

“We’ve only just begun. Together.”

*Cork GAA
Hurling and Football Draft Discussion Document
For the attention of all Club members*

*Draft 1
July 12th, 2016*

*Kevin O'Donovan,
County Coaching Officer,
Email: coachingofficer.cork@gaa.ie
Phone: 086-7753567*

Introduction – Ideas For Your Consideration...

With much discussion regarding the plight of Gaelic Games in Cork recently, there is little doubt that an urgent need for significant improvement at all levels in Cork GAA now prevails. While the extent of our decline will continue to be perused until we grace Croke Park again, it is appropriate to first shift the discussion towards the broader landscape....

What do we actually seek to achieve through our involvement in the GAA? Why did we choose here, this place, to express ourselves? Do we seek to represent the best of who we are? Do our sports currently represent the best of who we are? Do we seek to implement this 'best of us' in a consistent and sustainable way, in order that our games are passed on to our sons and daughters so that they may taste the same small glories as we have done? What are the ideas we now require to reach this 'best of us'? And most importantly, when did it all stop being fun?

While numerous commentators have described the challenges now facing us, it is surely time to take up the gauntlet and organise our thoughts into ideas and plans so that we can be the 'best of us'. Collective ownership. Collective responsibility. Collective action. Action at Child, Youth and Adult level. Action at Club, School and County level.

This document will briefly outline 25 proposals, which I believe will increase participation and performance levels in both hurling and football across Cork, at club, school and county level. Some actions may lead to the steps of the Hogan Stand on the first Sunday of September, others to small boys and girls simply kicking ball at lunch-break, lost in the epic moment of a damp Monday afternoon. All such things seek to reach the same place; the safeguarding of the glorious heritage passed down from Ring, Lynch and Morgan and indeed, from the unseen parish heroes at fields everywhere, from Mizen to Mitchelstown. This will be a living heritage; a live museum filled with blood, sweat, tears and above all, joy.

I look forward to members of clubs debating the merits of these proposals over the coming weeks and months. If a club or indeed any GAA supporter in Cork sees value in any element and makes direct contact with me before October 1st, I will then attempt to incorporate the relevant ideas into appropriate motions for voting by club delegates at county convention in December. Also, if you seek to add, oppose or amend any proposals, your feedback would be welcome, also. If silence and indifference is your response, then that will be an answer too. This is simply an outline; a first draft discussion document that will hopefully be amended and deepened on a continuous basis over coming years as our needs change and new solutions emerge. In that case further drafts will follow.

Finally, this is no coup. I write on my own behalf and do so with one objective; the betterment of Cork GAA. There is no secret cabal. The cult of personality is not for here. Hence, no names appear, no heads are called for, no Hollywood appointments are sought. There are no final solutions available. There is no absolute truth presented. There are simply ideas for consideration and a call for unity.

And yet, I do not wish to claim ownership of a single idea here. Each one was kindly pilfered from the many great thinkers or 'local gods' I have been privileged to meet at pitches and committee rooms, since I was first hypnotised in the front garden in Kilmeen on the night of July 17th 1983 as my father and I took turns at being Tadhg Murphy bursting the Kerry net, under the corner light.

A special word of thanks to the members of the 'Games' focus group that consulted with members in late 2015 and subsequently submitted a report that contained some of the ideas included. I hope that I can do such ideas justice here. In any event, the clubs of this once-great county will have the final say on whether they transform into reality... so that we may become great again.

First comes thought

Then organisation of that thought, into ideas and plans

Then transformation of those plans into reality.

The beginning, as you will observe, is in your imagination.

— N. Hill, author.

Context – A Holistic 'Systems' Approach...

