



**THE
CAMOGIE
ASSOCIATION**

An Cumann Camógáochta

Report of the Fixtures Review Committee

November 2016

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Introduction

‘Our Sport Our Future’, ‘Inspire to Play, Empower to Stay’

This is the cornerstone to the Camogie Association National Development Plan (‘NDP’), a plan which it is intended to guide us strategically into the future, to continue to provide a bright and vibrant game for all. As part of Uachtarán Catherine Neary’s 2016 Congress speech she highlighted that: *“The greatest threat is not from other sports. It is from us not providing every girl as a minimum the opportunity to play at an appropriate level for her ability.”*

The Fixtures Review was established by the Uachtarán to critically review our current fixture structures. As part of that the Uachtarán outlined the need: *“to ensure that our players can participate in a fixture schedule which maximises their opportunity to play as many games as possible at a level that is competitive, age appropriate and reflects their skill set.”*

Since 2009 at intercounty level there has been a significant increase in the number of fixtures. This has led to a very vibrant intercounty scene, promoting our game at the highest level. However, it cannot be ignored that each increase at intercounty level has an impact on our clubs and our club players. Since we all recognise that our clubs are the bedrock of the Camogie Association, it is incumbent on us to respond, to continue as is not an option.

It is widely recognised across all Gaelic Games that the club player needs to be equally valued. This dictates that club fixtures cannot be ‘shoehorned’ into either end of the intercounty schedule. Our intercounty players account for aprox 1% of our members, arguably intercounty fixtures currently take precedence to club fixtures. Without a schedule of properly planned and regular club fixtures we will struggle to retain or grow our adult playing numbers. This will weaken our association and we will lose the support of those we need to

provide us with the mentors, administrators, referees and community supporters of the future.

Equally our young players – particularly those at the elite level – are continuing to be faced with unsustainable fixture and training schedules across playing grades and codes. The long term effect on player welfare, through injury and burnout, is deeply concerning.

Therefore, serving all our members equally, retaining the interest of our club players, promoting the strength of our clubs and protecting the welfare of our young, talented players requires us to act now. As custodians of the game we must do so in the interests of our association – both current and future generations.

As part of this review the Committee consulted widely, by use of online club and county surveys, forums and engagement with the membership and supporters. The report contains a number of recommendations. These have been informed by our consultations and our review of best practice and research evidence. We believe that implementation of these recommendations will keep Camogie at the forefront of women's sport, protect our players into the future and ensure that our clubs thrive and grow, all the while enhancing Our Game.

1. Consultation & Methodology

The Committee consulted extensively and met regularly during the course of this review. The findings of the review are based upon the consultations detailed below and analysis of data and research, including that conducted by other expert bodies.

Consultations included:

- An online survey of intercounty players
- An online survey of clubs
- Direct consultation with chairs and secretaries forum
- Provincial forums held in Leinster and Munster
- Analysis of Camogie Association membership registration data over 3 years

2. Findings and Recommendations

The findings and recommendations have been split into three areas

1. Player Eligibility
2. Intercounty Competitions Structures
3. Club Competitions Structures

2.1 *Player Eligibility*

The Camogie Association rules permit players who are over 15 on the 31st of December in the previous year to play adult club competition and over 16 to play adult intercounty competitions (Rule 28.4). This eligibility has implications for player welfare and burnout, fixture congestion and the retention of adult players. An added consideration is that both Camogie and Ladies Gaelic football enjoy a cross-over of players at club and county level. These ‘dual players’, as they are commonly referred to, are important to both sports and we recognise the need to ensure they can continue to avail of the opportunity to play all codes within the Gaelic Games family.

The current eligibility rules permit underage players to play across several grades including the adult grade. Many young players particularly at the elite

level are participating in numerous training sessions and games across a number of grades. The intercounty players survey conducted showed that 81% of intercounty players train for adult intercounty 3-4 times a week and 74% of 17-19 year old train for adult intercounty 3-4 times a week. The evidence is that our minor intercounty players who play adult intercounty are also predominately training at adult level. The situation is replicated at club level and this focus on the short term gains for teams is detrimental in the long term to our players and game. Female sport participation is growing. The level of training – including strength and conditioning – is beyond comparison with previous years. If we continue to allow players to play across grades we are placing their long term welfare at risk.

“Anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) injury is becoming more prevalent in field sports and non contact injury accounts for 70% of these. Studies have shown an increased incidence of injury among females by a rate of 5-6 times that of males and have also shown that adolescent females have the highest incidence of ACL injury among this cohort.”¹

Currently some adult panels contain minor players. The number varies by county depending on membership numbers, management and underage structures. A review of 2016 All-Ireland Adult Championship semi finals showed that though some counties have small numbers of minors on their squads they are not necessarily on the starting 15. The information is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Participation of Minors in Adult Panels and Teams

All-Ireland Semi-Final Grade	Number of Teams	Number of Minors on Panels	Number of Minors on starting teams
Senior*	4 – approx 120 players	8	1
Intermediate*	4 – approx 120 players	16	5
Premier Junior	4 – approx 120 players	30	8
	360 players	54 Minors	14 Minors starting
These minors as a percentage of the adult players registered in these counties varied from as low as 0 % to 3% on the starting team and 0 % to 5% on the panel figures.			

* Cork and Kilkenny teams in both Senior and Intermediate grade

¹ Anterior Cruciate Ligament Injury Prevention in Elite Underage Womens’ Gaelic Games; Time to Engage? Dr Padraig McGillicuddy, Masters Medical Science Sport & Exercise Medicine University College Cork, Faculty of Sports & Exercise Medicine, April 2014

The Committee gave careful consideration to the higher prevalence of minors playing on adult intercounty teams at lower grades and in counties with fewer registered adult players. Although these minors still represent a very small percentage of overall registered adult players, we consider that it would be sensible to phase the introduction of changes in rule 28.4 so as to allow time for adjustment. This phased approach to age eligibility would allow for advance planning by counties and clubs. It would also ensure that no individual player who was eligible before the rule change would become ineligible after the rule change.

The use of underage players on adult teams restricts the availability of dates – an unsatisfactory outcome for both underage and adult player. The reality is that while the underage player is playing competitive games across several age groups the adult player can be forced to await for a single grade to be played.

Equally while our elite players are playing at multiple levels our core players are awaiting games at their relevant competitive level. Our adult club competitions are often awaiting the elite underage players to complete their intercounty schedules. These delays are not sustainable if we are serious about providing equality to all players. The added task is to ensure we do not place too great a burden on our young players or we will risk losing them to burnout or injury.

Highlighting the impact of fixture congestion at the 16 to 18 age group is the reality that a number of counties minor club championships are (a) played on a knock out basis and/or (b) played in the months of October and November. The playing of a premier underage competitions should not be consigned to after the completion of the adult championship.

The Committee examined the current rule in the light of these considerations, cognisant of the implications of any changes. However, at this stage we recommend a phased change to rule 28.4 as follows:

Recommendation on player eligibility

Proposal to Congress 2017:

Amend Rule 28.4

From 2018 – A player must be over 16 to play Adult Club Competition

From 2018 – A player must be over 17 to play Adult intercounty Competition

From 2019 – A player must be over 18 to play Adult intercounty Competition

We also recommend that in the long term the continuation of underage players participating in adult competitions should be subject to further review, including utilising additional expert camogie specific research into player welfare.

2.2 Intercounty Competitions Format

The current structure of intercounty competition leaves little window for club competition. While generally the feedback was that intercounty structures should largely remain as is, the round robin format can place added burdens upon the club fixtures calendar.

A number of recommendations are made below.

The current Minor All-Ireland competition is scheduled from the middle of February to end of April, with some counties participating during this period or later in the year in a provincial competition. Currently Connacht counties do not participate in a provincial competition. This is a particularly congested period with the post primary schools competitions also taking place, poor weather and exam preparations. This competition is the culmination of a players intercounty underage career, the last opportunity to play together on teams that have progressed through the age grades. We need to ensure we provide a positive experience to these players, showcasing what are skilful, fast and exciting games. The proposal is to run the round robin stages from end of February based on a Provincial format which would allow for smaller travelling distances. The Provincial finals would take place at the end of April with provincial finalists entering a knock out All-Ireland semi finals and finals in July. This would allow for the staging and promotion of the All-Ireland finals, enhancing their prestige during an optimal playing month, thereby completing the intercounty season.

Recommendation on the Minor Competitions

- Develop an All-Ireland Minor competition based upon a provincial structure accommodating Connacht counties in an equitable system, promoting best practice at all levels of the game. Including a development grade for emerging counties, with added supports for the progression into adult intercounty competition.

Proposal to Congress to 2017:

Removal of any rules to prevent the inclusion of Connacht counties within another provincial minor structure.

The current adult intercounty league and championship formats do not contain a relegation element, promotion is generally automatic on winning of the grade. This current model is unsustainable with promotion only, and with no relegation, thus contributing to increased sized groups and the removal of some grades.

