



CLG ULADH

AN CHOMHDHÁIL BHLIANTÚÍL 2015

GARBHACHADH, TÍR EOGHAIN, 31^ú Eanáir 2015

CLUICHÍ

CULTÚR

TEANGA



#WeAreUlsterGAA

TUARSCÁIL AN RÚNAÍ//

A Chairde,

When you examine the various elements that go to make a complete year there are many pieces that can work to encourage and inspire and some that act as barriers which can frustrate and demotivate our actions. All of these occurred in 2014 and in many ways even the negative occurrences have stiffened our resolve to continue to progress the GAA. The Association is what we say we are and our work is in Community and has no shareholders or corporate interests. We are and will remain dedicated to the promotion of our games, culture and pastimes and through these the development of a community ideal that is for the greater good for our members and through them to the greater benefit of our society as a whole.

The competitions of the past year have been most competitive and the Championships have demonstrated that the contest is still central to the purpose of our games and to the teams taking part. The development

of our Counties, Clubs and Schools is very much in evidence and the current standards are comparable to any part of the Association and what we do is still very relevant to the aims and ideals of the GAA and its future within our Country and the Irish Diaspora.

Dún na nGall achieved a unique success in winning the Senior and Minor titles while An Cabhán retained the Under 21 Football Championship. Aontroim won the Minor and Under 21 hurling titles and performed creditably in the Senior Championship. The Inter Provincial Football Championship saw our team reach the final but we had to acknowledge that Connacht were the deserving winners. The efforts of the Ulster teams demonstrates our continuing dedication to this competition and to having it represent the total support of the GAA in Ulster for the recognition of a provincial identity.

Ulster had four representatives in the Allianz Football League Finals, with contrasting results. Baile Atha Cliath defeated Doire in the Division One

Final while Muineachán defeated Dún na nGall in the Division Two decider. An Cabhán were defeated by Ros Comain in the Division Three Final. With regards to hurling, An Dún reached the Allianz Hurling League Division 2B Final where they were defeated by Cill Mhantain. Dún na nGall won the 3A title while Tír Eoghain claimed the 3B crown. The Red Hand County added to this with a great victory in the Nicky Rackard Cup Final where they defeated Fingal. Fear Manach were edged out in the Lory Meagher Cup as Longfort ran out winners in a thrilling final. Congratulations to all involved in these successes.

FINANCE//

There has been substantial expansion in regard to the financial workings of Comhairle Uladh. This has been in relation to the outworking of the proposed redevelopment of Casement Park but is also due to the increased attendances, greater input into funding for projects and more stringent budgetary requirements. The work in relation to the Council's own income and expenditure continues at a high level

and it is obvious that the demands have increased substantially. The regime of monthly outputs of finance does present a very substantial undertaking but we have met our commitments to our Counties in addition to our other demands to external bodies by ensuring a satisfactory cash flow. The income of Comhairle Uladh amounted to €6,532,150 inclusive of all grants. Our gate income, €2,056,631 represented 31% of this compared to 26% of the total income in 2013. In 2014 our grant income, €1,527,978, represents 23% of our total in comparison to 28% in 2013. The expenditure amounted to €5,987,468. In addition, the investment in Grounds and Infrastructure amounted €119,515. There was an operating profit on the years working equating to €425,167 which was transferred to our accumulated funds. The throughput of funds in respect of Casement Park are separately accounted for and this is the basis for the total project and beyond. We are grateful to the Finance and Governance Workgroup and Brendan Waters for their guidance on these very important work. We acknowledge the grants from DCAL and Ard Comhairle in respect of the Casement Park Project.

Our attendances have continued to increase over the past year and this has allowed for a more sustainable budget to be operated. This has seen an increase of income across all our competitions which we acknowledge and thank all our members and supporters for their continued support. We are again impacted by the substantial reduction in the value of the Euro and this has major implication on occasions when there are transfers to the sterling zone. The marketing of our games has been increased and this in turn has seen a continued increase in online sales of tickets for games. Subsequently, this has ensured that those attending our games can pre - purchase tickets either through our units or via tickets.ie or through outlets of the Musgrave Group. We continue

to work in difficult times and austerity is still prevalent in the plans for the future. We shall find this impacting on our operations but we shall seek to maintain our investment in games, games development and other areas of development.

Our team of stewards from the Counties, the team officials and members of Comhairle Uladh have been of great assistance in organising a very substantial games programme and without their continuing efforts we would be unable to maintain major input into all aspects of the games programme. We acknowledge the dedication and commitment of all who have given so generously of their time throughout the year and thank them for it. They all do so in a voluntary capacity and that includes many members of staff who are also vital to our work on match days. An Cisteoir, Oilibhear Ó Gealagain is a tremendously committed person who has rendered great work to the Council throughout the year and on many fronts. He has been fully involved in our financial affairs and has been an outstanding help to Comhairle Uladh. We are very grateful to him for his exemplary work on our behalf. The vital work of Michelle McAleer, our Head of Business and Finance has also been outstanding and her contribution to our work has been immense. The work of Brian Mallon has been a tremendous asset and we are well served by his enthusiastic approach. Paul Sanders also contributes to the overall controls that ensure that in this field, our finance team are always in charge. We are grateful to their diligence in taking care of our finances and related matters.

COMÓRTAISÍ CÚIGE//

In 2014, the Anglo Celt Cup returned to the hills of Dún na nGall while Aontroim again won the Liam Harvey Cup. The Ulster Club Championships both went to new homes in the recent months. Slaughtneil and Portaferry

collected the honours in their respective codes. Slaughtneil beat Omagh St Endas in the football final at the Athletic Grounds in front of over 9,000 spectators while Portaferry secured a memorable and historic win over Ruairi Og at Owenbeg. The attendances at our Ulster Club Championships continued to rise and we experienced particularly large crowds at the Ulster Football and Hurling Club Finals.

The Tain Adult Club Hurling League of 2014 was again organised. This initiative saw teams compete from across Ulster with the exception of Antrim as well as teams from Louth. There were a total of five divisions. Ballinascreen (Doire), Burt (Dún na nGall), Ballela (An Dún), St Feichins (Louth) and Buncrana (Dún na nGall) emerged as the divisional winners. With regard to the Quinns Corner Ulster Football Club League, a total of 35 clubs were involved, with 12 teams in Senior and 23 teams in Intermediate. Glenullin (Doire) and Dungannon (Tír Eoghain) won the senior and intermediate finals respectively. Both finals were great spectacles where the minimum separated the sides in both games at the final whistle. These competitions again provided clubs with competitive action at their appropriate level prior to the commencement of their internal county games programmes.

In our first competition of the year, the Dr McKenna Cup, Tír Eoghain again collected the title by defeating An Cabhán by 1-15 to 0-11 at a well attended final at the Athletic Grounds. I also extend my gratitude to Power NI for their sponsorship of this important competition in the Ulster GAA calendar.

SENIOR FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP//

The 2014 Ulster Senior Football Championship was a tremendous competition with many outstanding contests. Tír Eoghain overcame An Dún after a replay and set up a major

contest with Muineachan. Ard Mhacha defeated An Cabhan and in a great semi - final Muineachan defeated Ard Mhacha to advance to the Ulster Final. There awaited Dun na nGall who won a close encounter at Celtic Park against Doire. They won their semi final against Aontroim who had overcome Fear Manach at Brewster Park. The Ulster Final took place two weeks later where Dún na nGall and Muineachán met at St Tiernach's Park, Clones. Ulster Final day also saw the Ulster Senior Football Champions from twenty five years previously, Tír Eoghain being honoured. With the inclusion of honouring the successful teams from the past, Cumann na mBunscol exhibition games, band entertainment, the Minor Football Final and the Senior showpiece, Ulster Final day continues to be a celebration of our great Association in the province of Ulster. The game was a titanic tussle between two great teams. Dún na nGall seemed to possess a greater edge for scores and emerged as champions. The scenes of jubilation at the final whistle from a county who had regained the Ulster Championship after a mere one year lapse were memorable and congratulations go to Dún na nGall for a well deserved success.

ALL-IRELAND FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP//

The All-Ireland Senior Football Championship for Ulster representatives began with three of our counties enjoying wins on home territory on the last weekend in June. An Cabhán defeated Iar Mhi, Tír Eogahin defeated An Lú and An Dún beat Liatroim. The following week, Aontroim exited the All-Ireland series with a 3-11 to 0-15 defeat away to Luimneach. One week later, An Cabhán were defeated by Ros Comain, Ard Mhacha defeated Tír Eoghain in the all Ulster affair in Omagh while An Dún fell to a late surge from Cill Dara at Pairc Esler. Ard Mhacha followed this up with good victories over both Ros Comain and An Mhí to reach the

quarter finals. Muineachán took on Cill Dara in the last 12 and emerged winners after extra time at Croke Park.

