

# Inter County Ladies Football and Camogie Government Grant Scheme

Evaluation Report  
2018



wgpa



THE  
CAMOGIE  
ASSOCIATION







# Contents

Section 1	Introduction and Overview	04
Section 2	Evaluation Process	12
Section 3	Grant Scheme Headlines and Facts	17
Section 4	Grant Scheme Impact	22
Section 5	Grant Scheme Implementation	42
Section 6	Conclusion and Recommendations	60





## INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF GOVERNMENT GRANT SCHEME

This document sets out an independent evaluation of the Government Grant Scheme for Inter County ladies' football and camogie players. The grant scheme provides financial support for the highest-grade adult female teams in each code in each county in Ireland.

An interim evaluation report was submitted in April 2018 that focused primarily on the impact of the grant scheme against its core objectives in its first year. Given the short timeframe between interim and final report, the remainder of the evaluation has focused on the implementation of the scheme, that is, systems, structures and processes undertaken to deliver objectives.

Thus, this evaluation report is structured under the two overarching headings of 1. Grant Scheme Impact and 2. Grant Scheme Implementation.

The early sections of the report provide an overview of the scheme, its evolution, context, operating structure and aims and objectives. The final section of the report makes recommendations about the future implementation of any such scheme.

## Overview Government Grant Scheme

On the 15th June 2016, the then Minister of State for Tourism and Sport, Patrick O'Donovan TD, announced a two-year agreement, commencing in 2017, to provide support for Inter County Ladies Football and Camogie Players. Grant aid of €1,000,000 over two playing seasons (2017 and 2018), is distributed equally to all highest-grade county teams participating in National League and/or All Ireland Championship competitions.

Funds are provided by the Irish Government, distributed through Sport Ireland and administered collaboratively by the Ladies Gaelic Football Association (LGFA), the Camogie Association and the Women's Gaelic Players Association through a Scheme Implementation Group (SIG) to support initiatives that will raise standards and provide an enhanced playing and training environment for Inter County players and teams.

Counties apply for funding against 3 core priority areas including:

### I. Injury Prevention and Medical Cover

This support enables teams to invest in pre-habilitation activity such as movement screening, mobility training and injury prevention services. It also enables teams to access appropriate physiotherapy and medical cover at games and training or to access specialist recovery services such as Cryotherapy and sports massage.

### II. Maximizing Player and Team Performance

This area seeks to create enhanced and consistent access to activities and services such as strength and conditioning programmes, specialist coaching, performance analysis (e.g. video analysis and player statistics), performance nutrition advice and psychological preparation.

**A MAXIMUM OF 80% OF THE TOTAL AVAILABLE GRANT EACH YEAR IS ALLOCATED FOR THESE TWO ELEMENTS.**

### III. Access to Training Facilities

The third investment area for teams, supports access to specialist training facilities such as: all weather, indoor and floodlit facilities as well as gym and pool use.

**A MAXIMUM OF 20% OF THE TOTAL AVAILABLE GRANT EACH YEAR IS ALLOCATED FOR THIS ELEMENT.**

The overall funding package also provides an element of administrative support, capacity building and evaluation.

## Evolution of the Government Grant Scheme

The announcement of funding was an outcome of more than 18 months of lobbying and engagement, which culminated in a joint proposal by the Women's Gaelic Players Association (WGPA), the Camogie Association and the Ladies Gaelic Football Association (LGFA) to the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport. This proposal was underpinned by research conducted in 2014 entitled "Let's Make Things Better".

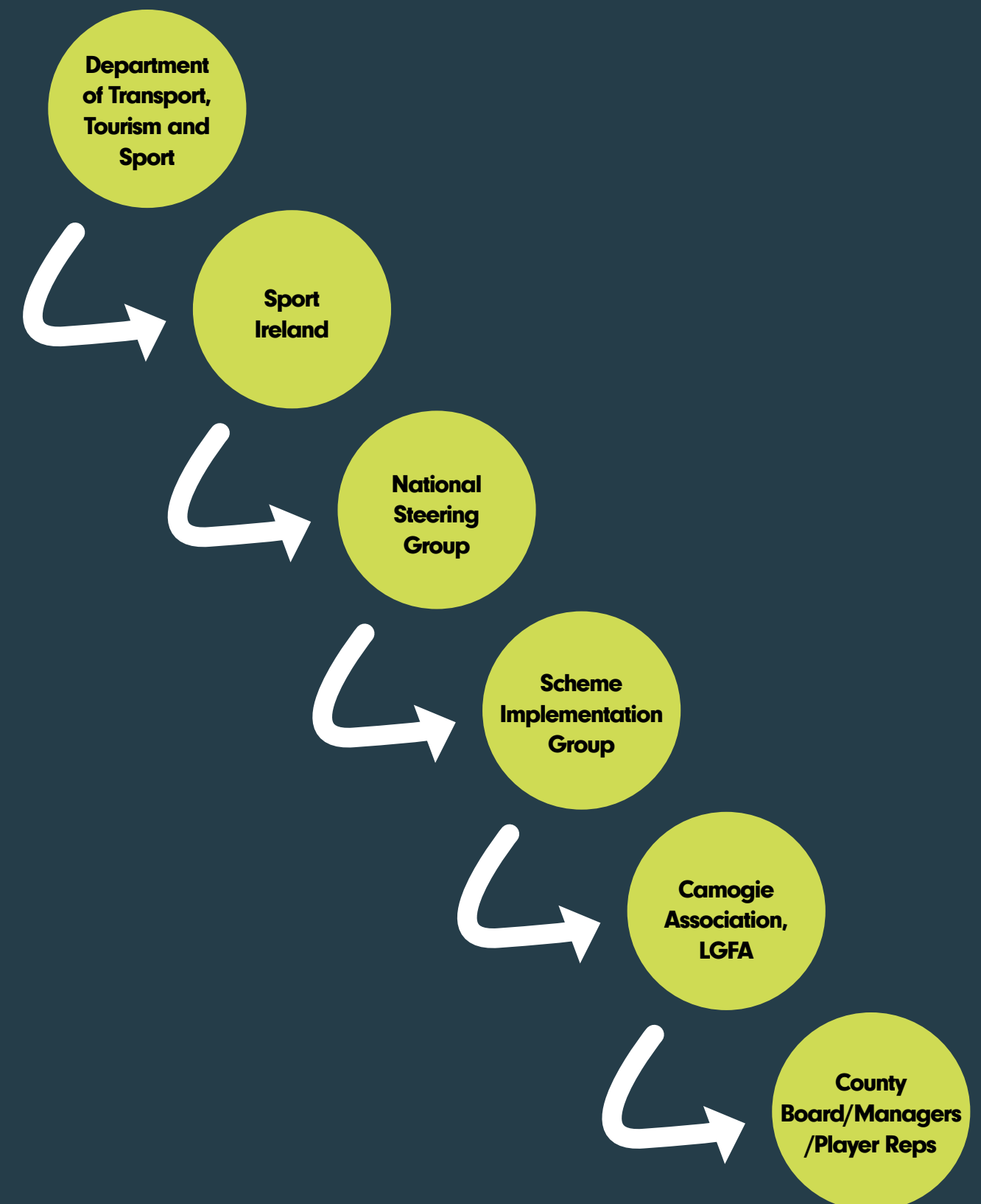
The findings of the report appear to be acknowledged and endorsed in the announcement of the scheme, Minister O'Donovan said **"I want to take this opportunity to recognise the valuable contribution that our Inter County Ladies Football and Camogie Players make to Gaelic games. Their success is important, not just at a sporting level, but also on the ground level where they inspire young women to become involved in ladies' football or Camogie and stay involved throughout school and into their adult life. The funding allocation shows the confidence held by the Government in the success of our Inter County Ladies Football and Camogie Players, and that it recognises the role of the teams, the volunteers and the supporters in forming strong community spirit throughout the country"**.

This sentiment was echoed by the then Chairperson of Sport Ireland, Mr Kieran Mulvey who commented that **"Government support for Inter County Ladies Gaelic Football and the Camogie Association players, distributed through Sport Ireland, is an indicator of the recognition that exists at national level for the unique contribution the players make as the leading exponents of our indigenous national games, the contribution that players make to the economic and social fabric of the nation and their commitment to play the game at highest level possible"**.

Thus, the context, evolution and purpose of the scheme are coalesced into core objectives of raising standards and creating an enhanced training and playing environment for Inter County players, recognising their status as elite athletes and deepening the contribution of these players and teams to wider participation and issues of societal challenge.

## Structure of the Government Grant Scheme

The delivery mechanism and operating structure for the grant scheme is presented below.





A team led funding model is a key distinguishable characteristic of this scheme. Funding is allocated to County teams to fund a set of activities agreed by the county board, player reps and county manager.

At County level, administrators (County boards), management and players must work collaboratively to consult, plan and report on agreed initiatives that are eligible for funding under the scheme. The Scheme Implementation Group (SIG) reports to a National Steering Group that is a sub-committee of Sport Ireland and includes representation from the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport. The following table highlights the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders.

STAKEHOLDER	ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES
Department of Transport Tourism and Sport	Funder - provides funding for the grant scheme and participates on the National Steering Group for the scheme
Sport Ireland	Administers grant aid from the Department to the various associations and leads the National steering group
National Steering Group	Provides strategic direction, oversight and scrutiny on the grant scheme. Receives reports from the Scheme Implementation Group (SIG) on strengths, weaknesses and impacts of scheme and considers the future direction of the scheme
Scheme Implementation Group (SIG)	Comprised of an independent chairperson, scheme administrator (appointed in February 2017) and two representatives each from the Ladies Gaelic Football Association, the Camogie Association and the Women's Gaelic Players Association. The SIG oversees the implementation of the grant scheme including liaising with Counties, assessing applications, making grant recommendations and overseeing an independent evaluation
Associations (Camogie, LGFA, WGPA)	Grant funding is filtered through the various associations and distributed to respective Counties. Responsibility lies with the associations to promote the scheme within their respective codes and engaging with Counties
County Board/Managers/ Player Reps	Consulting with stakeholders in each county, developing and/ submitting applications, monitoring and reviewing spend in line with grant offers and eligibility criteria





## Application Process

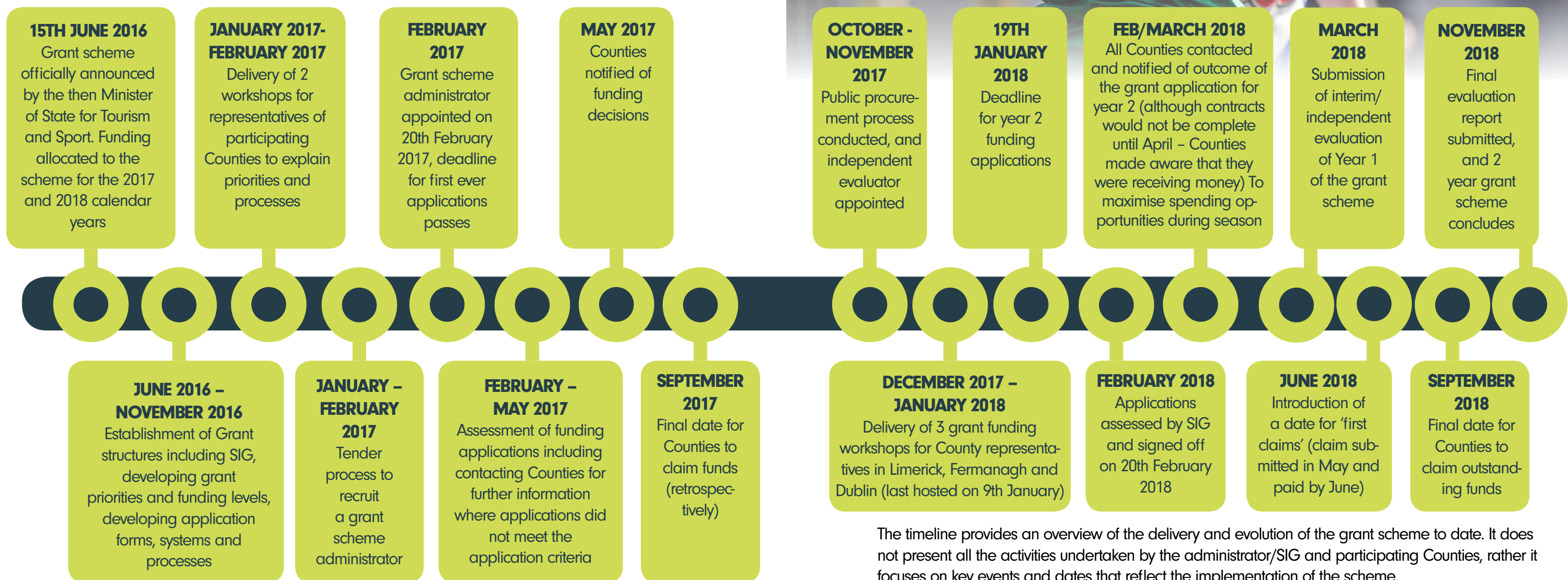
Funding is distributed equally to the highest-grade county teams participating in National League and/or All Ireland Championship competitions. The annual competitive season for both codes consists of these two competition structures. The National League usually taking place between January and May with the Championship taking place between May and September annually.

