the prevailing emphasis on competitive results that is commonplace at present be challenged and a new era of player development can commence in the GAA.



PURPOSE & VISION

The Review Committee underpinned their work with the following **Vision, Mission** and **Commitment** for player development in Gaelic Games:



Vision

To foster and develop in youth players a desire to maximise their potential so that they can actively transition to adult Gaelic Games at both club and county level. Such transitions will be underpinned by an enjoyable development experience which in turn will help to promote a lifelong association with the GAA.

Mission

To develop players holistically (both as people and as players) by providing opportunity to develop knowledge which will empower players to engage in the many challenges that they will encounter along the player pathway.



Commitment

Youth players will experience an individualised developmental environment that is populated with effective coaches who are highly qualified and appropriately resourced. These coaches will promote connection between various stakeholders and provide youth players with a coordinated and progressive approach to their development which will be heavily weighted towards clubs.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The core aim of this review is to provide all our members with a clear vision for player development within Gaelic Games and its individual units; clubs, schools, 3rd level and counties.

It is a vision that fully supports the values and ethos of the GAA and has our clubs as its most central component.

This vision is aligned to four key recommendation pillars within the review: **governance, stakeholder education, games programme and a player pathway framework.**



Purpose of this Review:

To conduct a review of the GAA player development pathway at inter-county level (U13 –U20) and its relationship with clubs, schools and third-level institutions.

Process Undertaken:

The Review Group initially conducted a desk study of relevant work previously completed in the area of player development in the GAA. This was followed by a large-scale consultation process involving stakeholders in every county of Ireland. These stakeholders included club coaches, teachers, academy coaches, county officers, academy players, their parents and fulltime county coaching staff. Finally, relevant administrative bodies associated with player development were consulted. All data gathered was analysed and recommendations were produced.

Big Question:

Are our academy squads positively contributing to player development?

Big Answer:

It is clear from this review that academy squads are contributing to player development but key issues are acting as barriers to development and minimising their effectiveness.

Big Wins:

Commended practices include the standard of coaching, network of available facilities, positive player welfare support and the role of fulltime staff.

Big Issues:

The big issues identified include stakeholder difficulty with describing and understanding the player pathway, the lack of educational opportunities, dysfunction between academies, schools and clubs, constant overlap between competitions and the uncertainty around competition fixtures.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS SUMMARY

- Provide an **effective governance structure** to support the management and implementation of a coherent player pathway in Gaelic Games. Without the proposed changes to the organisation structure of games development we believe this report will have little impact.
- Realign the current player pathway model to a Player Pathway Framework that is inclusive of participation, talent development, elite performance and player-welfare. By doing so, it is hoped to **provide all stakeholders with a clear understanding** of how to support the development of individual players in reaching their full potential. Such a framework would also position the club as the central component within this development pathway and promote lifelong involvement in Gaelic Games.
- Mirror the Player Pathway Framework with an Educational Framework so that all stakeholders can develop a **clear understanding of how to support individualised development**.
- Provide all stakeholders with a **games programme** that promotes engagement, player development and welfare and clarity of purpose.

KEY RECOMMENDATION 1: PLAYER PATHWAY FRAMEWORK

Reposition the club at the centre of the player pathway



The purpose of a framework is to have a structure where we can begin to hang programmes around governance, coach education and games underpinned by values and strategies that put the player and club at the centre of the development process.

- 1.** The **CLUB** is the key stakeholder in player development and as such it is recommended that programmes are designed to ensure embedding of governance excellence, high quality coaches and regular games programme.
- 2.** The **SCHOOL** provides participation and performance opportunities and it is recommended that it formally meet the County Games Manager(s) and local clubs at least twice per year.
- 3.** The **COUNTY BOARD** provides talent identification and development opportunities and it is recommended that the Games Manager and Player Pathway Managers meets formally with schools and address training programmes and games schedules at least twice each year..
- 4.** The **PARENT(S) / GUARDIAN(S)** play a central role for players and it is recommended that the County Games Mangers provide at least two opportunities per year that engages them in formal educational roles.
- 5.** The role of the Coach is central to the player pathway and it is recommended that coaches in all environments undertake both formal and informal education opportunities in order to work at the specific FTME levels.

GAELIC GAMES DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

FOUNDATION

F1 Learning and Acquiring Basic Movement

- Club Nursery
- Have a Ball
- Club Primary Section Coaching Activities
- Fun Do
- Gaelic Start

F2 Extension and Refinement of Movement

- Go Games
- Primary School Competitions
- Primary School Informal GAA Activity

F3 Commitment to Gaelic Games and/or Active Lifestyle

- Underage Club Competitions up to and including U17
- Adult Club Competitions

TALENT

T1 Demonstration of Potential

- U13/14 Schools of Excellence
- U15 Development Squad

T2 Verification of Potential

- U16 Development Squad
- 2nd level Junior Competition

T3 Practising and Achieving

- U17 Minor Inter-county Squad
- 2nd Level Senior Competition
- 3rd Level Freshers Competition
- U19 Inter-county Squad

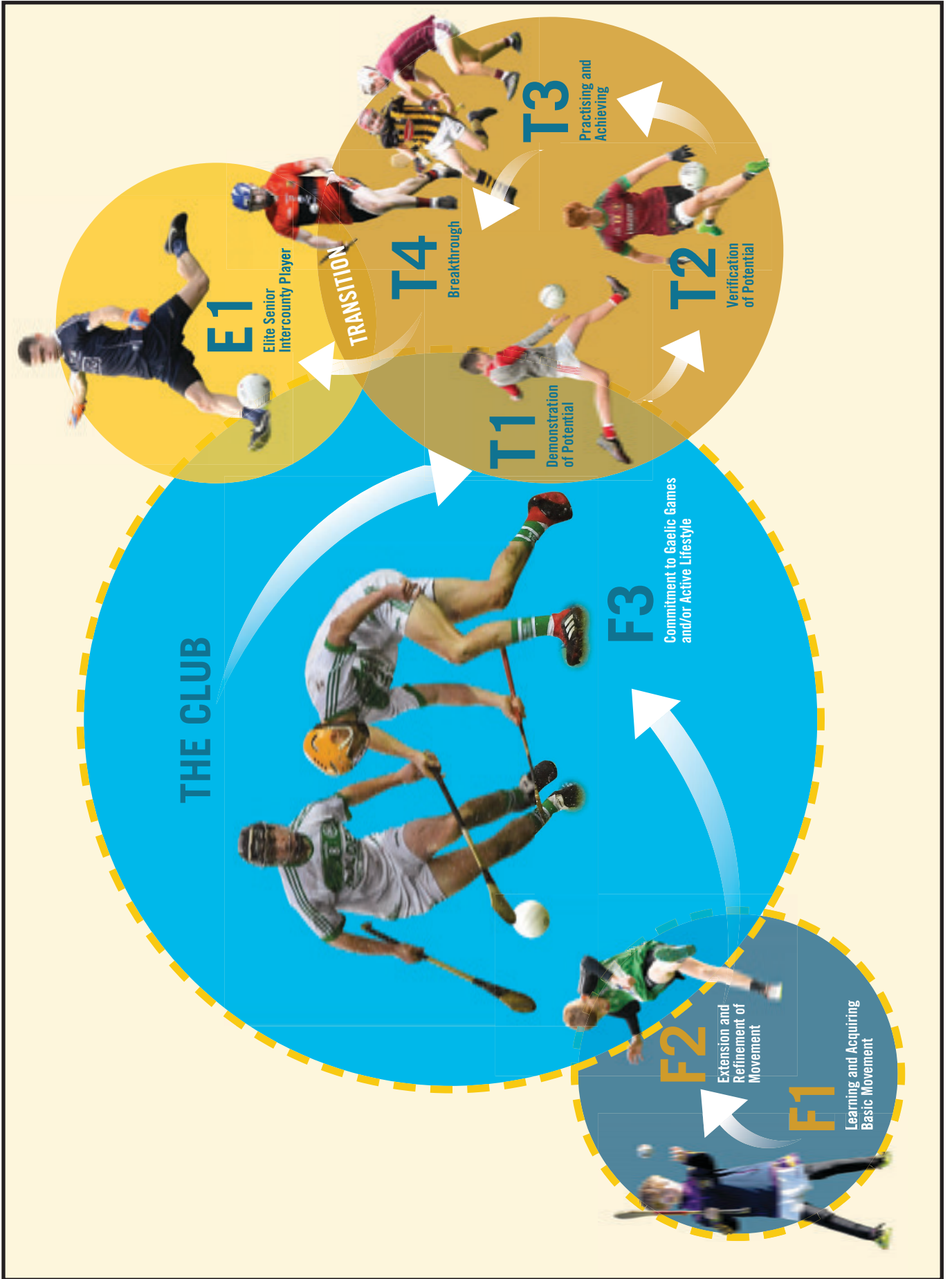
T4 Breakthrough

- 3rd Level Senior Competition

ELITE

E1 Elite Senior Intercountry Player

- Senior Inter-county Squad



THE FRAMEWORK PHILOSOPHY

The development of any framework for player development within the GAA is futile if such a framework does not consider the individual development of players in tandem with providing an overarching operating system that directly informs strategy. The Player Pathway Framework outlined in this report therefore has a duality of purpose.

Firstly, It provides the GAA with an effective blueprint for navigating the athlete pathway in terms of an operational framework. The blueprint, when aligned with effective coaching, will enhance player development since all stakeholders (e.g. county boards, schools, clubs, coaches, parents, referees and players) will share a collective perception and understanding of what constitutes an appropriate developmental environment in Gaelic Games.

It is without question that players should deserve such an environment in which they can reap all the life-changing benefits of a positive GAA developmental experience. Parents deserve guidance, support and leadership when it comes to making sure their child thrives through his involvement within the Association. Coaches should both deliver and receive the most life-enriching interactions as possible whilst our clubs should be promoted as the connection and foundation point for Gaelic Games participation and player development within their communities. This is exactly what this framework attempts to do, provide a clarity around the roles and responsibilities of

stakeholders within the developmental process.

In doing so, it crucially positions the player at the centre of the developmental process. Players presently are much removed from the epicentre of the development process and instead are guided by overloaded schedules and a myriad of competitions. This review strongly calls for a re-positioning. Such a re-positioning will require a shared vision from all stakeholders. This vision will, in time, be supported by a curriculum containing ageappropriate processes that are focused on the future realisation of potential. This curriculum will be embedded within the player developed framework and will place a strong focus on developing the skills of the game along with game understanding, physical development (appropriate sports science support) and psychological development. Psychological skills are an essential part of the developmental process and give players the mental skills to deal with opportunities, failure, challenges and transitions on their journey. The framework will combine all of these developmental components to meet particular individual needs, so that players experience a holistic, player-centred and individualised approach to their unique developmental trajectory.

As the context is different in every county Individual counties will therefore play a central role in the player pathway through the development of their county plans (Gaelic Football and Hurling) supported by provincial

and national appointments. It is important that the beliefs and opinions of key stakeholders are regularly solicited, tested and actively influenced by National Coaching & Games to ensure there is coherence throughout the system. 'Selling' the importance of the Player Pathway Framework to those on the ground is a critical aspect of its successful implementation.

Most importantly, re-positioning the player to the centre of the framework allows the player to own the direction of his own development. By owning the direction, the player becomes accountable and takes responsibility for his actions and performance. Such empowerment increases intrinsic motivation, initiative and responsibility; attributes that support the player to develop goals and solutions along his developmental journey. This journey has many twists and turns and it is these very goals and solutions that enhance player performance on the field and support quality behaviours off it. Finding this balance between performance and personal growth is difficult. However, it will not be achieved without quality coaching, supported by a clear understanding of development from other stakeholders.

Achieving such a vision within the minds and hearts of stakeholders and promoting such levels of autonomy for our players will not be easy. The GAA matters to Irish people and our culture is built on local rivalry. This rivalry can manifest itself in winning competitions which ultimately has unintended consequences for player development. This is not to say that winning and competitions are not important as they are a key learning variable and are part of the reasons young people play sport. However, solely visualising competition around winning takes little cognisance of the vulnerabilities of young players. The framework within this review supports a view of youth competition that is developmental in nature which has players striving to reach their potential as its priority. It views competition as a coming together, as a celebration of our Irish culture, as an opportunity for our young people to develop and thrive.

This vision is far removed from the realities found on the ground in pitches all over Ireland. However, our youth will not thrive as long as the tension that currently exists between long-term development and the desire for underage success remains. Young players are being robbed of developmental opportunities because of a misplaced focus on performance at competitions rather than focusing on player learning and development. Competition should be used to develop players, players should not be developed for specific competitions. However, the reality is that most coaches are competitive, and almost all feel the urge to win. This may mean they tend to play their strongest team or abandon the playing style to avoid defeat. This review believes that many coaches must park their egos and at the very least, begin to question their instincts around competition if they are going to produce players that can thrive within the Association. The outcome of losing or conceding is not the priority, the development process and the detail contained within it are.

Such a mindset change will involve a re-positioning for many stakeholders. It will also involve leadership and an element of bravery. This is where the Player Pathway Framework can aid the necessary change. Understanding the player framework and implementation of player curriculum will enhance the quality and appropriateness of the coaching environment and will have a lasting and crucial impact on the development and eventual success of our youth players. The framework allows stakeholders to visualise a new approach to development, a vision that accounts for individuality and variance, a vision that represents the realities of the development journey, a vision that has the end in mind. The endpoint crucially may not be on Jones' Road but for the majority, it may be within a club environment that values and appreciates its people so that their engagement with the GAA is sustained for life.

KEY RECOMMENDATION 2:

EDUCATION

Provide stakeholders with new opportunities to become better practitioners



Gaelic Games stakeholders will be provided with new opportunities in terms of acquiring new knowledge and practices. These stakeholders will be inclusive of coaches, administrators, referees and parents. The GAA will provide a level of education appropriate to the needs of the individual so that they can assist players in reaching their potential and become lifelong members of the Association.

- 1.** With the adoption of the Ftem framework development it is recommended that **the curriculum for a coaching and the player pathway** should mirror the phases of the Ftem Framework and the should be delivered in both formal and informal contexts.
- 2.** With the club at the centre of our strategy, it is recommended that **Club player and coaching support programmes** should develop both knowledge and competencies, enhancing the Player, Parent and Coach experience in their club setting.
- 3.** Given the specialist content for talent development it is recommended that the Academy **Coach Education and Mentoring programme** provide **specific coach development opportunities** to enhance skills and competencies and provide tools and knowledge to have a holistic development of players in their care.
- 4.** With the many different challenges that elite coaches and players face, it is recommended that **Elite Coaches require exposure to best practice and opportunities provided for Advance Coach Education Programmes by engaging relevant internal and external stakeholders.**

KEY RECOMMENDATION 3: GOVERNANCE



In order to support the management and implementation of a coherent Player Pathway Framework, we must provide an effective governance structure.

- 1.** As stated in the Keegan Report (2018) and as a means of supporting the structure of the National Games Development Committee, this review recommends the following appointments:
 - Player Pathway Manager (inclusive of Player Welfare)
 - Sports Science Manager
 - Education Manager
- 2.** Counties, with the support of provincial councils, shall take ownership and responsibility for producing a three-year player development plan for submission to and approval of Central Games Development Committee every three years.
- 3.** All national youth programmes and related funding (to include Club, Post-Primary Schools, and Inter-County) allocated to provinces and counties as well as designated county hurling and football funding should be immediately reviewed.

KEY RECOMMENDATION 4:
GAMES PROGRAMME

Provide a coordinated and coherent games programme for all



Grassroots Gaelic Games Stakeholders are demanding change and want clarity around fixture windows for different units of the Association i.e. clubs, schools, 3rd level and academies. The GAA must provide its grassroots members with such clarity and bring a level of coordination to fixtures that up to now has been difficult to achieve.