In the quarter finals, Muineachán were defeated by Ath Cliath while in the all Ulster quarter final, a late Patrick McBrearty point was the difference as Dún na nGall defeated Ard Mhacha by the minimum margin. Dún na nGall were left to fly the Ulster flag in the All-Ireland semi finals as they faced a formidable Dublin side. Despite entering the game as overwhelming underdogs, Dún na nGall produced a scintillating team performance to emerge winners to reach their second All-Ireland Final in three years. Unfortunately, in the All-Ireland Senior Football Final, they failed to scale the same heights and were edged out by Ciarraí on a spectacular day for the GAA. Despite this result, three Ulster titles in four years, a second Sam Maguire for the county and two All-Ireland Final appearances in the same period has brought Donegal back amongst the leading football counties in the Country.

The All-Stars reflected the effort of Dun na nGall and I extend my congratulations to the four Donegal players who received awards. Well done to Paul Durcan, Neil McGee, Neil Gallagher and Michael Murphy. Also, special mention to Ryan McHugh (Dún na nGall) who collected the Young Player of the Year award.

MINOR FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP//

The Ulster Minor Football Championship continues to excite and entertain. These games are fitting curtain raisers on championship days and 2014 again produced another great competition. In the Preliminary Round, Tír Eoghain easily defeated An Dún. In the quarter finals, there were wins for Dún na nGall, Ard Mhacha, Aontroim and Muineachán. On the eve of the Muineachán and Tír Eoghain game, Owen Bannigan,

father of Monaghan county minor player Michael, passed away suddenly. We extend our sympathies to the Bannigan family circle. Subsequently, the game was postponed to a further date. At this stage, I wish to commend the accommodation of both Tír Eoghain and Muineachan in facilitating a rescheduled date for this refixture. In the semi finals, both played at St Tiernachs Park, Dún na nGall easily overcame Aontroim while Ard Mhacha defeated Muineachán.

The final meeting between Dún na nGall and Ard Mhacha was decided by a strong finishing rally from the Dún na nGall side that saw them run out champions on a 2-12 to 0-10 scoreline. Congratulations to Dún na nGall for a well deserved success, their first at this level since 2006. It also completed a minor double for the county, as they won the Ulster Minor Football League earlier in the year. As Ulster champions, Dún na nGall took on Ros Comain in the All-Ireland Quarter Final in Sligo. A determined performance was enough for them to progress but unfortunately, Muineachán fell to the reigning All-Ireland champions, Maigh Eo in Croke Park. In the All-Ireland Semi Final, Dún na nGall needed a late Ethan O'Donnell point to see off the challenge from Ath Cliath. On Sunday 21st September, the minors and seniors from Dún na nGall descended on Croke Park. The minors fell to a strong Kerry side who ran out deserving winners. A disappointing end to the year for our Ulster champions, but the experience of playing in such massive occasions in front of huge crowds will leave an indelible positive mark on these youngsters.

UNDER 21 FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP//

This Championship continues to thrive in its current Wednesday night slot in the fixture programme, where it does not directly impinge on counties' preparations for National Football Leagues and also benefits from an increased interest from our spectators.

In the Preliminary Round, An Cabhán travelled to Celtic Park and came away winners. The four quarter finals all took place on the same night and there were wins for An Cabhán, Dún na nGall and Muineachán. Ard Mhacha and Aontroim played out a brilliant draw in the Athletic Grounds after extra time. In the replay played in Pairc Esler the following Wednesday night, Ard Mhacha progressed by three points. In the semi finals, the reigning champions An Cabhán defeated Muineachán while Dún na nGall did likewise to Ard Mhacha at Kingspan Breffni Park. I wish to place on record my gratitude to both Ard Mhacha and especially Dún na nGall for travelling to Cavan at very short notice after Healy Park was deemed unplayable.

The following week, An Cabhán and Dún na nGall played out a tense encounter in front of a large crowd at the Athletic Grounds. Their experience from winning the previous three Under 21 Championships was vital as the Breffni men collected their fourth title in a row. This was another tremendous success for An Cabhán which surely augurs well for their future. In the All-Ireland Semi Final played at Portlaoise ten days later, An Cabhán were narrowly defeated by eventual All-Ireland champions, Ath Cliath.

CLUB FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP//

The Ulster Club Championship still has a lure for our supporters and the local aspect means that all clubs at all levels can aspire to the greatest stage throughout the province and indeed, Croke Park. In the Preliminary Round, Clontibret hit a late goal to defeat Kilcoo by a point at Pairc Esler. In the Quarter Finals, there were wins for Omagh, Clontibret, St Eunans and Slaughtneil over Crossmaglen, St Galls, Roslea and Cavan Gaels respectively. At the Semi Final stage Omagh held off a resilient St Eunans challenge as they ran out winners at Celtic Park. In the other Semi Final Slaughtneil produced a

great team performance to win against Clontibret at Healy Park. In the Ulster Final, Slaughtneil and Omagh played out a tremendous game at the Athletic Grounds in Armagh. An injury time point from Christopher Bradley secured a first ever title for Robert Emmets Slaughtneil. Well done to all involved.

The 2014 Ulster Senior Club Championship was a brilliant competition which included a number of great games. Six of the eight games were decided by three points or less. This year also saw the re-introduction of the original Seamus McFerran Cup and it looked in pristine condition on Ulster Final day. The Intermediate and Senior Finals were played as a double header in the Athletic Grounds and it was a fitting end to another great year of activity on our playing fields.

The Intermediate Football Club Championship remains an extremely competitive grade and 2014 was no different. In the Preliminary Round, Cootehill defeated Antrim champions, Casements Portglenone. In the Quarter Finals, there were wins for Inniskeen, Warrenpoint, Cloughaneely and Derrylin over Cootehill, Dungannon, Castledawson and St Pauls respectively. Cloughaneely and Derrylin both required extra time to progress. In the semi finals, there were convincing wins for Warrenpoint over Cloughaneely and Inniskeen over Derrylin. In the Final, played in the Athletic Grounds, both teams played some fantastic football and a goal with ten minutes to go killed off the Inniskeen challenge. Cumann Pheadáir Naofa ran out deserving winners in a great advertisement for intermediate football.

In the Junior Football Championship, there was again no representation from Fear Manach so there was no requirement for a Preliminary Round. In the Quarter Finals, there were wins for Keady, Rock, Drumaness and Urris over Drumhowan, Moneymore, St Malachys and Arva respectively. In the

Semi Finals, Rock defeated Drumaness at Celtic Park and Urris beat Keady at Clones. The Junior Final was played in Owenbeg, and it was Rock who collected the Paul Kerr Cup for a second time.

ALL-IRELAND CLUB FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP//

Ballinderry Shamrocks were beaten by a strong St Vincent's side in the All-Ireland Senior Football Semi Final in Pairc Esler. In a great game of football, St Vincent's progressed to the final and then subsequently claimed the All-Ireland title.

In the All-Ireland Intermediate Club Championship, Truagh from Muineachán defeated Geraldines from An Lú in the semi final at Crossmaglen. In the All-Ireland Final played at Croke Park, they produced an incredible display of score taking to defeat Kiltane from Maigh Eo by 2-21 to 2-13 to claim the All-Ireland title. Well done to all involved.

In the junior grade, Emyvale were defeated at the semi final stage by Two Mile House at Longfort to end their involvement.

SENIOR HURLING CHAMPIONSHIP//

The Ulster Senior Hurling Final of 2013 between Aontroim and An Dún took place on Sunday 2nd February in Celtic Park. Aontroim ran out 4-21 to 0-17 winners. There are many factors why this did not take place in 2013 but it is important that the game was played and is a tribute to both teams and mentors.

The 2014 Championship was a five county competition with Aontroim again receiving a bye to the Ulster Final. In the quarter final, played in the Athletic Grounds, Doire defeated Ard Mhacha while the other quarter final was played as part of a double header with the Muineachán and Tír Eoghain Ulster Senior Football Championship game at St Tiernach's Park. An Dún ran

out comfortable 1-31 to 0-10 winners over Dún na nGall.

The Semi Final saw Doire take on An Dún in St Tiernach's Park, Clones and they could not be separated even after extra time. The following week, at the Athletic Grounds, Doire were victorious and went forward to their encounter with Aontroim. I am pleased to report that after the disappointing situation over last year's final, the 2014 Ulster Senior Hurling Final was played at Owenbeg in front of a really good crowd and those in attendance were treated to a great spectacle of inter county hurling. In a game that ebbed and flowed, Aontroim held onto the Liam Harvey Cup by virtue of the minimum margin. Well done to all involved.