County Boards are encouraged to plan early for both phases of competition (league and championship) to maximise the use of the grant scheme within their overall budget. Those participating in the grant scheme can access funding until they are knocked out of the championship.

The following timeline of activities offers an overview of the key grant scheme activities and milestones.



## Grant Scheme Timeline



The timeline provides an overview of the delivery and evolution of the grant scheme to date. It does not present all the activities undertaken by the administrator/SIG and participating Counties, rather it focuses on key events and dates that reflect the implementation of the scheme.



## Grant Scheme Characteristics

On the surface, this 2 year initiative is a straight forward grant making process whereby applicants submit proposals to a body in exchange for an agreed level of funding to improve standards in their County. Grant recipients then monitor spend in line with their approved application, including providing receipts, invoices and details of qualifications for relevant personnel providing services.

There are a number of key distinguishable characteristics of the scheme including:

- **TEAM APPROACH** – the grant scheme funds teams rather than individual players as with other schemes. As such, the application process is required to demonstrate a collective approach to its design. The process requires that consultation between player reps, managers and county board representatives to agree how funding should be allocated to raise standards and create an enhanced training and playing environment in their county. The grant application is to be signed by county secretary, team manager and player representative.
- **NGB COLLABORATION** – the grant scheme is managed collectively by the Ladies Gaelic Football Association, the Camogie Association and the WGPA with support of an independent chair and independent administrator. The collaboration required at a County level is mirrored by the management of the scheme at Association level. Operational decisions of the scheme require collective agreement of the SIG.
- **EQUALITY OF ACCESS** - the process is not a competitive process in that the amount of funding allocated is fixed per County (€8,000 year 1), (€9,000 year 2). Applications that are completed, signed and include eligible expenditure as set out in guidelines are approved and signed off by the SIG. The scheme does not differentiate the amount allocated per county across various tiers, County size or level of success. This approach is reflective of a wider, collective movement to improve the overall standard of the games.





# EVALUATION PROCESS

The SIG commissioned an independent and objective evaluation of the two-year Government Grant Scheme including an interim evaluation at the end of Year 1 and a final evaluation at the end of the scheme.

The terms of reference set out several objectives for the evaluation report, these are presented in this section along with the approach undertaken to meet key requirements.



## The terms of reference identified the following as its main objectives:

- A. To objectively evaluate the effectiveness of the Scheme in contributing to an enhanced playing and training environment for Inter County ladies' footballers and camogie players
- B. To identify and assess the key features and strengths /weaknesses of the Scheme
- C. To support the Scheme Implementation Group to determine future priorities for the strategic development of the Scheme

## The evaluation should include:

- ✓ An objective examination of if, and how the Scheme has impacted on county players' and county teams' development across the Schemes three primary areas (Injury Prevention and Medical Cover, Maximising Player and Team Performance, Access to Training Facilities)
- ✓ An objective examination of the perception of Inter County players on how the Scheme has impacted on their playing and training environment
- ✓ An objective examination of the methods and activities used to deliver the Scheme
- ✓ An objective examination of the systems used to track outcomes during the Scheme's implementation
- ✓ An objective examination of the range of relationships amongst stakeholders/participants engaged in the development and implementation of the Scheme
- ✓ An objective examination of the supports made available to participants in the Scheme
- ✓ An objective examination of the governance and administration processes of the Scheme
- ✓ An objective examination of the deployment of resources used to implement the Scheme
- ✓ A review of the promotional activities (promoting sport as a healthy activity) performed by Inter County Camogie and ladies football teams
- ✓ Provision of objective recommendations for future priorities for the strategic development of the Scheme.



S3 Solutions was appointed to complete the evaluation in November 2017. The following represents the steps taken in compiling this evaluation report.

STAGE

1

Initiation meeting with the Scheme Implementation Group (SIG) to agree Evaluation Framework & approach

STAGE

2

Development and distribution of web based survey to all participating counties (administrators, managers, player reps and players)

STAGE

3

Focus group workshops with all participating counties at grant scheme workshop events in Limerick, Enniskillen and Dublin

STAGE

4

Facilitated reflective discussion with the Scheme Implementation Group (SIG) and representatives of the various associations

STAGE

5

Development and submission of Interim Evaluation report (April 2018)

STAGE

6

Facilitated reflective discussion with Scheme Implementation Group (May 2018)

STAGE

7

Individual facilitated discussions with SIG members and National Steering Group reps (June - October 2018)

STAGE

8

Facilitated discussion with 16 Counties to discuss experiences/impact and process (June - October 2018)

STAGE

9

Facilitated reflective discussion with SIG to discuss key findings and recommendations (October 2018)

STAGE

10

Final evaluation developed and signed off (November 2018)



## Evaluation Reflections

This evaluation report presents key findings in two key sections: **Impact (Section 4)** and **Implementation (Section 5)**.

The interim report (April 2018) focused primarily on the emerging impact of the scheme. The rationale was that a proposal would be developed by the SIG and submitted to Sport Ireland/ the Department of Transport Tourism and Sport for a continuation or extension of the scheme in May 2018. Thus, the availability of impact data was prioritised to help shape and inform this proposal. Subsequent consultations with stakeholders have focused on an assessment of the scheme implementation, including a review of systems, structures, processes and future direction. This report is an amalgamation of both.

A number of evaluation reflections have been acknowledged.

- County Boards and teams experience a natural turnover of players, administrators and coaching staff at the end of each season. Some of those participating in the interim evaluation may not have experienced intercounty football or camogie prior to the grant scheme and therefore have no baseline experience with which to measure change. The research and consultation phase of the interim evaluation coincided with this natural turnover (November 2017 – February 2018)
- Efforts have been made to ensure the validity and reliability of findings through multiple method consultation (surveys, focus groups and interviews). As with any survey data, errors due to question non-responses may exist. The number of respondents who choose to respond to a survey question may be different from those who chose not to respond, thus creating bias. The multiple method consultation process was extended on two occasions to enable further engagement and sampling. Thus, the consultation process reached a point of theoretical saturation and the concepts in the thematic analysis are well developed.
- The scheme set out to improve standards across a number of identified areas. There was no baseline data or set of minimum standards with which to compare or measure change. Some baseline data was derived from a 2014 research report by the WGPA but this did not have direct alignment with the scheme objectives. Given the lack of baseline data survey responses gathered and semi structured interviews were largely dependent on participant recall and may be distorted and imprecise. This affects the overall reliability of the data collected. Establishing change and outcomes requires comparative data, representing a limitation within this evaluation and a future area of development for the scheme.
- The data gathered during this evaluation may be used as baseline information for any future evaluation of the scheme.



## GRANT SCHEME HEADLINES AND FACTS

The government grant scheme was reflective of the calendar years 2017 and 2018.

The headline statistics presented overleaf are taken from the interim evaluation April 2018. This section also offers an analysis of the allocation of funds over the 2 year lifespan and use of grant aid overall. This contextualises consultation data presented later in the report.



70% of players report increases in the extent to which they view themselves as an elite athlete

84% of players & 90% of managers' report the grant scheme as contributing to an increase in the general standard of the Inter County game

66% of players and 92% of managers' report increased standards of injury prevention

60% of players and 90% of managers' report increased standard of specialist coaching (i.e. goalkeeping)

46% of players and 67% of County Board Members/Managers report improved unity of purpose/relationships in the County

55 County teams accessed grant support (23 Camogie, 32 Football)

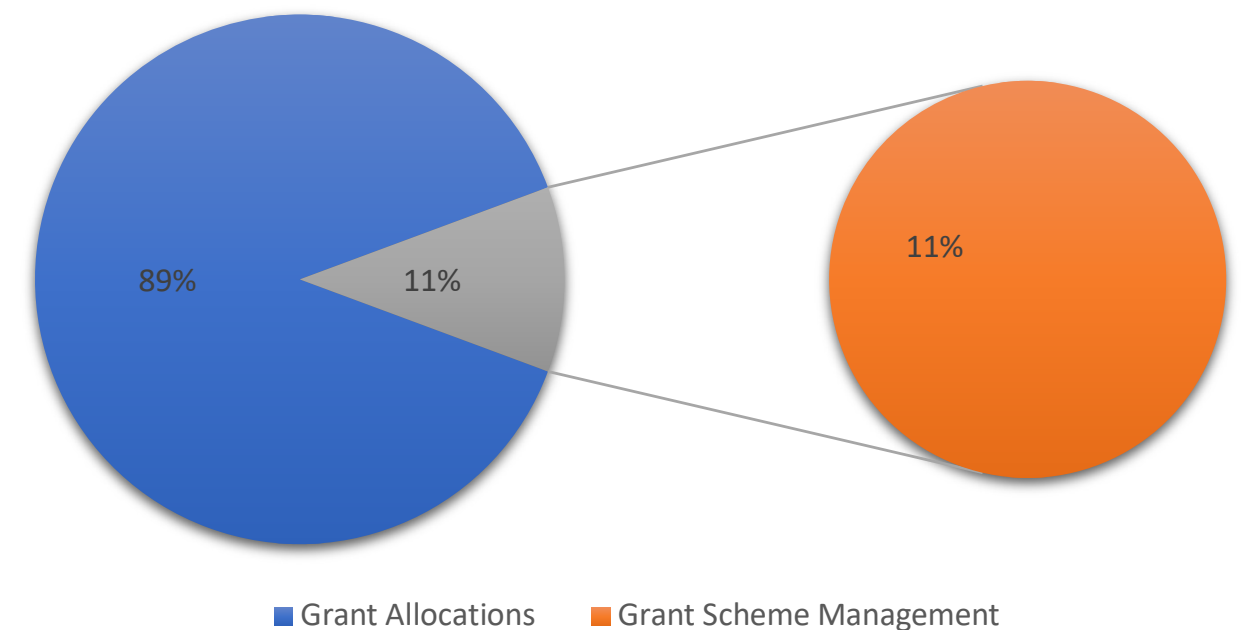
Physio at matches and at training (33%), strength & conditioning (17%) were the most common uses of grant aid

## Overall analysis of spend

The following charts provide an overall allocation of funds, as well as the breakdown of funds across each of the priority areas to all participating Counties across both codes. The total grants allocated in 2017 and 2018 was €886,911.96. 89% of the overall allocation from the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport was distributed to County teams.