Before delving into the finer detail of individual proposals, a macro-perspective of Gaelic Games is required. Without a comprehensive 'Systems' approach, stand-alone ideas are unlikely to come to fruition in a sustainable way. But, before entering the system, we must first examine and indeed prioritise our values. Without agreed values, a unified approach is beyond reach and a splintered strategy will lead to unsatisfactory outcomes. While so many positive values can be associated with the GAA, two simple value-laden objectives are clear: (i) to maximise participation and (ii) to optimise performance. These objectives capture all that is good in our games. Maximising participation will reflect enjoyment and fulfillment, as the retention of players to play and stay with the GAA is the ultimate measure of our meeting their needs. Meanwhile, optimising performance, though secondary to participation, captures another core aim of sport, for players and teams to strive to fulfill their potential and be the best that they can be.

The only approach that will deliver both objectives outlined is a games-based one. That is the provision of regular, meaningful games and top class games-based coaching. In

terms of organised games, 'regular' provides the quantity, while 'meaningful' provides the quality. The haphazard nature of fixture provision in the GAA previously with the predominance of inter-county programmes is no longer fit for purpose in the 'timetabled' nature of modern life, while in developmental terms, the early knockout of teams and idle pitches in the height of summer is no longer acceptable. While other sports do not face some of the geographical and traditional obstacles that the GAA must address, their provision of superior games calendars gives them a key advantage in capturing the hearts and minds of future generations and perhaps as importantly, their parents. Meanwhile, the games-based Coach 10 approach to coaching devised by Pat Daly is accepted as the most enjoyable, relevant and progressive development model.

Next, we must consider the three stages of the player pathway and the three platforms that the GAA utilises for promotion. A player's career is comprised of three stages (i) the 'Child - Play to Learn' stage (aged 5-12) (ii) the 'Youth - Learn to Compete' stage (12-18) and (iii) the 'Adult - Compete to Win' (over 18) and takes place in three platforms (a) the Club, (b) the School and (c) the County. This provides us with the matrix shown on page 5, whereby participation and performance must be achieved via regular, meaningful games and top class games based coaching in 9 different environments. As seen from the jigsaw model the various pieces are interactive and inter-dependent. That is to say that one piece cannot be considered in isolation without recognition of the unintended consequences of change on another area. Thus, the picture of the required systems approach becomes clearer

Once the values, objectives and approach are agreed we must proceed to ensuring stability and sustainability of the model outlined through the provision of supports. Such supports take two forms: structures, which ensure organisational effectiveness and services, which represent financial investment in personnel, facilities or equipment. All supports must ensure the establishment of *a Culture of Commitment and Excellence* both on and off the field at Club, School and County level. The actors who control the supports must build *an Inclusive, Progressive and United Organisation* acting in a manner, which keeps the best interests of players and those who develop them at heart.

Finally, when building all of the above we must consider the internal and external forces that may shape and indeed challenge our desired pathways and outcomes. These range from political to social, from cultural to historical, from economic to chronological and we ignore them at our peril. Sport does not exist in a vacuum. It can shape and is in turn itself shaped by personalities, relationships, traditions, societal values, population trends and economic factors, among others. Ultimately, sport has its place. It should enrich life, presenting a joyful refuge from the daily grind. It should present a platform for collective and self-expression. It is not a matter of life and death. It is simply a way to colour some of the many hours between the former and the latter. And it is no less important for that.