ALL-IRELAND HURLING CHAMPIONSHIP//

After their involvement in the Leinster Senior Hurling Championship round robin series, Aontroim were involved in the McCarthy Cup where they met Uíbh Fhaili in the First Round at Ballycastle. In a good encounter, the Saffron County lost out in close contest to end their involvement in the All-Ireland series.

In the Christy Ring Cup, Ard Mhacha, An Dún and Doire were Ulster's representatives. In a disappointing campaign Ard Mhacha were defeated by both An Mhí and Cill Mhantain. An Dún suffered the same fate as they were beaten by both An Mhí and Doire. Apart from this victory, Doire were beaten by both Ciarraí and Cill Dara to complete a miserable campaign for Ulster sides.

The Nicky Rackard Cup saw Dún na nGall, Muineachán and Tír Eoghain as the competitors from the province. Muineachán were defeated by both Dún na nGall and Ros Comáin. Dún na nGall were narrowly beaten by Fingal at Letterkenny to end their involvement in the competition. Tír Eoghain edged out Fingal in a brilliant

final in Croke Park. Congratulations to Tír Eoghain.

In the Lory Meagher Cup, Fear Manach were our only representative and despite wins over Warwickshire and Liatroim, they were very disappointed after a Croke Park final defeat to Longfort.

MINOR HURLING CHAMPIONSHIP//

Five counties competed in the Ulster Minor Hurling Championship in 2014. In the quarter final, Doire just edged past Dún na nGall at Letterkenny. In the semi finals played at Clones, Aontroim defeated An Dún while Doire did likewise to Ard Mhacha. A fortnight later, the final brought Aontroim and Doire together at Owenbeg. An impressive all round display by Aontroim saw them emerge victorious. Well done to Aontroim. In the All-Ireland Quarter Final, Aontroim were well beaten by Gaillimh at Kingspan Breffni Park.

UNDER 21 HURLING CHAMPIONSHIP//

Five Ulster counties including the Under 21 Shield winners, Tír Eoghain, competed in the Under 21 Championship, which was played on a knock out basis again. In the quarter final, which was played as a curtain raiser to the All-Ireland Senior Football Qualifier between the same two counties, Ard Mhacha emerged as winners. The semi finals saw Aontroim defeat Doire at Ballycastle, and An Dún advance at the expense of Ard Mhacha. The Ulster Final was a one sided affair and it was Aontroim who took the title by virtue of a victory over An Dún at the Athletic Grounds. In the All-Ireland Semi Final, Aontroim came up against Clare at Thurles and the Munster champions were in formidable form as they eased to a comfortable victory.

UNDER 21 HURLING SHIELD//

In the Ulster Under 21 Hurling Shield Quarter Final, Tír Eoghain easily defeated An Cabhán at Garvaghey.

The semi finals produced two great games where Fear Manach defeated Muineachán at Inniskeen while Tír Eoghain overcame Dún na nGall by the minimum at Letterkenny. Unfortunately, Fear Manach did not field in the final against Tír Eoghain who then failed to field in the All-Ireland Under 21 'B' Championship for a second consecutive year which was another disappointing development. The continuation of this competition in its current format into the future is surely in considerable doubt.

CLUB HURLING CHAMPIONSHIP//

In the Ulster Senior Club Championship, we were treated to some great encounters. The Slaughtneil hurling team being part of a dual title success was eventually derailed by Ruairi Og after a replay. Their drawn game epitomised all that is good about club hurling in this province. The Ulster Final threw up a major surprise as St. Patrick's, Portaferry claimed their first ever Ulster title by defeating Ruairi Og at Owenbeg. A tremendous success for this proud Ards club. In the Intermediate Club Hurling Championship, O'Donovan Rossa collected the title, following wins over Burt, Keady and Eoghan Rua Coleraine. In the junior final, Castleblayney defeated Na Magha at Dungannon.

ALL-IRELAND CLUB HURLING CHAMPIONSHIP//

Loughgiel Shamrocks were Ulster's representatives in the All-Ireland Club Championship, having won the 2013 Ulster Club Championship. In the All-Ireland Semi Final they came up against Carlow and Leinster champions, Mount Leinster Rangers at Pairc Esler. Unfortunately, for a second year in a row, it was a bridge too far as the Aontroim and Ulster champions just lost out by the narrowest of margins. In the All-Ireland Intermediate Club Championship, Clooney Gaels were well beaten by Rower Inistioge at Navan. In the junior grade, Kickhams





Creggan defeated Fullen Gaels the champions of Britain to reach the All-Ireland Final. At Croke Park, they played out a thrilling encounter with Waterford champions, Ballysaggart and the teams could not be separated after extra time. The following weekend at Mullingar, Kickhams Creggan sealed the All-Ireland title by winning out by a clear margin. Well done to all involved in this great success and deservedly won where it matters on the field of play.

INTER PROVINCIAL CHAMPIONSHIPS//

The Inter Provincial Championships in both football and hurling remained on the games programme in 2014. Ulster were delighted that this has been included in the fixture calendar in 2014 and again in 2015 albeit in the month of December. Our hurlers and footballers were away to our Leinster counterparts. The hurlers were defeated in Trim while the footballers recorded a remarkable 2-26 to 3-21 extra time victory over the same opposition in Navan a week later in a fascinating game of football. In the final played at Tuam on February Ulster were defeated by Connacht. While it is not what we wanted, it was important that Connacht won and deservedly so.

PROVINCIAL COUNCIL//

The return of Feile na nGael was a very significant event in our province and the input of the various Clubs, Counties and members of Comhairle Uladh are acknowledged and appreciated. The work of facilitating such an event is manifold and the input of the organising Committee, the various sub committees and host families were tremendous and highly reflective of the importance of Feile to the Association in Ulster. Given the optimism of a year ago in relation to the redevelopment of Casement Park, it is frustrating to report that as a result of the recent decision of the High Court on the Judicial Review that our planning

permission has been quashed. It needs to be stated that no fault was found with our side of the matter and given that we had a world leader in the field of Stadium design working for us we were satisfied that we were doing everything that was required of us. The reassessment of the case outcome will form a major part of our work in the coming weeks until we have a clear determination on the matters at hand and where the future is likely to lead us. The Project Board and our team ably led by Tomas O Dalaigh operated to the highest standards and did all that was required of us. The delivery of this project is a vital strategic objective set down in the Strategic Review Committee Report of 2002 and in subsequent Government documents outlining the requirement to meet the strategic needs of the three sports and that includes the GAA. The past year has seen the tremendous and ongoing work of the Officers and Members of Comhairle Uladh. Those who work on our Sub Committees have also worked diligently for the greater good of our Association and we are indebted to them. Our staff have collectively ensured that we are meeting the challenges that come our way, while at the same time assisting our constituent units and members in planning for the future and our role in it.

Our work is supported by the Irish Sports Council, Sport NI, the Departments of Education, Culture, Arts and Leisure, Environment, Social Development, Agriculture and Rural Development, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Tourism and Sport, Foreign Affairs, the North/ South Ministerial Council and all political parties, who have been encouraging us in what we do. This is acknowledged and very much appreciated by the GAA in Ulster. We are grateful to all of the staff with whom we work. Our appreciation is also due to the various Ministers with whom we engage with and we are particularly grateful for the input of the Department of Culture,

Arts and Leisure and its Minister Charal Ni Chulin.

An tUachtarain, Martin Mac Aibhne, has led from the front and has been very generous with his time. He has worked diligently on behalf of the GAA in general and the Provincial Council in particular. I thank Martin for his work and dedication to our overall good. Micheal O hOsain, Leas Uachtarain, has also given a tremendous amount of his time to work for the Council across all of our activity and has been fully involved in hurling matters and has made a significant contribution to the success of Feile na nGael. Oilibhear Ó Gealagain has been a totally committed Cisteoir and has been an outstanding support to the work of Comhairle Uladh and has also represented the Council on many occasions for which we thank him. Sean Ó Conghaile has given generously of his time in the office as OCP. He interacts with the media in dealing with the various issues that arise and also assists the Officers in carrying out a wide range of duties for the GAA in Ulster for which we acknowledge his input.

The Members of the Ulster Council continue to give generously of their time throughout the past year. Through their efforts they have provided a substantial service and support to the work of the GAA in Ulster. They contribute at all level of our affairs including working on our sub committees. They also help by supporting the operational requirements on match days. We acknowledge the work of our members and thank them for their dedication and support throughout the year. We record our deep appreciation of the work of those who leave the Council at this Convention and we acknowledge the outstanding contribution made by Tyrone Eastwood, Paul McArdle, Gerry Soden, Paddy Sheanon, Brendan Kelly, Jack Devaney, Diarmuid Cahill, Tiernach Mahon, Pat Darcy and Gerard Bradley all of whom have represented

their Counties with distinction and we wish them well in the challenges that they undertake on behalf of the GAA into the future. We thank them for their work on behalf of Comhairle Uladh during their time as members and know that they will continue to work for the Association in the years ahead.