Of the 11% used for grant scheme management, this accounted for the cost of: independent administration & evaluation, venue hire for grant workshops, reimbursement of county travel costs to workshops, the development of a promotional video for the scheme and the use of year 1 underspend for the development of enhanced grant workshops

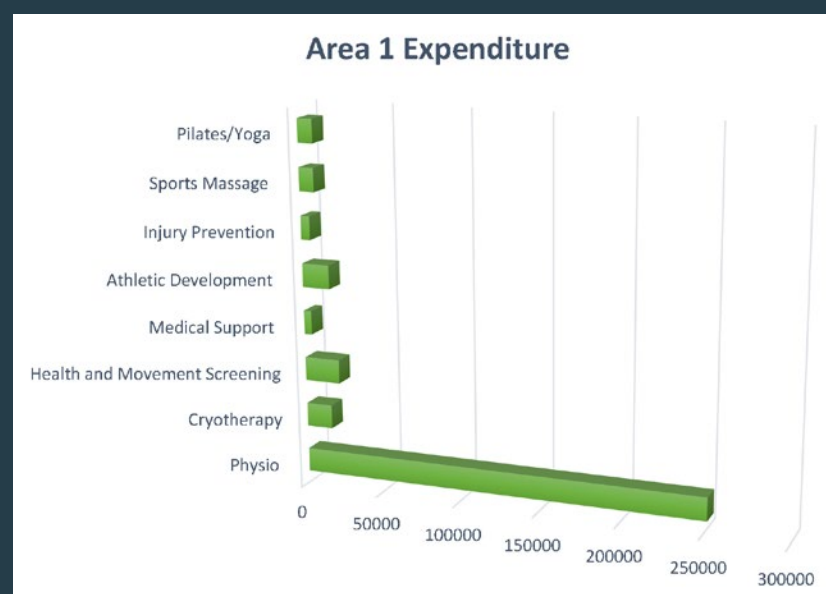
### Overview of Grant Scheme Expenditure





## Injury Prevention and Medical Cover

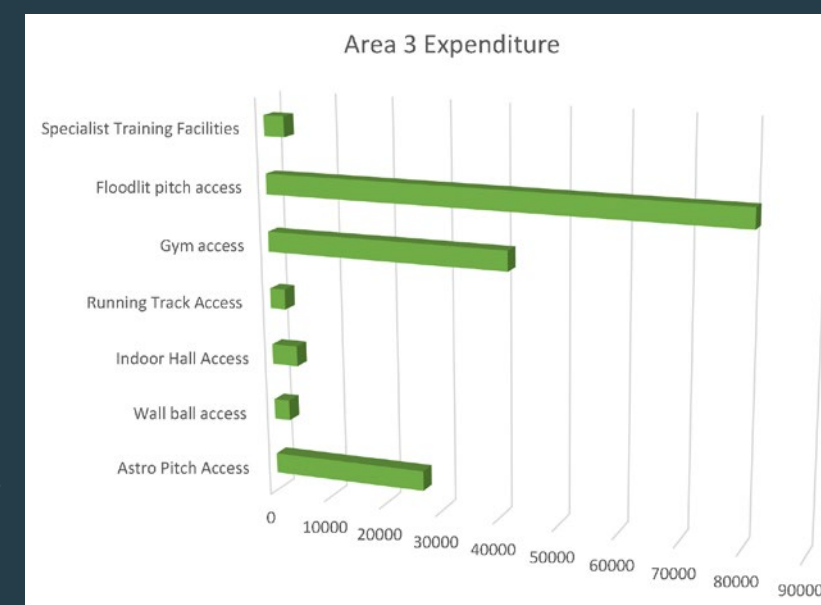
This support enables teams to invest in pre-habilitation activity such as movement screening, mobility training and injury prevention services. It also enables teams to access appropriate physiotherapy and medical cover at games and training or to specialist recovery services.



## Access to Training Facilities

The third investment area for teams supports access to specialist training facilities such as: all weather, indoor and floodlit facilities as well as gym and pool use. A total amount of €162,931.00 was invested in this area, accounting for

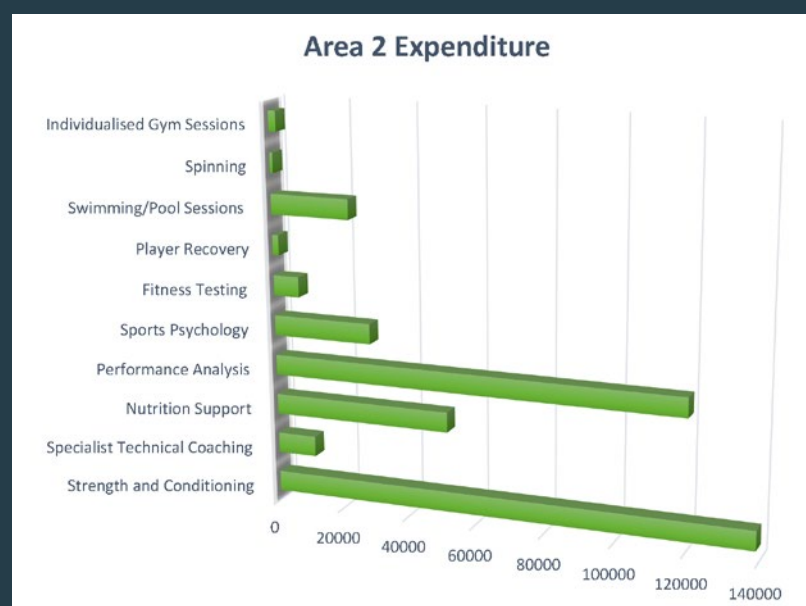
- 18% of the overall grant allocation.
- Access to floodlit pitches (49%), gym access (26%) and astro pitches (16%) made up the majority of this area.



## Maximizing Player and Team Performance

This area seeks to create enhanced and consistent access to activities and services such as strength and conditioning programmes, specialist coaching, performance analysis (e.g. video analysis and player statistics), performance nutrition advice and psychological preparation. Counties can only use the funds to engage industry accredited personnel. €387,081.88 was claimed by Counties for support under area 2, accounting for

- 44% of the overall grant allocation.
- Access to strength and conditioning (36%) and performance analysis (31%) were the most popular services accessed under area 2.



Year 2 of the grant scheme showed a greater diversity of spending areas, for example

- in year 1 Physiotherapy accounted for 33% of the overall spend, this reduced to 28% of overall spend after year 2 figures were considered.
- In addition, spend on performance analysis increased from 12% of the year 1 grant to 14% overall whilst year 2 included a greater diversity of activity under headings such as strength and conditioning and nutrition support.



## GRANT SCHEME IMPACT

A mixed method consultation approach with grant scheme stakeholders has enabled an assessment of the emerging impact of the grant scheme. A web-based survey containing a mixture of closed and open questions was developed and distributed, gathering 367 responses between December 2017 and February 2018.

A series of focus groups were facilitated with player representatives, managers and county board representatives at grant workshops in December and January 2018. In addition, a further 18 semi structured interviews were facilitated with County Secretary's, SIG representatives and National Steering Group members between June and October 2018. Overall, at least 400 individuals contributed to consultations informing the evaluation report.

This section sets out the key consultation findings regarding the impact of the grant scheme in contributing to raising standards and providing an enhanced training environment.

## Overview of Consultations and Thematic Analysis

The following provides some key information regarding consultation participation. In relation to the survey:

- ✓ 64% of respondents to the survey associated mostly with Ladies Football and 36% with Camogie, this is proportionate to the number of participating teams in each code
- ✓ At least 1 response was received from every County, with 40 the highest response rate from a single county (across both codes) and 27 the highest response rate from a single team.
- ✓ 100% of managers & administrators and 81% of all players indicated that they are aware of the Government Grant Scheme
- ✓ Players reported that physio at matches (87%), physio at training (76%), Strength and conditioning (70%) and access to facilities such as floodlit pitches (65%), gym (42%) and synthetic pitches (40%) were the most common uses of grant scheme
- ✓ Managers and administrators perceived strength and conditioning as the most common use of the scheme (80%) ahead of physio at training (78%) and physio at matches (69%).

More than 296 players reps, managers, County Board members, association representatives and SIG members participated in focus Group discussions and individual interviews. These were facilitated at 3 grant information workshops in Limerick, Enniskillen and Dublin (December 2017 – January 2018) and via telephone consultations (June – October 2018). Engagements with the Scheme Implementation group took place in November 2017, January 2018, May 2018 and October 2018.

The impact analysis of the grant scheme is structured under the following key headings:

- ✓ Raising Standards
- ✓ Experience of the Grant Scheme
- ✓ Indirect Impacts

*\* 'welfare support reflects the availability of showers, travel, overnight accommodation etc. Whilst these were not provided directly by the grant scheme, it was recognised that the grant scheme freed up resources to enable greater levels of these supports'*



## Raising Standards

The core objective of the fund is about raising standards and improving the standard of playing and training environments. Respondents to the survey were asked to rate perceived increases or decreases in standards as a direct result of services/support accessed in the 2017 season. The following represents the views of players/player reps and managers/administrators for comparison:

### Players

**84%**

of players report that the standard of the Inter County game generally has increased slightly or increased greatly

**66%**

of players report that the standard of injury prevention provision has increased slightly or greatly

**63%**

of players report that the standard of welfare support has increased slightly or greatly

**60%**

of players report that the standard of specialist coaching has increased slightly or greatly

**53%**

of players report that the standard of training facilities has increased slightly or greatly

### Managers / Administrators

**90%**

of managers/administrators report that the standard of the Inter County game generally has increased slightly or increased greatly

**92%**

of managers/administrators report that the standard of injury prevention provision has increased slightly or greatly

**88%**

of managers/administrators report that the standard of welfare support has increased slightly or greatly

**90%**

of managers/administrators report that the standard of specialist coaching has increased slightly or greatly

**73%**

of managers/administrators report that the standard of training facilities has increased slightly or greatly

A clear majority of those engaged reported an increase in standards in the Inter County game. The standard of injury prevention, standard of specialist coaching, standard of player welfare and standard of the Inter County game generally were reported as having experienced the greatest increases.

**“VERY POSITIVE AND EXCELLENT INITIATIVE. ALLOWS THE TEAM TO BECOME EVEN MORE PROFESSIONAL. ALLOWED TEAM TO IMPROVE STANDARDS (PLAYER)”**

For most players, this increase in standard is aligned to the increased access to professional services such as physiotherapists at training and at games, to dedicated strength and conditioning coaches, sports psychologists and performance analysis as well as access to improved facilities. The link between greater access to professional services and improved standards appears self-evident. The impact of the grant scheme therefore appears to be in creating the access to professional services, particularly where it would otherwise not have been there. References to welfare support reflect the provision of transport to games, overnight stays, access to facilities with showers and access to food after games. Whilst the grant scheme did not provide all of these directly, some respondents attributed the availability of grant scheme finance to ‘freeing up resources’ within the County to provide this type of welfare support.

The findings indicate that managers/administrators perceive greater increases in standards compared to players. This may reflect a greater understanding and awareness of what the grant scheme provided within specific Counties, and therefore an understanding of ‘what would not have been available’ in the absence of grant funding. The highest levels of attribution to the grant scheme were aligned to increased standards of injury prevention and increased standards

**“THE GRANT SCHEME ACKNOWLEDGED OUR SENIOR INTER COUNTY PLAYERS AS ELITE ATHLETES. COUNTY MANAGEMENT WERE FORCED TO LOOK AT WAYS TO ASSIST OUR ELITE PLAYERS WHICH THEY WOULD NOT NECESSARILY HAVE CONSIDERED BEFORE. COUNTY COACHES AND EXECUTIVES WERE PROVIDED WITH THE OPPORTUNITY TO TRY AND TEST SERVICES TO ASSIST OUR TOP PLAYERS AND PROMOTE OUR COUNTY TEAMS THAT THEY COULD NOT NECESSARILY HAVE AFFORDED PREVIOUSLY (ADMINISTRATOR)”**



In seeking to understand the impact of the Grant Scheme from a non-playing perspective, 10 County Secretary's (sample size of 18% of all grantees) participated in semi structured interviews. The findings are consistent with the survey data in that 9 of 10 reported significant impact:

**“ MADE ALL THE DIFFERENCE IN THE WORLD AND ALLOWED THE TEAM TO ANALYSE GAMES AND PROVIDE STATISTICS WHICH THEY HAD NEVER BEEN IN A POSITION TO DO BEFORE. I COULD ALSO SEE A BIG DIFFERENCE IN THE GIRLS AND THEIR ABILITY TO TRAIN IN THE DAYS AFTER HAVING A MATCH DUE TO BETTER RECUPERATION AND RECOVERY. ”**

**“ MADE A HUGE DIFFERENCE, THE COUNTY WAS IN FINANCIAL DIFFICULTY. IT CHANGED WHAT WE COULD DO FOR THE PLAYERS. TWO THINGS WHICH WE SPENT THE MONEY ON AND WERE THE HIGHLIGHTS FOR THE GIRLS- MOTIVATIONAL TALK WITH A WELL KNOW COUNTY MANAGER AND A SPORT PSYCHOLOGIST, THESE WERE GAME CHANGERS AND GAVE GIRLS MORE OF AN ONUS TO TAKE ON RESPONSIBILITY IN THEIR SPORT. THE COUNTY BOARD WOULD NOT HAVE AGREED TO THESE TWO TALKS AND THEY PROVED THE MOST BENEFICIAL. ”**

**“ THE GRANT SCHEME MADE A HUGE DIFFERENCE TO OUR COUNTY TEAM. RESULTING FROM THE ROLLOUT OF THE GRANT IN 2017, KERRY'S JUNIOR TEAM HAS ACHIEVED A STEP FURTHER EACH YEAR, 2017 REACHING SEMI FINAL IN ALL IRELAND JUNIOR CHAMPIONSHIP AND SEMI FINAL IN DIVISION 3 NATIONAL LEAGUES. IN 2018, KERRY JUNIOR TEAM, WON DIVISION 3 NATIONAL LEAGUE AND REACHED ALL IRELAND JUNIOR CHAMPIONSHIP FINAL. THIS HAS BEEN A REMARKABLE ACHIEVEMENT FROM A SMALL COUNTY LIKE KERRY. ”**

## Attributions

In comparing their access to services and facilities in 2017 with the 2016 season, 43% of the players and 59% of administrators/managers' report that they did not access these services in the previous season (2016). Two key reasons were provided to explain this, including: "did not have the finances/resources" or "did not have a team".

