

A Report on the Current and Future Amateur Status of the GAA



Prepared by the
Amateur Status Review Committee (ASRC)
for the attention of Ard Chomhairle

24ú Samhain 2025

WHERE WE
ALL BELONG



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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Although it is one of the Association's six core values, many GAA members see its amateur status as what distinguishes it from other sporting organisations. It invokes a commitment to communalism and fraternal solidarity that remains undiminished. From its inception, it could be argued that the GAA, especially in terms of mass participation, could only have been amateur since it lacked any means of compensating players financially. This concept of amateurism still shapes our understanding of the GAA's role and purpose in contemporary Irish society.

The GAA does not wish to be a professional or even semi-professional sporting body. It derives pride and satisfaction from its appeal to Irish people at home and abroad, its impact on community life in virtually every part of Ireland and, concerning its players, an unbridled sense of pride from the performance of amateur and voluntary athletes representing their clubs and counties with distinction without expectation, or indeed desire, of any financial reward for doing so.

But, like any popular sport, the GAA's amateur status has, throughout its history, increasingly come under strain. Particularly over the past 15 years, concern about the expectations placed on amateur athletes and volunteer officials has grown exponentially. The physical and psychological demands upon leading players have elevated significantly, whilst the increase in the amount of money required to support inter-county teams has also been a source of comment. Finally, payments to a range of people, including team managers, have proved totemic and posed searching questions of the GAA's ongoing commitment to its amateur credentials.

The Amateur Status Review Committee (ASRC) first met in April 2024 and, in the intervening period, has, in line with its Terms of Reference (See Appendix 1), undertaken a comprehensive examination of the factors that have caused a, for many, existential concern about the GAA's ongoing claim to amateurism, as well as the many symptoms of its apparent ineffectiveness in addressing these issues thus far.

The ASRC concludes that there are two overarching issues to consider when settling on a proposed response to the challenges the GAA faces in safeguarding its amateur status.

Firstly, it currently seeks to do so in the absence of a regulatory framework to define even minimum requirements across a range of issues from expenditure to an agreed off-season for its elite players, which directly impinge on the question of the GAA's amateur status. In contrast to its playing rules, for example, no clear regulations setting out the requirements for teams wishing to compete in any of its competitions meaningfully exist, and, in a setting where there are no agreed terms of engagement, it is perhaps unsurprising that symptoms of an erosion of the GAA's amateur status have persisted.

The second main factor to consider when examining the GAA's claims in this regard is that almost all the pertinent issues highlighted in this report, and which are widely reported upon elsewhere, relate to the reality of modern competition. Put simply, more GAA teams than ever before now attach greater importance to achieving some measure of success or progress, particularly at the inter-county level, and are willing to pursue all available avenues to secure the marginal gains deemed necessary to realise this.

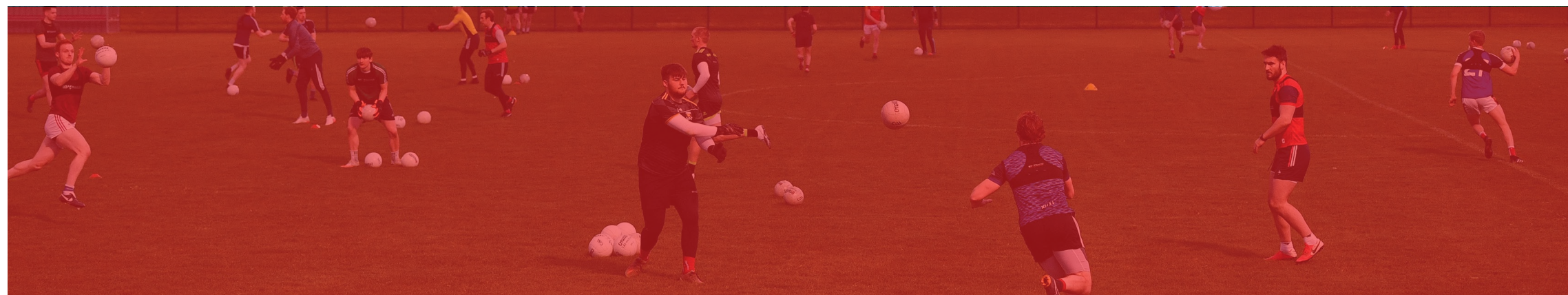
Combined, this suggests that just as the absence of a regulatory framework governing the practices of competing teams, alongside the widespread and relentless pursuit of success, is the source of many of the modern-day challenges faced by the GAA in protecting its amateur status, so too do these factors present the conditions for achieving this outcome. By requiring counties to demonstrate adherence to a set of agreed 'conditions of entry' to GAA-sanctioned competitions, approved at every stage by Ard Chomhairle, and linking these to participation in the competitions that teams are striving to win, there exists an inbuilt incentive for counties to abide by a set of conditions, from levels of annual expenditure, to adherence to 'return to training' and any 'closed season' stipulations, as well as simple, yet vital,

measures such as recording and sharing data on player injuries, an agreed way forward does exist.

This is why the central proposal of the ASRC is the establishment of a new GAA Certification Framework, to be introduced incrementally at the county level to begin with, and which sets out the agreed conditions that all competing teams must meet to avoid sanction. It reflects best practice in virtually every other major sporting organisation worldwide, but, of course, must be conditioned to the needs of a largely voluntary administrative workforce and must therefore begin slowly and proceed at a pace that recognises this constitutes a significant cultural change for the GAA and its units.

Alongside an updated and revised Amateur Status rule, and linked to a proposed new Standing Committee on Certification, Governance and Oversight, with the powers to investigate and propose sanctions if necessary, these proposals present the beginning of much-needed modernisation of GAA governance, specifically in respect to competition entry, which will, if fully implemented, result in a set of meaningful protections for the GAA's Amateur Status. It will not eradicate all issues of concern to GAA members in the short term, e.g. unethical payments from third parties that breach the current Amateur Status rule, but in the short to medium term, as a much more transparent and accountable regime takes hold, these practices will gradually subside, enabled in part by tighter regulatory expectations within the GAA but, it should be recognised, also by those external to it.

With the publication of this summative report and the tabling of its motions to Central Council, following review by the Rules Advisory Committee, the detailed review work of the ASRC over the last 19 months concludes, and acknowledgement of the sustained and committed work of its membership and the contribution of many groups of stakeholders with whom the Committee engaged over this period is both recognised and appreciated.



2. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

In March 2024, Ard Chomhairle ratified the Terms of Reference and Membership of the Amateur Status Review Committee (ASRC), which was formed to consider the current and future challenges associated with amateur status, one of the GAA's core values. (See Appendix 1 for approved Terms of Reference and Membership.)

Defining the 'amateur status' of the GAA and sanctioning breaches thereof has been a consistent issue for the Association since it first undertook to do so in 1954. Despite being in existence for 70 years, this year saw the first reference to the Association's 'amateur status' as it related to the playing of Gaelic games and followed at least a decade when counties had prioritised the frequency and duration of collective 'training camps' before inter-county competition (McAnallen, 2009).

A similar committee was established in 1971 and drafted the first formal definition of amateurism as it applied to the GAA. In 1985 and again in 1989, further tightening of the amateur status rules was approved in response to various external factors, including (again) the amount of time and effort teams needed to prepare for inter-county competitions. As these and other factors became more prominent, a total of 13 separate reports completed between 2011 and 2025, almost one each year, have either explicitly or implicitly addressed the question of the GAA's amateur status. Consequently, the challenges currently facing the GAA, and which have been considered in exacting detail by the ASRC as part of this report, remain significant, especially given the rapid changes in Irish society and within the Association itself, particularly over the past decade.

It is worth asking the question, “how have we got to where we are today?” to help contextualise the current landscape.

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly when things started to change in Gaelic Games, and consequently, the wider GAA that has led the Association to where it is today where it, in some facets, struggles to live up to one of its core values – Amateur Status.

This is a difficult question to answer. What we may be able to do is try and objectively address why these changes that have taken place occurred and what facilitated them.

To answer the “why”, one needs to ask, “what is the goal in playing Gaelic Games”? Participation is important, as is the sense of community that being involved with the GAA brings, but, for many, winning is the primary driver. Thus, competition, competitiveness, rivalry, and the drive to win appear to be among the key forces behind the why.