The Hearings Committee does a tremendous amount of work for us which continues to tax the voluntary efforts of this body. The volume of cases involving appeals and hearings is a very sizeable requirement on the system but the demand for expedited hearings and the determinations on perception of bias are placing a very significant burden on the Committee. We continue to be grateful for the work of the members of the Committee and especially Nollaig Mac Cumhaill and Eamonn Mac Mathuna who as Chairman and Secretary respectively of our Hearings Committee are always at hand to deal with matters that arise. We acknowledge the work and administrative support of Damian Kelly in servicing officer to the Committee.

Our Coiste Cheannais na gComórtaisí have an increasing function in dealing with an expanded fixtures programme and the disciplinary matters that arise from time to time. The volume of activity means a greater input by all involved and this is dealt with by the Committee on an ongoing basis. This places a substantial demand on our Counties, Referees, Clubs and also to other fixture making bodies. Stephen Donnelly does outstanding work on behalf of our Council in his servicing of the CCC and dealing with referees. He also does outstanding work on the provision of programmes and we are well served by his total commitment and dedication to this critical area for our Association.

We acknowledge the work of the members of Coiste Bainisti for their diligent work on our behalf and for the

input of Ryan Feeney as Servicing Officer for our Coiste Bainisti who has been a tremendous support in the outworking of this very vital Committee in the affairs of Comhairle Uladh. We are indebted to the Senior Staff Committee who act as the operational arm of our Management Committee and we acknowledge all for their outstanding efforts on behalf of the GAA in Ulster. Kathy Kelly has acted as Servicing Officer to the Senior Staff and in conjunction with Eugene Young, Michelle McAleer, Ryan Feeney and Stephen McGeehan have ensured that the operational work is carried out efficiently and as agreed by Coiste Bainisti.

Geraldine McKavanagh has been exemplary in her work on our behalf. Her work in respect of the Project Board and Project Steering Group has been onerous and immense. Geraldine also deals with many matters pertaining to my work and I am very grateful to her for her total dedication to the job at hand and for her loyalty, support and dedication to our work and to the Association. Our staff are enthusiastic and give generously of their time in the interests of the GAA in Ulster and many are active in our Association in addition to their employed time. We are grateful to them for the work they do on our behalf.

Last year I paid tribute to Aogan Ó Fearghail, Iar Uchtarain Comhairle Uladh who was leaving our Council after a long service as a County Representative and an Officer. He in the meantime has been elected as Uachtaran Tofa of our Association and we rejoice in his success and know that he will be a leader that will represent a very positive and assured GAA. We wish him well and assure Aogan that he has our unqualified support in the work he undertakes for and on behalf of our Association.

REFEREES//

The past year has witnessed the various commentaries of our games focus on the application of the Playing

Rules. The impact of this is to be provocative and to challenge the Rules or the perceived interpretation of the Rules or worse still the decision of the referee. The need for the Association to challenge this perception as in a year when we had a truly competitive series of games we seem to spend too much time reviewing what the referee is doing rather than analysing the tactic being deployed. Should there be too much fouling then that is the responsibility of the team managements and the players. There is a need to create a climate where the proper application of the Rules are supported by all and these do require match officials, team managements and players to know the Rules and to respect everyone involved in the playing or control of our games.

The Referees Committee continued to work for the development of refereeing. To this end a report indicated that there was a need to standardise the communication system being used by our referees. It was agreed that this should be undertaken and all of our Counties were supplied with similar equipment. This is a licensed system and all referees operating within our Counties or Ulster will be conversant with how it works and operates. The development of the referee is paramount and to this end it is imperative that we have ongoing recruitment, training and assessment of our referees. The work of the tutors, assessors and administrators are all engaged in this development and we are indebted for the efforts of everyone involved.

Patsy Mullan, as Chairman of our Referees Committee has been totally committed to the cause of referees and the Committee through its work have demonstrated their loyalty and support throughout the year. He has been fully supported throughout by our Referees Administrator and Secretary Jim O'Rourke for which we are very grateful. We thank the

members of the Referee's Committee for all their work in this vital area for our Association. Our referees make a substantial commitment of their time in the delivery of our games programme and are an important part of the team. We also acknowledge the ongoing work of the County Referees Administrators, Assessors and Tutors to whom we are also indebted and who continue to do outstanding work on our Association's behalf.

CLUB DEVELOPMENT//

We are currently in the process of completing the development of our new Provincial Strategic Plan that will act as our roadmap of development up to 2020. I am pleased that our previous five-year strategy achieved in excess of 90% of our aspirations and targets. Shortly every Club in Ulster will receive a feedback document as part of our consultation process so that we ensure that the grassroots GAA members are setting the strategic direction of the Provincial Council for the next five years. This will be Ulster GAA's fourth strategic plan and it is clear that the previous three have resulted in significant investment and development of the GAA in our Province ensuring that our focus remains on increasing participation and capacity of the GAA at all levels in Ulster.

At County level new plans are being developed in Cavan, Donegal and Antrim as part of the new five year strategic planning cycle. Already both Derry and Tyrone are well into the new cycle and it is clear that both Counties are yielding results across all areas of their operations.

Club Maith continues to be the recognised brand for club excellence among GAA clubs in Ulster. Twenty clubs have been accredited in 2014, five of which received Platinum awards, while the remaining fifteen received Gold awards. The scheme is proving hugely popular as an increasing number of clubs are

submitting their Club Maith Portfolios for assessment. Thanks must go to our voluntary Club Maith Facilitators who are essential to the process, and who were honoured along with accredited clubs at this year's Ulster GAA President's Awards. The Club Maith scheme has been reviewed in 2014, and the refreshed criteria is well-supported by a revamped Club Maith website for 2015.

The Club Planning Programme aims to ensure that all GAA clubs have a Club Development Plan in place by 2015; a huge undertaking of work which is made possible through the work of our County Development Officers and voluntary Club Planners. Training for County Development Officers and Club Planners was provided on two occasions by Ulster GAA during 2014, which has enabled many clubs to receive support in creating their Club Development Plans. In addition to Ulster GAA's Officer Training, Programme Funding Workshops have been delivered to clubs to emphasise the importance of forward-planning and to help clubs achieve a state of readiness in terms of drawing down external grants when accessible and available.

Ulster GAA held its Club Officer training for new Officers on Saturday 18th January in Holy Trinity College, Cookstown. This is the fifth year of rolling out this training which is focused on eight specific club officer roles. The aim of this training was to provide vital support and resources for GAA Club Volunteers new to their roles in 2014, so that we can ensure that our GAA clubs are operating to the highest possible standards which is good for clubs, counties and the Association. The Club Officer Training Programme for new Officers provides necessary information on the specific roles and responsibilities of each Club Official position as well as providing a good platform to explore key issues facing club officers in the year ahead.

The training builds capacity of GAA Club Volunteers by improving their knowledge base and developing their skills and talents. Over 100 volunteers from across the province attended the event where eight role specific workshops were held as part of this session addressing various positions of a Club Executive: Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer, PRO, Culture Officer, Development Officer, Coaching Officer and Children's Officer Training.

Ahead of 2014 training counties were asked to select four workshops that would address their individual needs for the year ahead. These four workshops were selected from six different themes; club development, governance, communications, health, volunteer development, culture and language. In addition to this all counties received a Child Protection Workshop delivered to update volunteers on any changes in legislation or GAA Rules. Workshops were held in all nine counties with over 700 volunteers attending representing a substantial increase on the previous year's attendance. The training programme aims to protect and support our volunteers while also encouraging strong leadership at grass root level.

Coiste Forbartha, Club and Physical Development Committee and Coiste Pairceanna agus Slandala are involved in advising and forward planning that is required within the Strategic Plans at County, Provincial and National level. This work is supported by the Community and Public Affairs side of the Ulster Council's work and is supported by a range of programmes that provide direct support to our units and members as diverse as health and wellbeing through to live to play. We are indebted to the trojan work of Ryan Feeney, Aileen Cummins, Sharon Haughey, Maura McMenamin, Donal McAnallen and Fionntan O'Dowd for their work in this vital area for our Association.



GROUNDS//

The Casement Park Development has been at the centre of our work for some considerable time and following the granting of our Planning Application, much pre-contract work was undertaken. All this changed as firstly an application was made for leave to take a judicial review against the award of planning by the Department of Environment in April. This was followed by the granting of a judicial review in June. The rest is now a matter of public record and the planning permission as awarded was quashed. This as I have previously stated has been most frustrating but the determination to build a new stadium that meets our strategic needs remains intact and the work now is to bring the matter forward to ensure that the redevelopment of Casement Park is taken forward mindful that there was no determination against the scale or design of the planned stadium. A substantial piece of work is required reestablishing the planning field and a full assessment of the High Court decision must now be undertaken. We need to be united in our determination that the GAA be treated fairly as detailed, in meeting the requirement as set out in the strategic outline case.