Consultations favoured:

- Where grades are in a group format, that the groups be capped at 5 teams per group, with the lowest in each group playing in a relegation play off.
- Where the format is a single group, the lowest placed team is relegated.
- Winners of the grade below are automatically promoted to the grade above.

The removal of the rules regarding teams grading from An Treoraí Oifigiúil would permit the adaption of competition structures to establish a fair and transparent relegation/promotion based upon competition rule.

As Camogie is unique in the inclusion of counties' second teams within the same competition, consideration should also be given to the impact of promotion and relegation upon the second team structure. This report does not make any recommendations on the role of second teams within current structures of national competitions, as it is the view that this should form part of an overall review of Camogie development.

Recommendation on Relegation/Promotion

- Include a games based automatic relegation and promotion mechanism in adult All-Ireland Championship and League based upon a transparent mechanism. Consideration of the impact of second teams and teams not competing in all matches within this new structure.

Proposal to Congress to 2017:

Removal of intercounty player grading rules to permit a structure where teams could be relegated/graded according to their placing in the previous year's league/championship in a transparent manner.

Additional Recommendations on intercounty Competitions Structures

- A maximum number of 5 round games per competition (with a minimum of 3 rounds) to limit the number of intercounty games to allow for club competition, while still maintaining a vibrant intercounty competition.
- Scheduled breaks in competition during the championship to allow club competitions to continue during the optimal playing season (April to September).
- The removal of the traditional break for the exam period at intercounty adult level to allow for gaps to be built into the schedule during July and August.
- That the Camogie Association assesses the feasibility of using the Servasport Competition Management platform currently in operation by the GAA and LGFA. This would allow for co-operation at national level by all codes within the Gaelic games family, potential promotional cross over's and a shared knowledge of competition management practice.
- Continuation of the scheduling of the U16 intercounty competition during the summer months with implementation of the age eligibility recommendations negating any impact of this competition on adult club fixtures.

2.3 Recommendations on Club Competitions

Club competitions are largely governed by the county boards resulting in a number of added considerations to their review, particularly:

- the rules impacting on these competitions may be county rules and not necessarily nationally mandated
- the quality of fixture structures and calendars vary greatly across counties
- counties are well placed to review their structures to ensure they are providing a vibrant club calendar.

We have taken these considerations into account in framing our recommendations for club competitions.

The Sports Council Report ‘Keeping them in the Game’ 2013, estimates that among participants aged 16 and over, more than 53 per cent of hurlers and 52 percent of Gaelic footballers will have dropped out of the sport within 3-4 years. (Camogie was included in hurling stats).

What is particularly concerning is that the report highlights that the drop-out rate from all sports and exercise activity is greater among young women. Furthermore women are much less likely to take up sport during adulthood. In essence if we don’t seek to retain our young adult players with vibrant club structures we are unlikely to attract them back to the game.

Our club competitions are currently largely structured around our intercounty competitions with many club players not being provided with an adequate fixtures schedule from which they can plan.

84% of respondents to the club survey want club fixture dates fixed and published as early as possible and adhered to.

Publication of an established fixture schedule is critical to retaining our club players. It allows clubs, players, management and supporters to plan. Currently the requirement under rule 33.1(c) that a draft fixture schedule is prepared is not guaranteeing that county fixtures contain set dates or even provisional dates. Adherence to this rule, through publication of fixtures schedules with dates, varies greatly by county.

Responses to our club survey completed by adult players suggest the highest proportion receive 3-4 games at club league and championship. More games are received in the league. Some 12% of respondents only received 1-2 championship games in 2015. This indicates that a number of adult club championships are run on a knock out basis. This is not providing an equitable club fixture schedule for our players across the playing season. It is not valuing our club player and will not sustain our players continuing participation in our Association.

It is apparent that while a number of counties may have a very good club fixtures structure the standard varies considerably by county and grade. The use of Fixtures Planners similar to those established in the GAA would allow for cross co-operation across counties, an accurate audit of club fixtures and implementation of best practice.

The standards of clubs and numbers vary greatly throughout counties. Our current club fixtures exist largely within county borders which sometimes can lead to uneven or one sided competitions. Geographical county borders should not be a bar to clubs receiving appropriate level of competitive games, more competitive games lead to a better standard of camogie and will help retain and revitalise players. Provincial councils should be utilised to establish club competitions based on grade and ability, to provide appropriate games at the appropriate level.

The use of a single competitions software programme such as Servasport would also allow counties to plan their club fixtures calendar, co-ordinate with national and provincial fixtures and, in cooperation with LGFA counterparts, facilitate dual club players.