Additionally, the environment (i.e., societal factors) has also played a role. In particular, the economic environment that existed when the GAA first formed was very different to that of the early 1990s. The former period was broadly associated with poor economic conditions that resulted in mass emigration. As a result, during this period, teams utilised basic athletic principles as a method to gain an advantage over opponents, mostly not based on sports science principles. There was very little in the way of financial resourcing available to invest in Gaelic Games during this period, especially from an athletic development point of view. This would change from circa 1994 onwards, which also marked the beginning of a turning point in the Irish economy.

This period resulted in additional funding opportunities within Gaelic Games. It led to senior inter-county teams, in particular, starting to look beyond the traditional confines of the GAA to professional sports as a means of identifying methods to enhance performance, competitiveness and chances of success.

This has evolved into the adoption of practices which have become common place within Gaelic Games today – i.e., strength and conditioning training, performance analysis, nutritional guidance, sports psychology etc. This evolution has taken place at senior inter-county level, which has now trickled down to underage inter-county grades and the club game, and all with the aim of increasing performance levels and increasing the chances of winning.

It is now known that there are significant and increasing costs to players and administrators associated with the playing of Gaelic Games, particularly at the senior inter-county level, and there is widespread recognition that this trend cannot continue unchecked.

These increased costs are primarily driven by three factors – societal changes, sports science advances and the commercialisation of Gaelic Games.

On the societal level, there is an increasing view that representing, in particular, an inter-county team must be seen as “worthwhile”, given the commitment involved. To retain players, when there are any number of distractions or alternatives available, this is a key criterion in the modern landscape. For a role to be “worthwhile”, there is a link to the desire for success, and success, or the pursuit thereof, does not come in the modern sporting landscape without increased time commitment, fitness levels, facilities, preparation etc.

Additionally, sports science has evolved over time and has become an industry in and of itself. The desire for teams and players to get ahead of, or even just stay within “the pack” has been a factor driving this. It should be acknowledged that modern scientific advancements in this context have yielded exceptional benefits in terms of athletic performance and, indeed, player welfare in many aspects. However, this expertise and consistent drive for excellence also comes at a cost. The GAA and GPA have responded to this by putting in a charter that recognises an appropriate level of treatment for those who are key players in driving the commercial success of the Association.

A broad summary of how the combination of advances in sports science and the GAA's need to provide for its elite players has manifested in recent times can be found in Appendix 2.

In essence, our inter-county (and in many cases, club) teams are preparing to standards set by professional sports. Currently, there is no ceiling on how far this can be taken. New, and often expensive, technologies, methodologies and equipment appear regularly.

Finally, in addition to increasing costs, it is necessary to look at how we, the GAA, have commercialised the games from the 1990s onwards. This has included – the advent of jersey and competition sponsorship, supporters' clubs, the redevelopment and success of Croke Park, commercial TV

rights deals, increased media focus and pressure, state funding and the advent of “outside” managers.

Demands have increased on amateur players, which have led to a more professional-looking game and this has contributed to an increase in overall costs.

The Association's commercial revenue was negligible in the 1980s. In 1989, Ard Chomhairle's overall revenue was c. €3.1m. By 1997, it was €10.6m. Today, it stands at c. €100m.

As revenue levels increase substantially, the desire for volunteer time or effort decreases.

Addressing the current and future challenges to the GAA's amateur status is a complex and evolving task as many factors are beyond the direct control of the Association. The ability of the Association to regulate transparently, consistently and objectively is considered critical in addressing the integrity of its amateur status now and in the future.

Currently, Rule 1.8 of the GAA's Official Guide states: “The Association is an Amateur Association. A player, team, official or member shall not accept payment in cash or in kind in conjunction with the playing of Gaelic Games.

A player, team, official or member shall not contract itself/ themselves to any agent other than those officially approved by Central Council. Expenses paid to all officials, players, and members shall not exceed the standard rates laid down by the Central Council. Members of the Association may not participate in full-time training.

This Rule shall not prohibit the payment of salaries or wages to employees of the Association.”

The rule, as it is currently written, is vague and requires updating, which, if approved, would constitute only the third revision of this rule in over 70 years.

3. WORK OF THE AMATEUR STATUS REVIEW COMMITTEE



The committee has met on 24 occasions in just over 19 months and received written and oral testimony from experienced professional consultants, academics, GAA officials and representatives of other national governing bodies of sport.

In addition, a comprehensive consultation process took place during Spring/Summer 2025, which involved Provincial ‘roadshows’, led by the GAA President Jarlath Burns, that engaged with over 120 Provincial and County officers from Leinster (in Dublin), Munster (in Limerick), Connacht (in Béalán) and Ulster (in Garvagh). Consultations also took place with inter-county players and, separately, inter-county managers. An online survey in which all registered members of the GAA were invited to participate (via Foireann) elicited over 4,720 valid responses and was important as it provided club members and officials a platform to convey their views on the question of the GAA’s amateur status. (See Appendix 3, for the ‘Results of Survey of GAA Members on Foireann’, an independent report authored by Dr Michael McKay, RCSI and Dr Peter Horgan).

Inevitably, much of the ASRC work concerned financial payments (to various parties, including team managers), the exponential growth in spending by many counties on their representative teams, and a requirement to consider parameters relating to demands placed upon the GAA’s amateur players.

This aspect of the committee’s work has been shaped by ongoing engagement between the GAA and the Irish Revenue Commissioners, which has meant that considerations on the question of payments have consistently been subject to the nature and direction of these discussions, which at the time of writing remain unresolved. In specific terms, whilst payments that are made and received as part of approved expenses (by Ard Chomhairle) remain permissible, there is now considerable scrutiny of payments that may exceed these and, alongside this, whether any such payments give rise to an ‘employer-employee’ relationship, which, if this is the conclusion that is

drawn, would have profound implications for the GAA at all levels.

The committee’s approach has been methodical and detailed but accepting, too, of the embedded nature of many of the issues it encountered. An obvious complicating factor is the absence of any existing, impactful regulation governing the approach of GAA units in the context of the Association’s amateur status. Unlike its playing rules, for instance, where there are well-established categories of foul play and associated sanctions, nothing of a similar standing exists concerning the effective governance of the Association or, specifically, interventions which meaningfully enforce the tenets of its amateur status.

As such, there is recognition that the discussion items set out in this report represent the beginning, potentially, of a process of regulating practices that have been largely devoid of such constraint and evolving to a new reality may require some adjustment.

The committee’s central finding is that the absence of a modern, consistent and accountable governance structure, which can be objectively and consistently implemented and assessed, is the central contributing factor to the ongoing concerns regarding adherence to one of the GAA’s most cherished values. Similarly, the implementation of a framework around the appointment of managers, for example, including the need to hold a GAA-approved qualification and a clear definition of the scope of work associated with being a manager should be prioritised. The continued preference of some counties (and clubs) to appoint a manager who is not a member of a club (the club) within its county boundary is also something that arose as part of the consultation process. (Having met with representatives of the Games Development Committee, it is the strong view of the Committee that the north star for the Association in the context of managers and coaches would be a situation where they are all subject to the

same eligibility criteria as players – i.e. they should be members of the club they are managing/coaching, or of a club within the County in the case of inter-county managers or coaches. The Committee notes the work that is currently underway by the GDC in this context and would be broadly supportive of this direction of travel).

At their core, the broader discussion items outlined foresee the GAA’s evolution from being exclusively a governing body to also that of a regulator, and the challenges presented by self-regulation, if this is the chosen path, are recognised. As indicated, the ASRC accepts that the items set out in this report represent, potentially, a seminal change in governance for the GAA, and for County Committees in particular. We also accept that the suggested changes may be seen as markedly new. In this respect, there is little question that some of the items detailed in this report are the subject of divided opinions, but the position adopted by the ASRC is to place these before GAA members to permit their discussion and agreement on the extent of any proposed change to be reached.

Finally, the ASRC made an early decision to consider the issues apparent at the inter-county level as its priority. This should not imply that similar concerns are absent at the club (and within other units) level, as there is clear evidence that this is indeed the case. Rather, this evolution should be understood as a process, one that will move through several phases before achieving full implementation.

Whilst it is possible to propose changes to rules/regulations, many of the issues outlined in this report are cultural and have become institutionalised practice within the GAA for many decades, even if they have been brought into sharp focus in the last 10 to 15 years. During this timeframe, in particular, there have been repeated, clarion calls for meaningful action to be taken to address chronic challenges to the Association’s ‘amateur status’, but little in the way of concrete action.