Our Stadium Project Board has been through exceptionally challenging times and this will remain so throughout the coming year. Many ongoing matters now need to be resolved to enable the advancement of the project. Tomas O Dalaigh has given enormously of his time in trying to ensure that the targets are met and that we can achieve the outcome envisaged from the outset. He has worked diligently, courageously and with forthrightness in advancing the project. The Ulster Council continues its work at progressing the Stadium that it was entitled to develop on the basis of strategic need and in line with the proposed need for all of the major field sports and that includes the GAA.

The Project Steering Group continues to deal with the operational side of our work. This is led by Stephen McGeehan, the Project Sponsor, and supported by our Independent Technical Advisor, Tim Harkin. They have been the pivot of engagement with our Integrated Supply Team, Heron Buckingham, Mott McDonald our ICT, and have had ongoing engagement with DCAL, the Planning Service and many other linked bodies. The input from Michelle McAleer into the overall financial planning and compliance with timelines applying to the project to date and into the future is immense and this will be a very substantial commitment throughout the lifetime of the project. Ryan Feeney has also been heavily involved in a wide range of matters from community engagement and marketing to engaging with political parties and Belfast City Council. Eugene Young has also played a significant role in the matters pertinent to the development. They all did everything required of them and on many occasions operated well beyond the call of duty. Geraldine McKavanagh as Stadium Administrator has carried out substantial amount of work has been a vital part of the delivery team for the project.

GAMES DEVELOPMENT//

The Games Development aspect of our Council's work are taken forward by our Coaching and Games Development Committee. Our programmes are designed within the Lifetime Athlete Development Pathway and are predicated on the development of players and coaches within defined parameters. The work of our Coaching and Games Development helps to ensure that those who participate in our games have highly developed skills and were required are appropriately qualified. Work is ongoing in the development of Sports Science and High Performance which is available to our Clubs and Counties.

Our Coaching and Games team are

funded by the Association and external bodies and the ongoing need to meet assessable standards is a huge demand on everyone involved. We work closely with our Counties in assessing and assisting their delivery and thus are working at all levels of the Association in delivering the various elements of the Coaching and Games Strategy. We also work with the Open College Network to establish independent verification of qualification as we also do with Coach Ireland. The ongoing demand for training and qualifications continues to grow and this in turn demonstrates our members and units commitment to the outworking of the GAA in the community.

The schools of excellence and development squads are an aid to talent identification and skills development. It is important that all our units are fully utilising these to ensure that those playing our games are enjoying their involvement and that our teams are able to compete for major honours on an ongoing basis. The competitions for the Jim McGuigan and Buncrana Cups that allow for progression as the players develop and the level of skill in these competitions are an encouragement for what we can achieve in the future. The advent of wheelchair hurling has also been an important development and the concept of the whole family of games for the whole life remains an incentive for everyone involved.

The Department of Education Curriculum Sports Programme continues to be a vital element of our work and the recognition of it by the receipt of a significant award is testimony to the development of physical literacy by the GAA in Ulster. It is tremendous work in introducing four to eight year olds to the concepts of agility, balance and coordination which are the basic building blocks of sports development and participation. Austerity may impinge on the scope of what we do in this area of work but

there is no doubt that this programme will deliver a generation of people that are fitter, healthier and also more skillful as they participate in our games. The delivery by thirty coaches across the six counties is of the highest standard and is something that reflects very well on our Association. We acknowledge the work of our Curriculum Coaches and particularly to Terence McWilliams who had the vision of what can be achieved and did an enormous amount of work in progressing it to an internationally recognised standard.

Hurling Development continues as a priority and the work undertaken at Club level demonstrates that at this tier our Clubs can compete with the Clubs anywhere in the Association. We need to examine ways to take this to where we can compete at County level. The winning of National competitions does not take our hurling to the national standard. We need a concerted effort by all involved to ensure that the game develops to the level that is currently inspiring the rest of the Country to the skills of the greatest game of all. We provide regional coaches to assist with the development of hurling clubs, primary and secondary schools and where possible support Club/School links. They also provide support to the coaches within the development squad programme and ensure that standards are achieved against the requirements of the schools of excellence and the development squads themselves. They support and guide hurling coaches at both club and county level and assist with the wider development of the game across Ulster. The work of Jimmy Darragh and his team is acknowledged and we know that persistence is the only way to achieve results.

Our Annual Coaching and Games Development Conference is an excellent occasion and the interest is at a very high level. The work that is undertaken is enlightening and encouraging. This is borne out by the

wide interest in the various workshops as they advocate best practice. This has in turn led to us being asked to present our work at other conferences both within and outside of Ireland. We are indebted to our Coaching and Games Development Committee and to the leadership of its Chairman, Gerry Duffy. We acknowledge the outstanding work that this Committee does through the input of its members. Eugene Young continues to give effective leadership to the whole field of games development and we are indebted to him for his forward planning and vision in the area that has such a critical function for all our players and teams.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT ENGAGEMENT//

Ulster GAA continues to lobby TD's MLA's MP's and Ministers for GAA support and development across a range of areas. The GAA remains a significant economic and social driver that provides significant benefits across all civic areas ranging from health promotion, community development, economic development, good relations and community cohesion. As such it is important that Ulster GAA continues to have a permanent relationship with all government departments and political parties across the island to ensure that the Association is being afforded the support it requires and deserves. At present Ulster GAA has an ongoing relationship with the following government departments namely Department of Education, Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Department of Social Development, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Department of the Environment, Sport NI, Public Health Agency plus other related public bodies. I want to thank the Ministers and officials from all departments and civic bodies for their ongoing cooperation and support. Ulster GAA recently submitted a response to the

Executive on the 2015/2016 budgets and again I highlight the importance for both Governments north and south to continue their investment in sport, culture and the arts.

A key area of public affairs work moving forward will be the engagement with the new local government structure coming into effect from the beginning of April. We again will be working with the County Committees to ensure that all future infrastructure and sports projects at local government level accommodate Gaelic Games and our needs.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND GOOD RELATIONS//

Ulster GAA continues to lead on the GAA's Community Engagement and Good Relations work and during 2014 meetings and engagements were organised with a range of groups and individuals from across the community spectrum. These engagements continue and will be core to Ulster GAA's work moving forward which underlines the GAA's commitment to development of a shared future which benefits all in our community.

The Cultural Awareness Strategy, funded by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, enabled a wide range of educational outreach activities to take place during 2014. Two large-scale schools events were co-organised with GOLI: the first at St Michael's College, Enniskillen, in March; and the latter at St Paul's High School, Bessbrook, in November. Both events featured presentations about the GAA and three other cultural and community organisations, followed by questions-and-answers sessions.

Fifteen other outreach talks were delivered to cross-community or unionist-community groups over the course of the year. These included talks in connection with the 'Key Institutions' project established by

Lisburn and Castlereagh Councils, the Rural Community Network, the STRIPE project and a number of local reconciliation initiatives. Talks about the GAA to visiting groups from Belmont Abbey College, North Carolina, USA; Georgetown University, Qatar; and the South African Gaels football team. More than 400 people attended these talks.

A novel project was launched by Comhairle Uladh at Queen's University Belfast in October, namely 'Forgotten Gaelic Volunteers', with a view to discovering and recording the stories of Ulster GAA members who fought in the First World War. This nine-month project, with support from the Heritage Lottery Fund, was designed to encompass a couple of further outreach talks about this subject and to conclude with the publication of a legacy booklet detailing the findings of the research.

A very successful Cúchulainn Cup project took place in April at the Tyrone GAA Centre in Garvaghey. Twelve teams took part from: Downpatrick; Belfast; Omagh; Enniskillen; Cavan; Coleraine; Roe Valley; Armagh; Letterkenny; Dungannon; Foyle; and Armagh. It was hugely positive to see a team from Letterkenny take-part, the first time a team from Donegal were involved. In total over two hundred and fifty players benefitted from the opportunity to learn new skills in Gaelic Football and Hurling. Thanks must go to Ulster GAA coaches for their support in the project. The Dungannon Cúchulainns were selected to represent Ulster GAA in the British Championships organised by our provincial counterparts in Britain. The competition took place in London in mid-July. Once again the international aspect of the programme proved hugely popular with prior trips to Croke Park and Parnell Park (hosted by Dublin County Board) a welcome addition to the development of interest in our games.

The Game of Three Halves events have been supported by Ulster GAA; bringing together the sports of Gaelic Football, Soccer and Rugby in a cross-community format. Although 2014 didn't see any formal programmes of activity as in other years through the Young Enterprise. Smaller scale events have taken place through-out the year. Once again the Belfast Interface Games was the major programme, running in four camps in Belfast during the summer and culminating in a flagship event in Seaview Stadium in early August. Antrim and Ulster hurler Neil McManus came along on the evening to meet with the 100+ participants.