A number of counties currently operate bye laws which impact on the playing of club fixtures during certain stages of intercounty competitions, in some cases allowing for the suspension of club competitions for long periods. Proper fixture planning at the start of the year should be used to try to prevent issues arising during the season while accommodating competitive club fixtures during the optimal playing months. These bye laws should be critically assessed as to whether they are best serving our game and all our players. Our elite adult intercounty players account for a very small percentage of our membership yet at stages during our optimal playing season they can account for the majority of our Camogie fixtures.

Furthermore the use of bye laws to regulate games-based activities means that structures cannot be easily adapted in the light of experience or changing circumstances. Competition rules are a far better mechanism than bye laws to control competitions, allowing for county boards to react quicker where needed. Taking account of the above issues the following are our recommendations relating to club competitions.

Recommendations on Club Competitions

- Fixtures Planners are appointed at regional levels to assess and monitor counties' club fixtures. These would have a similar role to that currently operated at county level by the GAA (see appendix for outline of the GAA fixture planner roles).
- These planners would audit the number of games provided per grade, frequency and the adherence to good planning. The information would be fed back to national level with recommendations for improvements and/or best practice guidelines.
- County bye laws to be reviewed by these planners to assess their impact upon fixture scheduling and make recommendations where necessary.
- The establishment of cross county club competitions by Provincial council and/or at national level to allow for appropriate age and skill set competition.
- The Camogie Association should assess the feasibility of using the Servasport Competition Management platform currently in operation by the GAA and LGFA to provide counties with an appropriate fixture management system.
- Rules which relate to games-based activities should be competition rules and not bye laws, which require a two thirds majority for amendment.

Proposal to Congress 2017:

To include the role of fixture planner within provincial structures, guaranteeing them access to counties' fixtures and to report to a county AGM with recommendations on competition structures.

To amend rule 33.1(c) to ensure that counties' draft fixtures schedules must contain dates of rounds of competitions.

Appendix 1

Table of Recommendations

Recommendation	Proposed Rule Change to Congress 2017
<p>1. Recommendation Player eligibility</p> <p>Increasing the age for player eligibility for adult club to over 16 and adult intercounty to over 18 on phased basis.</p>	<p>Amend Rule 28.4</p> <p>2018 A player must be over 16 to play Adult Club Competition</p> <p>2018 A player must be over 17 to play Adult intercounty Competition</p> <p>2019 A player must be over 18 to play Adult intercounty Competition</p>
<p>2. Recommendation on the Minor Competitions</p> <p>Develop an All Ireland Minor competition based upon a provincial structure accommodating Connacht counties in an equitable system, promoting best practice at all levels of the game. Including a development grade for emerging counties, with added supports for the transgression into adult intercounty competition.</p>	<p>Removal of any rules to prevent the inclusion of Connacht counties within another provincial minor structure.</p>
<p>3. Recommendation on Relegation/Promotion</p> <p>Include a games based automatic relegation and promotion mechanism in adult All Ireland Championship and League based upon a transparent mechanism. Consideration of the impact of second teams and teams not competing in all matches within this new structure.</p>	<p>Removal of intercounty player grading rules to permit a structure where teams could be relegated/ graded according to their placing in the previous years league/championship in a transparent manner.</p>

Recommendation	Proposed Rule Change to Congress 2017
<p>4. Additional Recommendations on intercounty Competitions</p> <p>4.1 A maximum number of 5 round games per competition a minimum of 3 in intercounty competitions to limit the number of intercounty games to allow for club competition while still maintaining a vibrant intercounty competition.</p> <p>4.2 Scheduled breaks in competition during the championship to allow club competition to continue during the optimal playing season (April to September).</p> <p>4.3 The removal of the tradition exam period break at intercounty adult level to allow for gaps built into the schedule during July and August.</p> <p>4.5 That the Camogie Association assess the feasibility of using the Servasport Competition Management platform currently in operation by the GAA and LGFA. This would allow for co-operation at national level by all codes within the Gaelic games family, potential promotional cross over's and a shared knowledge of competition management practice.</p> <p>4.6 Continuation of the U16 intercounty competition during the summer months with the age eligibility recommendations to negate the issue that this competition is impacting upon adult club fixtures.</p>	