- 1.** It is recommended that, as part of a county plan, games calendars will be produced that will allow for a co-ordinated approach to development and new levels of synergy between clubs, schools and academy squads.
- 2.** In order to bring synergy between club and inter-county competitions, it is recommend that all counties prioritise competitions at the following age grades: U13, U15 and U17 levels.
- 3.** In line with the Ftem player development framework, it is recommended that all inter-county competitions up to and including U17 would be developmental in their focus.
- 4.** It is recommended that all competitions at Post-Primary and Third level would be immediately reviewed and aligned to the Ftem player development framework.

THE LAST WORD

WHAT WE ARE ULTIMATELY TRYING TO ACHIEVE....

The recommendations outlined within this document are a response to the numerous conversations, workshops and observations the Review committee conducted over a 12 month period. In simple terms, combined, these four key recommendations attempt to integrate and place a real value on the efforts and inputs of all of our stakeholders. Such an integration we believe would have a profound effect on player development with the Association.

Most particularly, the approach to development supported within this review, will allow our youth players a greater opportunity to develop personal assets that are crucial for a positive transition to adulthood as well as adult Gaelic Games. Crucially, in terms of developing such assets, this review is finely balanced between the goals of improving performance within counties and individualised personal development. As coaches, finding this balance within our own philosophies is of paramount importance in ensuring such positive transitions.

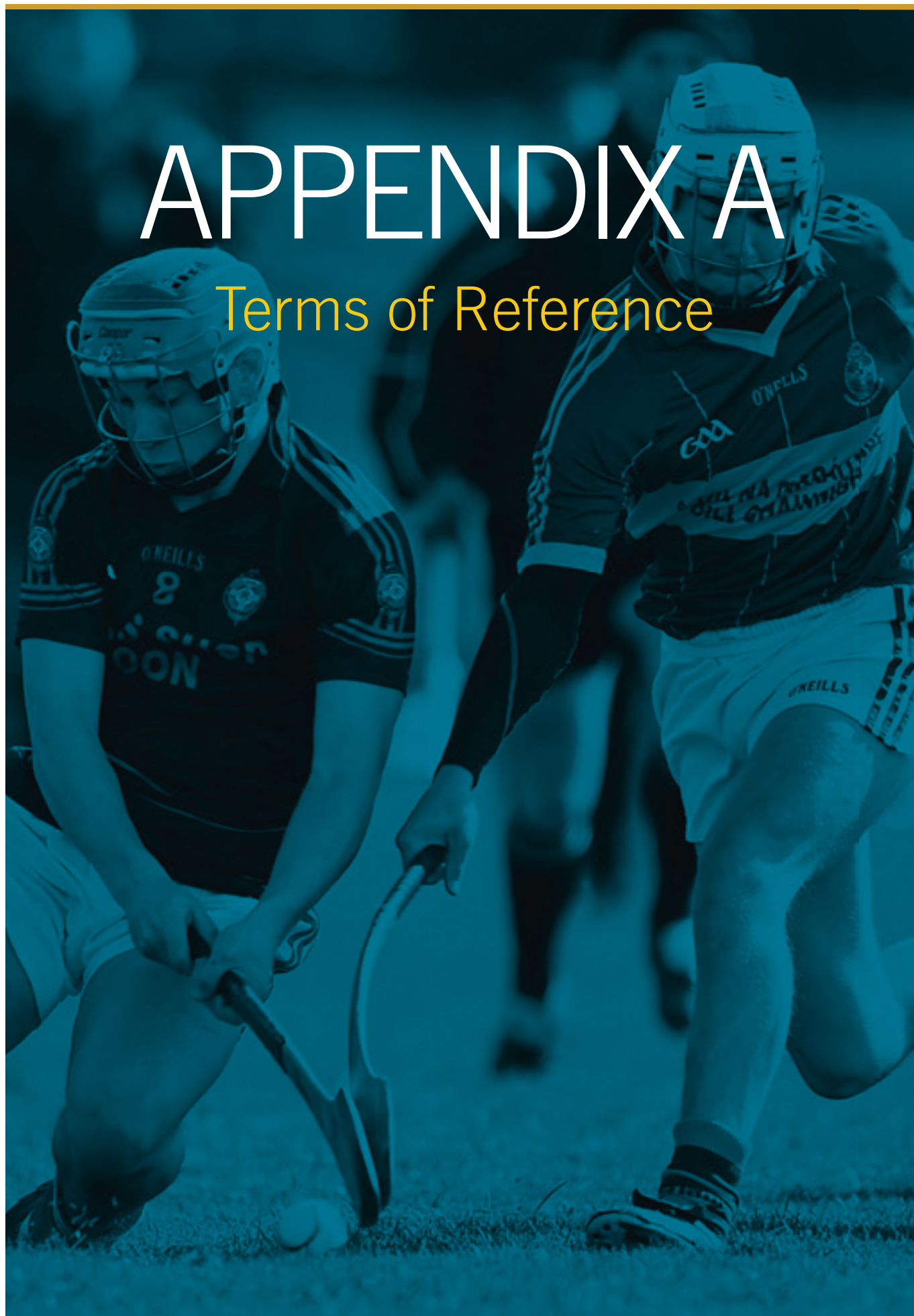
In finding this operational and philosophical balance, consideration of the 'what', the 'who' and the 'where' of development processes are vital. The 'what' concerns the type and timing of the coaching inputs the player receives. By utilising the Ftem framework, player development becomes measurable,

orchestrated and coordinated. The 'who' involves supporting our coaches, administrators and the parents of the players. This support is delivered through education as outlined in this document. Finally, the 'where' has to be also considered. Appropriate settings help create the right environment surrounding the player. Such environments in a GAA context involve a careful synergy between developmental processes and associated stakeholders at the club, school and county squads.

Integrating all of the above is a huge challenge. However, this review points in the direction of change and surmounting the player development challenges facing the GAA. Such change involves the promotion of a long-term focus to developing players. This focus has 'the end in mind' and allows players the space to grow, reach their full potential and hopefully enjoy a lifelong engagement with the Association. Most importantly, it places a value on the person and steers stakeholders towards an awareness of what really matters. That is, supporting our youth to become the best version of themselves, both on and off the field. Such support, delivered by the right people, at the right time will provide every county with a cohort of value-laden people that will ensure that the GAA will be sustained and will prosper for generations to come.

APPENDIX A

Terms of Reference



This committee is comprised of 11 members including:

Michael Dempsey (Chairman)
Jenny Duffy (Secretary)
Shane Flanagan
Garrett Coyle
Eugene Young
Jason Sherlock
Fergal O'Donnell
Jeff Lynskey
Jamsie O'Connor
Ray O'Brien
Brian Cuthbert.

The purpose of this committee is to carry out a review according to the following terms of reference:

- (a) To conduct a review of the GAA player development pathway at inter-county level and its relationship with clubs, post-primary schools and third level institutions. This review is inclusive of U13 schools of excellence, talent academies (u14-u16), minor (u17) and u20 age-groups and applies to hurling and football.
- (b) To consult with key stakeholders as required including but not limited to Players, Coaches, Parents, Clubs, Games Development Personnel, Coaching Officers, County Executives, Provincial Councils, Post Primary Schools, Post Primary School Committee and Higher Education Committee.
- (c) To report to GDC on the findings of the review.
- (d) To propose recommendations to GDC with regard updating policy in line with the review recommendations.

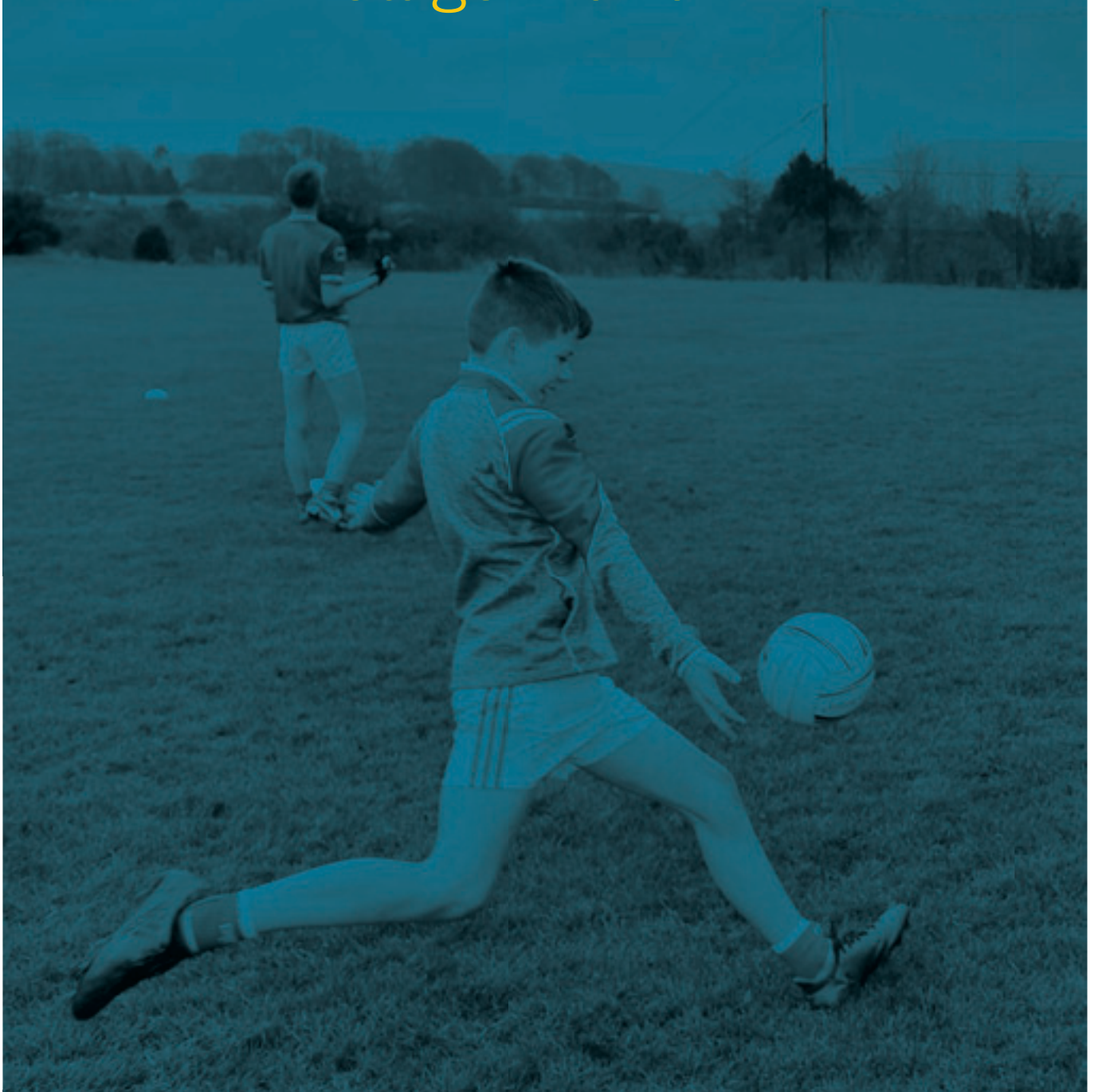
The review will include, but is not limited, to the following:

- Establish purpose and vision for inter-county player development programme from Under 13-20.
- Coherence between club, county, post-primary and third level activity.
- Resources committed by counties i.e. financial, gear, equipment etc.
- Governance, Leadership and capability.
- Coach recruitment, development and retention practices.
- Player selection and development practices.
- Management of player lifestyle and welfare.
- Competitions, games and coaching programme.

These terms of reference are proposed under the premise that the player pathway includes clubs, post primary schools, talent academies,

APPENDIX B

Collecting and Analysing Data Stage 1 and 2



APPROACH IN THIS REVIEW

Recent research specific to talent development within a Gaelic Games context has pointed towards challenges similar to those outlined in the previous section, as well as a number of opportunities (e.g. McCullick Report, 2012).

This research was the starting point of the committee's review process. What follows below is an outline of how data was collected in accordance with the Terms of Reference assigned to this committee. The process can be divided into two distinct stages.

STAGE 1

- Each county was surveyed with respect to quantitative data relating to squad activities in their respective counties.
- This is followed by a comprehensive qualitative data gathering exercise across the whole country. This involved over 1,000 youth development stakeholders inclusive of teachers, club coaches, academy coaches, academy players, their parents, games development staff and county executives. Individual county workshops were held over a three week period in October and November 2018 whereby the perspectives of sets of each of these stakeholder groups was sought regarding the various strands of player development. These included coaching, the games programme, facilities and resources, linkage between club, school and squads as well as inherent talent identification and development practices. This resulted in a dataset of almost 7000 individual statements from stakeholders.
- This data was analysed and themes emerged from the data bracketed under commended practices, key issues and key recommendations.

STAGE 2

- As a means of testing these themes and verifying the research process, a second round of data collection was undertaken from December 2018 to February 2019. This involved meetings with the following bodies:
 - Coaching Ireland
 - Third Level GAA Development Managers
 - Higher Education Committee Executive Members
 - Post-Primary Council
 - Provincial Games Managers
 - Provincial Coach Education Managers
 - CCCC (Provincial Secretaries)
 - Director of Games Administration
 - Games Development Staff
 - Director of Games Development and Research
 - Sports Science Committee
 - Congress 2019
 - LGFA
 - Camogie Association
- Analysis of data from these meetings supported conclusively the developed themes from Stage 1 but also highlighted realities individual to these committees. These realities are developed later in this report.

GATHERING AND ANALYSING DATA

WHO WAS SURVEYED

Unprecedented Data Gathering Approach

OVER **1,000**
STAKEHOLDERS
FROM ALL OF THE
32 COUNTIES SURVEYED

KEY THEMES

Over 7,000 statements concerning player development were gathered during Stage 1 consultation

CATEGORIES OF STAKEHOLDER

The following outlines the level of engagement involved in this review process. All 32 counties were visited by members of the review team and stakeholders were surveyed around player development within their county. Formal meetings were also held with executive members of our education units.

160

U16 players in total were surveyed across the country and their voices were very powerful.

192

County Board officers were surveyed. These included Bord na nÓg officers as well as senior board officers.

128

parents were surveyed within the review.

350

coaches were surveyed including academy and club coaches. Their viewpoints are very strong in this report and many felt that needed more support.

124

2nd level teachers contributed hugely to this review process. Again, they felt very much separate to the development process.

130

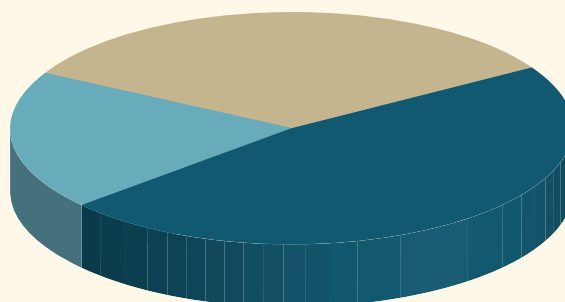
fulltime GAA staff also contributed hugely to the review process.

STAGE 1: ANALYSIS

Over 3,500 statements remained at the conclusion of Stage 1 analysis.

These statements ultimately formed the basis of the three main themes – commended practices, key issues and recommendations.

STATEMENTS



- Key Issues
- Recommendations
- Commanded Practices

STAGE 1: METHODOLOGY

Engaging our grassroots, Giving our people a voice



STAGE 1

32 individual county workshops

October and November 2018

Over 1,000 Stakeholder perspectives sought

Stakeholders in the one room for the first time

WHAT WE ASKED ABOUT...

Positives and Negatives of the following in each county:

- ▶ Coaching
- ▶ Talent Identification and Development
- ▶ Games Programme
- ▶ Linkage between clubs, schools and academies
- ▶ Resources and Facilities

The charts that follow represent the number of responses from each set of stakeholders in each individual country. In some cases, individual counties had more than one set of responses from a stakeholder group.

WHAT WE ALSO WANTED TO KNOW...