COMMUNITY HEALTH AND WELLBEING PROGRAMMES AND CAMPAIGNS//

Ulster GAA's Health and Wellbeing programme continued to grow in strength this year with a range of programmes and initiatives being rolled out. Undoubtedly the highlight of the year in this field of work was the Irish News 'Health is Wealth' conference which took place in the Ramada Plaza hotel in November. Over 200 club volunteers from across Ulster gathered to learn more about issues such as mental health, addiction, club health, youth health and crises management. The contribution of some of our high profile players who delivered personal testimonies added great value to the day and outlined the collective effort necessary on the part of the GAA family alongside public health services to address these issues. The conference also saw the launch of www.ulster.gaa.ie/health - our new microsite which is the one stop shop for all materials, resources and contacts Clubs need to assist them in delivering on a range of agendas.

Our established programmes continued to reach into all clubs across Ulster with one significant new one, 'Heads Up', being well received both within and outside the Association. 'Heads Up' is a Mental

Health Awareness campaign and each club in Ulster received a resource pack to assist them in understanding the issues around mental ill-health and what Clubs can do to impact positively on this. Our Clubs also received a pack of posters to display around their venues to further increase awareness. Many Clubs have also availed of training to equip members with more knowledge in this important area. We have also begun to work on a course called 'Smart Talk' which will offer a qualification in acting as a guidance role. Initial pilot programmes have been successful with those involved and we hope to expand it further in the year ahead.

PROMOTING EQUALITY, TACKLING POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION THROUGH SPORT//

The 'Stand Out from the Crowd' resource was produced this year to complement the ASAP programme already in existence. This resource, focused on the effects of alcohol and drugs on athletic performance and it was one of our most popular ever. Having impacted on development squads across the codes it is hoped to expand this programme into second level schools in 2015. These programmes were deliverable through this initiative and it also provided the funding for the 'Healthy Hamper' programme which ran successfully in schools again this year and was further enhanced by the provision of dental kits for participant children. The Live to Play programme once again was undertaken and was successful in getting the road safety message to our Association and particularly our young people. It was again supported by the DOE and a portion of the spend went on the creation of 'kidszone' within the existing microsite. The 'kidszone' offers a fun educational experience for primary school children who learn through an interactive journey to school. Coupled with the now traditional 'colouring in

competition' this kidszone tool has greatly enhanced the delivery of this programme. We are currently in the process of the 2015 delivery which sees a further development of this tool. Club education continues on a request basis while the Tyrone County Health & Wellbeing Committee are to be commended for organising a large scale event for their clubs in Garvaghy in early November.

Now in its eighth year the Drink, Drugs & Sausage Rolls Programme remains a popular resource amongst the student population. With the continued sponsorship from Squareball.com the Drink, Drugs and Sausage Rolls Programme took place at six University Campuses in 2014 aiming to help young people make the transition from home life to student life. The campaign presents a range of health messages in an innovative way to attract the attention of students raising their awareness on issues such as alcohol, drugs, diet and exercise. This year over 1000 students attended our stall, receiving a booklet and wall-planner providing them with guidance on Health and Wellbeing issues relevant to them.

The Association nationally took a step towards placing Health and Wellbeing at the core of its activities with the appointment of County Health Committees effective from January 2014. I am pleased to say that all Ulster Counties have a committee in place and are undertaking work to assist the betterment of their members. Funding from the Public Health Agency has been a welcome investment in assisting counties to deliver their programmes and to provide resources for Clubs to create a display unit devoted to Health and Wellbeing.

Clubs themselves are adopting similar governance structures as at County Committee level and with the appointment of the appropriate officer at this level to roll out programmes

and policies locally. It is a source of great pride that the work begun in Ulster is now Association-wide policy and will give us greater resolve to continue on a path which will assist the betterment of all our members and Clubs into the future.

SPORT IN THE COMMUNITY PROJECT//

As we come to the end of the third year of 'DSD Sport in the Community' I am pleased to say that this cross sporting programme has been an immense success. Focused on the development of volunteers and strong club structures it has been the platform from which we have delivered our capacity building programmes in the GAA community.

Programmes such as Officer Training, GoldMark and Club Maith have embedded a high standard of governance and operating standard within Ulster's clubs while our range of diversity initiatives including the Game of Three Halves and the Cuchulainn Cup have opened up our codes to a wider and enthused new audience. Such has been the popularity of these programmes that year on year we have exceeded our targets around increased volunteer numbers, programmes and opportunities to volunteer and given the challenging times we face in relation to recruitment and retention of volunteers this is no mean feat. Jointly with the Irish Football Association and IRFU Ulster Branch we have delivered a number of unique initiatives. The highlight of the year in terms of delivery was the 'Beyond the Games' Good Relations Conference which took place in June. Attracting around a hundred volunteers it was possibly the most successful format this annual event has attracted. Best practice in the area of good relations, health and volunteer support were relayed alongside the achievements of Clubs from each code who have excelled in these areas of development. Volunteers from across the codes, and

indeed other sports, were given further development opportunities through the 'Tackle Bullying Now' workshops which were held in two venues in the autumn. These workshops addressed some very pertinent issues for all sports clubs given our bases of young people. Indeed we have tried to harness the potential of youth in our Clubs through the GoldMark programme which continues to attract new volunteers to our Association. As negotiations with DSD continue regarding the future of this programme, I am confident that our work to date will place us in a strong position to secure the support necessary to continue this essential delivery.

GOLDMARK VOLUNTEER PROGRAMME//

Ulster GAA continues to be involved in the GoldMark Programme and in 2014 over seventy young volunteers aged 14-24 years old have been recognised for their efforts. For those helping out in GAA clubs, sometimes it's not seen as volunteering but more a way of life. This Programme has given an opportunity to highlight to our young members that the work they undertake as volunteers is making a significant impact to their club and local community. Being involved in any sporting organisation gives young people an opportunity to develop their skills and knowledge across a vast range of areas including: team mentoring, PR and communications, working with children, coaching, teamwork and so on. All the skills developed through volunteering are transferable to the work environment and will help those involved in GoldMark when it comes to applying for jobs, college or university.

SPORT NI EQUALITY STANDARD//

Ulster GAA are one of seven sporting organisations that have achieved foundation level of The Equality Standard: A Framework for Sport. Sporting organisations that are committed to tackling inequality



received their awards from Sport Northern Ireland at the House of Sport on Wednesday 16th April. The Standard assists sports organisations in widening access and reducing inequalities in sport and physical activity from under represented individuals, groups and communities. The Equality Standard provides our local sporting organisations with the adequate support to open sport up to all sections of the community. These organisations have engaged with equality, both within their internal structure and process and in the form of developing actions and initiatives which encourage participation in sport by everyone. Ulster GAA is delighted to have achieved the Foundation Level of Equality Standard. Achieving the Standard has helped build on existing good practice in equality and also embed equality at every level within the organisation.

INFORMATION, MARKETING AND COMMERCIAL//

For the third consecutive year Ulster GAA's commercial revenue increased and we are also delighted to welcome on board new corporate partners for 2015 namely First Trust, Subway, Bank of Ireland, 3FiveTwo Healthcare who have joined our current corporate partners: Tughan's, Lairdesign, UTV, Gaelic Life, the Irish News, Discover NI, O'Neill's and Power NI.

The three-year agreement with Power NI for the McKenna Cup ended in 2014 and I want to place on record my sincere thanks to Power NI for their support with this competition and I am pleased that they have decided to remain involved with Ulster GAA as a corporate partner. As a result of the Power NI deal coming to an end, we are delighted that Bank of Ireland agreed a three-year sponsorship package for the McKenna Cup covering the competition up to 2017. Following encouragement from our County Committees, Ulster GAA put in place a non exclusive healthcare agreement

with 3FiveTwo Healthcare that would allow our Counties and Clubs to get an agreed discount rate for player and member healthcare requirements. This agreement has been conducted in line with GAA player injury scheme policies and has been in place to ensure that the overall Ulster GAA healthcare costs are reduced and our members are making important savings while receiving appropriate care. I want to thank all our corporate partners and sponsors for their investment and continued confidence in Ulster GAA.