VALUES

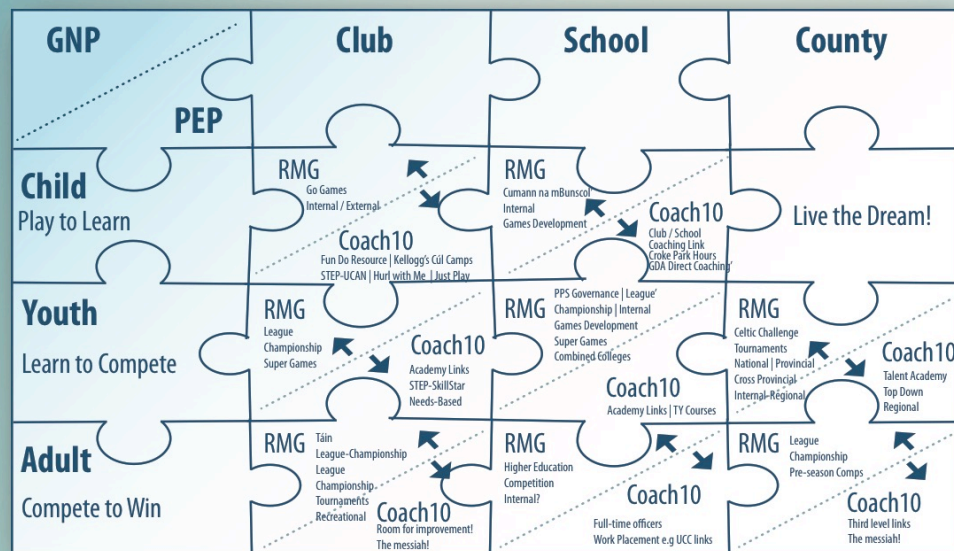
Participation
performance

Games Based Approach

Regular, Meaningful Games

Coach 10

TPP via MVA



Stability & Sustainability



Structures

Organisational Effectiveness | Local Needs & Nuances | Governance | Calendars
Games / Competition Formats | Guided Exposure | Fixtures Oversight
Communication Lines | Urban / Rural Challenges | Hurling Boards | Camogie integration

Support

Services

DOES CARE for ALL | Full-time personnel | Technology, Innovation, Promotion | Facilities & Equipment |
Sports Science Services | Direct Investment | Analysis / Benchmarks / Targets
National Policy | Deployment of Mentors | Twinning | Change Management Research



FORCES

POLITICAL

SOCIAL

CULTURAL

HISTORICAL

ECONOMIC

CHRONOLOGICAL

Summary of Proposals

1. Regular, Meaningful Games for our adult Club players
2. Appointment of Directors of Football and Hurling
3. Appointment of a Head of Physical Development
4. County and Regional Centres of Excellence
5. Additional Coaching Staff
6. Appointment of a full-time 'Junior Administrator' for Rebel Óg
7. Reorganise Rebel Óg structure to form one county-wide structure
8. Consider New Underage Club Structures
9. Re-define primary age groups at Fé 17,15,13,11,9,7 for a pilot period
10. Consider new club underage Games formats
11. Review and Support Development Squad Programmes
12. Review and Support Sciath na Scol Programmes
13. Review and Support Post Primary Games Programmes
14. The Jack Lynch Project – A Regeneration Hurling model for Cork City
15. Coordinated and Progressive Player Development Programmes
16. Design of Player Development Programmes for players aged 18-25
17. Support and Build links with Third Level Institutions"
18. Support and Develop Referees
19. Extend the Availability of our County Grounds
20. Establish a Representative Body for Club Players
21. Establish Friends of Cork GAA'
22. Develop and Extend Coach Education programmes
23. Establish Open Forums with all stakeholders of Cork GAA
24. 'A Call to Arms'
25. Reform Beyond Cork

Proposal 1. Regular, meaningful games for our adult Club players

The only arena where all players assemble is in the Club. It is our bedrock, our *raison d'être*, our beginning and our end. Yet, while we continue to pay lip-service to it like some ancient covenant, we continue to erode it with our actions. It's time for recalibration; time to renew vows with our first love.

While the days of 'one chance and you're out' championships are thankfully in the past, the step towards the hybrid 'backdoor' model has only brought us half-way. Yes, teams have longer championship summers, and yes, one bad day out no longer quenches a team's ambitions, however, the conflict between such complex models with organising a calendar based programme which is fair on players, mentors and their families must now be addressed.

A group stage model appears to represent the best way forward, with the early rounds providing regular, meaningful games and the latter stages allowing progression toward the cut-throat, all on the day knockout fare. Concerns about meaningless games can be addressed in the specifics of the numbers of teams and rounds. Concerns about gates and financial implications, though secondary to meeting players' needs, can be addressed through promotion and the ultimate increase in standards that will drive attendances.