Relating to access to services prior to the grant scheme, most administrators and managers (67%) reported in the survey that they would have had some access to the same services in 2016, but not at the same level.

Only 2 County teams report that they would have had the same access, whereas 14 teams (28%) report that they would not have had access at all in the absence of government grant.

This is reinforced in engagements with County Secretaries who reported on the proportion of the County budget for Senior Inter County team made up by the grant scheme, responses ranged from:

- ☒ **the scheme is very significant and was fantastic for our County, it covered around 40% of our budget, it may have even been 50%.**
- ☒ **Very significant – roughly about 25% of senior teams budget.**
- ☒ **Our life is a lot easier, less stress on trying to raise funds. Could refocus efforts on other things the county needs as a result of this being paid, it made up about 30% (of our senior team budget)**
- ☒ **The grant scheme was very significant for our county. It was a large proportion of our overall budget. It allowed opportunities to avail of strength & conditioning in their training to improve and enhance their overall fitness**
- ☒ **It made up about 50% of our budget**
- ☒ **In 2017 the grant made up approximately 5% of our budget, we probably would have been able to provide support anyway**

The data suggests high levels of attribution to any increase in service and thus impact, directly to the grant scheme.



In addition to improved standards on the field, the grant scheme appears to have contributed to improved off field standards:

- ✓ **70%** of players have reported increases in the extent to which they view themselves as an elite athlete
- ✓ **63%** of administrators and managers reported increased professionalism of the County Board
- ✓ **61%** of administrators and managers reported increased skills within the County Board

“ **MORE FUNDS ALLOCATED TO THE SCHEME IS THE BIGGEST PRIORITY. OUR PLAYERS READ OF THE GRANTS TO OTHER SPORTS AND THIS SCHEME, THOUGH VERY WELCOME APPEARS TO BE JUST A TINY STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION- ONWARDS AND UPWARDS HOPEFULLY** (ADMINISTRATOR) ”

The perceived increases in ‘being viewed as an elite athlete’ include high levels of attribution to the grant scheme from players. This is similar for increases in professionalism and skills, with reference to the processes required to access, administer and spend the grant as key contributors to increased professionalism and skills within the County Board.

The attribution of impact appears stronger in Counties that self-report as “lower grade” or “weaker” compared to those that are perceived as “higher grade” or “stronger”. This is reflective of a dramatic increase in access to services, in many cases accessing services or facilities for the first time compared to Counties who have already been exposed to these types of high performance initiatives. *“I am aware of the grant scheme, but I have not noticed much changes over the last 12 months”*. It is likely that this difference in perception will reduce should the grant scheme continue.

Despite general overall recognition of an increase in standards, one of the consistent themes emerging from the consultation process was the notion of **“a step in the right direction”**. A considerable proportion of players appeared to reflect on **“a new phase/stage of Inter County competition”** that focuses on high performance. This is reflected by one player who indicates:

“ **GREAT INITIATIVE. WOULD FEEL LUCKY TO BE A TEAM THAT IS AT A STAGE WHERE HIGH PERFORMANCE IS THE NEXT STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT AND ARE THEREFORE ABLE TO UTILISE THIS GRANT TO HIGHER DEGREE WHILE A LOT OF OTHER COUNTIES ARE STRUGGLING TO PROVIDE THE NECESSITIES FOR THEIR TEAMS. ENABLED US TO DEVELOP A RELATIONSHIP WITH OUR COUNTY BOARD AND ENLIGHTEN THEM ABOUT WHAT IS NECESSARY TO PROGRESS.** ”

Others in recognising the **‘step in the right direction’** also suggested that it is now **“impossible to go back to where we were”**. This aligns to an overarching finding that recognises the direct correlation between increased resources, leading to increased access to services, and therefore increased standards. This is reflected in significant numbers of respondents who then indicated additional funding or increased resources as a critical next step for the scheme.

Notable mentions were made regarding the impact of the scheme on player ‘turn out’ or ‘drop out’. The increased access to professional coaching, injury prevention and facilities appeared to be a key contributor to increased attendance. Meaningful references were made to increased internal competition between members of the same team, feelings of “not wanting to fall behind” are derived from the extra strength and conditioning sessions for example. Furthermore, this competitive edge is perceived to transfer to County level and ultimately Inter County games. A broad consensus is that the increased competition contributes to increases in standards overall.

“ **WHILE WE ACCESSED SOME OF THE SPORTS SCIENCE SUPPORTS BEFORE LAST YEAR, THE FUNDING ALLOWED US TO ROLL IT OUT IN A MORE CONSISTENT AND PROFESSIONAL WAY THIS YEAR. AS EVERYTHING WAS AGREED BETWEEN THE 3 PARTIES BEFOREHAND, THERE WAS BETTER ACCOUNTABILITY FOR ENSURING THE ACTION PLAN WAS IMPLEMENTED. A MORE ENJOYABLE PLAYING EXPERIENCE, FELT MORE VALUED AS A PLAYER & IT FREED UP MONEY FOR THE COUNTY BOARD TO SPEND ON OTHER THINGS E.G. WE RAN AN UNDERAGE DEVELOPMENT ACADEMY IN NOVEMBER FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER** (PLAYER) ”



“  
“  
VERY POSITIVE AND EXCELLENT INITIATIVE. ALLOWS  
THE TEAM TO BECOME EVEN MORE PROFESSIONAL.  
ALLOWED TEAM TO IMPROVE STANDARDS  
”  
”

“  
“  
AS ONE OF THE COUNTIES POSSIBLY CONSIDERED WEAKER THAN THE REST, THE  
GRANT PROVIDED US WITH SUPPORTS AND SERVICES ALLOWING US TO IMPROVE  
PLAYERS INDIVIDUALLY AND THEN AS A UNITED TEAM. THE PSYCHOLOGIST MENTALLY  
BROUGHT US ON AND SO DID OUR STRENGTH AND CONDITIONING COACH AMONG MANY  
OTHER THINGS, BUT THESE SERVICES WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE WITHOUT  
THE FUNDING WE RECEIVED. (PLAYER)  
”  
”

“  
“  
RECOGNITION OF LADIES FOOTBALLERS AND CAMOGIE PLAYERS AS ELITE  
ATHLETES. OPPORTUNITY TO CREATE A MORE LEVEL PLAYING FIELD BY  
ALLOWING ALL COUNTIES THE OPPORTUNITY TO ACCESS SUPPORTS  
SUCH AS S&C AND PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS  
”  
”

“  
“  
THE LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT OF PLAYERS APPEARS TO INFLUENCE THEIR AWARENESS  
OF THE IMPACT OF THE GRANT SCHEME AND THEREFORE ATTRIBUTION OF THE  
SCHEME TO ANY IMPACT. WE HAVEN'T ACCESSED THE POOL SO FAR THIS YEAR, BUT  
FOR THE MOST PART LAST YEAR WE HAD TO PAY OURSELVES, WE DON'T GET EXPENSES  
FOR TRAVELLING HOME FROM COLLEGE OR WORK IN OTHER COUNTIES DURING THE WEEK  
AND WE FUNDRAISE/PAY FOR ANY GEAR WE RECEIVE OR TRAINING WEEKENDS WE GO ON  
”  
”

“  
“  
I FEEL IT CONTRIBUTED TO BETTER TRAINING FACILITIES AND ALLOWS PLAYERS  
GREATER ACCESS TO THE DIFFERENT SPORT SCIENCE ELEMENTS OF THE GAME  
INCLUDING VIDEO ANALYSIS, RECOVERY METHODS, STRENGTH AND  
CONDITIONING. AREAS THAT MIGHT BE CONSIDERED MORE WITHIN THE FUTURE, ARE  
LOOKING AT TRAVEL EXPENSES. BUT DEFINITELY A VERY POSITIVE STEP IN THE RIGHT  
DIRECTION.  
”  
”

“  
“  
I THINK OVER TIME AS THE STANDARD AND PROFILE OF INTER COUNTY FOOTBALL  
CONTINUES TO IMPROVE THERE WILL BE MORE OF AN OPPORTUNITY TO USE THE  
GRANT SCHEME FOR SPECIALISED PRODUCTS AND SERVICES. CURRENTLY TOO MUCH  
OF THE FUNDING IS ALLOWED FOR PHYSIO WHICH MAKES IT EASY FOR COUNTY BOARDS TO JUST  
CLAIM THE MAXIMUM AMOUNT FOR PHYSIO. I FEEL PHYSIOTHERAPY IS A MINIMUM  
REQUIREMENT THAT SHOULD BE PROVIDED FOR PLAYERS AT THIS LEVEL AND SHOULD  
NOT BE INCLUDED IN THE CRITERIA UNDER THE GOVERNMENT GRANT SCHEME  
”  
”

“  
“  
IT HAS RAISED THE PROFESSIONALISM OF THE SPORT. IT HAS ALLOWED COUNTY  
TEAMS WHO PREVIOUSLY HAD NO ACCESS TO STRENGTH AND CONDITIONING, GYMS,  
AND PHYSIO AT TRAINING TO GAIN ACCESS. IT HAS DIRECTLY INFLUENCED THE RATE  
OF PLAYER TURNOVER IN JUST ONE YEAR. THIS WILL THEREFORE IMPROVE THE LEVEL OF  
COMPETITION IN THE CHAMPIONSHIP AND LEAGUE. IT HAS MADE PLAYERS FEEL MORE  
LIKE ATHLETES AND THEREFORE TRAIN MORE LIKE ATHLETES. IT HAS ALSO BEEN A  
MODEL FOR THE POWER OF INDIVIDUALS TO MAKE CHANGE.  
”  
”

“  
“  
IT'S A STEP IN THE  
RIGHT DIRECTION, BUT  
THERE IS STILL A LONG  
WAY TO GO TO MEET STANDARDS  
THAT ARE REQUIRED  
AT INTER COUNTY LEVEL  
NOW  
”  
”

“  
“  
FROM TALKING TO  
OTHER COUNTIES, IT  
SEEMS VERY POSITIVE,  
BUT I DIDN'T NOTICE HUGE  
DIFFERENCES IN MY COUNTY  
”  
”



## Experience of the Grant Scheme

One of the key distinguishable characteristics about this grant scheme is that it is to be used by teams collectively, rather than paid to individuals. Thus, adequate engagement and consultation between managers, administrators and player reps to design and develop the application for grant aid was set out in the guidance as one of the requisites of the application process.