ICT AND SOCIAL MEDIA//

During the period 01 January to 30 November 2014, the Ulster GAA website received 295,074 active visits from 166,241 users, which represents an average of 24,590 active visits per month, an increase of over 21% from 2013. Another interesting statistic is that 46% of traffic visiting our website now comes from mobile devices such as smart phones and tablets, so it is crucial that we stay abreast of current developments in technology in order to disseminate our information in appropriate formats. We also now have the official County websites for Donegal, Monaghan, Tyrone and Fermanagh migrated on to our Wordpress template which allows us to filter through County-specific promotional material in order to maximize exposure of our games at County level. Our social media following continues to grow and is now an intrinsic means of communication for us, as it allows us to reach a very large number of people at no cost. We currently have 23k and 34k followers on our official Facebook and Twitter channels respectively. The value of our social media activity was particularly evident throughout the Ulster Championships, when we generated over 10 million impressions on our social media channels over a three month period.

The Committee has continued to work diligently in advancing our recognition

in this field of operation. They have set down clear guidelines and have adhered to these as we progress. There is always the need to examine what we do and to measure it against the highest recognised standards. The role of Sean O Conghaile at the helm has been an important part of ensuring that matters are dealt with and where necessary brought forward for decision at the appropriate level. Ryan Feeney and the team also do a substantial amount of work to advance the areas that are determined within the overall structure. Damian Kelly also has ensured that a very extensive IT system is up to date and functional. We are indebted to all involved for the outstanding work that they do on our behalf.

GAEILGE AGUS OIDHREACTH//

It can be said with truth that satisfactory progress was made in the promotion of Irish in our ranks during 2014. The status of the national language remains higher in Ulster Council affairs than in any other sector of the GAA.

The Séamus de Faoite annual Irish course was held in the month of July, as usual, and many people took the opinion that the course is back to its best. Several changes were implemented to make the course more effective in terms of Irish-teaching and more attractive to learners, and they succeeded in doing so. There was a visible increase in attendance on the course and the experience was greatly enhanced by the sun shining strongly on Dún na nGall. It is a source of pleasure to us that a new cup was presented in memory of the ex-GAA President and course elder, Paddy MacFlynn RIP, and we thank his nephew Ruairí for making this presentation.

A lot of pride can be drawn from the fact that Comhairle Uladh enabled adult members to achieve Irish qualifications during 2014. As part of the 'Gaeilge sa Chlub' scheme, the Council funded and presented





21 bursaries to university diploma students in 2013/14, and a group of them received their certificates in the summer; the Council also presented 27 bursaries in the 2014/15, with assistance from Foras na Gaeilge. In addition to this, a class was initiated in the autumn for Comhairle Uladh staff members and officers.

Opportunities should always be available for members to speak the Irish language in a social setting. With this in mind, Comhairle Uladh sponsored its own Irish language quiz for clubs in 2014. We also commend the 'Irish Corner' concept that has been created by Tír Eoghain and Ard Mhacha committees for their counties' home games. Moreover, we see a bright future for Irish in GAA affairs when we look at the liveliness of summer camps that encompass the language, culture and Gaelic games.

The Committee continue to work for the advancement of the essential areas of language and heritage. We acknowledge the input of the Seamus de Faoite Workgroup and their ongoing input to the success of this course. We are indebted to Pat Conaghan for his work as Cathaoirleach and his representation of those working in this essential sphere of work. We are grateful to Sean Ó Dubhbeanaigh for his input and particularly Donal Mac an Ailin who provides a substantial service to the Committee and the Ulster Council.

CULTURE AND SCÓR//

Scór continues to provide a competitive outlet for our Clubs and members. We have had the first competitions under the new structure and the impact was insignificant as this element of our Association's affairs contributes to the important work being done in the field of cultural expression. Our music, dance, song and drama remain at the centre of the off field activity for many of our clubs. There is an ongoing need for

all our Clubs to ensure that Scór is an essential part of their years activity and that it is primarily organised for fun and involvement. With the importance of the original ideals still very much in mind the need to maintain and strengthen our cultural expression must be at the core of the work that we do as an Association.

The All-Ireland Scór and Scór na nÓg again demonstrated that our competitors represented the standard of Scór to an excellent level. Ulster had two winners namely Ceol Uirlise: Droim Thamhain and Naomh Columba Trath na gCeisteanna: and became the first winner of the new format our winners in Scór na nÓg. There were two winners in Scór namely Hannah Ferguson of Watty Grahams, Doire and Naomh Eanna, an Omaigh won the Grupa Baileid with an all male team. We are indebted to Coiste Scór for the work that they do on our behalf. The work of Eamonn Mac Mathuna has been totally dedicated to the work on behalf of Coiste and he has been ably supported by Ailis Nic an tSaoi. They in conjunction with the members organise the efficient delivery of our Ulster competitions and for which we are very grateful. Donal McAnallen provides support to the work of Coiste Scór for which we are grateful.

ASSOCIATION ISSUES//

It is everyone's responsibility to support the democratic decisions of our Association and we in turn must be satisfied that the outcomes are consistent with membership's wishes and reflective of their input. There is a clear need to examine the basis of how our structures are responsive to our membership and that we, at all levels are acting in unison to the delivery of the wishes and needs of the Association. Care needs to be taken to ensure that we are examining matters that are relevant to the wellbeing of our Association and that we avoid pressure groups or campaigns that are not linked through our units and

seek to change our games or how we represent the structure of the GAA.

Various reports as published recently have much in them to consider. There is a clear need to examine them in detail and provided that they can demonstrate that there is beneficial gain for the Association and are worthy of consideration. The need to maintain predominant position during the spring summer period in the media and the upholding of our TV presence are critical factors. We are looking at a calendar year and the real issue is have we the unity of purpose to adhere to a fixtures programme that places a much tighter regime on when we play our key fixtures. The test is for all of us to address is that we can agree the principal but have we collectively the discipline to deliver what is advocated.

Our work with the Counties and Clubs has been at a good and respectful level. We are part of the wider development of the Association, be it physical or games related. The ongoing engagement with the various officers has been maintained and where possible expanded. The working relationships between our Officers and their respective County counterparts be they Chairpersons, Secretaries, Treasurers and Games Development Managers has been excellent and have been cordial and business like. We acknowledge the tremendous work and commitment of our County Chairpersons, Secretaries, Treasurers and all the County Officers in delivering the key elements of our Association work within Ulster. I would also like to acknowledge the retirement of Micheal O Dubhslainne who as Runai, Comhairle Laighean has given steadfast leadership to his province and the Association as a whole. We in Ulster have been beneficiaries of his courtesy and encouragement. We wish him a long and healthy retirement and thank him for all his work on our behalf.

We have ongoing working

arrangements between the staff of Comhairle Uladh and those of Ard Comhairle. Likewise, there are similar arrangements in place between our Council and the Counties and our constituent units. We thank the staff at Central Level for their help and cooperation and would particularly like to acknowledge the assistance of Pat Daly, Peter McKenna and Lisa Clancy for their work and input. We also thank Ronan Murphy, Emma Tormey, Patrick Doherty and Fergal McGill for their assistance in their specific sphere of operation and will miss Ronan in the ticketing arrangements where he was of particular assistance.

The Ard Stiurthoir, Paraic O Dufaigh, has again led from the front and has provided clear and unequivocal direction in all of our Association's affairs. He has been a tremendous support in the work that we do and we are very grateful to him for everything that he does on our behalf. We acknowledge the work of Liam O'Neill, whose term as President of our Association ends at Congress. He too has provided leadership to our Association and has been ever available to visit our Clubs and encouragement to our members that we acknowledge and thank Liam for.

TWINNING ACTIVITY//

The work of twinning involving our council, the provincial council of Britain and the GAA in Canada has continued and in some cases expanded. We have continued to provide advice and support to the relevant County Committees. There have been coaching and officer training courses organised and we have also provided summer camp involvement in Ottawa. This proved very successful and clearly met the objectives established at our meeting with the Canadian Board last spring. We have provided referees for County Finals in Scotland and in Canada which also has substantially enhanced the games and assisted in the wider understanding of the rules and the

standards as they apply in Ireland. Our development officers Maura McMenamin and Fionntan O'Dowd travelled to Toronto in November as part of this twinning partnership with Canada to deliver a Club Development Seminar with the Toronto Clubs and the Divisional Board. This is an outworking of our arrangements of dividing Canada into two zones, into which we provide coaching support to one zone and officer training and club development to the other zone each year. Our President and Vice president attended the Canadian Convention and continued to build the relationship between Canada and Ulster.

We have also had meetings with our counterparts in Britain and have provided ongoing support for coaching and games development. Our Cuchulainn project is also linked to improving and strengthening the overall development of our games in Britain.

CHILD PROTECTION//

This has been a very busy year in the area of Child Protection with continuous updates and demands that will ensure another busy year ahead in both jurisdictions. In 2014 the new joint Code of Behaviour (Underage); was launched and we are very pleased that this initiative is now a core part of the child welfare strategies for the GAA, Camogie, LGFA, Handball and the Rounders Associations.