What role do the following have in the design, implementation and evaluation of programmes at academy level:

- ▶ County Board
- ▶ Provincial Coaching and Games
- ▶ National Coaching and Games

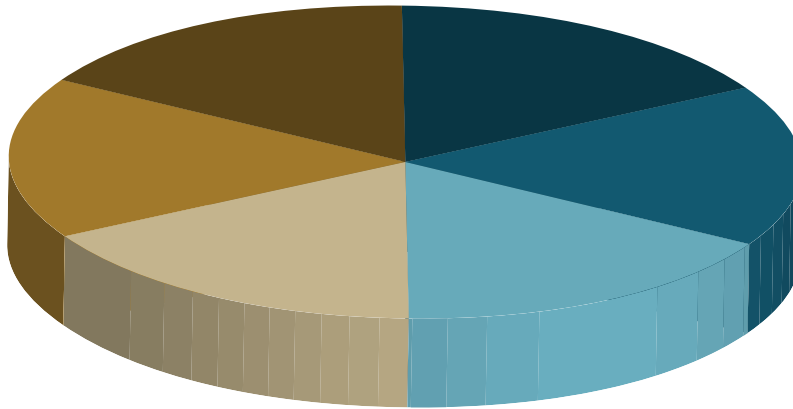
WHAT WE PROMISED STAKEHOLDERS...

- ▶ That their voices should be heard if they made recommendations to us



TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVE

PLAYER DEVELOPMENT AND FEEDBACK FROM TEACHERS

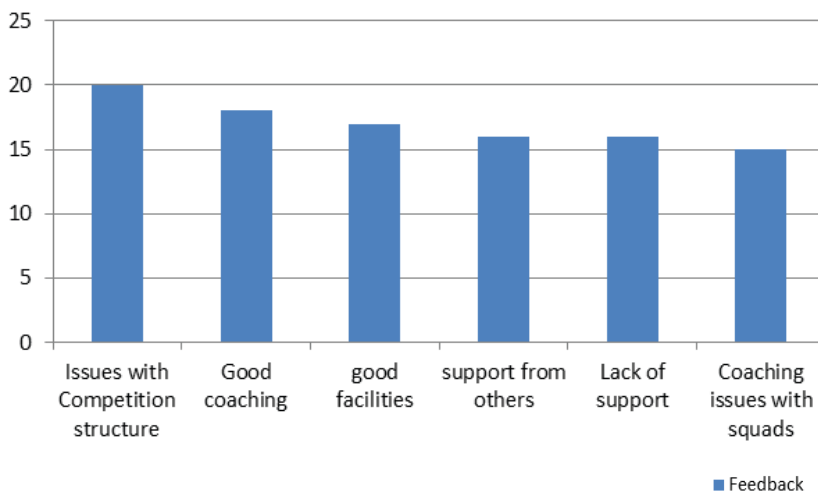


- Good Coaching
- Coaching Issues with Squads
- lack of Support
- Competition Structure Issues
- Good Facilities
- Support from Others

Positive and Negative feedback distribution from teachers across 6 key sub categories

WHERE IS OUR SPACE?

Player Development and Feedback from Teacher



Feedback By Sub-Categories

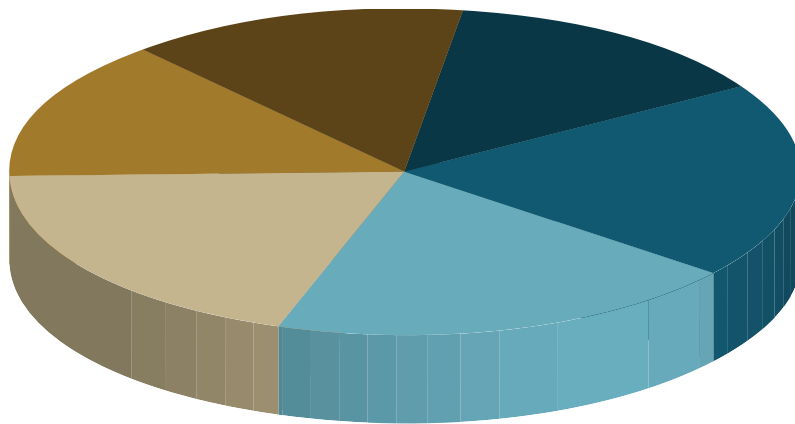
Feedback was classified into the above six main categories. Issues with the competition structure within individual counties was the the most common sub-category. Teachers believe that the school window is congested and that the space for school competitions is being challenged.

WHAT TEACHERS SAID

- ✦ Potential clash between Senior Schools and County U-19/20 competition.
- ✦ Player load management is a major issue especially in the months of September and October, with school and club overlap.
- ✦ No calendar of events available.
- ✦ Elite players schedule is far too busy.
- ✦ Lack of joined up thinking.
- ✦ Not enough happening for the club/non-elite player.
- ✦ More communication/discussion needed between stakeholders to create realistic windows for games to be played.
- ✦ Support schools as it is becoming harder for teachers to take teams.
- ✦ Reduce demands on players by incorporating programmes into school day.

PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE

PARENT FEEDBACK

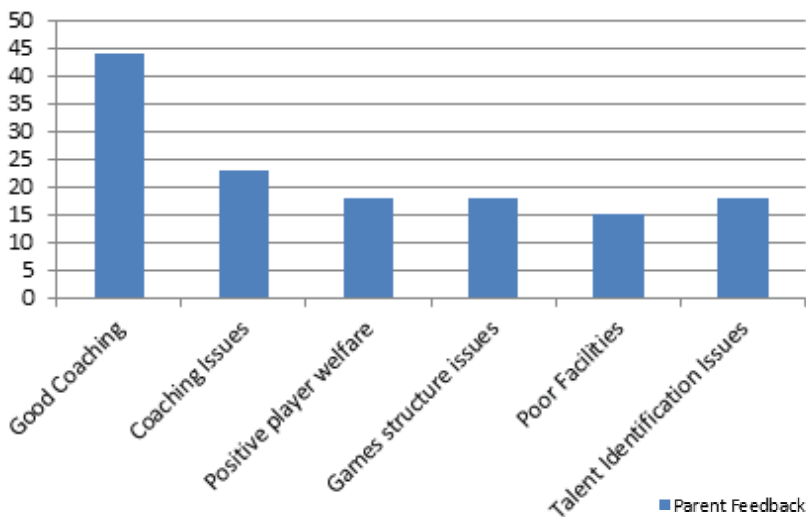


- Good Coaching
- Coaching Issues
- Positive Player Welfare
- Games Structure Issues
- Poor Facilities
- Talent Identification Issues

Positive and Negative feedback distribution from parents across 6 key sub categories

THINGS COULD BE A BIT BETTER

Parent Feedback



Feedback By Sub-Categories

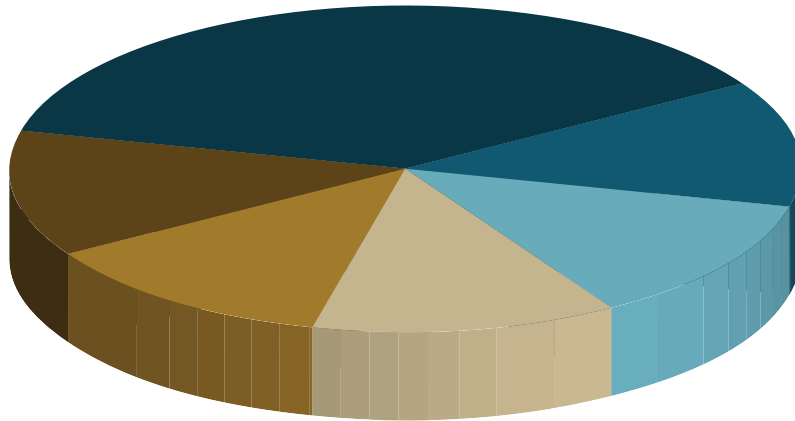
Feedback was classified into the above six main categories. Parents felt that the coaching was of a high standard and in many instances, players were well looked after. However, a number of negatives surfaced as shown in the graph.

WHAT PARENTS SAID

- ✦ Players are well trained and well looked after.
- ✦ Higher level of coaching at development squad level.
- ✦ Quality of structure within sessions by coaches is excellent.
- ✦ Some players are playing 12 months straight (can play three levels at once in smaller clubs).
- ✦ Workload is crazy, for example 11 days of involvement straight including four games.
- ✦ Decision made too quickly at trials – some players just get 20 mins.
- ✦ Players would benefit if there was an appreciation of all squads they are involved in and at what level. There is consistently pressure on them to play for all coaches.

CLUB COACH PERSPECTIVE

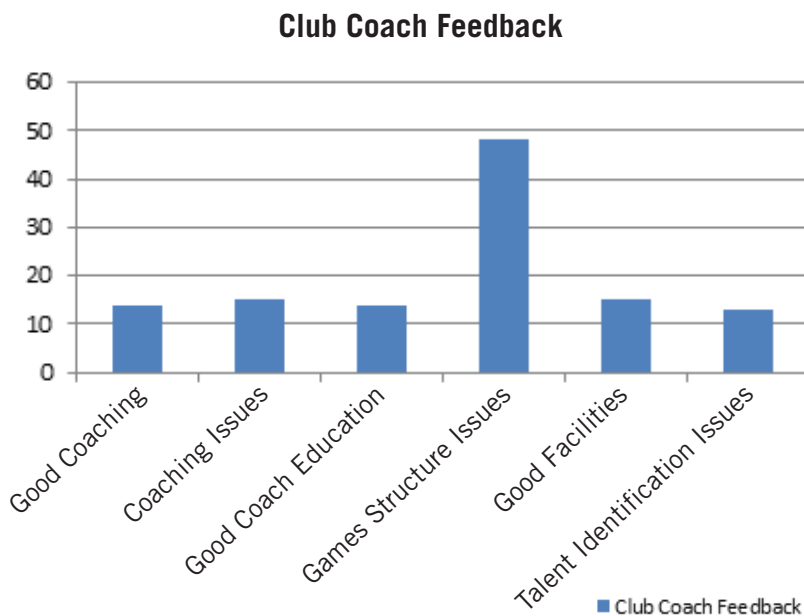
CLUB COACH FEEDBACK



- Good Coaching
- Coaching Issues
- Good Coach Education
- Games Structure Issues
- Good Facilities
- Talent Identification Issues

Positive and Negative feedback distribution from club coaches across 6 key sub categories

GIVE US A CALENDAR PLEASE



Feedback By Sub-Categories

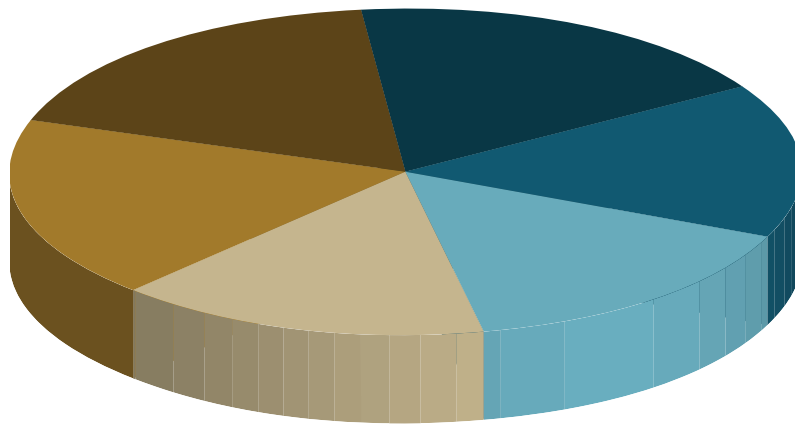
Feedback was classified into the above six main categories. Issues with the games structure within individual counties was by far the most prevalent issue for club coaches. Overlap of competitions, unbalanced programmes and long gaps between games were cited as being particularly problematic.

WHAT CLUB COACHES SAID

- ✦ Games played at wrong time of year.
- ✦ Too big of a gap between games.
- ✦ Rescheduling of games – fixtures coordinator required in the event of a dispute.
- ✦ Internal CCC fixtures and schools' fixtures placing undue pressure on players.
- ✦ Emphasis on coaching the coaches- increase in overall standard.
- ✦ No monitoring of coaches once they are appointed.
- ✦ All key partners involved in deciding fixtures at all levels to meet annually and a coordinated calendar agreed.

ADMINISTRATOR'S PERSPECTIVE

COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR FEEDBACK

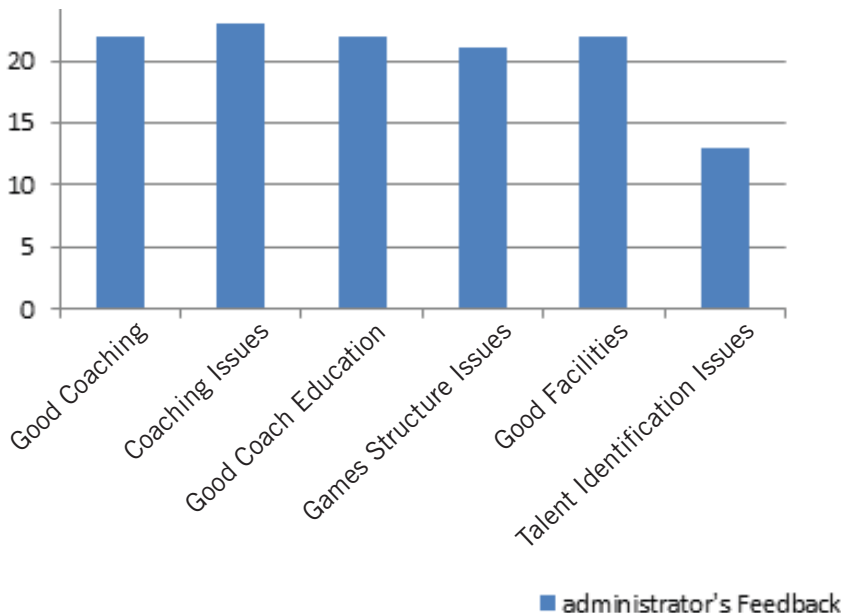


- Good Coaching
- Coaching Issues
- Good Coach Education
- Quality Games Structure
- Good Facilities
- Poor Stakeholder Synergy

Positive and Negative feedback distribution from administrators across 6 key sub categories

WE ARE MAKING PROGRESS

County Administrator Feedback



WHAT ADMINISTRATORS SAID

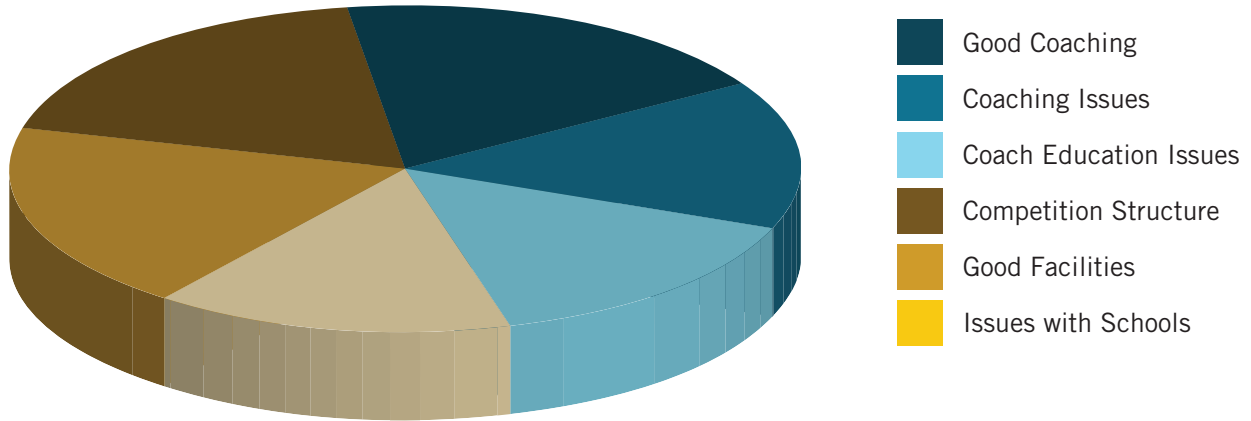
- ♦ Squads seen by clubs as a threat because they take better coaches away. Need to look at how we can get better clubs coaches in and still keep them involved with clubs.
- ♦ Work across schools and academy squads has been well received and the development and delivery of coach education courses have proved beneficial.
- ♦ Coaches focus on the holistic development of the players.
- ♦ Good programme – lots of games for players in both codes at U-14/15/16 with their clubs and also with academies.