4. CONSULTATION WITH MEMBERS

A paper in relation to the ongoing programme of work of the Amateur Status Review Committee was approved by the GAA's Management Committee in March 2025 and included permission to proceed to a detailed consultation phase with key stakeholders between June and September 2025. The consultation process was conducted through engagement with four main groups -

1. GAA County Officers (at Provincial meetings during June and July 2025)
2. Inter-County players (via a focus group held in August 2025)
3. A Comprehensive Survey Questionnaire was issued to all GAA Members (4,722 responses received when the survey was closed in July 2025)
4. Consultation with Inter-County Managers (via a focus group in September 2025)

The purpose of this important consultation exercise was to receive the views of GAA members, players, officials and other stakeholders to inform the committee's final recommendations. The process focused on garnering feedback mainly across the following broad areas -

- Payments to Managers/Backroom Teams
- Player Welfare matters
- Certification/Governance/Oversight practices

Feedback received from each group of consultees (as identified above) is summarised below -

(i) GAA County Officer Sessions - Summary

Payments to Managers

- The option (of three put forward by the ASRC) which received most support from Provincial/ County officers would see a combination of an agreed (by Ard Chomhairle) 'stipend (a fixed amount) plus expenses model' paid to inter-county managers; however, there was an acceptance that whilst there was a logic to the proposal there was also some doubt as to whether sufficient support existed for such a move.
- Following on from this, queries arose as to whether controlling such a stipend centrally would be feasible, what HR issues may arise through the introduction of such a model - i.e., through the creation of a potential "employee" model, whilst assigning the burden of a potential tax liability implication for the Association was another topic discussed at length within this context.
- There was recognition that any proposal in this regard, given the current climate, would be with a future start

date in mind.

- There was no consistent support for any proposal concerning the prohibition of managers from outside a county/club.
- Finally, the concept of a "managers' charter" (i.e. a contract/Service Level Agreement) was discussed at some sessions.

Player Welfare

- There was broad support for the concept of an agreed closed season and the regulation of training sessions at inter-county level.
- There was agreement that deterrents need to be established to prevent concerns around excessive training sessions/ preparations at the inter-county level, and consistent application/implementation of any agreed restrictions needed to be introduced.
- There was broad support in favour of the continuation of training camps - but also on imposing limitations for same (e.g., to a maximum of 3 days, once a year), rather than abolishing them or indeed on preventing teams from going abroad.
- Limiting squad numbers associated with county teams also received broad support from consultees. To implement this, there was recognition that what it means to be an "inter-county player" should be defined. In this context, there was a broad consensus that talent academy players or development squads would not be considered within this definition, even if the apparent sense of exceptionalism these create and anecdotal selection policies from as young as 14 years of age were raised with the committee.
- There was recognition that limiting player eligibility to specific teams is now needed - in particular, around the U20 grade and at the third-level representative grades. Again broadly, there was support for the notion of third-level players being ineligible for participation in the Allianz Leagues until their college is eliminated from the relevant competition, even if this was not universally true.

Certification/Governance/Oversight Practices

- There was broad support from amongst this group (Provincial and County Officials) for better regulation in general, along with general support for the concept of certification.
- It was acknowledged on numerous occasions that self-regulation will, regrettably, not work and that some form of independent regulatory body was required.
- The consensus was that limiting numbers on backroom



teams would represent a positive step, and that clarity on who within these teams should be eligible to receive expenses versus those that may receive payment (under contract) for the provision of professional services would be welcomed.

- There was support, in principle, for the notion of a mandatory, centrally controlled, GDPR compliant, anonymised GPS and Injury Management Data Hub.
- The notion of an Annual Maximum Expenditure Limit, which would impose a limit on the amount counties may spend when preparing their representative teams each year, also received broad support.

(ii) Inter-County Players' Focus Group - Summary

Payments to Managers

- There was broad agreement from this group of players that the role of an inter-county manager has developed into, in many cases, effectively a second full-time job. In this context, there was an understanding around the case for additional payments to managers beyond expenses i.e. there is a logic to this argument.
- However, there was consensus that the idea of formally paying managers in the context of a wider discussion that may result in restrictions being placed on expenditure on the preparation of inter-county teams could be considered contradictory and harmful. There was agreement that any such payments should be made in a regulated and transparent manner, i.e., payments should be published.
- The issue of 'unintended consequences' was also discussed - for example, the notion of external funders or other methods of payments coming into play irrespective of rules or enforcement.
- The issues associated with the GAA's amateur status at club level were also discussed at length by this group. Current challenges, such as difficulties attracting academy coaches because such individuals are being more favourably rewarded by clubs, and the contribution that a lack of regulation is bringing to the loss of good coaches, were raised.
- There was broad agreement that "payment bans" may not solve all the core issues - and that structured coach pathways, along with investment in schools and academies, could yield more positive results in the long term.
- It was agreed, however, that some form of control over managers would be seen as a positive development, given that this cohort is believed to currently hold the most influence and power.

Player Welfare

- The current in-season training volume was broadly regarded as acceptable. It was noted that there are differences between codes and priorities, making the enforcement of a blanket rule in this regard somewhat difficult.
- In terms of season length, it was raised that greater gaps between league finals and the commencement of championship were needed. It should be noted that this is being implemented in 2026.
- There was agreement that adherence to a “closed season” would be difficult to police, though beneficial, and that punishment for breaches of the same should reside with the county board/team manager rather than players, as very often they are simply instructed to adhere to the direction of the team manager.
- In a similar vein, the implementation of mandatory rest periods was thought to be a difficult concept due to the varying schedules of different county teams. It was agreed that the gap between the club season finishing and the inter-county season restarting would be more important, even if this could be agreed at a ‘local’ level. There were suggested timescales of a mandatory 2-week rest period at the conclusion of the inter-county season and 3-4 weeks at the conclusion of the club season (before a resumption of training/ competitive fixtures).
- Players were happy with the current arrangements in place regarding training camps.
- There was tentative support for the potential trialling of some Friday evening games on a local level e.g. between neighbouring counties.
- There was agreement, too, that playing fixtures 3 weeks in a row is a challenge associated with the current fixture making and addressing this would be very helpful.

Certification/Governance/Oversight Practices

- The consensus was that a maximum squad number of 36-38 could be acceptable.
- The declaration of qualifications for backroom staff was seen as a positive, but limiting expenditure made to these individuals was met with mixed views.
- The GPS and injury data issues were addressed and could be supported once details around GDPR were clarified. The collation of this data to establish minimum standards of practice was seen as positive.
- The notion of inter-county managers’ CPD was welcomed, but it would have to be enforced to be of benefit.

- There were some concerns raised around sanctions – and whether some of these, in the event of breaches, would punish players unfairly.
- Again, the issue of suggested “reductions” in resourcing negatively impacting on welfare was raised.
- The idea of greater financial oversight and transparency was met with a very positive response.

(iii) Public Questionnaire – Summary

General

- There was support from 71% of respondents for the formation of a GAA “Governance and Oversight Unit”, and this increased to 72% amongst elected Officers.
- Only 30% of survey respondents believed that the Association is currently safeguarding Amateur Status, which may be a concern.
- In addition, there was widespread acknowledgement that current practices are leading to a form of “shamateurism” or semi-professionalism and that many of these practices are being promoted by GAA members, clubs and counties.
- There was a view that current demands on inter-county players are unsustainable over the medium term.
- A prevailing view was that access to inequitable funding and/or sponsorship for counties leads to a form of “financial doping”, whereby the counties that are best resourced have an in-built advantage and, if unaddressed, may solidify this competitive gap over time.
- A commonly expressed view was that there was an “overemphasis on the county game”, which “hugely damages clubs” at the grassroots level, in particular.

Governance and Administration

- There was widespread acknowledgement of a “turning a blind eye” culture with respect to the current Amateur Status rule (Rule 1.8), and that there was a lack of enforcement by the GAA in this regard.
- The unsustainable demands being placed on volunteers at different levels were a common issue raised by respondents.
- Some 82% of those surveyed agreed with the principle of an Annual Maximum Expenditure Limit (AMEL) on spending on inter-county teams being introduced.
- A further 87% of respondents believed that minimum governance requirements should be in place (including those relating to player welfare).
- Relatedly, 75% of contributors agreed that too much is being spent currently on inter-county teams, and this

needed to be reduced.