As a registered body with AccessNI and the Garda Central Vetting Unit, we have continued to process vetting applications on behalf of our counties, clubs and our associated bodies in Ulster. To date we have processed over 19,000 vetting applications across Ulster. Vetting remains an integral part of the recruitment process for all those working/volunteering with Children and Vulnerable Adults in Ulster and we would remind all our constituent units that in line with statutory requirements, this is Association Policy. Our Training and Awareness

programmes continue to be rolled out throughout the province; and attendance at these workshops continues to grow. There are currently over 31,800 participants who have attended the Safeguarding Awareness workshops. The Association launched the Irish Sports Council (ISC) revised 3 hours Child Protection Awareness in Sport Programme in the 26 Counties and recognition as an ISC 2015 tutor has been given to 57 tutors. Further development work is ongoing in this area and it is anticipated that our 'Tutor Development Programme' will begin in 2015; this will create a level of quality assurance for delivery of these courses.

We continue to promote our Tackling Bullying Programme; this resource was developed and launched by the GAA in response to a growing demand for assistance at club level in dealing with incidents of Bullying. We continue to encourage our Counties and Clubs to avail of this supportive resource and sign up to the Anti-Bullying Policy Statement.

As I have eluded to earlier, 2015 will be a demanding and challenging year as we prepare to educate and update our members on new processes emerging as a result of both AccessNI and Garda Vetting systems moving to online formats. Also following on from the launch of the new Joint Code of Behaviour we will oversee the requirement for Counties and Clubs to put in place a Code of Ethics Hearings Committee to deal with breaches of the overall Code. These are undoubtedly new processes for us all and therefore we would ask clubs to ensure the appropriate club personnel attend the Club Officer Training events scheduled for 2015 in order for them to become familiar with the updated changes and how they can ensure their clubs are compliant with legal and best practice requirements.

We acknowledge the diligent work carried out by our Code of Ethics Committee under the Chairmanship

of Pat Darcy and Secretary Kathryn Anderson. Our County Children's Officers are also to be commended for their continued commitment to ensuring that guidance and support is given to our clubs. I am sure the work of the Committee will continue to make progress in the face of continuing challenges. Bernie Fox has provided tremendous work in this area to ensure that we achieve the required standards and we wish her good luck as she takes her maternity leave. Kathy Kelly has been part of the Child Protection team and she has undertaken the role of Children's Officer during Bernie's absence. Kathy has done a remarkable job in keeping this area of our work up to date and has dealt with all matters in an exemplary manner. We also record our sincere thanks to Gearóid Ó Maoilmhichíl, National Child Welfare Officer, for his continued support, advice and assistance in an area of vital importance for the GAA.

EDUCATION//

The work across all facets of the education field is important to our future wellbeing and development. We need interaction between all of our constituent units and the education sector to ensure that all aspects of our Associations work are developed within the wider development of our youth. The ethos and idealism that has motivated our Association is important and relevant today and tomorrow. To this end we are grateful to the Schools, Colleges and Universities for the work

that they do and the important sense of value that they are contributing to.

We begin in the Primary Schools and we are well served by our local Primary Schools. These are austere times and we do need to work to maintain the sense of identity to an area and to its local Club. Justification can be found to indicate that economics can be the determinant factor but the cost in monetary terms may be insignificant against the community loss that will arise from the removal of the school from centre of its community. We are indebted to Cumann na Bunscoil and to the teachers and coaches that encourage and develop all our young people that there is a role for everyone. The whole family for the whole life comes back to mind.

The Second Level is in a period of change which has thrown up several challenges for the GAA. We have been well served by our Vocational Schools Committee and by our Colleges Council. The basis for different systems of fixtures exists but there is a clear need for the unification of administration and an alignment of Second Level in cross-county and intra-county now needs to be addressed. It is important that we deal with the changes that are taking place in the Second Level sector and ensure that the reliance which is placed on the Second Level Schools continues to be met and that we can ensure these changes are occurring all around. We acknowledge the work

of the teachers and the standards that are apparent in the activity. We also pay tribute to all involved in the administration of this vital area and look for everyone working to ensure that the greater good prevails.

The Third Level is at the centre of developing our young people into contributors to society and the community. It is important that these institutions have a clear understanding of our Association and our role in community development. We are recognised for our games but we constantly need to develop our community identity and the central ethos of what the Association does and the contribution that we can make to the community be that Club, County, Province or indeed Country. We have worked to develop strong relationships with the Third level and this is an area that requires that we are constantly engaging with the Universities and those active within their delivery. The scholarship programme continues to be organised and I pay tribute to Jimmy Darragh for his diligence in dealing with the assessment of applications.

MEDIA//

The term media covers all aspects of those that report on our affairs. It plays a vital and important part of the work that we do in making the public including our supporters and members aware of what we do. We deal with the media on an ongoing basis and while we are not always in agreement





we would as a country be the poorer without their input. We ask those who report or cover our affairs to be fair in what is stated. The sensational headline might catch the eye but there are times when they do not accurately encapsulate the matter at hand and can be detrimental to the GAA in matters that have nothing to do with us. Where we treat each other fairly then we can deal with any critical matter on the basis of accuracy while at the same time assisting in the dissemination of views, opinions and facts relating to the complexity that is the GAA.

The level of television coverage in the past year was substantially improved for the Association but in Ulster there were problems at times. The new contracts that the GAA have in place have improved our overall position and many benefits have been obvious to the Irish Diaspora. The TV coverage of our Senior Football Championship has seen a substantial reduction of coverage by the BBC and our province has to be largely dependent on RTE to provide a satisfactory platform for our main games. We acknowledge the continued support of Paraic Ó Dufaigh, Peter McKenna and Noel Quinn in these matters and through the delivery of these packages to the Association and to our audience for which we thank them. The position of UTV remains at an unsatisfactory level and given that they have now become an all island body it seems very strange that they have no contractual arrangements in place for Gaelic Games.

We have in general a good working relationship with the media. The journalists, photographers, radio and television personnel are acknowledged for the coverage that they afford us in bringing out the build up to our games, reporting on the events and occasions and recording for posterity our great occasions and events. We acknowledge the work of The Irish News in their coverage for every aspect of our Associations affairs and their support for The Club Conference and the Club

and Schools Awards. Our thanks are due to Sean Ó Conghaile for his work as our Public Relations Officer. He has assisted me in many ways and always represents a very sound image for the Association and its affairs. Our thanks are due to Ryan Feeney, Stephen Donnelly and Damian Kelly for their work in dealing with the media on a daily basis and also for their ongoing support to our Council in this area of our engagement with our members, supporters, the public and all parts of the media.

COMHBHRÓN//

The past year again has witnessed many bereavements across the GAA in Ulster and numbered within them have been many people who gave outstanding service to the GAA. In the deaths we all share the sense of loss suffered by their families, their Club and the Association. Among them was Tomas O Cuilinn who was the embodiment of everything that we as an Association hold dear. He had been an outstanding servant of our Council and did so much in the work and development of Coiste Gaeilge agus Oidhreacht. He was at the centre of our Centenary celebrations and provided a history of Comhairle Uladh. His commitment and dedication were exemplary. We shall miss him and his wise council. At the time of writing this report I have learned of the death of Malachy McGeeney. He served for many years in Armagh and was the representative of Cumann na mBunscoil for many years. He was enthusiastic about everything he did and we are all the better for his work. Phil Curran who gave great support to Comhairle Uladh as a stiles man for many years also died. He travelled to games with me for very many years and he shall be missed in his loyalty and commitment to the GAA and the work that we do. We extend our sympathy to everyone who suffered bereavement and particular to the family and friends of those who died in the past year. There have been many occasions where we have felt the sense of loss most acutely as we attended funerals and wakes to show our solidarity with

the family of the deceased. The Sacrifice of the Mass will be offered for all the deceased members of our Association in St. Mathew's Chapel, Garvaghey on the morning of Convention at 11.00 a.m. It is hoped that all delegates can attend as a mark of respect for all our deceased members.

CONCLUSION//

Today we attend Convention on the achievement of a vision that has been delivered by Tir Eoghain. The GAA is better and stronger for it. While in this place we need to reflect that it is in adversity that we find the strength to climb to heights that appeared beyond our limits. I think that the GAA will always prosper while we look slightly beyond the horizon and scale any hurdle that gets in our way as we build our future. We have a clear vision of the route we must travel and like the wonderful venue of today our ultimate achievement will be a sense of achievement and pride that will motivate the next generation why the GAA exists and the importance of community to our rationale for existence.

Is mise le meas,



DÓNALL Ó MURCHÚ

RÚNAÍ



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Ulster Council GAA
Chomhairle Uladh CLG

Ceannáras Uladh T (0044) 28 3752 1900
8-10 Market Street, F (0044) 28 3752 8092
Armagh, BT61 7BX E info.ulster@gaa.ie

www.ulster.gaa.ie