Respondents were asked to report on the grant scheme process in their respective Counties using a set of Likert scale questions in the survey, the key findings include:

### Players / Player Reps

**55%**

of players agree or strongly agree that they understood what they could and could not apply for

**57%**

of players agree or strongly agree that they were aware of the application process and were consulted as part of the process, 30% disagree or strongly disagree that this was the case

**57%**

of players agree or strongly agree that players voices were represented in the decision-making process

**71%**

of players agree or strongly agree that the grant scheme priorities are applicable and relevant, only 5% disagree and 23% are unsure

### Managers / Administrators

**90%**

of managers/administrators agree or strongly agree that they understood what they could and could not apply for

**98%**

of managers/administrators agree or strongly agree that the completion of the application form was a collective effort involving county board representatives, managers and players

**90%**

of managers/administrators agree or strongly agree that players voices were represented in the decision-making process

**96%**

of managers/administrators agree or strongly agree that the grant scheme priorities are applicable and relevant, only 4% disagree

This experience appears to differ on a team by team basis, no specific trends have emerged by County or by code. Several clear trends have emerged during the thematic analysis;

- 1 High levels of awareness of the scheme, yet low levels of engagement in its design creates frustration amongst playing members. "The grant itself is a huge positive to Inter County teams but the implementation of funds was a negative experience within our county". This polarises the administrative and playing sides of the County, leading to perceptions/and misperceptions regarding the use of the grant such as "We received nothing more than we would any other season. In my opinion our county board used the €8,000 as part of their normal annual budget and not in addition to their annual budget for the Senior Ladies team".

**“ IT IS DEFINITELY A GREAT INITIATIVE BUT HOW GOOD THE IMPACT IS DEPENDS ON HOW EACH COUNTY BOARD AND MANAGEMENT USE IT AND PERSONALLY DIDN'T SEE A MASSIVE IMPACT IN OUR COUNTY UNFORTUNATELY ”**

- 2 The level of involvement of players appears to influence their awareness of the impact of the grant scheme and therefore attribution of the scheme to any impact. In one County, 100% of managers/administrators reported the grant scheme as having a major contribution to improved injury prevention standards for example. Conversely, less than one third of players in this County recognise the government grant scheme as having a 'major contribution' on any improvement to injury prevention. Further, in Counties that appear to have implemented a highly consultative and engaging process, participation in the evaluation activities (surveys and focus groups) was evidently stronger.
- 3 Where Counties appear to have co-designed the grant application and negotiated use of the grant with players, it has contributed to a greater unity of purpose and morale in that County. This manifests in players reporting greater understanding and empathy for the job of county administrators, whilst those on the administrative side of the County report having a greater appreciation for the requirements to compete at the elite level.

**“ VERY POSITIVE, INCREASED ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN PLAYERS REPS/PLAYER/ MANAGEMENT. ALLEVIATED SOME PRESSURE FOR CONSTANT FUNDRAISING RAISING, ALLOWED US ELITE PLAYERS GAIN ACCESS TO ELITE FACILITIES. INCREASED MORAL IN THE SQUAD AS A RESULT AND INCREASED OUR OVERALL APPRECIATION FOR THE WORK THAT THE WGPA DO FOR US ALSO ”**



In the semi structured interviews with 10 County Secretaries in June – October 2018, the following descriptions of the experience of the grant scheme were recorded:

“ MEETINGS WERE HELD TO REACH AGREEMENT WITH ALL THREE PARTICIPATING AT THE COUNTY BOARD- PLAYERS AND MANAGEMENT WOULD PRESENT WHAT THEY WOULD LIKE TO HAPPEN, THE COUNTY BOARD WOULD PRESENT WHAT THEY EXPECTED TO HAPPEN. IF THINGS WENT OUTSIDE THE BUDGET THE COUNTY BOARD WOULD MEET THESE COSTS, USUALLY THEY WOULD BE MET E.G. 90% OF THE TIME PROVIDED THEY WERE IN THE BEST INTERESTS FOR THE COUNTY. ”

“ WE WOULD SIT DOWN AS SECRETARY, MANAGER AND HER SELECTED PLAYERS (CAPTAINS VICE CAPTAINS) LOOK AT THE OPTIONS AND ADDRESSED WHAT WAS NEEDED. MANAGER AND PLAYERS WOULD GIVE THEIR INDIVIDUAL IDEALS AND HOPEFULLY WE COULD REACH A CONSENSUS. IT HAS GONE WELL AND WE REACHED A GOOD BALANCE. FIRST YEAR WAS A BIT TOUGH AS WE DIDN'T WANT TO SPEND THE MONEY. BROKEN UP SECTIONS IS VERY GOOD. ONCE THE INITIAL DECISIONS ARE MADE THE MANAGEMENT AND COUNTY BOARD TAKE ON THE RESPONSIBILITY, HOWEVER I FOUND AS THE SECRETARY I DID MOST OF THE WORK. THE MANAGER ARRANGED THE DISCUSSION SESSIONS. ”

“ DECISIONS WERE MADE BETWEEN TEAM MANAGEMENT AND PLAYERS, WITHIN REASON ANY REQUEST MADE BY PLAYERS WOULD BE MET REGARDLESS OF WHETHER THE GRANT WAS AVAILABLE. THEY ALREADY HAD A GOOD SETUP FOR A DECISION MAKING PROCESS, THE GRANT WAS ADMINISTERED THROUGH THAT ALREADY IN PLACE. ”

“ MYSELF AND (OTHER SEC) ATTENDED THE WORKSHOPS WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF PLAYERS AND MANAGEMENT. WE COLLABORATED AND THEN AGREED ON WHAT THE GRANT SHOULD BE SPENT ON AND THEN BROUGHT IT TO THE BOARD, WHO HAD NO ISSUES. ”

“ ALL OF THE SECRETARIES ENGAGED REPORTED A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE APPLICATION, ALTHOUGH SOME APPEAR TO HAVE HAD MORE INVOLVEMENT FROM PLAYERS THAN OTHERS. THE VIEWS PUT FORWARD WERE REFLECTIVE OF YEAR 2 OF THE SCHEME AND APPEAR TO HIGHLIGHT A MORE COLLABORATIVE APPROACH GENERALLY THAN IN YEAR 1. THIS MAY REFLECT THE EMPHASIS PLACED ON COLLABORATION AT THE YEAR 2 GRANT WORKSHOPS. ”

“ THE WGPA REPS ORGANISED A MEETING TOGETHER WITH THE TEAM AND MANAGEMENT AND DISCUSSED THE AREAS THEY NEEDED TO FOCUS ON THIS YEAR WITH REGARDS TO THE GRANT SCHEME. THE WGPA REPS THEN MET WITH THE COUNTY BOARD REPS AND DISCUSSED WHAT WAS REQUIRED. PLAYERS, MANAGEMENT, WGPA AND COUNTY BOARD REPS WORKED IN AGREEMENT IN PROCESSING THE GRANT SCHEME. ”

“ WGAP COUNTY BOARD REP, MYSELF AND COUNTY MANAGER LIAISED WITH ONE ANOTHER. MANAGER ALREADY KNEW WHAT HE WANTED TO SPEND THE MONEY ON – HAD A PLAN ALREADY IN PLACE – SO WE MATCHED THIS WITH REQUIREMENTS OF THE GRANT. ”

“ WE HAD A COLLECTIVE APPROACH. MYSELF, SENIOR MANAGER AND CAPTAIN ALL ATTENDED AND AGREED WHAT IT SHOULD BE SPENT ON. ”

All of the Counties engaged reported a collaborative approach to the development of the application, although some appear to have had more involvement from players than others. The views put forward were reflective of year 2 of the scheme and appear to highlight a more collaborative approach generally than in year 1. This may reflect the emphasis placed on collaboration at the year 2 grant workshops.





# Indirect Impacts

The objectives of the grant scheme are clearly set out in relation to raising standards and improving the playing and training environments. However, the feedback from consultations has identified a range of indirect impacts of the scheme.

## Self esteem/Confidence and Role Models

A recurring theme throughout the consultation process was the increases to self-esteem and self-confidence experienced and reported by players. This is reflected both in the significant (70%) proportion of players who report increases in the extent to which they view themselves as an elite athlete and anecdotally through focus group data. In relation to attribution, the consultation identifies several key trends regarding the source of this impact:

- 1

**Recognition** – several references to the source of funding (i.e. government support) were regarded as an endorsement of esteem by players, administrators and managers: “Apart from extra funding which was vital, the grant scheme gave an impression of elitism and professionalism to our players, allowing them to see that they were regarded as top sportspeople by our government”.
- 2

**Professionalism** - In both open-ended survey questions and through focus group engagement, players associate “access” to professional coaches and service providers with status and feelings of “elite”. The perception of enhanced professionalism has contributed to enhanced self-esteem and self-confidence: “It has raised the professionalism of the sport. It has allowed county teams who previously had no access to strength and conditioning, gyms, and physio at training to gain access. It has directly influenced the rate of player turnover in just one year. This will therefore improve the level of competition in the championship and league. It has made players feel more like athletes and therefore train more like athletes. It has also been a model for the power of individuals to make change”
- 3

**Role Models** – During focus group discussion, several Counties reflected on the “trickle down” impact of the grant. Players and coaches provided anecdotes about Minor teams showing significant increases in enthusiasm and motivation as a direct result of observing the seniors participate in strength and conditioning classes with a qualified coach. Players also acknowledge the “increased status” they felt within the County, emerging as role models for younger players and contributing to an increase in aspiration, this in turn generated enhancements to their own self-esteem.

## Profile/Perceptions and Decision Making

The introduction of the grant scheme was largely underpinned by negative perceptions amongst players within the Inter County game regarding how they viewed themselves as elite athletes, how they were viewed by the general population and how they were viewed by the sporting population. These were reported in the 2014 ‘Lets Make Things Better’ research report\*. The introduction of government support was regarded as a potential catalyst that would challenge these perceptions and create a greater recognition for the status of the game. The consultation process has revisited baseline findings from this research to assess potential change.

	STRONGLY AGREE/ AGREE	NOT SURE	DISAGREE/ STRONGLY DISAGREE	BASELINE 2014 (WHERE APPLICABLE)
Inter County female players are respected as elite athletes by the sporting population	41%	18%	41%	47% agreed and 38% disagreed
Inter County Female players are respected as elite athletes by the general population	17%	28%	55%	21% agreed 68% disagreed
Inter County Female game has a greater profile now than it did 2 years ago	95%	2%	3%	3% agreed that game got enough coverage in 2014
Inter County players are involved at decision making at county board level	25%	34%	40%	5% agreed and 77% disagreed
Inter County players are involved at decision making at national level	19%	43%	38%	3% agreed and 73% disagreed
I often feel stressed or overwhelmed as an Inter County player	56%	19%	25%	80% agreed

\* ‘Lets Make Things Better Research Report, WGPA, (2014)



Apparent personal/intrinsic increases to self-esteem and self-confidence are not reflected in players perceptions of how they are viewed externally. The survey findings demonstrate that there remain negative perceptions about how the Inter County game is viewed by the wider sporting and general population, this despite widespread agreement that the Inter County game has a greater profile than it did 2 years ago (the increased profile is difficult to attribute to the grant scheme alone, other factors such as sponsorship are major contributors during this time). This potentially reinforces the notion of the scheme as 'a step in the right direction' and a recognition that the scheme, and its impacts are still very much in its infancy.

The responses indicate considerable increases in the perceptions amongst players of their involvement in decision making at county level and at national level compared to the 2014 baseline. Despite improvement, only ¼ of players agree that Inter County players are involved in decision making at County Board level. This suggests a need for greater levels of engagement and involvement with players. It should be noted that only 10% of player reps responded to the survey. Player reps are party to the funding application in each County and therefore greater engagement from player reps may have affected this finding.

Players were also asked to identify the extent to which the scheme has helped build relationships between the various levels of the County setup.

- ☒ 46% of players strongly agree or agree that there is an enhanced unity of purpose between players, administrators and managers.
- ☒ 67% of county board members and managers report improved relations between the playing and administrative components of the County.