Feedback By Sub-Categories

Feedback was classified into the above six main categories. County administrators were generally positive regarding player development within their county. However, in many instances, they had difficulty in describing how they implement and evaluate activity at development squad level

ACADEMY COACH PERSPECTIVE

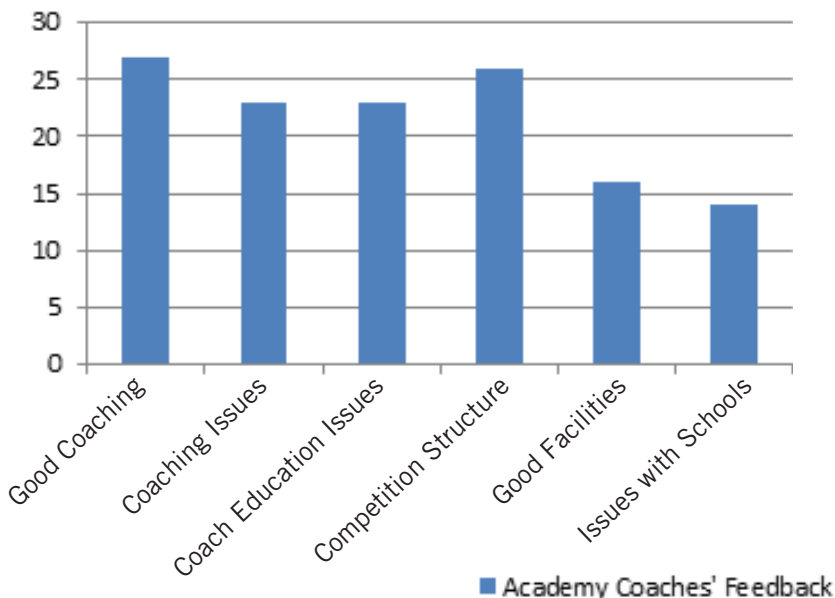
ACADEMY COACHES' FEEDBACK



Positive and Negative feedback distribution from academy coaches across 6 key sub categories

WE WOULD LIKE MORE SUPPORT

Academy Coaches' Feedback



Feedback By Sub-Categories

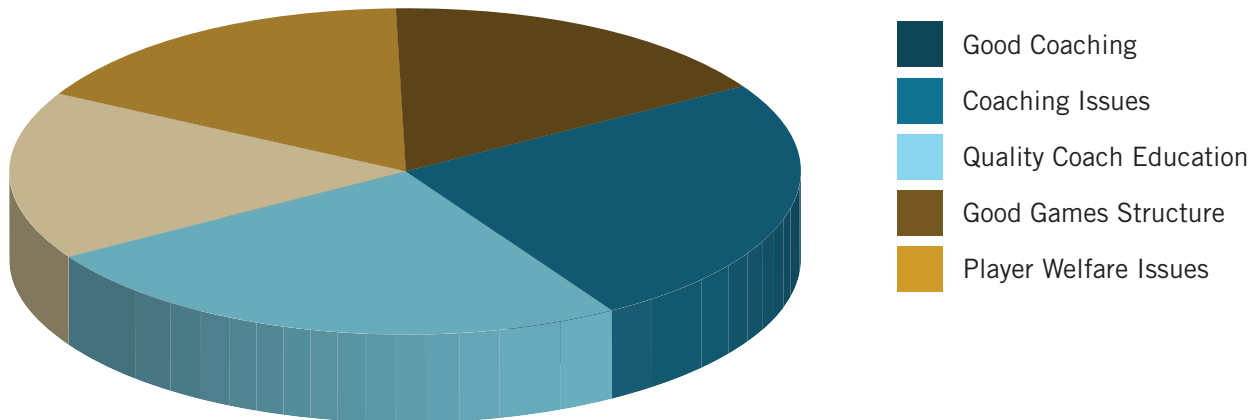
Feedback was classified into the above six main categories. County administrators were generally positive regarding player development within their county. However, in many instances, they had difficulty in describing how they implement and evaluate activity at development squad level.

WHAT ACADEMY COACHES SAID

- Sessions are planned out in advance, generally by lead GDA. There is a plan for each session which he discusses with the coaching group which is positive.
- Quality of coaching in squad is high. Noticeable difference between club and county.
- Sort out age grading – stick to one either U.13/15/17 or U12/14/16.
- More Inter County games as opposed to Blitz days – Football Celtic Challenge.
- U-17 is too young for National Competition – needs to be re-examined.
- Pitches and floodlights very high standard Access not restricted to particular squads.

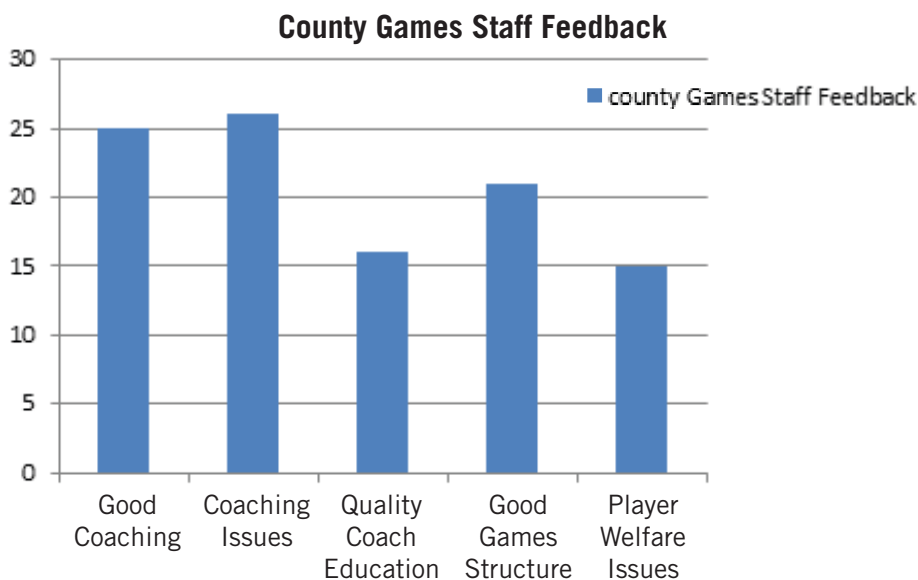
COUNTY GAMES STAFF PERSPECTIVE

COUNTY GAMES STAFF FEEDBACK



Positive and Negative feedback distribution from county games staff across 6 key sub categories

A LOT DONE, MORE TO DO



Feedback By Sub-Categories

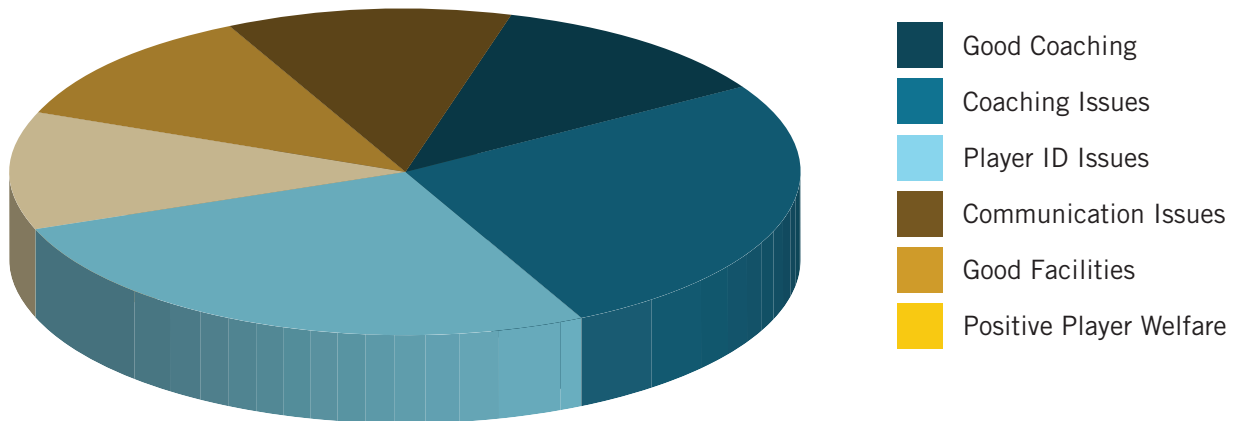
Feedback was classified into the above five main categories. County Games staff in many counties were very positive regarding development in their respective counties. However, in some counties coaching standards and player welfare were considered to be an issue.

WHAT GAMES STAFF SAID

- Standard of coaching in the county can be improved.
- Joined up thinking on our coaching philosophy with squads.
- Committee needed to recruit and develop academy coaches.
- A lot of our top coaches working outside the county.
- Well-structured pathway in place.
- Lead coaches are head hunted.
- Squads respect club championship periods and cease training.

ACADEMY PLAYER'S PERSPECTIVE

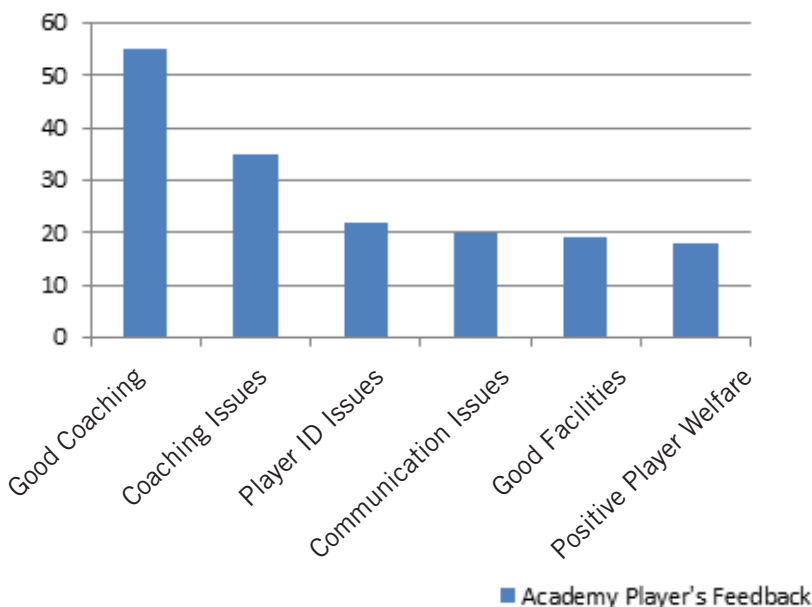
ACADEMY PLAYERS' FEEDBACK



Positive and Negative feedback distribution from academy player's across 6 key sub categories

THIS COULD BE A BIT EASIER

Academy Players' Feedback



Feedback By Sub-Categories

Feedback was classified into the above six main categories. Academy players were very positive about the coaching they received in the academy in many counties but some players had issue with trial system and communication between their coaches.

WHAT PLAYERS SAID

- Sessions well organised/planned/ higher level of coaching at academy squads.
- Learning new skills and tactics – high level of coaching and exposure to best practice.
- Needs to be a healthy relationship between players and coaches – get down to the level of the players.
- 'Once players are in they are in' – no contact with club coaches during the year.
- Can get bypassed if don't play well at trials.
- We get plenty of gear. Food, MooJoo, towels, ice at the competitions – little things done well. Well looked after in general.

STAGE 2 CONSULTATION LEADING

3RD LEVEL DEVELOPMENT OFFICERS

STRENGTHS

COMPETITIONS

Playing GAA at 3rd level has many benefits:

- High number of games
- Integrate students into college life
- High standard of play
- Players from weaker counties develop

LINKAGE

GDOs as a group have a very strong interrelationship which allows competitions to be played on time. There is some elements of linkage internally in colleges through the use of faculty resources such as Sport Science. Students are offered huge supports such as scholarship opportunities.

GOVERNANCE

Much has been improved in recent years in the following areas:

- 3rd level used as a level to experiment with rules
- freshers tied to 1st year competitions only
- fixtures fulfilled due to the level of goodwill between the GDOs
- Player eligibility issues are less frequent

CHALLENGES

COMPETITIONS

More than ever before, 3rd level colleges cannot access eligible players due to the following competitions:

- All-Ireland Club Championships
- National Leagues
- Club Fixtures from October to December
- Provincial Preseason Competitions

Teams are completely different in pre and post Christmas.

LINKAGE

Players are really feeling torn between their many teams which leads to burnout from an early age. Players are under pressure and have huge demands placed on them. County Managers and outside club managers are dictating availability of players to 3rd level colleges

GOVERNANCE

Constant Issue with player eligibility and associated rules as well as poor communication from the executive, There is a feeling of isolation among GDOs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

COMPETITIONS

- A calendar which includes 3rd level and allows players to focus on specific teams at one time is a must.
- Age - no player over 26 should be eligible for 3rd level competitions
- National leagues dates revert back to 2016-17 dates
- Current competition dates for 3rd level remain as is

LINKAGE

- Better engagement between county managers and 3rd level colleges
- Appointment of a provincial link at 3rd level

GOVERNANCE

- Players are prevented from travelling home for midweek training during the 3rd level season
- Mission Statement outlining role of 3rd level executive is now required
- Fresher players not eligible for senior intercounty until March
- Need for representation on the 3rd level executive

3RD LEVEL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES	RECOMMENDATIONS
<p>COMPETITIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exposure of all age grades at varying levels; college is a stepping stone onto inter county scene for some players. Fresher competition – great pathway for all players across all colleges Competitions & structure of competitions and leagues give others opportunities <p>LINKAGE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fixtures are taken into consideration in National Calendar Opportunities available to students, scholarship benefits (academic/monetary/player development & well-being) Facilities – College facilities in use by schools, clubs and inter-county squads <p>GOVERNANCE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Governance working well Foothold in third level is a huge benefit to GAA 	<p>COMPETITIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> National leagues and Club championships Colleges don't get access to players Overlap of fixtures and games on-going basis Participation is a huge challenge, getting players for 2nd, 3rd teams U20 competition is a huge challenge Exams in December and January <p>LINKAGE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students travelling home for county training More engagement required between CA & GAA Officers - it's a 'them and us' scenario <p>GOVERNANCE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of regular engagement with Senior GAA Officials Sense of isolation within 3rd Level unless there is an issue which draws media attention Third level support taken for granted by the Association Better linkage needed with CCCC 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Representative necessary on Coaching & Games Committee Input into CCCC (at specific time of year) Non-voting representative on Central Appeals for 3rd Level Appeals to assist with interpretation of 3rd Level rules Increase in budget from Coiste Bainistí to facilitate increased competitions Academic research to be undertaken in relation to Third Level player burn out Set-up of independent review of GPS and training load data between clubs, colleges and Counties for 3rd Level Players to ensure management of playing/training load Creation of 2nd Year only competition Sigerson & Fitzgibbon Competitions to include age limit (U-25) Sigerson & Fitzgibbon Competitions revert to straight knockout Sigerson & Fitzgibbon Competitions to be played in January with Colleges having first call on players in this period

THE TEACHER CONTRIBUTION

Every one one of us has been influenced by a teacher along our developmental journey. We can all look back and vividly recall how it felt to be guided by a special teacher. Fortunately for the GAA, many of these memorable moments for many people occur on school pitches all over the country. It is immeasurable what teachers have given the GAA over the past century and the role schools have played in the developing the values and ethos of our Association.

This consultation involved many teachers. To say that they feel isolated would be an understatement. Teachers, now more than ever before, are finding it very difficult to continue to give as much as has been given in the past. Supervision, funding and school management support is challenging what we may have taken for granted in the past. The space for school competition is also under threat as club and academy activity dominates the youth player landscape. These factors combine to create real problems for teachers who want to give to the GAA.

Teachers are ideally placed to play a lead role in the development of players of all levels. They understand holism and the importance of seeing the person in the player. As a profession, their focus is on individualised development and many teachers manage to bring such a philosophy from the classroom to the pitch. They toll away in the dark evenings of autumn and winter long after the school bell has sounded. Normally, its a small group of committed GAA people who drive and keep our games going in a school. They seek very little except for a value to be placed on their contribution and to have

some level of engagement with other stakeholders within the development process.