So-called 'relegation' simply must be part of any games programme for adult players. I say, so-called, because the term is now commonly used to describe some form of banishment to the abyss of a basement grade, a version of punishment for under-achievers. As long as this image persists then the spectre of relegation will indeed put players under undue negative pressure to preserve the perceived status of their homeland. Such hyperbole is bizarre when considered. From this point forward, the term 'regrading' will be used. At the end of a season a team would be regraded to the tier below based on their results, while a team from the tier below would be regraded upwards. It would not cast doubt on their manhood; it would simply mean that they would play in a more suitable level of competition in the following season. No one dies; we simply try harder next year.

Such regrading must always take place based on results on the field of play in a given season. One team must replace another in the pecking order. Vague notions of deciding what teams should play in a competition at adult level based on the consideration of some committee doesn't wash. Let the scoreboard decide. The bottom team is regraded.

The most appropriate place to start in Cork would be a sixteen-team club competition split into groups of four (the inclusion of divisional / university teams is described in the next paragraph.) Twelve team championships with two groups of six would be more competitive, with more games, but the dual nature of many clubs and the haphazard nature of inter-county fixtures does not make this option sustainable at present. So, four

groups of four is proposed, for now. Three games each. Top two in each group progress to the next stage, the bottom team in each group proceeding to regrading play-offs. This championship programme would require six (or seven with divisions) weekends. Claims of meaningless games in this format ignore the facts. In the final round all teams would be fighting for a top two place or avoiding the bottom place in the group. All teams would have a minimum of three and a maximum of seven championship games. There would be no replays to allow a streamlined programme of games. The financial consequences would simply have to be incurred as a cost of treating our club player with respect.

The status of divisional / university teams would be preserved through entry to the competition as follows. These teams would play until a number of four was reached and these four teams would play the group stage runners up in a round 4 with the winners proceeding to the county quarter-finals versus the group winners. Including divisional teams in the earlier rounds with clubs causes fixture chaos.

Other key elements of efficient games programmes are the preservation / limiting of numbers in a competition, having bumper designated club championship weekends, consideration of the possibility of ultimate success for any given team, the status or terminology used in naming grades and the link to Munster / All Ireland club competitions. Taking such factors into account, the following is proposed. Three Senior grades of sixteen teams each, formerly the Senior, Premier intermediate and Intermediate competitions, now titled Senior 1, 2 and 3 incorporating 48 clubs teams, in total (divisional / university teams added to the Senior 1 clubs). Ideally, four grades of twelve teams would allow a better chance of success for clubs, but this would not match the four groups of four format outlined above and may be considered at a later date. The winners of Senior 1 would proceed to the Munster senior club championship, with the Senior 2 and Senior 3 winners proceeding to the Munster intermediate and Junior competitions, respectively. While it is argued by many that the intermediate grade be abolished with these teams returning the divisional Junior championship, the desire of most clubs appears to be to compete in county competitions and in any case the divisions are already imbalanced in terms of numbers.

At Junior level, the divisional Junior programme would be preserved, following review. In general, Junior 1, 2, 3 and possible 4 levels would follow. However, a review of the variable competition formats in the different divisions is required. Depending on a team's geographical location within the county, the path to a county Junior A title differs greatly, at present. The uneven nature of the divisions must be addressed. Otherwise, county-wide competitions at all levels would be the only alternative and this would be a major step considering the traditions associated with the eight divisions. Major concern is currently evident amongst divisional officers about the erosion of their divisional championships. If changes are to follow, it must be by consensus and fair and open debate.

A competitive league programme must accompany any championship programme, providing the bulk of regular games. Every team in the county should be part of the one league structure with regrading between all levels. League status would be independent of championship status. Any links between both formats are unfair on clubs who do not have full and unrestricted access to club players due to county involvement.

Any formats must also take the dual nature of clubs into account. For example, the senior hurling clubs in Cork are currently happy to play 15 league games, while expecting a similar programme of dual clubs in both codes would be challenging. Therefore, moving down the divisions the number of teams per group would lessen and the format at the lower levels would be regionalised. Hence, divisions 1-4 would have 12 teams, divisions 5-8, would have 10 teams, divisions 9 and 10 would have four regional groups each labeled a to d and would have 8 teams in each group). Two up and two down regrading from each division would ensure a competitive format. All leagues would be concluded before the third and possibly final championship game for any club. League finals would be played mid-summer with the added bonus of increased gates.