Despite considerable improvements to baseline data (2014) regarding players perception of their role in the decision-making processes at local level, the scheme could have anticipated an even greater improvement given the prominence of consultation in the application guidance. It should be noted that the engagements with County Secretaries in June – October 2018 already appear to reflect improvements in the level of consultation and co-design within Counties in year 2.



# Theory of Change

For clarity and ease of reference, the following theory of change seeks to summarise the emerging impact of the grant scheme in year 1. No previous evaluation of LGFA or Camogie has been commissioned or introduced, therefore the statements included in the theory of change diagram are based on information derived from two sources: 1) the consultation process informing this report, 2) 2014 let's make things better research report.

BEFORE	GOVERNMENT GRANT SCHEME	AFTER
<p>No previous government funding for Inter County LGFA &amp; Camogie</p> <p>Absence of opportunity to engage/access statutory funding for county teams</p> <p>Issues and concerns regarding standards/profile/status and perceptions of the game</p> <p>Frustration amongst associations and players at lack of recognition and support despite required commitment</p> <p>Varied approaches to interaction across counties relating to Inter County team development</p> <p>Annual fundraising requirements created pressure and stress for County boards, management and players</p> <p>Occasional difficulties with attendance at County training</p> <p>Varying levels of funds available to individual Counties (fundraising and sponsorship)</p> <p>Counties at varying levels of development (some did not have teams until 2016)</p>	<p>Scheme Implementation Group established incorporating Camogie Association, LGFA and WPGA with independent chair</p> <p>Central administrator appointed to administer scheme &amp; reporting</p> <p>€425,000 distributed in 2017 in direct grant aid to Inter County Camogie and Football teams</p> <p>23 Camogie teams and 32 Football teams accessed grants up to €8,000 for the 2017 season</p> <p>33% of funds spent on physio at training and matches, 17% to strength and conditioning, 12% to performance analysis, 7% to access gyms and floodlit/astro pitches</p>	<p>Increased access to professional services and facilities leading to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increases in standards of injury prevention</li> <li>Increases in standards of specialist coaching</li> <li>Increases in standards of player welfare</li> </ul> <p>Varying experiences of the grant scheme on team by team basis</p> <p>Increases in the extent to which players view themselves as elite athletes</p> <p>Increases in player input to decision making at County and National level</p> <p>Increases in unity of purpose/togetherness in County teams with high levels of consultation</p> <p>Increases in player attendance, self-esteem, self-confidence</p> <p>Trickle down effect on motivation and enthusiasm of younger players. Seniors are role models</p> <p>Increases in communication and collaboration between associations</p>



## Conclusion

The consultation process sought to explore the impact of the grant scheme against its underpinning objectives and aspirations. The findings demonstrate considerable perceived increases in standards, particularly in relation to injury prevention and specialist coaching with high levels of attribution to the government grant scheme. The survey has highlighted a disconnect in the view of players and administrators/managers, highlighting communication and co-design as a key area for development. It should be noted that this experience is different on a team by team basis and does not reflect the experience of an overall County or Code.

The findings highlight significant improvements in feelings of self-worth as elite athletes amongst players and despite challenges with process, overall players report having increased involvement in decision making at County level and at National level.

This section offered a range of qualitative statements that capture the individual and collective impact of the scheme as perceived by players, administrators and managers. It also offers a range of suggested areas of consideration for the future development of the grant scheme.

Further detail on the impact of the grant scheme is available in a promotional video produced by the SIG. Scan the code opposite to view the video:





# GRANT SCHEME IMPLEMENTATION

The Inter County Government Grant Scheme was a new initiative and therefore none of the systems, structures and processes existed prior to its emergence. Section 1 describes these structures and provides an overview of the timeline of activity, summarising the implementation of the scheme in 2017 – 2018.

The grant scheme has faced a number of challenges over its lifespan. The key challenges are highlighted in this section along with detail on how they have been overcome and key lessons learned. The information included in this section is derived from direct engagements with members of the SIG (individually and collectively) as well as consultations with members of the National Steering Group.

This section provides a thematic analysis of the findings from these engagements. This analysis is structured on the following key headings:

- 1 Grant Scheme Principles and Approach**
- 2 Strategic Fit**
- 3 Grant Scheme Governance (Systems, Structures and Processes)**
- 4 Tracking Outcomes and Impact Measurement**



## Grant Scheme Principles and Approach

The interim report in March 2018 identified that the key distinguishable characteristic of the grant scheme was its focus on a team approach and the shared development of applications by County boards, managers, player reps and player reps. The context underpinning the grant scheme is that of acknowledgement from Government of the elite status of the Intercounty game and a recognition of its contribution to the fabric of Counties and communities. This is a shared narrative that players, administrators, managers and associations are proud of, the spirit of this approach is reflective of the decision to allocate funds collectively to teams as opposed to awards to individual players, there remains wide consensus that this was the right model.

The importance and prominence of this 'ethos' has been reinforced consistently in follow up consultations and engagements with scheme administrators and national steering group reps. So much so that the thematic analysis has identified the emergence of a set of unwritten or undefined principles which appear to underpin the administration, management and delivery of the grant scheme. These include:

- 1 Unity of Purpose** - the scheme advocates the co-creation of applications by all of the stakeholders in a County. This is also replicated in the conduct and operation of the Scheme Implementation Group where decisions are debated, then agreed and communicated collectively as one body rather than as individual associations.
- 2 Equity of Access** - the same amount of funding is allocated to every eligible team across the various codes and the different tiers of competition. This is important in the context 'unity of purpose' and a collective movement to raise the standard of Ladies Football and Camogie overall.
- 3 Raising Standards** - the interim evaluation referenced considerable contributions made by the grant scheme in relation to participation, capacity building, relationship building. Whilst these were warmly accepted, the SIG has consistently revisited the underlying principle of the scheme on raising standards and sought to retain this focus over the duration of the funding period. Other impacts are regarded as highly beneficial and complementary.
- 4 Rigorous & Professional** - the SIG demonstrate rigour in the administration of grants, record keeping and data management and maintain a professional approach to partnership working and communication, both internal and external. There appears to be a shared sense of responsibility, not just for the implementation of the grant scheme itself, but in protecting what the introduction of the grant scheme means for the status and future direction of the both codes.
- 5 Measure Impact** - there is a clear collective recognition of the greater good of the grant scheme for Ladies Football and Camogie and female participation generally. Thus, a commitment to maximise and record its impact is evident both amongst the grant scheme administrators, but also amongst County representatives, this is reflected in their participation in the evaluation process.





## Strategic Position of the Grant Scheme

Funding of sport over the next 10 years in Ireland is intrinsically aligned with the new National Sports Policy 2018-2027<sup>1</sup>. It sets out a Vision for Irish Sport and defines the actions to be undertaken to achieve three high level goals, namely:

- **Increased Participation:** A significantly higher proportion of Irish children and adults from all sectors of society are regularly involved in all forms of active and social participation in sport.
- **More Excellence:** There are more Irish athletes and teams systematically and fairly achieving world-class results at the highest level of international competition
- **Improved Capacity:** We will have “fit for purpose” Irish sporting bodies (NGBs, LSPs and clubs) with strong leadership, ethics and governance at all levels, professionals and volunteers suitably trained and developed, and modernised working methods and systems. There will be greater levels of cooperation within and across sport, and between sport and other sectors, private and public.

Of note is the national sports policy’s definition of sport, adopted and adapted from the Council of Europe’s definition<sup>2</sup> as;

**“All forms of physical activity which, through casual or organised participation, aims at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental wellbeing, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels.”**

This adaptation has resulted in two separate strands, namely ‘recreational sport’ and ‘competitive sport’ being defined in the Sport Ireland Act (2015)<sup>3</sup> as follows:

- ‘recreational sport’ means “all forms of physical activity which, through casual or regular participation, aim at — (a) expressing or improving physical fitness and mental wellbeing, and (b) forming social relationships;”
- ‘competitive sport’ means “all forms of physical activity which, through organised participation, aim at — (a) expressing or improving physical fitness, and (b) obtaining improved results in competition at all levels”.

It is noteworthy that the National Sports Policy high level goals relate to ‘participation’ (regular sport) as well as ‘more excellence’ which relates to International, Olympic and Paralympic achievement. There is potentially a gap between competitive sport and those sports that are classified as high performance, but not on a European, International or Olympic stage (i.e. Gaelic Games).

In this context, the consultation process has identified difficulty in establishing the strategic position of the grant scheme and thus its future funding arrangements.

This evaluation has evidenced that the grant scheme makes considerable contributions under the ‘Increased Participation’ high level goal. For example, the National Sports Policy references that:

**“STEMMING THE WITHDRAWAL OF YOUNG PEOPLE, ESPECIALLY YOUNG GIRLS, FROM STRUCTURED PARTICIPATION IN CLUBS DURING THEIR TEENAGE YEARS IS PARTICULARLY CHALLENGING. RECOGNISING THAT ISSUES AROUND BODY IMAGE AND SELF-CONFIDENCE CAN INFLUENCE BEHAVIOUR IN THESE FORMATIVE YEARS, WE WILL CONSIDER INTERVENTIONS TO MITIGATE THIS CHALLENGE SUCH AS IMPROVED CHANGING FACILITIES.”**

The impact section of this evaluation highlights the potential of elite inter county players as role models in contributing to participation and retention amongst young females. In addition, there is clear evidence that the scheme has resulted in enhanced governance and administration capacity of volunteers and County Boards, as well as improving coaches, enhancing cooperation across codes and improving systems. This is evidenced in 1-1 consultations with County Secretaries.

These are regarded as indirect and positive impacts of the Grant Scheme.

The introduction of the Inter County Government Grant scheme was a government intervention, announced by the then Minister of State for Tourism and Sport in June 2016. It falls within the wider investment in Irish sport which sits at just over €111 million (2018). This includes funding through Sport Ireland, the Sports Capital Programme, the Local Authority Swimming Pools Programme and Dormant Accounts Funding.

This position can be viewed as both a strength and a threat.

The grant scheme is focused on improving performance and standards directly, its purpose clearly defined as:

**“‘SUPPORTING INITIATIVES THAT WILL RAISE STANDARDS AND PROVIDE AN ENHANCED PLAYING AND TRAINING ENVIRONMENT FOR THE HIGHEST-GRADE ADULT TEAMS IN EACH CODE IN EACH COUNTY IN IRELAND.”**

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.dttas.ie/sites/default/files/publications/sport/english/national-sports-policy-2018-2027/national-sports-policy-2018.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/16804c9dbb>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2015/act/15/enacted/en/html>



The Inter County level is currently the highest level available to these athletes in the indigenous sport(s) of the island. This was recognised by Sport Ireland in the announcement of the scheme, which was an acknowledgement of the players status as **“the leading exponents of our indigenous national games, the contribution that players make to the economic and social fabric of the nation and their commitment to play the game at highest level.”**

It is unanimously the position of the Associations that the scheme fits under the ‘more excellence’ strand of the National Sports Policy.

The challenge for the scheme, is that under the National Sports Policy, neither the LGFA, WPGA or Camogie Association are positioned to make contributions to the Key Performance Indicators associated with the ‘More Excellence’ High Level Goal. These include:

- Increase in number of medals at successive Olympics and Paralympics
- Country ranking in Olympics Medal Table
- Country ranking in Paralympics Medal Table
- Increase in numbers of medals at junior & senior European and World level

In protecting the future of the grant scheme, it will be important for the associations to work with Sport Ireland and the Department to determine its strategic position and define its contributions to the National Sports Policy high level goals and key performance indicators. The uniqueness of Ladies Football and Camogie as indigenous national games merits definition and placement amongst wider policy agenda.



## Governance and Administration

(Including Systems, Resources and Processes)

There a number of sub sections that cover the governance theme. Each is addressed individually below:

### Grant Scheme Operational Structure

The Scheme Implementation Group is viewed as ‘the guardian of the grant scheme’. The composition of the SIG comprises “well established, professional organisations that have a track record of managing public funding as part of their core business. Numerous high calibre and capable individuals represent the various associations in overseeing the operation and function of the grant scheme”. This is widely regarded as one of the key contributors to the success of the scheme overall.