The GAA cannot ignore their plight and it is vital that these committed people are supported. Our games can thrive in our schools but only when they are properly supported and resourced. The school landscape has dramatically changed over the past number of years, we must react to this change and provide our youth players with a schools games experience that will add real value to both their personal and sporting development.

NO. OF 2ND LEVEL SCHOOL GAMES PER PROVINCE

Ulster	Leinster	Connacht	Munster
1,800	1,700	800	600

POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS

The Perspective of the National Committee

1  **Current Difference between Age Grades in club and schools competition**


- a. Half Year Age Grades for Schools is preferential to balance relative Age Effect
- b. Should Year/Class Based Grading Be considered
- c. Consider 2nd and 3rd Team competitions up to Provincial level

3  **Informal Games and Participation**


There is a vital need to increase informal GAA activities in 2nd level schools across the country

5  **Links with local Primary Schools**


Participation Workgroup should address how this should operate at ground level

7  **Well-Being Curriculum**


How will this be addressed in terms of the role of the GAA and how can it integrate with the Future Leaders Programme

9  **Very Large Schools**


Some new schools are very large and have a limited connection with Gaelic Games. How do we target these schools and promote GAA within them?

2  **New Junior Cycle and Assessment**


- a. Can timetabling be used to improve coordinated provision of formal and informal games opps.
- b. Provide set Programme of fixtures..what about weekends or evenings
- c. Can we dictate windows for games

4  **Links with local Clubs**


Feeder clubs for each school should at least have one yearly contact with their local school initiated by the school

6  **Future leaders Programme**

This is progressing well and is providing the GAA with huge integration with the TY programme across the country

8  **The new Leaving Cert PE Programme**

How will this be addressed in terms of the role of the GAA and how can it build on the work of the Future Leaders Programme and utilise the expertise of the Education Workgroup

10  **Player Development**

We need to address the issue of too many masters pulling in different directions for talented youth players - governance is necessary. Coach Education targeted at Post Primary Coaches is also necessary.

PLAYER DEVELOPMENT AND THE PERSPECTIVE OF PROVINCIAL GAMES MANAGERS



1

Do we have a vision for academies, what philosophy underpins their existence? Crucial that we develop and communicate this vision.

2

Academies need a place on county calendars inclusive of a set number of sessions. At younger ages, the focus must be on the game, not training.

3

Fixture making bodies need greater alignment. Players cannot continue to be stuck in the middle of communication issues between managers.

4

U17 inter-county competition should be developmental, similar concept to Celtic Challenge.

5

Individual Counties need a 3-5 year county plan inclusive of dates and policies regarding games development within their county.

6

Gear should be centrally allocated from Croke Park for all squads from U14 -U17. All squad players should receive the same gear regardless of what county they are representing.

PLAYER DEVELOPMENT AND THE PERSPECTIVE OF PROVINCIAL SECRETARIES



1

Develop a shared vision for player development within the Association inclusive of process, curriculum, pathway and calendar.

2

2nd and 3rd level representatives should be invited to attend CCCC meetings when master fixture schedule is being developed.

3

Competitions across clubs, schools and 3rd level need specific windows with clubs commanding the most central position within such scheduling.

4

3rd level competitions need to be reviewed with regards to eligibility. Also, it may be now necessary to promote a vision around the benefits of such competition in relation to the player pathway.

5

2nd level schools players should only be eligible for one grade in All-Ireland stages of schools competition.



THE BIG WINS

- ▶ The standard of coaching at academy level in many instances was considered by stakeholders to be of high quality
- ▶ The GAA now possesses a network of training facilities in many counties that are state of the art and accessible to academy squads.
- ▶ There were many instances in counties whereby player welfare practices were common. These included access to sports medicine, nutrition and psychology workshops as well as the use of load management tools.
- ▶ The role of full-time staff was seen as a positive in many counties. Stakeholders felt that GDAs and other staff play a significant positive role in the design and implementation of academy activities.

CONSULTATION COMMENDED PRACTICES

1. COACHING PRACTICES

'Coaches listen and help, care and can be trusted, it's a positive player environment'

Coaching has seen a marked improvement at squad level over recent years. Players felt that they were exposed to challenging practices and that their coaches listened to them, could be trusted and cared. Sessions had good player: coach ratios in many instances. Stakeholders felt that there was a marked step up in both the experience and the quality of coaches operating at squad level as against what is available at club level.

2. FULL-TIME STAFF

The full-time staff were viewed by many stakeholders as facilitators to development. The youths felt that the full-time staff in general had a very good rapport with squad members and because of the nature of their job, they know all of the players before they come in to the squad. This was reiterated by parents. It is their work in schools which really deserves mention and how they operate as the ears on the ground for squad mentors. This was seen as very beneficial by all.

'A couple of years ago, things were shabby, but now the GDAs have a plan in place and things have vastly improved'

3. FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

'Excellent range of facilities available to all county squads'

The standard of facility varied but stakeholders mentioned that squads had access often to the best facilities within each county. Centres of Excellence and links with schools, clubs and 3rd level institutions was very much recognised as a positive by many. Also, some counties operated hubs around their county so as to minimise travel for players.

'Our squad days include information on nutrition, recovery and S&C'

4. PLAYER WELFARE

There were many instances in counties whereby players and other stakeholders felt that player welfare issues were well catered for. These included nutritional advice, medical support as well as the issue of protecting one's positive mental health.

5. ELEMENTS OF THE GAMES PROGRAMME

Stakeholders reported that some elements of the games programme in individual counties was very satisfactory. This was in the minority but in some counties, games were regular, season was defined and there was a good balance between club and squad activities. The Celtic Challenge competition model was highlighted for praise. Where Under 17 at club level was in place counties saw benefits for the player with the end of conflict with adult fixtures.

'Games programme provided early in the year in a master fixture plan'

6. LEVEL OF COMMITMENT AND ENERGY

'Coaches are of a good quality and are always looking to improve themselves'

The level of commitment and energy shown by all academy stakeholders was remarkable. Coaches and parents especially, went to huge lengths to ensure that the academy experience was very worthwhile for prospects and that all necessary means were utilised to find a way to deliver such experiences.



THE BIG ISSUES

- Stakeholders had difficulty in describing and understanding what the player pathway and its various components should look like within Gaelic Games. They sought clarity around the pathway and are looking for direction from the GAA.
- Stakeholders believe that there is a lack of educational opportunities available to them within the GAA. This was especially true of coaches and administrators.
- In many instances, there were examples of dysfunction between academies, schools and clubs. Nobody is leading the developmental process and players were often conflicted by the demands placed upon them.
- Stakeholders had many issues with the games programme within their county and the constant overlap between competitions.
- Similar concerns were raised regarding the uncertainty of fixtures and the need for a standardised calendar.

KEY PLAYER DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

1

Framework and Strategies

There currently does not exist a uniform Talent Identification and Development framework so as to inform practice of squad mentors in relation to identifying and developing potential. Currently, the emphasis with talent identification within academies is based on non-inclusive, uni-dimensional and low predictive identification strategies e.g. one off trial systems, annual deselection practices.

2

Role Clarity and Understanding

Strategy is rarely outlined by individual counties and there is a distinct lack of role clarity and expectations between stakeholders. This lack of clarity can sometimes manifest itself in confusion between coaches at club, school and county level.

3

Monitoring

Counties use Smartabase to measure load but this data was rarely used to identify which players need rest etc. Also, ongoing individualised monitoring (such as testing) doesn't seem to be utilised to inform identification decisions. The coaches' eye could be supplemented with such data when making decisions on player progression.

4

Inconsistencies

There are numerous inconsistencies between verbalised strategy, practice and levels of support. County context is crucial and a one size fits all approach will not work in the GAA. However, players, parents and coaches need a consistent approach to identification and development based on principles and processes that can be applied in all contexts.

5

Communication

More work is needed on communicating with and between stakeholders. A GAA approach to the identification of potential and its' development must be continuously communicated to all stakeholders. Such communication will bring clarity of purpose and allow a consistent and co-ordinated approach to practice.

6

Focus on Junior Success

The focus in talent identification is on current performance rather than future potential. Annual competitions reinforce such viewpoints where teams are selected to win tournaments. This process hinders development and many players of potential are denied opportunity to participate at academy level. The focus in many instances remains on winning youth competitions. However, research outlines that senior elite performance is associated with late specialisation, sampling other sports and a later entry into sport systems.

7

Relative Age Effect and Maturation

Such a focus in turn reinforces what is known as Relative Age Effect whereby mentors, unknown to themselves, identify players who are born in the first three months of the year as having the greatest potential. This phenomenon is related to players being grouped solely by age or one calendar year e.g. boys born in 2003. Again, there seems to be a focus on identifying players due to physical size. This ties into winning competitions and tournaments whereby players who may need more time to develop are not given the opportunity.

8

Coach Education and Recruitment

Despite many committed and enthusiastic coaches working within the system recruitment of coaches was cited as key issue. This hinders talent id and development and in some cases where this is pronounced we need to question value of the programme in place. There is currently a lack of coach development opportunities or sufficient rewards to attract the best coaches to get involved.

9

Funding

The current competition structure and preparation for tournaments is hastening deselection and reducing pool of players in the system. Finance is also a driver here too with costs of gear determining numbers to be involved.

10

Competition Structure and a Coherent Fixtures Calendar

The absence of a coherent fixtures calendar is causing overlap and forcing young players to play too many games with too many teams. Some players have too many games, others not enough. The dual player is also a major issue in some counties.

11

Accountability

The organisation and management structure of the squad system is limiting to the extent that there is little planning, monitoring or evaluation taking place. There is little accountability and people roles are not clear.



Coaching

'Its very hard to get coaches at both club and county level as there are too few coaches available, a lot of our better coaches are working outside of the county'



Coach Education

'Courses need to be more practical and less class based, we also need to mentor our academy coaches'



Communication

'One player did double PE, followed by school training and the county football for the Fr. Manning that night'

THE BIG ISSUES

As Perceived by the Clubs



Competition Structure

'In our county, u16 hurling and football leagues were even clashing, we are forcing players to make decisions regarding teams in our club, not to mention other teams that they are on elsewhere'



Funding

'Venues and facilities are still an issue, especially during the winter'



Role Clarity

'Some schools have gone over the top in their preparations and approach to training, there is serious pressure on lads now to manage to play for their club, school and county. We need clarity and communication for all.'



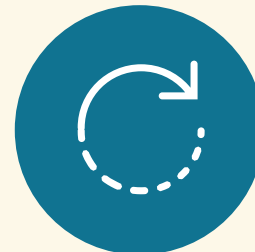
Governance

'There is a lack of governance across squads. There is a lack of engagement. Steering committees are not enough'



Monitoring

'More individual monitoring of technical & physical development with testing, individual programmes and individualised recovery is needed'



Winning

'The focus must be on development of players over winning and this must be communicated to all stakeholders'

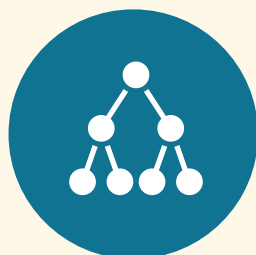
THE BIG ISSUES

As Perceived by the Grassroots



Inconsistencies

'We need a better way of identifying players, a central approach, squads, teachers and clubs all having an input'



Framework

'At the moment, we are simply doing what we think is the best approach, we have zero guidance from anywhere'

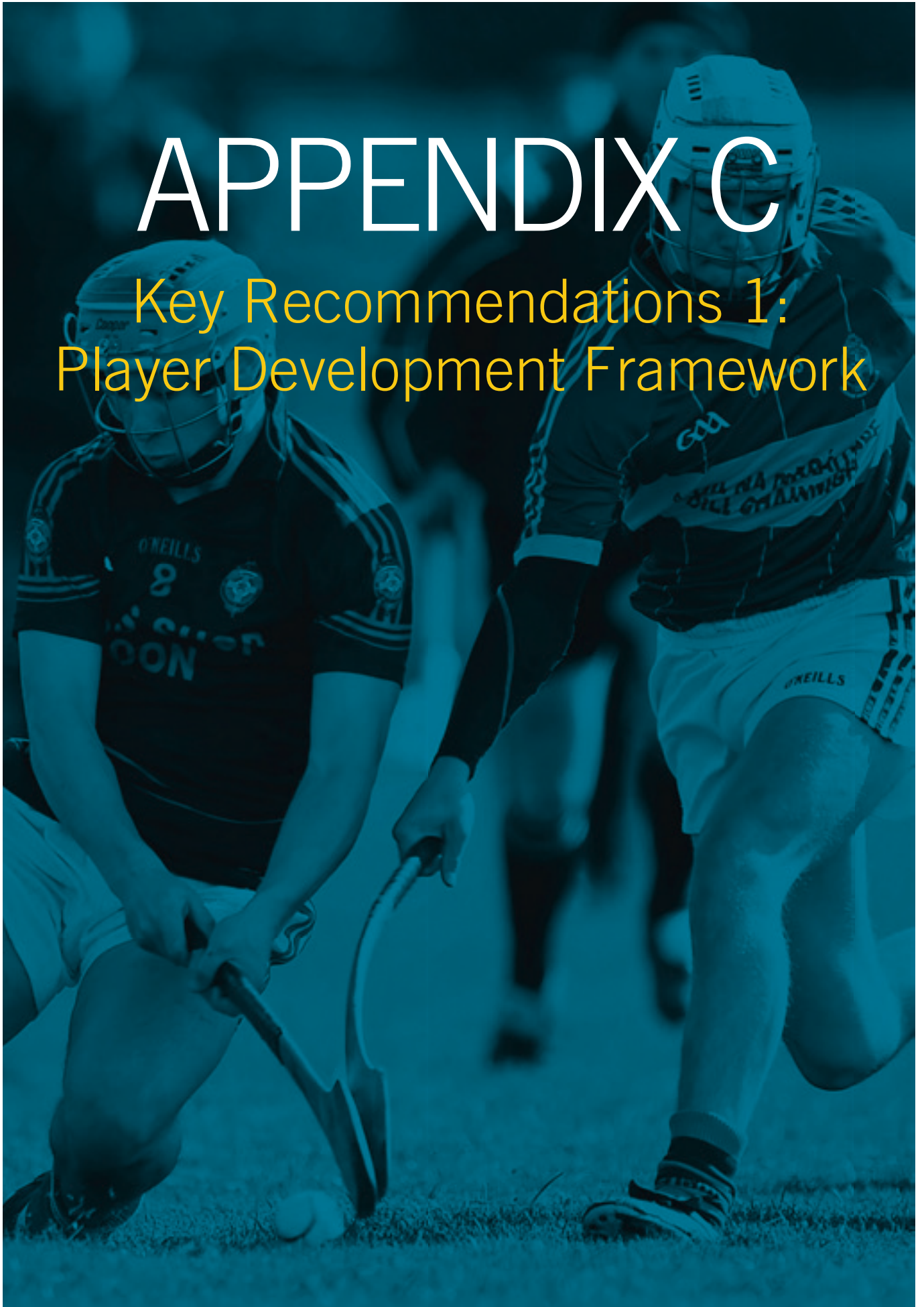


Accountability

'The full time staff are responsible for the design and implementation of the programme. We leave it up to them'

APPENDIX C

Key Recommendations 1: Player Development Framework



Reposition the club as the central component of the player development pathway. This will be achieved by realigning the current player pathway model to a clear and concise framework which is inclusive of participation, talent development and elite performance.