<p>Recommendation</p>	<p>Proposed Rule Change to Congress 2017</p>
<p>5. Recommendations on Club Competition Structures</p> <p>5.1 That fixtures planner are appointed at a regional levels to assess and monitor counties club fixtures with a similar role to those currently in operation at county level by the GAA (see appendix for outline of the GAA fixture planners roles.)</p> <p>5.2 These planners would audit the number of games provided per grade, frequency and the adherence to good planning. The information would be fed back to national level with recommendations for improvements and/or best practice guidelines.</p> <p>5.3 That county bye laws be reviewed by these planners to assess their impact upon fixture scheduling making recommendations where necessary.</p> <p>5.4 The establishment of cross county club competitions by Provincial council and/ or at national level to allow for appropriate age and skill set competition.</p> <p>5.5 That the Camogie Association assess the feasibility of using the Servasport Competition Management platform currently in operation by the GAA to LGFA to provide county with an appropriate fixture management system.</p> <p>5.6 Recommendation that rules which relate to games based activities should be competition rules and not bye laws, which require a two thirds majority for amendment.</p>	<p>Proposal to Congress 2017</p> <p>To include the role of fixture planner within provincial structures, guaranteeing them access to counties fixtures and to report to a county AGM with recommendations on competitions structures.</p> <p>To amend rule 33.1(c) to ensure that counties draft fixtures schedule prepared must contain dates of rounds of competitions.</p>

Appendix II

A. Fixtures Review Committee Members

Hilda Breslin (Chair) (Chair of National Competitions Management Committee)

John Greene (Member of GAA Coiste Bainistíochta and Fixtures Planner, Longford)

Mary Howard (Cahir Camogie Club, Co. Tipperary)

Geraldine McGrath (Galway Camogie Board Co. Secretary)

Niamh Mallon (Down and Portaferry player)

Mary O'Connor (Director of Camogie Development)

Liz McGuinness (National Competitions Administrator)

Appendix III

B. *Highlights from Online Fixtures Review Survey Conducted*

- Respondents came from 29 counties
- 30% classified themselves as predominately a club adult players
- 17% classified themselves as predominately a club mentors/managers
- 13% classified themselves as predominately a club & county adult players
- 55% of respondents play club adult camogie
- The top ranked reason for participating in camogie at 76% was that they enjoy playing the game, followed by supporting a family member and 3rd reason was that they wanted to give something back to the game
- 84% of respondents think that club fixtures should be fixed and published as early as possible in the season
- 53% of respondents think that Club fixtures are impacted by the number of intercounty adult fixtures
- 52% of respondents think that Club fixtures should try to accommodate dual players to play both camogie and ladies Gaelic football at club level.

Appendix IV

C. Highlights from Online intercounty Players Survey Conducted

- Respondents came from 18 counties
- 49% of respondents were under 22 years of age
- 46% of respondents also play club ladies Gaelic football
- 81% of respondents train for adult intercounty 3-4 times a week
- The top ranked reason for playing adult intercounty was that they feel it is an honour to play for their county, followed closely by wanting to win an All-Ireland
- 66% of respondents agree that there is an adequate number of games at intercounty level between league and championship
- A majority of respondents like the round robin format, they believe dual players should be accommodated and they are neutral on whether intercounty fixtures impact negatively on club fixtures
- The top reason that they would stop playing intercounty camogie would be due to work/family or college commitments, followed by the reason if they stopped enjoying it.

Appendix V

D. GAA Role of the County Fixture Planner

The Role of the County Fixture Planner can be summarised as follows:

- To monitor the County Fixtures schedule (as drafted by C.C.C) for the current year. This will involve on a monthly basis calculating how many of the scheduled games for that period were actually played.
- To audit the County Fixtures schedule on a weekly or monthly basis. This involves counting the number of games being played at each grade and code as well as measuring the spread of the games (i.e. the length of time between each game in a particular grade). The information gathered should be reported to the County Committee meeting on a monthly basis.
- To analyse the County Fixtures schedule for the current year. This should be carried out following the publication of the County Fixtures Programme in January or February. It should analyse the scheduled fixture programme under (a) the number and (b) the spread of games. This process should assist the Fixture Planner in making recommendations to the C.C.C for the following year.
- To make recommendations to the CCC based on the results of the monitoring process and in conjunction with the CCC, formulate a fixtures schedule for the following year.
- To monitor and evaluate on an annual basis the County's performance at U-14, U-16, Minor and Adult level, against the GAA's minimum standards for provision and spread of games.
- To use this information to prepare a report and present to County Convention and to present this report to the Provincial Fixture planner.

- To facilitate feedback from Clubs and stakeholders in the fixture process through an annual “Club Forum”. A Club Forum can be either:
 1. A formal end of year County Committee meeting
 2. A forum of random club members facilitated by the Fixture Planner
 3. A series of focus groups chaired by the Fixture Planner
 4. A questionnaire circulated to and returned by clubs
- To liaise with and attend meetings organised by Provincial Fixtures Planners.



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