Access to county players is an obvious issue for many clubs currently. Playing more games with clubs, as long as such games are meaningful and competitive, would have positive benefits for both club and county set-ups. Currently, the haphazard nature of the so-called 'release' of players is unsatisfactory. Designated weekends are essential to bring life back in to the county leagues. It is proposed that of the eleven league weekends implied above, county players would play for their clubs on a minimum of 6 designated weekends in their primary code. If they also played club hurling / football as a second code, they would play on three designated weekends in this code also. These are minimum targets. If county panel members did not play for an inter-county league game on a particular Saturday, for example, they would be immediately released to clubs on the day after for league action, in addition to designated weekends. The size of inter-county panels is also relevant. Only players who actually played inter-county on a given date would be unavailable subsequently to clubs for league action that weekend.

In summary, the standard of the club game in Cork must improve for several reasons. It can only do so through regular, meaningful games arranged in an organised fashion. Appropriate coaching can then follow.

Proposal 2. Appointment of Directors of Football and Hurling

Given the scale of Gaelic Games in Cork, which is far greater than in any other county, the coordination of coaching models at club, school and county level is challenging. While the dual-mandate of officers and staff is a worthy one, a need for designated personnel to oversee specific, coordinated development programmes in both football and hurling is necessary. Such persons would have a proven track record at inter-county and club level, ideally with All Ireland success, would have a high level of independence in the role and would report directly to the board executive through the county chairman.

Their role would include the following elements:

- Devise player development pathways under the following programmes
 - (i) Skill development,
 - (ii) Tactical development – individual & collective decision making
 - (iii) Personal development – character building
 - (iv) Physical development – devised by a county director of S & C)
- Oversee implementation of this such pathways in Club, School and County teams and corresponding Coach Education programmes
- Liaise with head coaches of all county teams and GDAs to ensure strict implementation at all levels
- Serve on all team management appointment committees from U14 to Senior
- Ensure one management vision across all teams to ensure consistency for players on more than one panel e.g. U21 and Senior or as they progress through the age groups
- Attend all inter-county fixtures as a background support to team management
- Advise all relevant committees on best practice in terms of fixture planning and implementation
- Liaise with corresponding director in football / hurling to ensure common goals and programmes and to agree on appropriate guidelines for dual players

The position would be a full-time one with offices based at the main Centre of Excellence to ensure regular contact with members at all levels. In an attempt to address the perceived cult of the manager which has contaminated the GAA at all levels, whether factual at all times or not, all subsequent appointments to team managements from U14 to senior would only include a head coach and two other mentors / coaches / selectors, with these three persons solely responsible for making direct decisions on tactics and team selection on match-day. Backroom logistics teams could be organised to support behind the scenes.

Proposal 3. Appointment of a Head of Physical Development

Given the fragmented approach and financial costs of having multiple decision-makers and practitioners involved with inter-county teams at all levels, the appointment of one full-time person to design and implement programmes is necessary. This person would oversee physical conditioning programmes with all county teams. These would be implemented without deviation by a voluntary physical coach with each team. The head of physical development would also have a hands-on role where possible, but the design and implementation of programmes would remain primary. Such a person would be based at the main Centre of Excellence also and would be appointed by and subsequently report to an expert physical development group which would in turn report to the county committee.

Proposal 4. County and Regional Centres of Excellence

A vibrant, multifunctional central hub with regional outposts for the promotion of games at all levels is required. While the completion of the reconstruction of Pairc Ui Chaoimh will meet some requirements, the establishment of long-term licence agreements with both CIT and UCC is essential. In addition, licence agreements with potential regional bases in clubs such as Clonakilty or Mallow are also necessary. The provision of 4G all-weather pitches and multifunctional indoor spaces would be an important element of such agreements to shift particular developmental programmes to the winter months.

Proposal 5. Additional Coaching Staff

It is widely acknowledged that the ratio of clubs per GDA is higher than the national average and that wide geographical dispersion of clubs, the rural / urban divide and the dual mandate of most clubs presents a unique set of challenges which is not found the vast majority of counties. Therefore, a need to increase the levels of coaching staff is clear. There are a number of ways to address this requirement. The recruitment of additional GDAs would reduce the ratio described above and allow a better service for clubs and schools. However, given the time spent by GDAs in administration, it is possible that adding a larger pool of full-time coaches or 'boots on the ground' working under the GDAs may be more efficient. Ultimately, if Cork GAA wishes to keep pace with competing counties further bodies are required to assist the volunteer in meeting the increasing coaching demands. Priority areas for such coaches would be in primary and particularly, post primary schools.

Proposal 6. Appointment of a full-time 'Junior Administrator' for Rebel Óg

Given the requirement for a county wide approach to fixtures at all level, the employment of a full-time fixture planner / manager for all underage games would bring many benefits. Such a role would incorporate all club, school and county fixtures under a single system ensuring that consistent and sustainable windows would be incorporated for each programme of activity. The appointment of referees for all fixtures would also be centralised, again using a central database and one point of communication. A number of subcommittees would then focus on the ancillary support of fixture programmes such as the taking of gates, presentation of trophies, disciplinary action and grading. Obviously, the Junior Administrator would have an input to the oversight of such activities also. If additional servicing officers in Cork PPS or Sciath na Scol, for example, were required they would work in partnership with the Junior Administrator also.

Proposal 7. Reorganise Rebel Óg structure to form one county-wide structure

There is major frustration in clubs at present with issues such as travel, the absence of local rivalry, premature completion of games programmes in early summer and dissatisfaction with development squads and gradings. However, the formation of Rebel Óg in 2010 has allowed a county-wide vision for underage activity and reverting back to eight separate imbalanced divisional underage boards would be a regressive one. In fact, one major issue with the current structure is the imbalance created by the over-sized East region. Therefore, a further step towards increased integration is necessary.

A new county-wide structure within which teams would be grouped regionally on a competition by competition basis to play a significant number of regular, meaningful games under a new fixture plan with defined nights for all age levels would solve many problems. Firstly, maintaining the current Premier grades is essential as incorporating the elite teams in the county in local groups will only lead to imbalanced and unfair competition. Allocating 8 places in each of Premier 1,2 and 3 allows as progressive model where clubs with successful teams should aspire toward the higher grades. While urban clubs will continue to populate the Premier 1 grade, Premier 2 and 3 leagues could be merged for example, to reduce travel. Avoiding the erection of further geographical boundaries allows such flexibility.

In terms of the A, B and C competitions, it is imperative that evenly divisible numbers of teams are allocated to each grade. For example, putting 24 teams in the A grade allows three regional league groups of 8, or perhaps two 12s for East and West championships or six groups of 4 for group stages. Incorporating uneven numbers results in byes and irregular formats.

Ultimately, one point is clear. If the final aim is regular, meaningful games a structure incorporating regional boundaries will not work. Boundaries designed for hurling will

not work for football or vice versa. Boundaries designed to suit the geographical dispersion of U16 teams will not match the spread of the same clubs at U14 level.

Another issue that requires further investigation is the dissatisfaction of a number of city clubs who played 'on the age' previously and therefore had a more comprehensive programme of regular games. Now they find the corresponding competitions populated by clubs with smaller catchment areas who are using players from a number of years thus causing fixture clashes and postponements. The supplementary age grades of U15 and U13 currently should be for clubs fielding on the age and be organised a coordinated fashion free from potential clashes. Also, consideration should be given to ring-fencing other competitions to clubs who can field such independent teams and bring back some of the old city rivalry.

Proposal 8. Consider new Underage Club Structures

As a follow-on to considering the differing needs of urban and rural clubs outlined above, it is clear that the 'one adult club = one underage club' model may not always be suitable. As one who has often questioned the viability of underage amalgamations in fear of weaker players being sidelined in the pursuit of success, I now accept that such consolidation is necessary in many cases. Ultimately, if in pursuit of participation, it is teams and not clubs which is the real measure. If less underage clubs allowed the preservation of the current number underage teams and less overlap between teams, it would be beneficial and drive standards.

In urban centres the fielding of multiple teams per age group is essential to ensure the retention of the explosion of playing numbers from U10 downwards. This must be facilitated and encouraged. The urbanisation of the county is perhaps the biggest long-term challenge facing Cork and unless participation is driven in large urban centre the playing population will decline interminably. A full review of population trends in the county is proposed with structures continuing to be adjusted accordingly,

Proposal 9. Re-define primary age groups at Fé 17,15,13,11,9,7 for a pilot period

Subsequent to the change in general rule, whereby players under the age of 17 are no longer eligible for adult competitions and with the inter-county Minor grade changing to Fé 17, there is now merit in reducing the club Minor age grade from Fé 18 to Fé 17. This would break the link between adult and juvenile competitions and therefore allow more streamlined competition formats and games programmes. Also, the clash with Leaving Cert exams would be avoided allowing players to focus on their studies during this important period

Such a change would also require a corresponding adjustment of primary younger age groups to Fé 15, 13, 11, 9, and 7. Secondary competitions could also be arranged for large clubs at the intervening age groups. No player would be allowed play at more than two age groups. In year 1 of the pilot a Fé 18 knockout competition would be incorporated along with a Fé 17 one to ensure that all players played a final year at Minor. Adult games programmes would also need expansion / adjustment to ensure that 18 year-olds had adequate games programme with their clubs. Concerns about player retention have merit, however, as outlined earlier, the provision of suitable adult games presents a viable solution.

Proposal 10. Consider new club underage Games formats

The introduction of a new 'Super Games' programme on Saturday mornings to cater for mass participation at youth level (13-17) to complement development squad and regular club fixture programmes would ensure that players not involved at elite level would not be left idle. Also in structural terms, large urban clubs could field multiple teams depending on holidays, while smaller clubs forced to amalgamate for regular competition could maintain some form of identity by fielding their own smaller-sided teams in such competitions.

Proposal 11. Review and support development squad programmes

Newly appointed directors of football and hurling would complete an immediate review of all development squad programmes. The long-term aim of moving development squad programmes into secondary schools would be a primary aim.

Proposal 12. Review and support Sciath na Scol Programmes

Sciath na Scol programmes are an essential element of both participation and performance and full financial and logistical support of its officers is essential. Given its importance, constant review of all GAA activities in schools and the growing partnership between the GDAs and teachers is important in order to meet the changing needs of youngest members.

Proposal 13. Review and support Post Primary Games Programmes

Again, changing demographics are a major challenge at post primary level with pupils now more dispersed and attending a wider range of schools. As outlined earlier, significant coaching resources are required to support teachers, while fixture programmes may need review and more and more sports are competing for time on the school timetable and travel becomes a growing issues for schools.

Proposal 14. The Jack Lynch Project – A Hurling Regeneration Model for Cork City

In order to address the decline of hurling in the heartland of Cork city in terms of both participation and performance, it is proposed to implement a three year programme for children aged 6 and 7 years in Senior Infants and First Class in all city schools and clubs. Running from late 2016 to mid 2019. It would contain four major strands.

Strand 1 – ‘City Schools Project’ The City based GDAs would implement 8-week coaching programmes for Senior Infants and First Classes in all city schools. The programme will be delivered in two four-week blocks. See schedules below. Block 1 will comprise of ‘Hurling Fundamentals’ with children receiving instruction on the grip, catching and ABCs of fundamental movements. Block 2 will comprise of ‘First Touch Hurling’ with children receiving instruction on the necessary skills of the swing and ground strokes required to play an organised game at U8 level. Former national director of hurling Paudie Butler would be asked to design both programmes. Corresponding games programmes will be organised by Sciath na Scol in conjunction with the GDAs.