REVIEW SUMMARY SUPPORTING THIS RECOMMENDATION:

1. This review recommends that the GAA adapts the Ftem framework (Foundations, Talent, Elite, Mastery) to suit its own context. Since there is no international competition outside of the Compromise Rules Series, the GAA framework can discard the mastery tier.
2. FTEM is a user-friendly framework of sporting development that is representative of the 'whole of sport' pathway continuum. It integrates three key outcomes of sport participation: active lifestyle, sport participation and sport excellence.
3. It is structured in a linear way and subdivided into phases, but also takes into consideration the possibility that, in the course of their sporting career, athletes may move up and down or across phases, go through phases at different speeds, get back into a sport in a lower phase or even change back and forth between popular sport and competitive sport. Each stage is supported by 'best practise' strategies to support development.
4. By adopting such a framework, we can develop and support stakeholder understanding of the necessary requirements at the various phases, in developing players to reach their full potential which in turn will sustain a lifelong participation in sport and Gaelic Games. This understanding was lacking during the consultation period.
5. The FTEM framework will allow administrators and coaches to apply an informed, contemporary 'best practice' approach to each stage of development within their own context.
6. In essence, the framework will support development by providing the right support, at the right time, for the right athletes e.g. U16s must be afforded a different support structure than an elite inter-county player.
7. The framework will provide for a better understanding of the developmental pathway since coach education in the GAA will mirror the staged approach as outlined within the framework. Such an understanding is key for achieving the desired developmental outcome of each phase and transitioning players through the pathway.
8. Crucially, the framework allows the Association to position its various units appropriately. The foundation Stage features the club from first involvement to last, from child to adult. The Talent Stage is where our academies, schools and colleges belong. It is here that players of potential are identified and participate at higher competitive standards than those found at the Foundation level. Potential is verified and nurtured to become talent at some later stage of the process. This is extremely complex but the FTEM framework somewhat simplifies the stage through its support for a shared developmental approach between schools and academies and county teams and colleges; no single entity has a dominant role in a player's development. In particular, it allows for coordination and communication between stakeholders and places the player at the centre of his own personal and sporting development. In essence, teachers, academy, inter-county and 3rd level coaches work in partnership and in doing so ensure that the individual needs of players in their care are catered for. They combine to orchestrate the pathway for their individual players, each playing their part in ensuring that player is appropriately supported to transition along the pathway. By adopting the FTEM framework, the status of our volunteer coaches working in 2nd and 3rd level educational institutions is immediately improved since they no longer have to work in isolation. They now will be recognised for the centrality of their role in developing players and will become very much part of a synergised and unified approach to the development of potential.

GAELIC GAMES DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

FOUNDATION

F1 Learning and Acquiring Basic Movement

- Club Nursery
- Have a Ball
- Club Primary Section Coaching Activities
- Fun Do
- Gaelic Start

F2 Extension and Refinement of Movement

- Go Games
- Primary School Competitions
- Primary School Informal GAA Activity

F3 Commitment to Gaelic Games and/or Active Lifestyle

- Underage Club Competitions up to and including U17
- Adult Club Competitions

TALENT

T1 Demonstration of Potential

- U13/14 Schools of Excellence
- U15 Development Squad

T2 Verification of Potential

- U16 Development Squad
- 2nd level Junior Competition

T3 Practising and Achieving

- U17 Minor Inter-county Squad
- 2nd Level Senior Competition
- 3rd Level Freshers Competition
- U19 Inter-county Squad

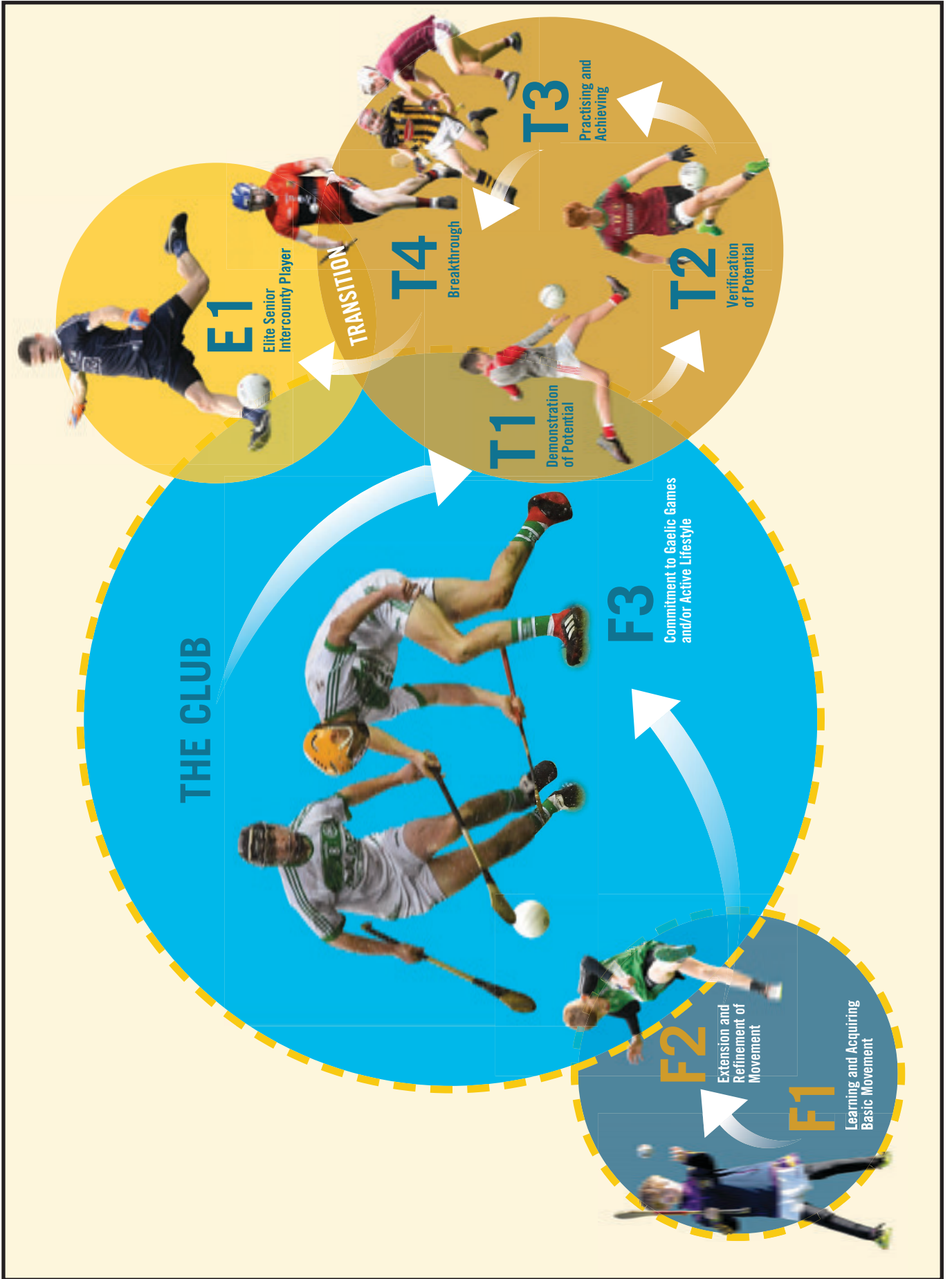
T4 Breakthrough

- 3rd Level Senior Competition

ELITE

E1 Elite Senior Intercountry Player

- Senior Inter-county Squad



DESCRIPTION OF PLAYER DEVELOPMENT STAGES F1 – F3:

THE FOUNDATIONS OF OUR GAMES - THE CLUB

STAGE	MAIN FOCUS	DESCRIPTOR
Foundation 1 (F1) U4 – U7	LEARNING AND ACQUIRING BASIC MOVEMENT	The emphasis during this phase should be placed on open play (general movement) with all children playing, exploring movement through new and fun experiences. Younger children will continue to participate in activities that are enjoyable and rewarding to them. The end product should be a fun and safe experience. Establishing a core set of motor skills related to Gaelic Games early in life enables children to gain a sense of achievement and establish a positive relationship with sport and physical activity.
Foundation 2 (F2) U7 – U12	EXTENSION AND REFINEMENT OF MOVEMENT (BASES)	The emphasis during this phase is on further developing functional movement skills, early physical literacy and the early acquisition of the specific skills of hurling and football. These outcomes are to be achieved through the broad exposure to non-structured (deliberate play, schoolyard games, back-yard games) and structured sports formats such as blitzes, Go Games, informal and formal school games. By the end of this stage, the child will become exposed to low level social competition.
Foundation 3 (F3) U12 - Adult	COMMITMENT TO GAELIC GAMES (GRASSROOTS)	The emphasis during this phase is on the consolidation and refinement of the skills acquired in the previous phases. This phase is inclusive of the majority of Gaelic Games athletes and is inclusive of all club activity from youth to adult Gaelic Games. This phase is represented by a real commitment to training and competition at an individual's club as well as the development of a sense of engagement and belonging within the Gaelic Athletic Association.

DESCRIPTION OF PLAYER DEVELOPMENT STAGES T1 - T4:

RECOGNISING POTENTIAL TO BREAKING THROUGH - OUR SQUADS, OUR SCHOOLS AND OUR COLLEGES

STAGE	MAIN FOCUS	DESCRIPTOR
TALENT 1 (T1) U13 –U14 Regional Squads	DEMONSTRATION OF POTENTIAL	The emphasis during this phase is on identifying, developing and consolidating a player’s potential. It’s very much the beginnings of a pre-elite positioning on the player pathway and this stage is not to be confused with the inter-county game or winning All-Ireland championships. This stage will rely on the ‘coaches’ eye’ supported by simple age appropriate tests to gauge a player’s current player profile and future talent potential. This process will be defined by its holistic and inclusive approach to potential identification and development
Talent 2 (T2) U15 – U16 Regional/County Squad Junior Schools Competition	Verification of Potential	Players who are identified as having potential are at this stage, immersed into a formalised observational period so as to verify their future talent potential. This involves coaches observing players during training and games. These observations will be supported by a number of specific assessments related to psychological skills and character, sport specific skills, physicality and the ability to manage training loads as well as a player’s coachability, commitment and motivation. Such a verification approach will provide accountability around selection decisions.
Talent 3 (T3) U17 County Squad Senior Schools Competition U19 Inter-county Squad	Practicing and Achieving	After being confirmed as potential elite players (T2), players at this stage are committed to achieving higher levels of performance. This correlates to high training volumes and appropriate competition exposure whereby the player strives for continual performance improvement. Co-ordination and the quality of development support available within all three worlds (club, 3rd level, county) is critical at this stage in order to reduce dropout, injury, underachievement and to facilitate the transition for some players to senior elite level.
Talent 4 (T4) Senior Higher Education Competition	Breakthrough and Reward	Players at this stage gain formalised and professional individual support for their continued development. Their efforts towards continual development at T3 is rewarded by selection into a county senior colleges squad or senior elite training squad. These players must benefit from proactive strategies that minimise the barriers to progression to elite senior level. These may include increases in individual support from coaches at club and senior college squad level, from high-performance professionals as well as support from mentors who may be recently retired senior inter-county players.

DESCRIPTION OF PLAYER DEVELOPMENT STAGES E1:

ELITE INTERCOUNTY SENIOR PLAYER - OUR SENIOR INTER-COUNTY SQUAD

STAGE	MAIN FOCUS	DESCRIPTOR
Elite 1 (E1) Elite Intercounty senior player	Representation on elite intercounty teams	Players at this stage achieve senior elite status through selection and representation on their senior inter-county team in championship. This level is characterised by effective deliberate programming including guidance and support prior to, during and following early elite senior competition experiences. Support and management of the dual career (GAA and work/study) is a critical component at this stage. Players will receive an individualised case management approach to their development through their interactions with quality coaching and an effective interdisciplinary service support i.e. sport science, medicine, psychology etc.

KEY COMPONENT OF DEVELOPMENT STAGES F1 - F3:

STAGE	THE PLAYER	THE ENVIRONMENT	THE GAME
F1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Key Values Developed - Fair Play, Respect and Appreciation ● Physical Development - Focus is on play and learning through the medium of play. Focus is not on sport at this stage. Participation in a number of sports should be encouraged throughout this stage ● Technical Development - There is limited focus on specific technical development at the initial stages of the F1 stage outside the development of fundamental movements such as throwing, jumping catching, running, striking and kicking. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Teacher - at this stage the teacher should provide structured learning through play as part of the P.E. curriculum whilst later in the stage, players should be encouraged to play multi-sports. ● Coach - ensures that FUN is the centre of all activities and that the technical aspects of the game are progressively addressed as the player moves towards the end of this stage. ● Parent - supports the child and encourages play, exploration, enjoyment as well as some level of practice at home as the child moves towards the end of this stage. ● Sports Science and Medicine - not applicable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Training Duration - at this stage the child needs daily activity of between 40 - 60 mins. ● Intensity - Only moderate intensity is necessary so that the focus can remain on skill development. ● Scoring - recording scoring should only occur at the latter stages of this phase. ● Competition - Formal competition should not begin

STAGE	THE PLAYER	THE ENVIRONMENT	THE GAME
F2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychosocial Development - The focus at this stage is on developing children's intrinsic motivation to engage in sport • Physical Development - Participation in a number of sports should be encouraged throughout this stage so as to maximise movement development and sports skill exposure. By the end of this phase, the child should be able to master all fundamental movements bilaterally. • Technical Development - Within this stage, basic skill acquisition becomes crucial so that the refinement of skills can properly occur at a later date as the child matures. Modified games are crucial in this regard such as the Go Games model. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher - at this stage there must be a strong partnership between the school and the club so that the child is exposed to a broad and balanced sports experience e.g. gets to play other sports as well as Gaelic Games. • Coach - ensures that is a progressive approach to developing the technical aspects of the game as the child moves through this stage but the focus remains on deliberate play. • Parent - supports the child and encourages play, exploration, enjoyment as well as some level of practice at home as the child moves towards the end of this stage. • Sports Science and Medicine - not applicable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training Duration - at this stage the child needs daily activity of between 40 - 60 mins. • Intensity - Only moderate intensity is necessary so that the focus can remain on skill development. • Scoring - recording scoring should only occur at the latter stages of this phase. • Competition - Formal competition should not begin until children reach the U13 age grade.
F3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychosocial Development - The focus at this stage is on increasing intrinsic motivation as well as developing capacities such as emotional control and self-regulation. • Physical Development - At some point, the athlete decides to specialise in Gaelic Games. He will be exposed to an evidence based coaching curriculum that incorporates strength and conditioning, performance analysis, injury prevention and management etc. • Technical Development - Within this stage, fundamental and specialist skill development occurs within a group decision making environment and the context of the game. Ultimately, skills must be performed under fatigue and at skill 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher - at this stage there must be a strong partnership between the school and the club as well as the academy so that players with potential can smoothly transition into pre-elite levels (T1). This partnership must involve trust, co-operation and education. • Coach - ensures that players feel valued and positive coach/athlete relationships are the dominant feature of the environment. • Parent - at this stage, parent's role is very much focused on emotional support for their children. • Sports Science and Medicine - Players at F3 level are exposed to best practice standards within the constraints of the club environment in the area of sport science and medicine. This is inclusive of S&C, Performance analysis, Nutrition and Sports Medicine. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training Duration - Sessions will last between 60 and 90 mins and players should have at least two rest days per week. • Intensity - the intensity of training will vary according to a periodised training plan and the level of activity of the training group. • Competition - Formal competition should not begin until children reach the U13 age grade. Players showing potential or those who mature quicker than others should be facilitated by playing up age grades.

KEY COMPONENT OF DEVELOPMENT STAGES T1 - T4:

STAGE	THE PLAYER	THE ENVIRONMENT	THE GAME
T1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Psychosocial Development - Players must be given opportunity to connect with each other, build relationships and take on challenges that will foster personal development and well-being. Players at this stage will be introduced to the Psychological Characteristics to Developing Excellence curriculum Physical Development - Decisions around specialisation are delayed until U16, players are encouraged to play other sports. No formal training sessions will take place at U13 level but may occur at U14 level. The focus of these sessions remains The Game. At U15 level, players will begin to be exposed to a defined physical literacy programme related to the needs of our games. Technical Development - The Game is the focus of this stage. U13 regional squads will play against other regionals squads within their county only, if feasible (i.e. numbers allow). U14 and U15 regional squads will play against squads in other counties. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher - at this stage there must be a strong partnership between the school and the club as well as the academy so that players with potential can smoothly transition into this level (T1). This partnership must involve trust, co-operation and education. The teacher will encourage the development of communication within all prospects. Coach - The Academy coach should act as a link for development of individual players. They must act as a conduit between the three worlds of club, school and academy and at all times focus on the best interests of individual prospects. Parent - promote personal development by allowing player make decisions for himself in consultation with his coaches. Sports Science and Medicine - used to support coaches' eye in determining future talent and current potential. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training Duration - Sessions will last between 60 and 90 mins and players should have at least two rest days per week. The maximum number of games per week should not exceed three. The maximum contact time for academies at this stage cannot be greater than 3 occasions per month. Intensity - the intensity of training will vary according to a periodised training plan and the level of activity of the training group. Competition - High intensity blitz days should be avoided. If they are organised, then proper squad rotation must be practiced. Players must have a days rest pre and post such blitzes if they are organised. Selection - This stage will not involve deselection so as to ensure numbers remain high and all players are given opportunity over a prolonged period to develop.