The SIG sits under a National Steering Group which is found to work well and offer valuable strategic oversight and guidance for the grant scheme. In addition, the appointment of an independent chair to the SIG is regarded as an important step, offering objectivity and balance in decision making processes.

The appointment of an administrator in February 2017 is viewed as one of the key enablers for the grant scheme. The early (December 2016 - January 2017) coordination of workshops, application calls and communication with Counties fell on representatives of the three organizations. This was unlikely to be a sustainable model, given that the grant scheme only represents a small proportion of the overall work of association staff.

The SIG, supported by the administrator, adopted a formative approach to the management of the grant scheme. The group dedicated time and space at regular meetings for detailed reflection on issues and challenges emerging during the delivery. As a result, a number of changes were introduced from year 1 to year 2, including:

- 1 A challenge for many of the Counties was the retrospective nature of grants, claimed sporadically until September 2017 in year 1. In year 2, the SIG introduced a system whereby grants can be claimed on two fixed dates (May and September). This introduced an earlier payment option for Counties and reduced the administrative burden of sporadic claims reflective of the scheduling of league and championship competitions.
- 2 In year 1, Counties were not notified about a successful grant allocation until May 2017 (it should be noted that funding for the scheme was not received by the Associations until May 2017). A decision was taken to wait until all applicants had provided all documentation before notifying any of the grantees. In year 1, one of the most common themes across qualitative statements and anecdotal feedback was that the timeframe between submission and assessments of applications and the actual allocation of funds “took too long” according to most Counties. This led to an element of uncertainty about what monies would be available and, in some cases, contributed to an underspend for teams that were knocked out of Championship at an early stage. In year 2, the application deadline was brought forward by 1 month, and a more coordinated and efficient assessment process meant that Counties were informed by February/March 2018 (2.5 months faster than year 1).



## Time Investment/Commitment

SIG representatives report underestimating the time commitment required to implement the grant scheme. The terms of reference for the SIG indicated that it would meet three times per annum. In year 1, six meetings were facilitated and at the time of writing, seven meetings of the SIG have taken place in year 2.

All meetings have been well attended and information such as minutes, agendas and meeting structures shared and facilitated in a timely and professional manner. However, the consultation process indicates that some of the meetings may have been better assigned to a small operational group of the SIG who could facilitate additional, less formal meetings to progress agreed actions and tasks. There is also a general acknowledgement that the grant scheme makes up a small proportion of the work of the associations and therefore its implementation has resulted in considerable 'in kind' contributions.

A major challenge in relation to scheme administration has been in managing and chasing up non-responsive County secretaries. The administration resource for the scheme equates to 100 hours per annum. It is estimated that 25-30 hours have been allocated to SIG meetings in year 2 and a further 15 hours to pre application workshops. This leaves approximately 55 hours to contribute to application assessments, manage claims and provide any follow telephone support across 55 participating teams.

An online grant management system may enable efficiencies to be achieved and free up administration time which could evolve to provide capacity building support for counties in relation to grant administration and financial management. In addition, a small uplift in administration support would benefit the scheme moving forward, particularly if grant allocations are increased.

In acknowledging that County executives are led by volunteers, the SIG has offered a degree of leniency in respect of deadlines and has provided considerable time (via the administrator) in 'chasing' secretaries to complete financial claims. This represents 'non-productive time'. There is potential for the SIG to work with Counties to build their capacity around grant management and the introduction of more stringent protocol in relation to missed deadlines and claims may offer greater efficiency and longer term benefit for grantees.

## Systems and Processes

The ease at which the evaluation team accessed accurate data on grant expenditure and profiles is evidence of the effective and efficient systems developed to oversee the scheme. These are manual systems developed by the administrator, therein presenting a risk to the scheme in the case of a change in personnel or loss of data. The development of an online grant management system was suggested consistently during the consultation as a means of increasing efficiency and in developing a more sustainable and secure set of data management systems. This would also provide valuable reporting information.

The manual nature of the application and administration process is also a challenge for Counties. The timing of applications and workshops typically coincide with natural turnover of personnel (i.e. secretaries/treasurers) resulting in the appointment of new management teams or the election of new members to County Boards. It is felt that an online process would enable better reflection, information sharing and innovation in approach within Counties by being able to 'log on' and view previous years applications and the relevant feedback/comments from the SIG assessment.

The evaluation has established that the overall quality of application in year 1 was low and at times lacked imagination in the use of funds. It is acknowledged that the timing constraint was a key contributor to this and for many, it may have been the first time completing such an application process. The quality of application and variety of content did improve from year 1 to year 2, however the availability of previous applications via an online system and thus the opportunity for reflection may provide the impetus for more innovative approach within counties.

In addition, the existing systems require manual signatures from at least 3 representatives within a county, this is seen to create logistical/practical hurdles that could be overcome through an online or digital solution.

**“ THE MOST AWKWARD THING ABOUT THE SCHEME IS THAT THE MANAGER AND PLAYER ARE TO SIGN OFF, DIFFICULT TO CO-ORDINATE ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU HAVE A SUBMISSION DEADLINE, I SUGGEST HAVING AN EMAIL SIGN OFF OR LINK INSTEAD TO ACCOMMODATE. ”**



Supports made available to Grantees

Support offered to grantees was in the form of facilitated grant workshops hosted in December and January annually. A total of 5 workshops were offered (two in year 1 and three in year 2). The workshops consisted of presentations by multiple members of the SIG and focused on:

- 1

Grant scheme priorities, eligibility and guidance
- 2

Application process, timeframes and systems
- 3

Expectations in terms of the co-create of applications and consultation with players, player reps, management and County board members
- 4

Instructions on claims and reporting

County Secretaries consistently referenced the benefit of the workshops in providing information and guidance, particularly as many were new to the role having only been appointed in November/December of the previous year and thus in some cases, had no previous experience of the grant scheme.

Despite the positive experience of workshops, consultees referenced that more, smaller workshops would be of benefit. In particular, those consulted referenced that the inclusion of mentoring and technical support in how to plan a season incorporating strength & conditioning, specialist coaching, analysis and recovery would be of benefit in designing applications.

Further support was offered to grantees in the form of telephone calls and email support by the administrator, this was referenced as effective by the majority of County Secretaries consulted, for example:

“

THE NIGHTS HELD IN DUBLIN WERE VERY GOOD, THE LADY THERE SPOKE WITH US AND ANYTHING THAT WAS WRONG ON OUR FORM WAS FLAGGED STRAIGHTAWAY AND WE WERE KEPT RIGHT ON WHAT WE COULD AND COULD NOT APPLY FOR. GOOD TO HAVE THAT GUIDANCE WHEN WE WERE UNSURE OF ANYTHING ESPECIALLY IN THE FIRST YEAR

”

The SIG were aware that the application process and subsequent management of the grant was an additional task for volunteers and therefore offered flexibility and leniency in terms of making changes to grants and working with Counties to re-profile budgets where appropriate. This was primarily managed through telephone and email exchange between County Secretary’s and the scheme administrator.

“

IT WAS GREAT ALSO THAT WE COULD RE-PROFILE SOME OF THE THINGS WE HAD INITIALLY ASKED FOR. FOUND OUT THAT SENIOR GIRLS DIDN’T NEED TO HAVE NUTRITIONIST FOR AS LONG AS WE ORIGINALLY BUDGETED FOR AND WERE ABLE TO CHANGE THE GRANT TO GET A SPORTS PSYCHOLOGIST INSTEAD. CHRISTINE WAS ALSO VERY HELPFUL AND VERY RESPONSIVE VIA EMAIL WITH ANY QUERIES.

”

Whilst there is evidence that participation in the scheme is generating capacity building impacts for Counties:

“

THE PROCESS WAS VERY STRAIGHT FORWARD THIS YEAR AS WE HAD LEARNED FROM THE 2017. THE WORKSHOP THAT WAS HELD WITH REGARDS TO THE INFORMATION REQUIRED FOR THE GRANT APPLICATION WAS VERY INFORMATIVE AND WORTHWHILE. WE WERE MORE EXPERIENCED WITH REGARDS TO THE GRANT APPLICATION FOR 2018.

”

There is also an indication that grantees require further support and capacity building

“

IT WAS STRAIGHTFORWARD ENOUGH BUT THERE ARE SOME CHALLENGES/ ISSUES. FORMS COULD BE BETTER LAID OUT, I WAS CONFIDENT WITH WORD AND EXCEL SO DIDN’T FIND ANY ISSUE BUT OTHERS WHO ARE NOT EXPERIENCED WITH THOSE SYSTEMS COULD STRUGGLE... A LOT OF WORK IS INVOLVED IN MANAGING IN THE SCHEME, THIS IS A DIFFICULTY ESPECIALLY FOR THE SECRETARY AND TREASURER WHO ARE ALREADY IN QUITE CHALLENGING ROLES IN A VOLUNTEER CAPACITY, THIS IS ON TOP OF THEIR WORKING JOBS.

”



## Grant Scheme Priorities

The consultation established broad agreement that the priorities identified (injury prevention, maximising performance, training facilities) were appropriate, however mixed views emerged in relation to caps placed on funding criteria. This is particularly prevalent amongst Counties self-reporting as 'weaker' or 'lower grade' who suggest that needs led approach is required to 'bridge the gap' or 'level the playing field' with "higher grade" or "stronger" Counties. The case is proposed by several Counties that at a specific stage in their evolution (some teams only newly formed), that certain services are not yet required or prioritised and therefore flexibility should be allowed to use a greater proportion of funds under one criterion.

Conversely, many of the Counties indicated that the 'cap' required them to think about the various areas of performance that could be enhanced and in many cases Counties 'tried out' or 'tested' services for the first time (i.e. performance analysis, athletic development). Significant number of references made to including additional criteria within the grant eligibility, this included: training and capacity building (i.e. training local individuals to complete performance analysis training), equipment, nutrition and potentially moving toward individual player expenses, particularly for travel to and from training.

## Resources used to Implement

Of the €1,000,000 allocated to the Government Grant Scheme, 89% was distributed directly to County teams. The majority of these resources were used to provide access to: Physiotherapy at training and matches (28%), strength and conditioning (16%), performance analysis (14%) and floodlit pitch access (9%), the remainder of the grants were spent on 21 other areas of support.

11% of the overall allocation was used to support the administration and management of the scheme, this included the hire of venues and provision of travel expenses for grant information workshops, the commissioning of independent evaluation and promotional video for the scheme as well as the appointment of independent scheme administrator (regarded as one of the key enablers to the success of the programme). The scheme experienced some underspend in year 1 which is attributed to the time delays in the original announcement of the scheme and the drawdown of money. Thus, delays were incurred in informing Counties that their applications were successful (covered elsewhere in this report). The SIG acted quickly to reprofile budgets, resulting in an uplift in funding for Counties in year 2, and investment in additional administration support.

Overall, the scheme resources have been managed effectively, systems and processes have evolved to enable enhanced and faster scrutiny of budgets, allowing for efficient decision making on potential underspend.

## Tracking Outcomes and Impact Measurement

One of the aims of the evaluation was an objective examination of the systems used to track outcomes during the Scheme's implementation. The primary tool used to track outcomes has been the independent and external evaluation of the scheme. Monitoring and tracking by the SIG was limited to financial data and claims, as well as anecdotal feedback based on incidental engagements with grantees.

The absence of baseline data created challenges in attempting to measure and define increases in standards. Whilst the impact survey and focus group engagements delivered during the interim evaluation provide sufficient evidence that standards have increased, much of the data gathered was based on players and managers perceptions of that increase. The survey data and focus groups largely relied on participant recall and therefore created some limitations.