- There were some concerns expressed around the levels of bureaucracy and detachment amongst paid staff in the context of the reality of what it means to be a volunteer in the GAA, especially at the grassroots level.
- Additionally, some concerns were also raised around increasing levels of commercialism, which undermines Amateur Status as it appears to highlight the hypocrisy of promoting an amateur message on the one hand, whilst engaging in highly commercialised practices on the other.

Training Regulations

- A total of 72% of respondents expressed a desire for training regulations/controls at the inter-county level
- Some 61% of respondents did not agree that the season length should be further reduced.
- Some 48% of respondents believed that the ‘split season’ has increased the intensity and demand placed on players.

Structure of Competitive Season

- Some 62% of participants in the public (members) survey wanted to retain the Provincial Championships.
- Equally, 62% were willing to amend the pre-season provincial competitions if this would assist in ameliorating demands placed on players.
- Inter-County Players expressed a desire for a 7-month IC season, the highest proportion of coaches who responded wanted this to extend to 9 months.
- There was broad support for a closed season at inter-county level and a mandatory rest period.
- Most respondents were in favour of training camps of a maximum 3-day duration for amateur players.
- There were very mixed views around the desired lengths of both the inter-county and club seasons.

Backroom Teams/Payments to Managers

- There was a lack of consensus on this area throughout the survey – 31% of respondents favoured a formal contract method of engaging members of backroom teams, whilst 34% supported an expenses-only approach and, finally, a further 28% of respondents were in support of the ‘expenses plus stipend’ option. The remainder did not express a view for any of the above options.
- Some 64% of respondents agreed with the proposal for a requirement for IC managers to hold a formal coaching/ management qualification.



- Only 37% agreed that manager eligibility should be on the same basis as player eligibility, i.e. effectively resulting in a ban on so-called ‘outside’ managers.
- There was broad support for an expenses-only model for selectors, coaches, video analysts, performance analysts, goalkeeping coaches, liaison officers and logistical personnel.
- In addition, there was broad support for professional fees being paid to doctors, physios, masseurs, S&C coaches, nutritionists and sports psychologists who held appropriate qualifications.
- Finally, 78% of respondents believed that service-level agreements should be in place where fees are being paid, and 80% believed that there should be a cap on the number of backroom team members overall.

(iv) Inter-County Managers’ Feedback - Summary

It should be noted that this consultation was held with only a small cohort of either current or former senior inter-county managers. A total of 22 recently retired or current inter-county GAA managers were approached to participate in this focus group, but most either declined the invitation to do so or did not respond. Nonetheless, the committee still believes the data which emerged from this to be of relevance in the overall context of this report, even if no claims for its widespread application can be made.

Payments to Managers

- There was a pragmatic consensus that an ‘expenses-only’ model is unlikely to be adhered to in practice, as there was widespread abuse of this concept at many levels of the Association.
- The ‘stipend plus expenses’ model was preferred, but clear lines would need to be drawn around who would receive any such stipend and who wouldn’t, and the rationale behind this. It was felt that an alignment of the professional roles involved, to clearly defined backroom team roles, associated costings and any minimum requirements could work. This would also assist in creating a consistent approach across counties.
- The fully contracted approach was ruled out by this cohort of current or past managers.
- It was raised that aligning any approach at the inter-county level with the club level would be important to avoid unintended consequences, such as managers being drawn towards a less tightly regulated club scene.
- There was a suggestion around focusing on specific role

profiles, i.e. such job descriptions should be consistent for people holding these roles, and there should be obligations that come as part of this.

Player Welfare

- This group acknowledged that there is an expectation of essentially copying what other counties were doing when preparing their teams. For example, if one team appointed a recovery coach, then there was a level of pressure on neighbouring counties to do likewise. In general, this group of consultees were in favour of limiting the number of training sessions for inter-county players, but enforcement would be the key challenge, as ever.
- The overall length of the season was seen as acceptable, but greater spacing between games would be ideal.
- The ‘closed season’ idea was met with positivity, but appropriate sanctions would need to be applied for transgressions.
- It was felt that the GPA and player leadership groups would have a big role to play in enacting cultural change, following any policy implementation.
- The mandatory rest period was not seen as practical due to the number of variables at play – it was suggested that this could be included within the calendar but not made mandatory.
- There were no issues with training camps if they are not too onerous on players, whereas the widespread flouting of the ‘return to training’ dates was seen as a major issue. The cohort were of the view that a 6-week pre-season should be sufficient and may assist in this regard.
- The group did highlight that extreme examples always make the headlines, but what should not be lost is the fact that there are plenty of positives in this space, which often do not receive coverage.

Certification/Governance/Oversight

- A maximum squad limit of 36 was seen as achievable and desirable.
- Allowances for players to be available for their clubs was seen to be an important element as part of any new policy i.e. these are first and foremost club players.
- The notion of a centralised, anonymised data hub to capture player injury data/ demands on players was seen as a positive development.
- Some key considerations the group felt important included that talent academies should not be part of

any proposed AMEL, and consideration of “lesser codes” in counties would be important too – to avoid diversion of funds from hurling, for example, in counties where Gaelic football may be understood as the preeminent code.

- The regulation of 3rd level players is of the utmost importance and, the most straightforward proposal, is that those players that are eligible to play for their Universities/ Colleges in 3rd level competitions should be available to exclusively do so until their University/ College exits the competition (parameters to be agreed) in question e.g. Sigerson or Fitzgibbon Cup.
- In addition, building in interviews/public relations requirements as part of any new policy direction, to increase the public exposure of players and the games, was regarded as being important.
- Finally, the cohort agreed with the concept of a manager’s CPD course but suggested that coaches also be included within this new proposal.



5. PROPOSED NEXT STEPS BASED ON CONSULTATION FINDINGS

It is a concern for all sporting organisations that their governance retains the confidence of their members, funders and the public. This is equally true for the GAA.

An illustration of the importance of effective oversight in the GAA is the erosion, over time, of the governance of its amateur status, as the results of our members' survey starkly demonstrate. In the opinion of many of those who completed this survey, this status is central to the Association's purpose and existence. Yet, for at least the last three decades, there has been disquiet, specifically, about payments to team managers, amongst others, that are in contravention of the organisation's rules.

In addition, a rapid growth in expenditure on inter-county team preparation, including on both backroom teams and county panels, as well as physical and mental demands on amateur players, often considered incompatible with any reasonable definition of this term, has become more prominent.

In the main, these factors are symptoms of the absence of a modern, fit-for-purpose governance framework in the GAA, specifically at county and club levels. This conclusion should not be interpreted as a criticism of the volunteer officials who serve the Association at these levels but merely highlights the absence of a form of effective regulation that foregrounds the basic principles of modern governance, namely transparency, accountability, integrity, effectiveness and fairness.

It is the central contention of the ASRC, therefore, that an evolution in GAA governance at these levels, from what might be solely understood as an 'old style governing body' to an effective regulator of GAA activities, should now commence.

The mechanism for achieving this should be the introduction of a GAA Inter-County (in the first instance) Certification Programme, which may be co-designed with the relevant GAA units and include, for example, metrics relating to agreed levels of team expenditure, the size and function of backroom personnel, the effective monitoring of demands on amateur players (including effective recording of common forms of injury) and so forth.

Agreeing on minimum standards for these measures and collating them in the form of a Competition Certificate emphasises their importance in safeguarding the GAA's amateur status and, at the same time, evolves its current governance practices in a manner consistent with most medium to large national governing bodies of sport.

It should be recognised that in seeking to introduce effective regulation into a volunteer-led organisation, this needs to be incremental, at a pace that volunteers are content with, and, ultimately, enabling in its approach, especially so during its early phase.

However, for the required cultural step-change to be achieved, it will be necessary to consider how adherence to these new standards can be assured – a consistent theme of the feedback that our stakeholders have provided. Inevitably, this will mean agreement on a form of regulation that includes a range of sanctions from relatively minor forms to more serious interventions in the case of chronic or egregious breaches.



6. ASRC CORE PROPOSAL - THE INTRODUCTION OF A GAA INTER-COUNTY CERTIFICATION PROGRAMME

Overview

The issues that threaten the GAA's Amateur Status are well documented throughout this Report and reflect the concerns raised in both the consultation process and the Committee's own deliberations. There are also plenty of meritorious solutions available for the myriad of issues highlighted.

Yet, at its most basic, the problem for the GAA has always been the absence of a regulatory framework with which to ensure compliance with its proposed solutions and indeed best practice generally in the many areas highlighted here and, it should be said, in many other areas of its practice too.