STAGE	THE PLAYER	THE ENVIRONMENT	THE GAME
T2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychosocial Development - Players must be given opportunity to connect with each other, build relationships and take on challenges that will foster personal development and well-being. Players at this stage will continue to develop the Psychological Characteristics to Developing Excellence Coaches will observe levels of commitment and motivation players possess as well as their coachability. • Physical Development - At this stage, players will be introduced to individualised physical development programming and should aim to achieve benchmark targets or physical development norms. Physical deficiencies should be identified at this stage and targeted with intervention programming. • Technical Development - The focus at this stage is on advanced decision making development within the context of the team and the game. This may include both individual and team performance analysis. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher - at this stage there must be a strong partnership between the school and the club as well as the academy so that players with potential can smoothly transition into this level (T2). This partnership must involve trust, co-operation and education. The teacher will encourage the development of communication within all prospects. • Coach - The Academy coach should act as a link for development of individual players. They must act as a conduit between the three worlds of club, school and academy and at all times focus on the best interests of individual prospects. • Parent - promote personal development by allowing player make decisions for himself in consultation with his coaches. • Sports Science and Medicine - used to support coaches' eye in determining future talent and current potential. Also, professionals begin to become involved in the player's development including physios, S&C coaches, performance analysts etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training Duration - Sessions will last between 60 and 90 mins and players should have at least two rest days per week. The maximum number of games per week should not exceed three. The maximum contact time for academies at this stage cannot exceed 4 times per month. • Intensity - the intensity of training will vary according to a periodised training plan and the level of activity of the training group. • Competition - U16 will be the first opportunity for full county squads to play against each other. These squads will play in a Celtic Challenge format competition that will be focused on development and involve all squad players receiving equal playing time. • Selection - This stage will involve deselection and academies must develop a context based policy around same. This must meet approval of the Provincial Talent Manager.

STAGE	THE PLAYER	THE ENVIRONMENT	THE GAME
T3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychosocial Development - At this stage, athlete education will be ongoing. The focus should be on deliberate programming cognisant of individual case management and inclusive of self-regulation, time-management and performance psychology skills. • Physical Development - At this stage, players will continue with their individualised physical development programming and should aim to achieve benchmark targets or physical development norms. Physical deficiencies will continue to be targeted with intervention programming. • Technical Development - The focus at this stage is on developing training strategies that promote athlete skill progression under competitive-like contexts, environmental constraints and fatigue. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3rd Level College - The county must maintain a strong alliance with colleges so as to provide accessible, athlete-friendly and flexible study programmes. • Coach - The coach must be supported at this level with ongoing education inclusive of mentoring/communities of practice which will emphasise contemporary, evidence based practice. • Parent - promote personal development by allowing player make decisions for himself in consultation with his coaches. • Sports Science and Medicine - Professionals are very much part of the player's development including physios, S&C coaches, performance analysts etc. The coach must coordinate these teams so that the player can receive maximum individual benefit from their involvement. Load management is crucial at this stage, an athlete management system should be utilised at this stage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training Duration - Sessions will last between 60 and 90 mins and players should have at least two rest days per week. The maximum number of games per week should not exceed two. Players at this level should be available to play with their club at least once per week. • Intensity - the intensity of training will vary according to a periodised training plan and the level of activity of the training group. • Competition – U17 is a tiered Celtic Challenge developmental competition. U19 is to become the first All-Ireland competition. • Selection - This stage will involve a maximum of 30 players at U17 and 30 players at U19 level. Players cannot play on both squads.

STAGE	THE PLAYER	THE ENVIRONMENT	THE GAME
T4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychosocial Development - At this stage, athlete education will be ongoing. The focus should be on deliberate programming cognisant of individual case management and inclusive of self-regulation, time-management and performance psychology skills. • Physical Development - At this stage, players will continue with their individualised physical development programming and should aim to achieve benchmark targets or physical development norms. Physical deficiencies will continue to be targeted with intervention programming. • Technical Development - The focus at this stage is on developing training strategies that promote athlete skill progression under competitive-like contexts, environmental constraints and fatigue. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3rd Level College - The county must maintain a strong alliance with colleges so as to provide accessible, athlete-friendly and flexible study programmes. • Coach - The coach must be supported at this level with ongoing education inclusive of mentoring/communities of practice which will emphasise contemporary, evidence-based practice. • Parent - acts as an emotional support to players at this stage. • Sports Science and Medicine - professionals are very much part of the player's development including physios, S&C coaches, performance analysts etc. The coach must coordinate these teams so that the player can receive maximum individual benefit from their involvement. Load management is crucial at this stage, an athlete management system should be utilised at this stage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training Duration - Sessions will last between 60 and 90 mins and players should have at least two rest days per week. The maximum number of games per week should not exceed two. • Intensity - the intensity of training will vary according to a periodised training plan and the level of activity of the training group. • Competition - players will participate in 3rd level competitions whilst also participating fully with their clubs.

KEY COMPONENT OF DEVELOPMENT STAGES E1:

STAGE	THE PLAYER	THE ENVIRONMENT	THE GAME
E1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Psychosocial Development - At this stage, athlete education will be ongoing. The focus should be on deliberate programming cognisant of individual case management and inclusive of self-regulation, time-management and performance psychology skills. ▶ Physical Development - At this stage, players will continue with their individualised physical development programming and should aim to achieve benchmark targets or physical development norms. Physical deficiencies will continue to be targeted with intervention programming. ▶ Technical Development - The focus at this stage is on developing training strategies that promote athlete skill progression under competitive-like contexts, environmental constraints and fatigue. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ 3rd Level College - The county must maintain a strong alliance with colleges so as to provide accessible, athlete-friendly and flexible study programmes. ▶ Coach - The coach must be supported at this level with ongoing education inclusive of mentoring/communities of practice which will emphasise contemporary, evidence based practice. ▶ Parent - acts as an emotional support to players at this stage. ▶ Sports Science and Medicine - professionals are very much part of the player's development including physios, S&C coaches, performance analysts etc. The coach must coordinate these teams so that the player can receive maximum individual benefit from their involvement. Load management is crucial at this stage, an athlete management system should be utilised at this stage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Training Duration - Sessions will last between 60 and 90 mins and players should have at least two rest days per week. The maximum number of games per week should not exceed two. Players at this level should be available to play with their club at nominated times throughout the season. ▶ Intensity - the intensity of training will vary according to a periodised training plan and the level of activity of the training group. ▶ Competition - this is the ultimate competition in our sport, the All-Ireland championships. It is proposed that adult competition should be tiered in line with youth competition as described earlier so that all players may experience the opportunity for success. The football championship should have 4 levels, the hurling championship should not change. ▶ Selection - Elite Squads should not exceed 35 panel members.



APPENDIX D

Key Recommendations 2: Education

“Create an environment within the Association whereby education becomes valued and available to all stakeholders at the right time and within the right context.”



It is envisaged that in order to achieve the above, coach education as it is constituted presently, will require some alterations. Most pertinently, this review has two broad subrecommendations in relation to the key aims of this focus area. These are.

- 2.1** That the **Coaching pathway should mirror the Player pathway** and be linked to the FTEM framework. The programme should have core coaching modules and specific modules designed to meet the needs of the target coaches and player group.
- 2.2** The **Coaching pathway would also be aligned with the National Qualifications** framework with a system to provide coaches with credits for ongoing formal and informal learning.

The following are the suite of recommendations that the review believes will engage the cohort of coaches within the GAA so that they feel appropriately supported and intrinsically motivated to seek new knowledge and skills. Many of these recommendations were previously developed in the McCullick Report (2012).

- 2.3** Coach Education **core modules would be developed around the three distinct phases of the FTEM**

framework – Foundation, Talent and Elite. The focus of the core modules would centre around good coaching, focusing on the holistic development of the player. Supplementary modules relating to each phase would be developed and become a necessary component of each level.

- 2.4** As described by McCullick (2012), the **implementation of less formal methods of coach education** and more face to face and coach mentoring to suit individual coaches' needs would be embedded. **Methods would include** (a) the delivery of education through the GAA learning portal, (b) structured mentoring of coaches, (c) delivery of GAA approved workshops and (e) facilitation of communities of practice in clubs and within counties.
- 2.5** To facilitate **quality coach education** alignment with Coaching Ireland, existing **Tutors and Tutor Trainer should undertake the CI Coach Developer programmes**. This should be prioritised, and the qualifications aligned to the National Qualifications framework, in so doing this adds value to the coach education system and ensure a measure of quality control for these important educators (McCullick 2012).

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- 2.6 Volunteer coaches** should be rewarded for undertaking formal and informal coach development opportunities. As such our systems should evolve to allow coaches to accumulate credits towards coaching awards. This creates a more **informal and flexible way** for coaches to undertake personal development within the coaching pathway. The evolution of systems to manage this is a requirement.
- 2.7 Provincial Club / School Coaching Programmes need to be formalised and embedded within the County structures.** The desire to set up coaching structures and development opportunities to embed quality coach education in club and schools through **communities of practice** will add significant value.
- 2.8 Coaches working with talented young players should receive specific training and mentoring,** in line with the FTEM framework, and to suit the needs of the Players and Coaches. Administrators and Parents should also receive appropriate education around the Talent Stage of player development.
- 2.9** It is recommended that a Coach Education Tutor Pathway is devised for Post Primary School teachers and in particular PDST Associates involved in the GAA Future Leaders Programme. This tutor group could then deliver workshops to teachers who are coaching at second level. It would be also in the interest of the Association if all undergraduates in the teacher training colleges undertook the Award 1 GAA coaching qualification.
- 2.10 National and Provincial Conference** programmes should be designed to **directly engage targeted stakeholders**, with agenda items to educate and inform officers, volunteers, administrators, full-time staff and volunteer coaches at the specified levels. **Targeting groups with key messages** will help embed a new culture and holistic approach to player development.
- 2.11** Key stakeholders such as **County Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer, PRO, Coaching Officer and Games Manager** need to formally meet **once per month** to provide the **accountability and review the support and financial investment** in personnel and programmes within their county.
- 2.12** Counties should **review the current investment in full-time coaching personnel** and work to **maximise the skills and competencies** of staff to support emerging structures. **Higher level professional development** opportunities should be provided for staff on a regular basis as this will help enhance their skills, knowledge and competencies and their self-esteem and motivation.
- 2.13 Elite coaches should be provided with high performance opportunities** and be exposed to environment where they can **enhance and master their skills, knowledge and competencies.** Opportunities for **personal mentoring and attendance at international conferences** should be encouraged on a coach by coach basis through a National Coach Academy.



CORE LEVELS		SUPPLEMENTARY MODULES (2 TO 3)	CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (Accredited learning opportunities)
1	FOUNDATIONS 1 AND 2	1. Fundamental Movement Skills 2. Coaching Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Workshops, ✦ GAA Learning Portal ✦ Club Mentoring Programme ✦ Club Coaching Programme ✦ Provincial Conference
		3. Coaching through Games 4. Coaching Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Workshops, ✦ GAA Learning Portal ✦ Club Mentoring Programme ✦ Club Coaching Programme ✦ Provincial Conference
	FOUNDATIONS 3	5. Coaching Youth and Adults 6. Communication and Coaching Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Workshops, ✦ GAA Learning Portal ✦ Club Mentoring Programme ✦ Club Coaching Programme ✦ Provincial Conference
2	TALENT	1. Identifying Potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Workshops ✦ GAA Learning Portal ✦ Coach Academy Mentoring Programme ✦ Coach Academy Community of practice ✦ National Conference
		2. Verifying Talent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Workshops ✦ GAA Learning Portal ✦ Coach Academy Mentoring Programme ✦ Coach Academy Community of practice ✦ National Conference
		3. Practising and Achieving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Workshops ✦ GAA Learning Portal ✦ Coach Academy Mentoring Programme ✦ Coach Academy Community of practice ✦ National Conference
		4. The Breakthrough	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Workshops ✦ GAA Learning Portal ✦ Coach Academy Mentoring Programme ✦ Coach Academy Community of practice ✦ National Conference
3	ELITE	Performance Coaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Performance Workshops, ✦ Individual Mentoring Programme ✦ Coach Academy Community of practice ✦ International Conference



APPENDIX E

Key Recommendations 3: Governance

Provide an effective governance structure to support the management and implementation of a coherent player pathway in Gaelic Games.

REVIEW SUMMARY SUPPORTING THIS RECOMMENDATION:

- Due to the sheer size of the GAA, communication issues arise when decisions and strategic direction are relayed incorrectly or misunderstood by various agents within the association. This review process supports the fact that such scale hinders any accountability measures imposed by the organisation.
- The rapid growth of the organisation in the last 25 years has led to greater complexity. This level of complexity was most vividly represented in this review process by a strong element of disconnect between those working with teams and administrators within their own counties as well as a complete disconnect in some instances between the various units of the organisation i.e. clubs, schools and academies.
- The sense of responsibility with regard to player development was, at best, clouded across the country. A common response to various questions was – ‘who makes the call’ or ‘we are not sure whose decision that is’. Such uncertainty, when aligned to a dysfunction between ground level and policy developers, clearly has implications for player development.
- This review identified a solo culture in existence in many counties. Such a culture affords limited opportunity for a coherent approach to player development. It is now vital that the Association introduces a number of actions to support coherency across the player pathway.

The following steps are necessary if player development is to be appropriately supported and governed within the Association:

1. Congress 2019 passed motion for establishment of the Central Games Development and Coaching Committee

The purpose of this motion was based on the recommendation of the Strategic Review Committee (SRC 2002) in that it identified Games as ‘strategic priority for the GAA’. To practically express this strategic view it recommended the appointment of a

Central Games Development Committee – in effect a regulatory body that would have the powers and responsibility to develop, implement and control games development policy.

We also recommend the roles and responsibilities of the County and Provincial Games Development Committee be repositioned to better support the implementation, evaluation and monitoring of the recommendations contained in this report. Provincial Council’s shall have responsibility for ensuring County Steering Committees overseeing games development in the county meet regularly and function to required standards.

The Central Games Development Committee shall through engagement with all interrelated bodies and key stakeholders (National, Provincial and County) annually review and evaluate how games development policy at all levels. As an organisation the GAA should know if national policy is making a difference at grassroots level in terms of participation, retention and player development along our pathway. An additional purpose to this exercise should be to improve COMMUNICATION between all stakeholders.

In addition, the GAA should know if policy is impacting volunteer and full-time coaches directing games development activities.

2. So as to ensure coherency of governance across units, appoint representatives from the following Councils to the Central Games Development and Coaching Committee:

- Primary School Council
- Post-Primary School Council
- Higher Education Council

3. If ‘Games’ are to be the strategic priority for the Association we recommend the Director of Games Development and Research should be appointed to the Management Committee of the GAA. There is merit replicating this model at provincial and county level.