There is a clear need to begin to develop a monitoring and evaluation system that measures and records impact/change. This aligns with the aspirations of the National Sports Policy which indicates strong commitment to monitoring and evaluation, for example:

**OUTPUT INDICATORS WILL BE DEVELOPED AROUND GOVERNANCE, ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, ANTIDOPING, NUMBERS OF COACHES TRAINED ETC., OR AROUND PARTICULAR PROGRAMMES WHERE A DIRECT EVALUATION APPROACH WILL ALLOW ASSESSMENT OF IMMEDIATE PROGRAMME IMPACT. MEDIUM TO LONG TERM OUTCOME INDICATORS WILL INCLUDE OVERALL PARTICIPATION LEVELS BOTH ACTIVE AND SOCIAL, CHANGES IN GRADIENTS IN PARTICIPATION BY AGE, GENDER, SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS, DISABILITY, ETHNICITY ETC. AND STANDARD OF PERFORMANCES AT INTERNATIONAL SPORTING EVENTS. IN MEASURING THE IMPACT OF PARTICIPATION IN SPORT WE WILL SET CLEAR PARTICIPATION TARGETS FOR SPORT IN ITS OWN RIGHT, IN THE CONTEXT OF SPORT'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE NPAP. WE WILL ALSO MEASURE SPORT'S IMPACT AND CONTRIBUTION TO ECONOMIC AND TOURISM ACTIVITY, AND EDUCATIONAL PERFORMANCE**



Stakeholders suggest that as/if the scheme evolves and develops, it would benefit from the development of a series of metrics or the evolution of an agreed set of minimum standards that enable an exploration in increases in standards on a team by team basis.

Comparable models have been offered such as the Rugby 7's Women's team or the Irish Women's Hockey team. However, KPI's for these NGB's relate to rankings and performance for one team. The Government grant scheme offers support to 55 teams across 32 Counties, these teams are spread across multiple tiers and are at varying levels of their development and evolution. The development of an all-encompassing set of minimum standards is therefore a challenge, which needs to be overcome to optimise the effectiveness of the scheme.

A consistent theme in the consultation process is therefore the need to work towards a charter or set of minimum standards that will enable Counties to self-assess or self-report on improvements or increases. Some of the indicators that may be applicable include:

- Non-subjective data that records the frequency or prevalence of support services that would typically be reflective of a minimum standard for elite athletes (i.e. % of training sessions where a physio was present, % matches where a physio was present)
- Quantitative, measurable data that demonstrates improvement in standards (i.e. reduction in average recovery time from muscular injury during a season, % increase in standardised strength and condition testing)
- Qualitative and subjective self-reporting data from players based on perceived increase in the standard of training facilities, in the standard of player welfare and their treatment as elite athletes

There is an opportunity to gather baseline data as part of the annual application process in 2019, particularly if the process moves to an online/digital form. The minimum standards charter and data required to measure it should not be a static initiative, moreover, it should be reviewed annually as part of the evolution of the scheme and in line with funding, NGB and Sport Ireland objectives. The opportunity to agree and define a strategic position within the National Sports Policy may also help shape the development of KPI's and metrics relating to increased standards in performance. For example: of training sessions where a physio was present, % matches where a physio was present, reduction in average recovery time from muscular injury during a season, % increase in standardised strength and condition testing, % increase in County teams self reporting improved standards).

## Economic Impact

Absent from the terms of reference for this evaluation, but consistent in the consultation interviews was the exploration of the economic impact of the grant scheme. The consultation consistently referenced the impact of sponsorship deals such as Lidl (Ladies Football), Liberty Insurance (Camogie) and TV exposure via TG4 as major contributors to an enhanced profile of Ladies Gaelic Games over recent years.

This was evident when the attendance record was broken once again at the 2018 All-Ireland Ladies Football final, as 50,141 spectators turned out to watch Dublin defend the Brendan Martin Cup against Cork..

Attribution of the government grant scheme to increases in profile is challenging, however the grant scheme is widely regarded as a significant 'piece of the jigsaw', those consulted feeling that the increased standards will encourage repeat attendance and long term committed fans and contributors.

To augment the impact of the grant scheme on standards and to better understand its contribution to the wider social and economic fabric of civic society, future evaluation would benefit from an exploration of the economic impact of the scheme. This includes (note examples are approximate and further detailed analysis would be required to identify cost benefit and economic impact):

- Initial research (via interviews with 10 County Secretaries and via the web based survey) indicate that the proportion of the grant scheme as part of the overall senior inter county budget ranges depending on each County. Of the sample of 10 Counties engaged, the % contribution ranges from 5% - 50% of the annual budget for senior teams. The average contribution of the grant scheme for these 10 equates to 25% of the overall senior team budget. This suggests that for every €1 invested in the highest level of the game by the government grant scheme, Counties are generating and investing an average of €4 through their own fundraising efforts. These are crude estimates based on a small sample and do not include exploration of accounts or financial records – further exploration is required but this type of measure may be valuable.
- Each County is governed by an executive committee, usually comprising 10-12 individuals who operate on a voluntary basis. Future evaluations of the Inter County government grant scheme could explore the volunteer hours contributed to management and administration by county Executives, focusing on the proportion of time allocated to the senior team. This calculation would provide an estimate of the value of the in kind contribution to elite performance.
- The grant scheme involves a considerable spend on services such as physiotherapy, strength and conditioning, nutrition and specialist technical coaching. In 2018 (year 2), the scheme supported 349 providers at an average of €1,186 per service, based on the €413.7k overall (some providers may have offered multiple services). The consultation process identifies that a considerable proportion of supported activity would not have happened in the absence of grant funding. This support offers contribution to local employment and self-employment whilst the rental of training facilities enhances the sustainability of local sporting infrastructure.



## Partnerships and Relationships

Several examples have emerged from the consultation process that reference the enhanced levels of collaboration and connectivity between and within counties and associations. The original proposal for funding (submitted to the Department for Tourism and Sport) was a strategic collaboration between the Ladies Gaelic Football Association, the Camogie Association and the Women's Gaelic Players Association.

The stakeholders reflected that this partnership has continued effectively in respect of the delivery mechanism for the grant scheme. Previous formal engagements between the associations were reasonably limited, but the management of this scheme has created the space for shared professional learning and has initiated discussions across other common areas of interest.

The shared sense of ownership regarding the progression and recognition of the Intercounty game binds codes and counties together. This is reflected in a collective commitment to maximize the impact of the scheme, this was self-evident at the year 2 grant workshops, indicating that the grant scheme itself has stimulated further efforts to improve standards across the Inter county game.

County Administrators also indicated that there are limited opportunities for Counties to come together and despite having competing interests during league campaigns and in the championship, the grant workshops provided space to share knowledge and experiences in relation to season planning, consultation and engagement processes and on technical components of the game.



## Inter County Government Grant Scheme SWOT Analysis

The following SWOT analysis has been applied to the consultation data to capture and summarise the key findings:

### STRENGTHS

- Team ethos as a distinguishable characteristic
- County teams have opportunity to connect via grant workshops
- Strong commitment to the grant scheme across Counties and Associations, recognition of its importance in enhancing standards
- Strong, professional organisations as 'guardians' of the grant scheme
- High calibre capable individuals involved in its delivery
- Grant workshops have been effective
- Independent Chair and Independent Administrator
- Unity of Purpose engendered by the commitment to a team ethos
- Evidence of raising standards
- Evidence of indirect impacts on participation and capacity building
- Equitable distribution of grant irrespective of tier/division
- High levels of acknowledgement of the role of volunteers in scheme implementation

### WEAKNESSES

- Limited resources available to provide additional support to grantees
- Level of consultation and engagement not where it should be in some Counties in year 1 co-design of applications (although anecdotal evidence of improvement in year 2)
- Quality of applications in terms of innovation was low in year 1 - reflective of experience/capacity/resources within Counties - although anecdotal evidence suggests that quality and variety of content is improving
- Lack of baseline data to measure change in standards

### OPPORTUNITIES

- Introduction of service provider guidelines and technical advice to County teams
- Opportunity to introduce capacity building on both grant application & management as well as high performance and technical support
- Opportunity to develop partnerships with a number of different bodies across key facets of the scheme (i.e. access to facilities)
- Capture the economic impact of the grant scheme
- Opportunity to capture the wide range of promotional activity that players engage in
- Collation of baseline data to provide longitudinal research analysis of the impact of the scheme

### THREATS

- Strategic position of the grant scheme is not clear in the context of National Policy
- Sustainability of systems (manual)
- Managing the transition to high performance and creating a 'gap' between County and Club
- Capacity/Non responsive nature of County reps
- Non adherence to stringent deadlines potentially threatening efficiency
- Uncertainty over fund security and late notification - longer term funding cycle required



## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section provides concluding thoughts on the key learning points and considerations for the grant scheme. A series of 4 key recommendations are provided for consideration by the Scheme Implementation Group (SIG) and National Steering Group.





Conclusion

The following table summarises the key evaluation findings against the core evaluation objectives from terms of reference.

EVALUATION OBJECTIVES	COMMENTARY
To objectively evaluate the effectiveness of the Scheme in contributing to an enhanced playing and training environment for Inter County ladies' footballers and Camogie Players	<p>The grant scheme has enabled increased access to services and facilities that, for the most part, would not have been achieved in its absence. This is the case for a significant majority of the participating counties.</p> <p>The result is a direct contribution to increased standards across key components of the games (injury prevention, standard of specialist coaching, facilities, player welfare). High levels of attribution to the scheme are reported by players, managers and secretaries.</p> <p>The evaluation has also established a range of indirect impacts resulting from the implementation of the scheme including Increases in players feeling valued as elite athletes, improved engagement with training and preparation, enhanced competition between and within County teams, trickledown effect on motivation and enthusiasm of minor players and greater collaboration between associations.</p>
To identify and assess the key features and strengths /weaknesses of the Scheme	<p>The distinguishable feature of the grant scheme is its team approach, reinforced by the requirement for player reps, county boards, managers and players to co-design their application and subsequent use of the grant. The impact of the grant scheme is more apparent in teams that have successfully implemented this process and the evaluation has established significant improvements in co-design and consultation from year 1 to year 2. Other key features include the equitable distribution of grants irrespective of code, tier, level or stage of evolution as well as the acknowledgement of the role played by volunteers in managing the scheme, this was reflected in the approach adopted by the SIG.</p>

EVALUATION OBJECTIVES	COMMENTARY
	<p>The scheme remains in its infancy, it was a new initiative with no pre-existing structure to oversee its implementation. The high calibre of individual and professional organisations involved in the scheme implementation are key contributors to its success over the 2 years. The inclusion of independent chair and the appointment of a scheme administrator were important and contributed to its success. The scheme has evolved from year 1 to year 2 including an overall improvement in the quality and diversity of application, a reduction in the time taken to allocate and approve grants and the development of more effective administration and claims processes. Scheme Implementation Group in the roll out of year 2 funds. The management of the scheme has contributed to a continuation of positive working relationships between associations.</p>
To support the Scheme Implementation Group to determine future priorities for the strategic development of the Scheme	<p>There are clear areas of learning and development including improvements to impact measurement through baseline measures, the introduction of online grant management systems and processes and strategic engagements to protect the high performance nature of the scheme in line with the National Sports Policy.</p>





## Recommendation 1

In recognising Inter County players as high performance, elite athletes and in protecting and safeguarding the future of the scheme: it is recommended that the SIG engage with the National Steering Group and Sport Ireland to define and agree the strategic position of grant scheme and its alignment to the National Sports Policy

## Recommendation 3

The SIG should move towards an online grant management system. This system should create efficiencies for both the participating Counties, as well as in the scheme administration and implementation. In addition, any uplift in future investments in the scheme should have a proportionate uplift in administration support, efficiencies created by an online system should result in a reprofile of administration time to focus on capacity building amongst Counties with a particular focus on administration and financial management/claims.

## Recommendation 2

In measuring the impact of future investments in the scheme in raising standards, the SIG should work to develop a set of baseline measures and metrics aligned to an agreed charter of standards. The process of gathering baseline data should be integrated into an annual application process for participating County teams. In addition, future approaches to evaluation should include an exploration of the economic impact of the scheme.

## Recommendation 4

The SIG should work with umbrella bodies/quality standard bodies to generate guidelines on what service providers should offer to Counties. These bodies could also contribute to the development of a standards charter for Inter County teams. In addition, the SIG should seek to enhance the annual grant workshops with contributions from key service providers regarding best practice in season planning including strength and conditioning, nutrition, recovery, specialist coaching and injury prevention.











Brochure Design:

