

Introduction

The phrase “Club-School links” is a term often used in strategic documents, grant applications and general discussion within Sports Development/PE and School Sport. It is also used in the both the Sport NI and Irish Sports Council and the National GAA. The phrase is becoming more common and there is a great need for schools and clubs to work more closely together – if only just in communication!

Every child goes to school. The players the GAA will rely on over the next 20 years are all now at school. It's therefore absolutely vital that the GAA gets these children 'on board' as soon as possible ... and as effectively as possible!

Many young people take part in School sport, but there are fewer who take part in sporting activities outside of school. In addition, after they leave compulsory education most young people do not take part in any form of regular sport or physical activity at all. Establishing Club-School links gives young people the opportunity to continue participating in worthwhile sporting and physical activity throughout their lives. It allows youngsters to make the most of their experiences in both settings, to try out new sports and to feel comfortable in a club setting. As a result it makes them more likely to continue participating once they leave school.

Why should Clubs link to Schools?

- Some Schools don't even know what GAA Clubs are in their area: personal contact is the best way to promote your Club. Posters are not enough!
- Children are more likely to get involved if they know what they're dealing with. If they have already seen club coaches in the familiar surroundings of their School they are more likely to attend the Club! They will also of course already know the coach
- Unless young people know where opportunities exist to take part in different Gaelic sports, they will never engage in them
- Schools and Clubs can work together to promote opportunities for participating in Gaelic Games much more effectively

Who should be involved?

- Children
- Parents
- School Staff
- Physical Education Staff/PE Co-ordinators
- Club Coaches
- Club Youth Officers
- Club School Liaison Officer
- Club Committee Members

What are the benefits of forming a Club-School Link?

Creating partnerships between Schools and Clubs helps to create continuity between the promotion of Gaelic sports in both the School and the Club. Creating Club-School links can create the following benefits:

Club

- More young people involved in the Club
- Increased participation levels in the Club
- Opportunity to identify talent of the future
- Potential access to School facilities and equipment
- Raised profile of Gaelic Games in the community
- Opening up Club access to wider community
- Increase potential to recruit new volunteers for coaching, particularly parents)
- Pool of young leaders, coaches and officials of the future
- A familiar, safe environment for the children

School

- More active, and ultimately healthier, pupils
- Raised profile within the community
- Increased funding opportunities
- Community Links: social benefits
- Pathways for sport: easy exit routes for children into ongoing involvement
- Higher standard in school teams due to better coaching received by pupils
- Recognition as an institution that supports development beyond the School environment
- Support and assistance with extra curricular teams/activities
- Access to GAA facilities and resources



Young People

- Improved opportunities to access Gaelic Games in their local community
- Opportunity for their talent to be identified and nurtured
- Move confidently between School and Club opportunities to develop coaching and leadership skills
- Understand how their experiences in School and at the Club complement each other
- Recognise how the GAA prepares them for their involvement in Clubs at junior age and beyond
- Introduction to a healthy living agenda
- Choose a Gaelic sport that is suited to them

How can Club-School Links Work?

What sort of things can you do to create a Club-School Link?

The following list highlights some of the things that you can do to create and develop a Club-School link.

Club

- Appoint someone to liaise with the school(s)
- Ask the school to provide the club with information and promotional material about the Club. Establish a GAA notice board in the School that promotes Club activities and events
- Run a competition at the School or between local feeder Schools in the community
- Run a Club open day/fun day at the Clubgrounds for the School
- Provide people to assist with extra curricular activities
- Link with the School's PE Co-ordinator
- Run coaching sessions on the school site during term (with the Principals permission) encourage the children to get involved in Gaelic Games by promoting the time and venue of the Club youth programme
- Tell the Schools about their pupils' achievements (e.g. in a School newsletter)
- Advise School of relevant events and activities that might attract children to the Club
- Provide officials for School fixtures/tournaments
- Make regular School visits

- Actively promote the idea of a Club member becoming a member of the Board of Governors
- Offer the school the use of club facilities for sports day or events
- Invite local School staff and governors to Club events
- Help fund the School's GAA work

School

- Promote the Club within the School by highlighting and promoting upcoming matches and events
- Provide facilities by offering the School site for the Club to run sessions
- Nominate a Club liaison representative to liaise with the Club's schools liaison officer
- Distribute any promotional material that the Clubs may have
- Invite Club coaches to speak about their Club in School assemblies/PTA meetings
- Dedicate a notice board or other point of information to the Club
- Provide advice to pupils about getting involved
- Provide the Club with letters of support for funding applications
- Regularly communicate local Club opportunities and information to parents
- Encourage teachers to become qualified GAA Coaches
- Help the Club in Scór and other cultural/heritage work

It would help initially if a meeting takes place between the School and Club to develop an understanding of the Club-School links programme and to provide a mutual commitment to the way forward and the development of the link.

A programme of regular meetings between the School and Club is a good way to review the effectiveness of the link.

What makes a Club-School link effective and successful?

When a School and GAA Club are working well together, they:

- Put the children at the centre of everything
- Talk to each other regularly
- Communicate well with young people and parents
- Respect each other
- Have a shared vision and approach
- Agree expectations and goals
- Find ways of enabling young people to take part in Club activities
- Build on what young people learn in both settings
- Recognise, share & celebrate achievements
- Share and develop teaching and coaching expertise
- Share facilities, equipment and resources
- Understand the roles and responsibilities of other agencies that contribute to and support the Club-School link
- Leave the children - and each other - better than they found them!



Who else can be involved/assist with developing Club-School Links?

Other organisations in the community can also be of value to Clubs. Each Local Council has a Sports Development or Leisure Services Department, which houses a number of Sports Development Officers. These Officers can support the club in a number of ways:

- Keeping Clubs informed of wider sporting opportunities that are taking place locally
- Providing training opportunities for coaches, administrators and other Club personnel
- Helping with applications for funding

- Creating links with Schools
- Sourcing facilities or accessing time in facilities
- Linking with other sports and community programmes
- Supporting Club promotions
- Helping with the writing of development plans

Each County Board has Games Promotion Officers and Games Development Managers who are available to advise and support schools and clubs in forming new links and partnerships.

The Ulster Council also has School Coaching Officers located across the province and Regional Development Officers available to offer support to clubs if required for more information log on to

www.ulstergaa.ie





Acknowledgements

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© Club Maith-Ulster Council GAA and Ulster Cumann na mBunscol
By: Ryan Feeney, Dr. Eugene Young and Terence McWilliams

Contributors

Kevin Kelly, Sheena Tally, Mark Conway,
Paul Duggan and Pat McGivern

Find us on:



Comhairle Uladh CLG, Ulster Council GAA, 8-10 Market Street, Armagh BT61 7BX

Tel: +44 (0)28 3752 1900 **Fax:** +44 (0)28 3752 8092 **Email:** info.ulster@gaa.ie

ulster.gaa.ie