It is therefore the view of the Amateur Status Review Committee that the GAA should address this obvious shortcoming and introduce a regulatory framework to promote best practice in this regard, which assists County Committees to meet minimum criteria annually in order to compete in GAA competitions.

It is a model that has been shown to work very effectively in other sports in response to the internal demand for better regulation in areas such as player welfare and financial governance. A widely cited example, and the main reference point for what can be achieved by the GAA in this context, is UEFA's hugely successful Club Licensing model, which has transformed Club administration across European soccer in the last decade and beyond. Moreover, it has effectively eradicated concerns around the financial sustainability of the game, and its affiliated clubs, across Europe challenging the highly damaging practices of club owners before this reform was introduced. The proposed Inter-County Certification programme could be largely modelled on what has worked exceptionally well for UEFA but, of course, tailored and simplified for the GAA's most pressing needs and adapted for its volunteer-driven structure.

As outlined elsewhere in this report, the drastically increasing costs and time involved in administering the GAA's Inter-County Game is a threat to the Association's core purpose and, in some cases, its very sustainability and is a problem that can no longer be ignored. In addition, it is acknowledged that such challenges exist in the same vein in the club game and, once embedded at the county level, the case for the implementation of a similar certification process at the club level is compelling.

However, what is proposed here represents a fundamental cultural change in how the GAA has operated heretofore,

and the Amateur Status Review Committee believes that this change should commence initially in the inter-county game, before, as has been said, an incremental introduction to the club game. As things stand, the GAA does not have an overarching vision or strategy for addressing the problem and core issues that continue to erode its most cherished entity – its amateur value – but this proposal provides the basis for one to emerge. Costs associated with preparing inter-county teams have risen by over 100% in the last decade, and time demands on players and volunteers are at unsustainable levels.

However, the introduction of a regulatory framework which sets out minimum criteria for County Committees to meet before being certified to compete in GAA competitions can assist significantly in:

- **Preserving the Association's core purpose and ethos and ensuring the sustainability of the Association by improving player welfare, coaching, games development and financial management standards.**
- **Reducing the time and burden currently placed upon all stakeholders to deliver the GAA's Inter-County Games programme annually, especially those experienced by players and volunteer officers. It is envisioned that this may consequently render these roles more attractive to prospective officers.**
- **Strengthening the governance structures around Inter-County team administration so that they are less opaque, can be easily compared across counties and promote best practice in modern sport governance.**
- **Reducing the costs of preparing Inter-County teams and the potential reinvestment of savings in the broader Association, especially in the light of ongoing discussions concerning the formation of 'One Association' in the near future.**

If approved, the County Certification programme can be in place in time for the 2027 season, with the definition of initial minimum criteria in areas such as games administration, player welfare, coaching and games development, finance and qualifications becoming part of the culture around the inter-county game and incrementally developed and strengthened in years to come.

The establishment of a new standing committee (the GAA Certification, Governance and Oversight Committee) and dedicated staffing resources to further design, direct and implement the new certification approach is key to the successful delivery of this goal. It is vitally important to

emphasise that this Certification programme would be a 'slow build', and the intention would be that its initial provisions would be set at a level that would be very achievable by all Counties, thereby bringing all counties in line from the outset.

How might an Inter-County Certification programme work?

Counties intending to participate in the GAA's National Leagues and/or Senior Inter-County Championships in football or hurling would be required to obtain certification annually from the Central Council to do so. The certification requirement would be based around a set of minimum standards – i.e., the Inter-County Certification Programme – in areas relevant to player welfare, financial governance and adherence to Association Rules or policies.

Overall responsibility for the Inter-County certification programme would reside with a GAA Certification, Governance and Oversight Committee, a sub-committee of Central Council, which would be enshrined in rule and appointed in the normal manner (see Rule 3.45 – the Nomination Committee, Management and Central Council).

This committee would be responsible for directing the work of full-time and dedicated personnel within the overall Central Council staffing structure. Its main function would be to develop, maintain and oversee compliance with the programme annually, and it would be required to propose the specific minimum standards for inclusion in the Certification Programme for approval by Central Council each year.

It would also be required to develop appropriate sanctions for breaches of the minimum standards initially, and once the programme is in place, to propose sanctions for breaches when and if they occur. Any Hearings requested in relation to proposed sanctions would be dealt with under the current provisions of the GAA Disciplinary system – i.e. Hearings would be at the Central Hearings Committee, with Appeal Hearings, if required, falling to the Central Appeals Committee.

In broad terms, the programme would have two key stages annually:

Phase 1 – Pre-Season (the initial criteria of which, it is envisioned, would be obtainable by counties and not place additional pressure on administrators) and

Phase 2 – In-Season (There would be the provision for sanctions to be proposed for breaches of the Certification

programme.) The reasoning for the two stages is due to the existence of those criteria, which can be verified prior to competitions commencing, and others which require monitoring as the season progresses.

Phase 1 – Pre-Season

On a practical level it is envisaged that to obtain certification, Counties would have to meet certain basic requirements before the commencement of the season – for example, that they have (initially) senior managers in place who have completed the GAA inter-county manager induction course for that season, that appointed backroom teams have qualifications appropriate to their role and/or that the County are compliant with player welfare initiatives, such as the provision of GPS or Injury data to a centralised repository.

Financial governance issues – for example, that the County's end-of-year Financial Statements are prepared in accordance with current accounting standards (FRS102) or that the County has adhered to any agreed Annual Maximum Expenditure limits (AMEL) in the previous 12 months – could also be part of the granting of certification for the year ahead.

Failure to meet or sign up to these basic requirements could – in extremis – result in a County not being certified to participate in that season's League or Championship until these matters (i.e. the agreed terms of engagement) are addressed.

Phase 2 – In-Season

During the competitive season, ongoing compliance would also be required in various essential areas. These could include adherence to agreed return to training or closed season stipulations, payments to backroom personnel remaining consistent with Amateur Status rules and Central Council policies, adherence to anti-doping requirements, adherence to agreed levels on backroom team numbers, panel registration provisions and/or GPS or injury data protocols, amongst other possible examples.

Breaches of the minimum requirements during the season could carry sanctions on a suggested "penalty point model" basis, with a set number of points for each breach (or repeated breach). These would accumulate towards a maximum limit that, if exceeded, would ultimately lead to the withdrawal of certification to participate in the National Leagues or Championships in any given year.



These measures would be enforced through the GAA Certification, Governance and Oversight Committee, via a staffing structure at the National Level, with any sanctions remaining open to appeal through the standard structures outlined earlier.

A more in-depth overview of the type of areas requiring regulation and compliance, and which could become part of the Certification programme in time, as well as the rationale for each, is outlined in the following section:

Proposed Required Areas of Compliance and Rationale for Inclusion in an Inter-County Certification Programme

Phase 1 – Pre-Season

(i) GAA Financial Statements Template

Rationale

GAA County Board Financial Statements are required to be prepared in accordance with current accounting standards (FRS102). It is also vitally important that County Board personnel are clear and transparent in their financial reporting to their respective County Conventions. They are required to be accountable to club members and County Board delegates for how they have managed County Board finances. This is important in all areas of spending but particularly in county team costs, where, it is accepted, there has been a lack of detailed reporting in the past. Central GAA have prepared a financial statements template that is issued on an annual basis for accounting standards and GAA reporting requirements. This will ensure consistency in reporting across county boards.

(ii) Verified adherence to an Annual Maximum Expenditure Limit (AMEL) at Inter-County Level

Rationale

The establishment of an AMEL is therefore proposed in relation to spending on inter-county teams in both Gaelic Football and Hurling as part of the Inter-County Certification Programme. Ard Chomhairle would set the AMEL for each code (Hurling and Gaelic Football) annually, based on advice provided by the GAA Finance Sub-Committee/Audit and Risk Committee, and with reference to the GAA Certification, Governance and

Oversight Committee. In order to be effective it is likely that each Counties AMEL level would need to include expenditure on all inter-county panels (i.e. Minor and U20 as well as Senior). Consideration could be given to increasing the sanctioned AMEL for Counties that qualify for the latter stages of the relevant competition each year (i.e. the AMEL would be flexible to allow for increased costs due to a prolonged involvement in the respective Championship).

The AMEL would include all expenditures on payments to team management, training, transport, apparel, coaches, equipment, backroom personnel, etc. The nature and extent of payments above allowable expenses (if deemed appropriate) would be agreed upon and reflect the qualifications and experience of the individuals involved.

It is accepted that players' mileage expenses vary due to the geography of counties and therefore would not be included as part of the AMEL.

It is envisaged that by October 30th annually, each county would submit its proposed expenditure (budget) for the following year's inter-county competitions, detailing how it will comply with the AMEL set for the following year, before any such expenditure can be incurred. A random audit of 20% of all county expenditures could be conducted upon submission of formal end-of-year accounts to ensure the integrity of this process and compliance with the agreed AMEL for the season in question.

(iii) Counties to use only GAA-supplied and approved GPS trackers and abide by a data-sharing agreement with the Association (GAA)

Rationale

Alongside concerns regarding the degree of downward pressure on the GAA's amateur status due to financial matters, there is considerable unease too surrounding player welfare. In this regard, there is a lack of consistency and reliability in the available data on the physical demands associated with training and playing inter-county hurling and football. This is explained by the absence of an agreed central repository for such data, a reluctance on the part of many counties to share data they hold, and the absence, too, of protocols (perhaps agreed with the GPA) for gaining informed consent on the part

of amateur athletes to receive, store and process their personal data.

Without this anonymised central dataset, a full understanding of the physical demands placed on players, accurate information on injury prevalence and severity, and other such markers are currently placed beyond the reach of the GAA. Consequently, it has not been possible to recommend specific parameters on the physical demands placed upon amateur players e.g. total training load, rest-to-training ratios or competitive games, because this information is not available in a way that provides confidence in its generalisability or as its basis for rulemaking.

To address this, it is proposed that the GAA commission and manage the allocation of GPS units (i.e., a single source supplier following a competitive tendering process), for all senior inter-county teams and that wearing these for all collective training and matches would be a condition of ensuring the validity of its (i.e. that county's) competition certificate. This proposal does create some challenges, especially if individuals decide not to provide consent for the release of their data, but as this does not currently appear to be an issue at the county level, with the crucial support and advocacy of the GPA, it is anticipated that the GAA should be able to overcome any concerns in this regard. This proposal would also result in a cost saving for Counties.

With reliable and full data sets, the ability to analyse and consider the appropriate physical demands on players, an appropriate games programme and, crucially, the importance of rest and recovery, can be satisfactorily achieved in the short-term.

(iv) Provision of Data to the Central GAA Injury Database

Rationale

The GAA's Medical, Scientific and Welfare Committee (MSWC) has researched and developed resources around anonymised Gaelic games' injury data collection for many years. However, it struggles to convince many counties and practitioners of the value for the greater good of providing data to a central hub, which thereby inhibits its full impact.

In the interests of the welfare of all Gaelic games' players,

the Association requires access to a centralised, anonymised injury data hub. The data collected within this, on its own merit and when coupled with additional data sources, such as GPS stats, training loading etc. is crucial in assisting the MSWC and its medical experts in understanding the key injury trends within Gaelic games so that strategies can be developed to mitigate against these and inform the broader policies of the Association in terms of training practices and fixture programmes.

It is therefore suggested that the provision of data to the GAA central injury database also be a key requirement for the provision of certification annually.

(v) Completion of a GAA Senior (initially) Inter-County Managers' Development and/or Induction Programme

Rationale

The Senior Inter-County Manager performs a key role in the promotion and development of our games, as well as focusing on competition success and the enhancement of team performance and player welfare. There is a need for certification and common approaches and standards for the development of Gaelic games, modern and agreed coaching methods, and an exchange of information on competition structures, rules interpretation, best practice player welfare and wellbeing, amongst many other factors.

At present, the structures around manager recruitment and reimbursement are unregulated, leading to a race for appointments each season that has become both unethical and unsustainable, akin in many respects to professional sport, and is contributing to a distortion in the understanding of the role, a lack of proper governance by the County Board in question, and (as has been highlighted in this report already) potential financial and tax liabilities.

Currently, there is no officially recognised development framework, and therefore no qualification requirements, for GAA inter-county team managers. This framework needs to be established and implemented, with an up-to-date GAA Inter-County Management qualification becoming mandatory as a minimum for managing senior inter-county GAA teams that participate in the Sam Maguire and Liam McCarthy Competitions (initially). The GAA's core values should underpin

the proposed educational framework and any accompanying Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programme(s).

The Amateur Status Review Committee acknowledge that the development of a formal qualification or education framework is a significant and time-heavy pursuit in its own right, but as part of any initial Certification Programme, an annual obligatory induction meeting or short course for inter-county managers – based around information sharing and best practice in the area of player welfare and sports science – would represent a suitable starting point.

Phase 2 – In-Season

(vi) The introduction of a limit on the total number of individuals who can be part of a GAA Inter-County Management or Backroom Team in a paid capacity.

Rationale

In the first instance, the ASRC recognises that many of the advances across the Association brought about by the addition of professional service providers have had a very positive impact, particularly in the realms of sports science and player welfare.

However, the unrestricted growth in the number of personnel in GAA Inter-County backroom teams is creating an imbalance in competition preparation between counties, is unwieldy, increasingly costly and can contribute to the intensity of the demands on amateur players.

It is proposed as part of the Inter-County Certification Programme that a restriction is placed on the overall number of individuals permitted to serve as part of an Inter-County Team Management. From the ASRC's own discussions, it would seem reasonable to insist that all Inter-County Management and Backroom teams be comprised of a named Team Manager and up to 3 other named individuals holding the positions of Assistant Team Managers or Selectors.

It is also reasonable to suggest that the number of individuals

in a Backroom Team that may receive payment above approved expenses would not exceed no. 10 and that any such payments could only be made to individuals providing a service consistent with their professional qualifications (e.g. a Doctor or Chartered Physiotherapist). All other payments could only be on a 'vouched expenses' basis.

It is proposed that any such Backroom Team – at the Sam Maguire or Liam Mac Carthy levels initially – should include, as a compulsory appointment, a minimum of 3 qualified medical personnel (e.g. Team Doctor/Physiotherapists).

The minimum qualifications, skills, competencies, responsibilities and duties for each member of the official inter-county backroom team, in a paid capacity, should be established along with the standardization of financial remuneration – a task that could be undertaken, with external advice, by the proposed GAA Certification, Governance and Oversight Committee, and based on existing relevant resources, such as the Gaelic Games Player Pathway Sports Science Framework, and deliberations with the MSWC. This process should be undertaken in collaboration with domain experts, including professional associations, representing coaching, sports medicine, athletic development, video analysts or stats personnel.

Any member of a backroom team receiving a payment would be required to agree to a 'Services Level Agreement' (SLA) reflecting their specific duties and KPIs.

The number, identity and costs of the Team Management and Backroom Team would be included in the AMEL application for Certification by each county for the year in question before any such expenditure could be incurred.

In all cases, an Official GAA Operations Manual, setting out clearly how County Boards should approach and implement these and all aspects of the proposed new Certification Programme, would be developed and published, thereby providing a basis for satisfactory adherence with its requirements.

(vii) Adherence to Contact Hours and Closed Season Policies**Rationale**

An ongoing issue for the GAA (and indeed the Gaelic Players Association) in the last number of years has been the need for a meaningful closed season for inter-county players. The ESRI report of 2018 used data from a survey of the 2016 cohort of inter-county players to examine how the demands of playing at the inter-county level affected players' personal and professional lives, and their club involvement.

It recognised the time demands on senior inter-county players as a major threat to their ability to commit to the inter-county game on an ongoing basis, and among other things highlighted the importance of players having a meaningful closed season (i.e. a significant period of time each year where they were not subject to collective training demands from their inter-county team).

In response to this issue, the GAA and GPA developed a contact hours policy to improve the inter-county training and playing environment and support player welfare by determining optimum training contact hours for teams. The policy is evidence-based (utilising quantitative data) and captures the optimum contact hours required to perform at the highest level while also supporting the balance across sport/career and life, as recommended by the ESRI report.

The policy highlights the importance of an inter-county off-season and respect for the agreed dates for the Return to Collective Training annually (these dates are typically 6 weeks before players play their first competitive inter-county game). It also advises – in broad terms – limiting the number of collective sessions that players are required to commit to, to four per week (including games).

The policy is based on what is appropriate for Amateur and volunteer sportspeople, and while there have certainly been improvements regarding adherence with its provisions in the last number of years, there is still compelling evidence available that not all Counties are adhering to the best practice and player-centred recommendations of the policy. An ongoing issue for the GAA – and indeed for inter-county players generally – has been the lack of an appropriate regulatory framework in which to ensure adherence to and monitor breaches of the policy.

The ASRC believes that if ongoing observance of the provisions

of the contact hours policy is included as part of the conditions for the certification programme, it has the potential to significantly improve adherence to these key player welfare ambitions and restrict some of the more extreme demands occasionally being made on players and for which there is little sports science or player welfare justification.

(viii) Anti-Doping Requirements**Rationale**

Since the early 2000s, GAA players – in keeping with most other athletes – have been subject to the Irish Anti-Doping Rules and related requirements. The GAA's own Rule 1.14 requires players who wish to participate in the National Leagues or Senior Inter-County Championships to have completed the GAA's online anti-doping education course.

GAA – and Sport Ireland policy – also requires Counties to provide details for their collective training sessions so that out-of-competition testing by Sport Ireland can take place. Failure to do so currently leads to the relevant unit being required to cover the costs of a “missed test”, but more importantly, repeated missed tests can lead to an entire panel being deemed to have committed an anti-doping rule violation.

Clearly, compliance with Anti-Doping requirements is hugely important and something which can have extremely serious consequences if neglected. Thankfully, both the completion of the online anti-doping education course by players and the provision of the so-called ‘whereabouts policy’ by Counties, there is a very high degree of compliance by counties, and therefore their inclusion as part of the Certification programme is something that should be relatively straightforward for them to achieve.

(ix) Limit on Panel Numbers and Panel Registration Provisions**Rationale**

The number of players that are training as part of an inter-county panel is not regulated by the GAA. Moreover, there is currently no definition of what constitutes an inter-county player.

It is not uncommon in recent years for County panels to consist of up to 50 players, with extended “training panels” now considered the norm in many Counties. There is an obvious

cost element (for Counties in particular) to the absence of regulation in this area, but more importantly, many of the players on these panels are required to meet all the commitments of inter-county participation, often without any realistic prospect of playing a competitive game. At the same time, these players remain largely unavailable to their clubs and miss out on the development and game-playing opportunities that would otherwise be available to them.

The ASRC do not believe this is a situation that benefits the Association or its players. For that reason, the committee believes there should be a restriction on the number of players that constitute an inter-county panel in any season.

The formal registration of a limited number of players (the consultation process with County officers and some GPA members would suggest a total of 36 players per panel to allow for injuries, etc.) for both the National League and the Championship is an initiative we believe the GAA should pursue and adherence to which could be included as part of the Certification Programme. Doing so would ensure a clear definition of an inter-county player each year and would provide clarity in terms of which players are subject to the provisions of out-of-competition Anti-Doping testing, the Players' Charter and Government funding under the Government Eligible Expenses Scheme for inter-county players. Most importantly, it would ensure players outside of the registered panels were available to their clubs, allowing them to train and play alongside their teammates in the normal way.

Counties, as part of the Certification Programme, would be required to submit their panels, of a maximum of 36 players (or whatever number Central Council agrees upon), to Central GAA twice a year (i.e. in January before the commencement of the National Leagues and in April before the commencement of the Inter-County championships).



7. INTER-COUNTY CERTIFICATION PROGRAMME – SUMMARY

The requirements outlined above represent a sample – based largely on the Committee’s own discussions and the issues arising from the consultation process – of what may be suitable for inclusion in a Certification Programme. There may well be other items– either relevant to current or future, and yet, unforeseen practices – that the Association, via the proposed Certification, Governance and Oversight Committee and Central Council, decide merit inclusion in future iterations of the Certificate.

The ASRC also recognises the significant challenges that will come with the cultural change that it is proposing in this regard. We further understand that, realistically, many of the above initiatives may take time to refine, communicate and develop before they are ready for inclusion in a Certification Programme. As such, the Committee believes it may require a realistic timeframe before the Certification programme contains all the elements outlined above; however, there are clearly a number of those detailed above which can be put in place in time for the 2027 Competitive season and built on accordingly in the years that follow.

The ASRC believes that the implementation of a governance structure like the Inter-County Certification Programme will offer the Association the best chance of safeguarding its amateur ethos in theory and practice and will reduce pressures on administrators, encourage volunteers to assume roles at all levels of the Association, and offer better protections for our players.

It also concludes that it is in the Associations’ best interest to address the primary cause of the many challenges to the GAA’s Amateur status in a coherent and immersive manner, rather than introduce a series of ad hoc responses, which speak only to the symptoms of this. Issues in the club game are, similarly, reflective of the absence of a proper governance structure in this space and will be addressed in due course. This Certification programme begins the process of enacting an embedded and much-needed cultural change and will offer sustainability and viability for all counties moving forward.



8. MOTIONS FOR APPROVAL

Proposal

The ASRC has submitted the motions set forth below to Central Council in November 2025, in consultation with the Rules Advisory Committee, in the belief that this approach will yield effective, implementable and necessary governance changes in the best interests of the Association moving forward.

Motion 1: Introduction of a Certification System

It is envisaged that there will be two parts to the motion to enable the introduction of a Certification System as follows:

- (a) Enact a new Rule 3.16 – “**Inter-county Certification Programme**” as follows – (subsequent Rules in Chapter 3 to be re-numbered accordingly):

“A County intending to participate in the National Leagues and/or Senior Inter-county Championships in football or hurling shall meet the Certification requirements determined by Central Council annually to do so. The requirements and parameters of such certification shall be determined annually by the Central Council based on advice from the Certification, Governance and Oversight Committee (the “Certification Programme”)”

Rules affected or possibly affected: Rule 3.17 (Powers of County Committee), Rule 3.41 (Powers and functions of Central Council)

- (b) Introduce a new Central Committee “**Certification, Governance and Oversight Committee**” as Rule 3.54 as follows: (subsequent Rules in Chapter 3 to be re-numbered accordingly)

Certification, Governance and Oversight Committee

- (a) It shall be responsible for developing, maintaining, and overseeing compliance with the Certification Programme as set out in Rule 3.16
- (b) On an annual basis, it shall develop and propose minimum standards for inclusion in the Certification Programme for approval by Central Council. The minimum standards shall apply to areas such as player welfare, adherence to Amateur Status [as set out in Rule 1.8], financial governance and other minimum standards as proposed by the Certification, Governance and Oversight Committee from time to time.
- (c) It shall also develop and propose appropriate sanctions

for breaches of the minimum standards for inclusion in the Certification Programme, for approval by Central Council.

- (d) It shall have responsibility for the monitoring of and compliance with the Certification Programme and shall have the authority to propose and make preliminary findings and recommended sanctions for breaches of the Certification Programme against relevant parties.

(*Note – it is proposed that Hearings for proposed penalties will be dealt with under **current disciplinary provisions (i.e. CHC and CAC)**.

Motion 2: Amendments to Rule 1.8 – Amateur Status

Amend Rule 1.8 (Amateur Status) as follows:

The Association is a volunteer-led and Amateur Association.

- (i) A player, official or member may claim expenses in conjunction with the playing of Gaelic Games. Expense payments to officials, players and members are permitted only to the extent that they do not generate an income tax liability in the relevant jurisdiction. Expense payments made by Association units (or individuals on their behalf) shall not exceed the standard rates laid down by the Central Council.
- (ii) Players are permitted to benefit directly from endorsements or commercial initiatives related to the playing of Gaelic Games. Personal endorsements shall respect GAA intellectual property rights as outlined in Code 3.2. Players may not participate in full-time training and all preparation for competitions shall be consistent with policies issued by Central Council
- (iii) Other than as outlined above, a player, team, official or member shall not accept payment in cash or in kind in conjunction with the playing of Gaelic Games from any party.
- (iv) Nothing in this Rule shall prohibit the payment of salaries or wages to employees of the Association in administrative or broader games development related coaching roles approved by Central Council.

Minimum Penalty for breaches of any of the above provisions: Twenty-four weeks suspension.

Maximum Penalty on Repeated Infractions: Expulsion from the Association.



9. APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Amateur Status Review Committee – Approved Terms of Reference and Membership

In T.O. Part 1, 1.8, the GAA’s Amateur status is affirmed with clear direction provided regarding the capacity of officials, players, and members to receive forms of compensation for their involvement with the Association, including financially.