Strand 2 - ‘Equipment Provision’ The provision of equipment has been identified as a major obstacle to mass participation in hurling, particularly in urban areas. Therefore, the second strand of the project would be to ensure that all children have access to their own hurleys, helmets and sliotars. This would involve discount sales of equipment through clubs and schools for players at these ages.

Strand 3 - ‘Club Nursery Project’ Coordinated club nursery programmes would be organised in all city clubs to ensure that the increased participation levels in schools have matching access to club coaching and games programmes. No club membership fees would be charged for players in these two years to ensure mass migration from the schoolyard to the club grounds.

Strand 4 - ‘Field of Dreams Initiative’ A further element of ensuring that the children involved have an inclination towards to a lifelong involvement in Gaelic Games is the provision a wide range of promotional events to increase the emotional connection with club and county identities. For example, free entry to Pairc Ui Rinn and the redeveloped Pairc Ui Chaoimh, half-time games and jersey days are just a few promotions that would help to strengthen a Cork identity.

If the project was deemed to be successful in year 1 it may be expanded to further class groups and other areas across the county in years 2 and 3. Potential partners would include clubs, school, Rebel Óg, Sciath na Scol, Cork Camogie, Seandún Board, Cork Sports Partnership, UCC / CIT.

Proposal 15. Coordinated and Progressive Player Development Programmes

Clear deficiencies are evident at all levels of Cork hurling in terms of aggression / physicality and all levels of Cork football in terms of skill proficiency. As outlined earlier, the directors of football / hurling would be asked to address such issues by developing appropriate player development programmes in the following areas:

(i) Technical (ii) Physical (iii) Tactical (iv) Personal.

Proposal 16. Design of Player Development Programmes 18-25

Clear inconsistencies are evident from Minor upwards in terms of coordinated player development programmes and planning. Mixed messages are leading to confused players. The directors of football / hurling would oversee all programmes ensuring a clear and consistent approach from Minor, U21, Intermediate to Senior.

Proposal 17. Support and build links with Third Level Institutions"

Further strengthening of linkages with UCC, CIT and other third level institutions in the county is required, not alone in terms of facilities, as outlined earlier, but also in terms of their expertise and potential services. It is a two-way street however and our support of their programmes is also vital.

Proposal 18. Support and develop Referees

Proposal 19. Extend the availability of our County Grounds

Proposal 20. A Representative Body for Club Players

Proposal 21. Establish Friends of Cork GAA'

Proposal 22. Develop and extend Coach Education programmes

Proposal 23. Establish Open Forums with all stakeholders of Cork GAA

Proposal 24. 'A Call to Arms'

Proposal 25. Reform Beyond Cork

Time and space does not permit expansion of the remaining proposals (18-25), listed above, for now. Further details may follow if interest from members is forthcoming. In summary the need for more flow to club games in both football and hurling with less rigid refereeing allowing a more aggressive approach by players and teams is required. Greater support of and respect towards referees is also necessary however. The opening of Pairc Ui Chaoimh will present a great opportunity to open the gates regularly to all stakeholders and make it a 'living' place where all are welcome. It is now clear that a representative body for club players is necessary. While the GPA meets the needs of the county player, the club player is left without a voice. The founding of a club players body in Cork is proposed. Given the potential corporate support available throughout the city and county and the army of supporters for Cork teams, a supporters club should be formed immediately, incorporating all Cork supporters whether 'big or small'. Links to ticket packages, the clubs draw and various coaching initiatives would present a win-win for all sides. Coach education programmes require further review. More of this later. Open forums on all issues raised in this document are necessary. While final decisions rest with club delegates on the floor of county board, constant consultation with all members is necessary and not to be feared. 'A call to arms' refers to the urgent need to entice all former greats to return to the coaching scene within the county. We appear to be unique as an exporter of coaching talent to other counties. All efforts must be made to recruit all former Cork players and coaches, without exception. And finally, while we reform our procedures within the county, we must see beyond our borders too and rather than constantly voting against national reforms, instead be drivers of change nationally showing true Rebel character in a fearless and positive fashion.