4. As stated in the Keegan Report (2018) and as a means of supporting the structure of the National Games Development Committee, this review recommends the following appointments:

- Player Pathway Manager (inclusive of Player Welfare)
- Sports Science Manager
- Education Manager

NATIONAL ROLE	RESPONSIBILITY
Player Pathway Manager	Ultimate responsibility for player development within the GAA for players up to the U20 grade and overseeing the planning and implementation of county plans. This position involves designing a national curriculum and thereafter supporting and evaluating its implementation. It also relates to synergising development across the individual units of the Association as well the promotion of GAA policy around participation and performance.
Sports Science Manager	Ultimate responsibility for developing a best practice approach within the GAA in the Sports Science area inclusive of S&C, nutrition, sports medicine, performance analysis and psychology. This person would work closely with the Pathway Manager in developing a curriculum for all players up to the u20 grade. This person would also evaluate Sport Science practices within the GAA and ensure alignment to GAA developed policy.
Education Manager	Ultimate responsibility for setting and delivering a strategy to ensure the quality, consistency and recognition of coaches (full-time and volunteer) within the GAA, appropriate to the needs of the game being played at different levels. This person will have responsibility for the promotion of the coaching pathway, and to ensure that it is integrated with the player pathway. They will also have responsibility for the creation of a culture for coaching and administration excellence through the provision of high quality coach and administrator development material.

- **The above National Games Development Department functions shall be mirrored at provincial and county level.**
- To achieve greater underage competition coherence between all the key stakeholders we are recommending the appointment of a Fixtures Coordinator. The position will be responsible for in conjunction with the relevant organising committees the coordination of underage club, intercounty, post-primary and third level competitions. At county level depending on the number of games and activity this appointment may be a volunteer or be employed on a part-time or full-time basis. The success of Go Games can be attributed to such an approach in many counties where a member of the games development team is responsible for these fixtures.
- As stated in the Keegan Report 2018, a Critical Data Insights Unit within Croke Park reporting to Árd Stiurthóir, should be created with responsibility for monitoring and evaluation, and collections and interpretation of insights gained from games development activities.
- We recommend the working hours of games development personnel be re-balanced with greater engagement in clubs and post-primary schools.

5. To enhance the effectiveness of the national appointments we recommend the establishment of expert advisory groups that will act on a voluntary consultancy basis to support the development of curriculum and programmes and also assist in their evaluation.

* Such groups will be formed by the Games Development Executive of the Central Games Development Committee in consultation with the national lead functions.

6. Counties, with the support of provincial councils, shall take ownership and responsibility for producing a three-year player development plan for submission to and approval of Central Games Development Committee every three years.

* Each plan shall focus on key areas and how they will be delivered in the unique playing environment of each county at youth level across club, school and inter-county structures and aligned to the Ftem Framework. Counties will be supported in developing such plans and their implementation thereafter will be supported, evaluated and monitored by both provincial and national functions.

Each county shall be responsible for producing a plan under the following focus areas:

- Organisation and Management Structure
- Participation
- Talent ID/Development
- Player Support/Welfare
- Coach and Stakeholder Development
- Games Programme
- Facilities
- Finance

7. All national youth programmes and related funding (to include Club, Post-Primary Schools, and Inter-County) allocated to provinces and counties as well as designated county hurling and football funding should be immediately reviewed. It is recommended that funding around the development and implementation of an appropriate player pathway must be prioritised in individual counties.

8. An outcome of any funding review should be the creation of an awards or recognition programme to acknowledge the invaluable work undertaken by coaches and teachers and the role they play in promotion and development of Gaelic Games.

9. GAA to explore option of centrally providing gear to development squads

10. We recommend the GAA GIVE RESPECT GET RESPECT Programme be relaunched and its principles strongly integrated into our youth development pathway.

10.2 In addition, we recommend at all levels the Player Pathway Manager shall work in conjunction with the relevant Childrens Officer for ensuring adherence to the measures and guidelines set out in GAA Code of Behaviour to protect and safeguard the welfare of youth players and creating positive and safe development environment.

11. The roles of County and Club Coaching Officers need to be elevated within the Association with more defined roles and responsibilities established. We recommend that County Coaching Officer be an appointed position.





APPENDIX F

Key Recommendations 4: Games Programme

Provide all stakeholders with a game's structure that promotes engagement, player development, welfare and clarity of purpose.



GENERAL

A number of factors influence player development and in particular the provision of games in a county. The number of clubs/schools, dual players, code dominance, geography, demographics and culture all in one way or other determine what the county games programme looks like. Notwithstanding this a games programme if applied appropriately can enhance player development and retention.

To reflect the unique playing environment of each county we recommend that an overall games programme (calendar) shall form a key component of any county player development plan submitted to the Central Games Development Committee annually for approval. It should highlight how they propose to provide a meaningful programme across club and school structures in conjunction with provincial fixtures making body.

- A key recommendation to support the above and ensure coherence between stakeholders and an appropriate game to training ratio is achieved will be through the appointment of a Fixtures Coordinator at Provincial and County level.
- Access to facilities play an important role in facilitating fixtures programme. The proposed creation of windows to avoid overlap will require significant investment in infrastructure. We recommend the Association to develop a strategy for the development of synthetic grass pitches.

It is recommended that the Association undertake a referee recruitment drive to support an increased games programme. It is also recommended that a referee development programme is introduced and aligned to the Ftem Framework.

CLUB

A consistent programme of club games should be provided from March to Mid-October with an emphasis on providing more playing opportunities for all our players. We recommend Central level facilitate this ambition through:

- The further expansion of Féile to include additional age grades with competitions at county, provincial and national levels. We also recommend a consistent format be applied throughout the country. The focus should be developmental with more opportunities for clubs to participate. The Association needs to be mindful and plan for the possibility of legislation that will curb overnights.
- County Committees are directed to review their club programme after minor grade for the purpose of increasing player retention.
- The introduction of the '20 minute' substitution rule for the National Féile weekends has been positive and should be expanded to other age grades and competitions at county, provincial and national level for the purpose of retaining players.

- Central Fixtures Analysis Committee to review underage games programmes and identify examples of good practice that can be shared to improve the games programme for the youth player.

AGE GRADES

With inter-county minor at Under 17 we recommend the following age grades at Under 13, 15 and 17 at club level. This supports the work and conclusions reached by previous groups. Post minor our preference would be Under 19 – however we accept some further examination is required

POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS

A key goal of the Post-Primary School Action Plan 2017-2020 is; To promote integration between Post-Primary Schools and all other relevant GAA units. Our Workgroup supports this goal and would envisage this report having a key role in achieving that goal. Furthermore, we believe by identifying the post-primary sector as key constituent and consultee in this process it reinforces the role schools and teachers play in developing our players.

Whilst we have rightfully identified the club as the key component of the player pathway we fully acknowledge the contribution schools (primary, post-primary and third level) play in developing players in terms of participation and performance opportunities.

- We recommend a complete review of Post-Primary Competitions at Provincial and National level that achieve the following outcomes:
 - Senior competitions that will have greatest impact on club/inter-county schedules be completed earlier. It is worth revisiting The Minor Review Workgroup 2015 that recommended Senior Competitions should be completed by 31st March.
 - Under 19 (Senior) will be the only All-Ireland Competition. Provincial Councils shall have responsibility for determining the end date for Junior Under 16 ½ competitions.
 - All competitions to guarantee at least 3 games.
 - The competition emphasis below Junior grade should be on participation with move towards year-based competitions and expansion of Super Games Centre model to account for emergence of larger schools and changing assessment format.
 - Opportunities for schools to enter more than one team at Junior and Senior grades.
- We recommend where appropriate the utilisation of post-primary schools as player development hubs where internal county school games opportunities and player development programmes e.g. S&C are provided in the place of squads.

- To be eligible for Senior Under 19 a player shall be over 16 ½. This is to facilitate the completion of the games programme and reduce multi-team involvement.

- Players at Post-Primary level restricted to playing at one age grade only across both codes. This is to protect player from risk of injury by limiting multiple team involvement.

INTER-COUNTY

- We recommend a developmental competition structure from Under 13 to Under 17 with playing opportunities available to a wide base of players at regional, provincial and national level through a Celtic Challenge type format.
- Weekend blitzes must at all times provide players with meaningful developmental games for development squads at regional, provincial and national to complement club activity.
- Inter-County Under 19/20 competitions shall be organised on an All-Ireland tiered basis. Careful consideration is required around the scheduling of these competitions.
- Introduction of a tiered U.17 (Minor) All Ireland competition.
- We recommend experimentation around playing rules shall be permitted in competitions below senior grade and not subject to Official Guide restrictions.
- The start dates for development squad (including Under 17) along with competition and training dates shall be included County Calendars and form part of county player development plan to be submitted to Central Games Development Committee. Squad coaching sessions and games shall be restricted to Saturdays.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INTER-COUNTY/FIXTURES SCHEDULING REVIEW

It is the stated intention of An tUachtarán to conduct a Review of the inter-county season/fixtures scheduling post-Championship 2019.

In this regard we ask the Review Committee to consider the need for:

- The proposed Ftem Player Development Framework being a determining factor in any proposed changes.
- The Central Competitions Control Committee (CCCC) shall have the authority to and responsibility for the

planning and production of a Master Fixtures Plan that encompasses all national Club, Inter-County, Post-Primary and Higher Education competitions to ensure coherence. Post-Primary and Higher Education Councils will still be responsible for execution of their fixture programme.

- Provincial competitions (Club, Post-Primary and Inter-County) that are linked to an All-Ireland series shall be included in the national Master Fixtures Plan.
- The Central Competitions Control shall the authority to delegate to a subgroup responsibility for the organisation including discipline for particular competitions as is the case with the Celtic Challenge.
- The existence of multiple organising committees for adult and underage competitions has impacted competition coherence and leading to cross-purposes. To bridge this, we recommend that one CCCC shall exist in each county. A counties requirement for any additional CCC shall be determined by the Provincial CCC following a review.
- The appointment of a representative from the Post-Primary Council and the Higher Education Council to:
 - Central Competitions Control Committee
 - Provincial Competitions Control Committee and,
 - County Competitions Control Committee (Post-Primary only)
- The merit of transferring responsibility for Age-Grades (Rule 6.27) to Central Council.
- The ESRI Report 2018, highlighted how 68% of players 18-21 played with four or more teams in 2016. The report also highlighted how the effectiveness of the changes to the inter-county season at Under 20/21 and Senior could be hampered 'as no modifications have been made to the HE competitions'.

Our Workgroup recognises the role Third Level Institutions have played in the development of Gaelic Games and indeed the investment made in facilities that in turn support the GAA in a wider context. However, a definite tension exists between the third level and inter-county game. As alluded by the ESRI this tension is ratcheted annually over the period of the Sigerson and Fitzgibbon competitions. The net result is huge pressures being placed on our players and some of the best example of where our Associations values and ethos are undermined.

We agree with the recommendation set out by the ESRI. To safeguard players' welfare greater collaboration and cooperation is required between all stakeholders. However, above all the GAA needs to take control and in this regard, we recommend:

- The GAA take a more proactive role in player welfare in particular to safeguard the cohort of 18-21-year olds who are playing on multiple teams. Key to this has to be greater engagement and the integration of inter-county managers/coaches into our player development and player welfare processes.
- The GAA conduct an immediate review of Higher Education competitions for the purpose of aligning their games programme with the Ftem Player Development Framework. We believe HE Competitions can play a significant part in assisting player make the "breakthrough" to play at senior inter-county elite level and also encourage life-long participation in our games.
- Greater cooperation in the area of conditioning of players during HE/Inter-County season to reduce travel time, number of overlapping training sessions and pressures around exam times.
- Sigerson and Fitzgibbon competitios to be played over the period October to end of January to reduce overlap.
- A review of player eligibility for Sigerson and Fitzgibbon.
- Greater integration at a governance level between Central Council and Higher Education Council.
- Greater integration of GAA Development Officers into GAA games development structures and their inclusion in continuous professional development programmes.



APPENDIX G

Planning Ahead

KEY MILESTONES 2019 – 2022

	2019	2020	2021	2022
Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish Central Games Development Committee Reposition role and functions of provincial and county games development committees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revised Competitions Control Committee in place at Central, Provincial and County level Appointment of key national managers Each county to develop three-year plan in line with national guidelines Revised funding model for youth development programmes in place First annual Games Development Policy Review Forum Appoint Director of Games Development and Research to GAA Management Committee Centralised structure in place around provision of gear to squads 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provincial and County operational structure aligned to national executive Establish expert advisory to add capacity and capability to support national lead functions Revised and clearly defined roles in place for County and Club Coaching Officers Structured monitoring and evaluation process in place to support implementation of county plans Creation of Critical Data Insight Unit County Coaching Officer an appointed position Recognition scheme in place for all coaches and teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central Games Development Committee first national forum of all related bodies to review and recommend policy development
Games Programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish Uniform Age-Grades across club and inter-county 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Club, County, Post-Primary and Third level competition windows in place Revised Post-Primary and Third Level Competitions in place for 2020/2021 seasons Appointment of Fixture Coordinator at Provincial and County Levels. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revised development games programme in place for Under 14-17 (regional, provincial, national) Trialling of experimental playing rules permitted on a three-year cycle in Under 19 competitions Tiered Under 17 inter county competitions in place Revised eligibility criteria in place for Post-Primary and Third level completion in place New Substitution rules in place for youth competitions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revised and expanded Féile in place Master Fixtures Plan encompassing all units in place at county level

	2019	2020	2021	2022
Pathway Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central Council adopt Vision, Mission and Commitment recommended in this report Central Games Development Committee adopt Ftem Framework as policy to support player development Games Development Unit realign current programmes to fit within the FTEM framework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop an overarching strategy for player development inclusive of expectations and timelines Curriculum developed across all interdisciplinary areas to support implementation of player pathway. Relaunch and repurpose Give Respect Get Respect programme Role clarity of all stakeholders and their contribution to the player pathway to be developed and communicated Develop Well-being and Psycho-social skills programme to complement player development at academy, school and club levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have a better system unity in place through a shared vision of improving the player pathway as per strategy Develop policy around the use of data from athlete management tool (i.e. Smartabase) so as to inform and enhance individualised approaches to development Pilot in individual counties synergy projects whereby schools, clubs and county academies would formulate hubs of best practice within target schools Best practice template to support implementation of player pathway at club level in place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a partnership with Sport Ireland and the GPA in relation to developing innovative, pre-emptive and holistic approaches to assist pre-elite players in negotiating an appropriate sport-life balance towards ultimately managing a dual career i.e. work and sport Develop national refined strategies of identifying and developing players of potential Develop strategies around supporting players through key transition stages of their athlete and non-athlete careers such as education, the workplace and key phases on the player pathway.
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement process conducted with all key stakeholders to support implementation of recommendations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programme of capacity building in place to support all key stakeholders in implementation of player pathway. High level programme of CPD available to full-time games development personnel Coaching Pathway revised and aligned to player pathway GAA Tutors undertake Coaching Ireland Coach Developer programmes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revised National Coaching Conference programme in place – targeting specific coaching audiences Coaching pathway aligned to National Qualifications Framework Specific education programme in place for coaches working with development squad players Accreditation process in place to certify those working with intercounty teams Under 14-20 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inaugural Club Coaching Officer national conference High performance training opportunities available to elite intercounty coaches

COUNTY PLAYER DEVELOPMENT PLAN GUIDELINES

AREA	NATIONAL POLICY GUIDELINES (SUMMARY)
1. Organisation and Management Structure	Structure, organisation and management of policies to ensure there is strong control systems in place to execute and measure performance of the plan for the purposing of increasing participation and growing the talent pool.
2. Participation	Programmes and methods used to grow participation at grassroots level in the clubs and schools.
3. Talent ID/Development	Systems used to identify and develop players with potential through programmes at club, school, county and selection and tracking methods. Programmes used to develop talented players aligned to a curriculum ie technical, tactical, team-play, physical fitness, nutrition, psychology, player-welfare, medical and performance analysis.
4. Player Support/Welfare	Supports and services available to players to help them reach their potential in-career and post-career.
5. Coach and Stakeholder Development	Education programmes provided to coaches and key stakeholders (players, coaches, administrators, development officers, teachers and parents) at club, school and county level.
6. Games Programme	Games programme provided to players at club, school and inter-county to meet the participation and performance needs of the players in each code.
7. Facilities	Facilities available and utilised provided to support players development.
8. Funding	Budget and resources required and utilised to support the player development programme.



“To inspire our youth to enjoy our games and to become lifelong active members in our Association”



GAA