Included in this rule, as currently worded, is an understanding that:

- A player, team, official or member shall not accept payment in cash or kind in conjunction with the playing of Gaelic Games.
- Furthermore, a player, team, official or member shall not contract himself/itself to any agent other than those officially approved by Central Council.
- Expenses paid to all officials, players, and members shall not exceed the standard rates laid down by the Central Council.
- Members of the Association may not participate in full-time training.
- This Rule shall not prohibit the payment of salaries or wages to employees of the Association.

A proven infraction against this rule carries a penalty of 24 weeks’ suspension or expulsion.

Terms of Reference

1. Undertake a review of the Association’s Amateur status concerning each of these criteria (listed in Rule 1.10), highlighting specific areas of focus as they arise.
2. Relatedly, consider the current regulation and governance arrangements in place concerning the Association’s Amateur status and consider if these require revision and/or updating to reflect current national and international best practices.
3. With specific reference to 2 (above), propose a GAA Licensing scheme blueprint, with application to the governance of the GAA at county level in the first instance, designed to achieve, inter alia, the following outcomes:
 - a. to further advance the standard of all aspects of GAA activity across Ireland and overseas, prioritising the participation and welfare of young players.
 - b. to promote participation in our Games and contribute to the development of GAA activities amongst all units.

- c. to ensure that Counties (and their sub-units) have an appropriate level of management and organisation, advancing key principles of good governance.
 - d. to ensure, in the context of the Association’s amateur status, that counties are providing its players and membership with appropriate, well-equipped, and safe facilities.
 - e. to protect the integrity and efficient staging of GAA-sanctioned competitions.
 - g. to encourage cooperation between the various constituent parts of the Association, specifically Counties in the first instance, to enable the development of benchmarking in financial, sporting, legal, administrative, and infrastructure-related criteria.
 - h. to promote greater discipline and rationality in GAA finances and in particular: to improve the economic and financial sustainability of Counties and, by extension, units over which it has responsibility and accountability.
 - i. to promote better cost control and thereby safeguard the sustainability of the Association at County level, with specific reference to expenditure associated with the preparation of representative teams participating in inter-county competitions.
 - j. to encourage Counties to manage their activities based on their own actual and projected revenues and thereby safeguard their long-term viability.
4. Consider the definition of what constitutes an ‘employee’ of the Association, specifically, and otherwise review and update all other relevant definitions used in this context.
5. With reference to other sporting organisations and their practices, consider the components of a modern definition of amateurism in a sporting context and its application, inter alia, to players, coaches, officials, and, as appropriate, their memberships.
6. Conduct an examination of the structures and systems necessary to permit players (and others, as appropriate) to seek external representation that may allow them to benefit (financially and in-kind) from their membership in the GAA.
7. Regarding players, specifically those participating in inter-county competition, consider the appropriate physical and mental demands of participating in high-level GAA competition and, as appropriate, seek to establish proposed regulations aimed at ensuring all such expectations are consistent with the long-term welfare of the player as an amateur athlete.

ASRC MEMBERSHIP

Amateur Status Review Committee

David Hassan - Cathaoirleach
Niall Moyna
Tom Parsons
Pat Compton
John Joe O’Carroll
Mike Hyland

Deirdre Murphy
Aidan Eames
Dr Elish Kelly (to May 2025)
Fergal McGill
Raymond McKeown (from June 2025)
Michelle McAleer – Rúnaí (to June 2025)
Eoghan Tuohey – Rúnaí (from June 2025)

APPENDIX 2

– A Comparative Summary of Common Practice pre 1990 and today

Common Practice Pre 1990	Common Practice Today
Manager + Selectors + Doc/Physio – typically 5/6 people involved	Manager, Selectors, forward/defensive coaches, goalkeeping coaches, psychologists, nutritionists, analysts/stats people, logistics, liaison officers, multiple doctors/physios/masseurs etc, 20-25 common in backroom teams
Panel <30 generally	Panels of 40-50 players common
Overnight stays rare	Overnight stays common
Managers generally not paid	Paid Managers & other backroom team members
Non-serious injury treatment not as common (e.g., precautionary scans)	Precautionary medical treatment (rubs, scans etc.) prevalent
Gym culture almost non-existent	Players attending gym 3/4 times per week – cost of membership, travel etc.
Training 2-3 times per week	With gym, training 5/6 days per week
Training gear minimal	Training gear provisions significant
Leisure wear minimal	Leisure wear provisions significant
All the above provided for c. 30 people	All the above provided for c. 60 people
Technology almost non-existent	All counties have costly GPS systems for players; that data needs to be analysed and supplied to players (meaning extra personnel involved)
Training weekends or team holidays rare (potentially All-Ireland winners)	Training weekends/team holidays a lot more common
Fewer games (i.e., League and knock out championships)	More games (i.e., introduction of back doors, round robins in addition to Provincial Championships)

APPENDIX 3

Broad Summary of themes from ASRC Survey on GAA Members, full report authored by Dr Michael McKay and Dr Peter Horgan

Full report – “ASRC – Results of Survey of GAA Members on Foireann” – available here - [Final Report - UU ASRC Survey Data.pdf](#)

While the question invited commentary on overlooked issues, contributors used the opportunity to voice deep anxieties about the erosion of amateur values, the growing influence of commercialisation, and the widening gap between grassroots volunteers and elite-level operations. Themes such as transparency, player welfare, governance, and community identity recur throughout, underscoring the need for a balanced and inclusive approach to reform.

1. Transparency and Governance

A dominant theme across responses was the demand for greater transparency in financial operations at all levels of the GAA. Contributors repeatedly called for the publication of itemised accounts and salaries for full-time staff, with one respondent stating: “The Annual Accounts of County Boards should be carefully audited by independent Chartered Accountants... every item of income and outgoings must be detailed and vouched for.”

Concerns were also raised about opaque payments to managers and backroom staff, often funded by third-party sponsors or benefactors, which undermines the amateur ethos.

2. Professionalism vs. Amateurism

Many participants expressed concern that the GAA is drifting away from its amateur roots, with some describing the current situation as “professionalism by stealth.” One contributor noted: “The Association is getting further from its ethos with every passing year.” Others argued that the demands placed on players and managers now mirror professional standards, and that the organisation should either embrace professionalism transparently or reinforce amateur principles. As one respondent put it: “If managers are officially paid, it’s only fair that inter-county players... should be appropriately remunerated too, formally and transparently.”

3. Player Welfare and Equity

Player welfare emerged as a critical concern, particularly regarding injury, mental health, and financial strain. Participants highlighted the lack of support for players who sacrifice career progression and personal time for county commitments: “Players receive no compensation or support for these opportunity costs... yet the Association generates substantial income from broadcasting, sponsorship, and gate receipts.”

There were also calls for equal treatment across Counties, with suggestions for standardised expenses and benefits to avoid disparities between wealthier and less-resourced Counties.

their input being valued more than my voluntary professional contributions.” Others stressed the importance of preserving the GAA’s community-based identity, noting that: “We must take a stronger stance on behaviour... the GAA is about community, not commerce.”

5. Commercialisation and Media Influence

Participants criticised the increasing commercialisation of the GAA, particularly the use of pay-per-view platforms like GAA+ and rising ticket prices: “Pay-per-view takes away everything the GAA is meant to be for... greedy really and not the ethos of an amateur sport.” There were also concerns about the influence of large sponsors and the unequal distribution of resources, with calls for centralised funding models to ensure fairness.

6. Referees and Match Officials

A significant number of responses focused on the need to improve the standards and treatment of referees. Suggestions included better training, performance reviews, and fair compensation: “Referees should be paid fairly from central funds... poor performance reduces pay; good consistent performance increases pay.”

7. Youth Development and Club Sustainability

Concerns were raised about the pressures placed on young players, particularly in development squads, and the impact on long-term participation. Participants also highlighted the financial strain on Clubs: “The future flourishing of Gaelic games in areas of social disadvantage is a serious risk... long-established clubs in danger of folding.”

8. Gender Equality and Integration

Several contributors called for the integration of LGFA and Camogie into the GAA and equal treatment for female players: “Female players... frequently receive far less in terms of resources, facilities, media coverage, and recognition.”

Summary of text responses

The additional submissions reflected a deep concern about the sustainability of the GAA’s amateur ethos in the face of growing professional demands, financial pressures, and cultural shifts. While some advocate for a pragmatic move towards semi-professionalism, the majority emphasise the need for transparency, fairness, and a renewed commitment to community values. The challenge for the GAA lies in balancing tradition with modern realities — ensuring that the organisation remains inclusive, accountable, and true to its founding principles.





WHERE WE
ALL BELONG

