



REPORT OF THE FIXTURE CALENDAR REVIEW TASK FORCE

December 2019



WHERE WE
ALL BELONG



REPORT OF THE FIXTURE CALENDAR REVIEW TASK FORCE



Report of the Fixture Calendar Review Task Force

Contents:	Page
1. Foreword	3
2. Background	5
3. Current Landscape	8
4. Methodology – Task Force Approach	10
5. Guidance Framework	12
6. Governance & Oversight	14
• Recommendations	
7. National Fixtures Calendar – Scheduling Models	19
• Split Season	
• Multiple Windows	
• ‘Spring Window’	
8. Current National Competitions & Recommendations	
• Closed Season/Pre-Season Competitions	22
• 3 rd Level Competitions	23
• 2 nd Level Schools	24
• All-Ireland Club Championship	25
• National Leagues	27
• U20 Football	29
• U20 Hurling	30
• Minor Football and Hurling Championships	32
• Junior Football Championship	34
• Senior Hurling Championship	34
• Senior Football Championship – Options & Calendars:	36
• Option 1 8 Team Provincial Championship	
• Option 2 National League Format for Championship	
• Option 3 Retention of trial structures (extended club window)	
9. Appendices	
I. Summary of Recommendations	51
II. Task Force Membership and Terms of Reference	54
III. Written Submissions Received	55
IV. Questionnaire Results	57

1. Foreword

The GAA Fixtures Calendar Review Task Force, which was established by Uachtarán CLG last June, has now completed its work with the preparation and finalisation of this report.

The Report addresses the various issues of concern that were identified in the group's terms of reference.

The Task Force consulted widely, drew extensively on earlier relevant reports, reviewed initiatives and the wide-ranging changes that have been introduced in recent times.

From the outset, the Task Force was conscious of the strength and depth of feeling about some of the issues and, in particular, about the 'imbalance' between the attention given to the inter-county and club games.

The Task Force was also conscious that, in its deliberations and in developing proposals, there had to be a balanced approach to all the competing demands and aspirations. Consequently, it developed a framework to help guide its approach in a consistent manner.

There are three main aspects to the report:

- Firstly, it contains suggestions and recommendations regarding the oversight and governance arrangements relating to games and competitions which if implemented would go a long way, in the view of the Task Force, to resolve many issues raised, particularly in relation to the playing of club fixtures.
- Secondly, the report sets out a series of recommendations on the various inter-county competitions in the national calendar regarding specific aspects referenced in our terms of reference.
- Lastly, the options for the senior football championship around which new structures for the National Fixtures Calendar could be considered.

As with any organisation the Association needs to continually adapt and evolve. Indeed, the great success of the Association over the decades has been due, in part, to its willingness to embrace change. While some may contest the pace and extent the fact that there has been significant change is not credibly contestable.

At this juncture, the issue for the Association is to:

- decide on the way it wishes to approach the wide range of issues and recommendations, and
- develop a structured implementation plan that would set out, amongst other things, the timing and pace of the steps necessary to achieve the new order.

Of course, any such proposals and plan will need to be based on the Association's appetite for change. The Task Force is of the view that there is a healthy appetite for this throughout the organisation and that this opportunity needs to be seized.

At a personal level, I would like to thank the individual members of the Task Force for the huge amount of time and energy that they have put into the work of the group. The Association is fortunate to have members of such high calibre who are willing and able to share their considerable experience, expertise and intellectual capacity addressing what is a very complex and inter-locking set of issues.

Finally, I would also like to thank the secretary to the Task Force for his unstinting effort in guiding us, deftly and with patience, throughout our deliberations.

I commend the report and recommendations of the Fixtures Calendar Review Task Force to the Association.

Eddie Sullivan

Chairman, GAA Fixtures Calendar Review Task Force

29th November 2019

'Nothing endures but change' (Heraclitus)

2. Background

Establishment

The Task Force was established in June 2019 by Uachtarán, Chumann Lúthchleas Gael Seán O hÓráin to consider current significant issues affecting the Association's National Fixtures Calendar, including the current positioning and footprint of inter-county competitions and the time available for clubs.

The Task Force was also asked to examine current national competition structures and timing and to provide recommendations on options for change.

There are many factors that complicate fixture-making in the GAA and that, generally, would not arise for other similar sporting bodies.

In the first place, the GAA runs two separate codes – football and hurling. Secondly, GAA players are eligible not only across these two codes but also they can be eligible to play at various grades and levels e.g. an adult player can be eligible for U20, Junior and Senior across a variety of levels - club, county, 2nd level, 3rd level.

This diversity is at the heart of the difficulties and challenges the GAA faces in trying to achieve a reasonable balance in the fixture calendar.

Too many competitions

Given the number of grades and levels that exist it is not surprising there is a perception that there are “*too many competitions*” in the GAA. This may be an overly simplistic view¹ but the cumulative effect across many levels serves to create a hugely crowded calendar and one that is particularly overloaded for those players playing at both county and club level.

Historical context

In the past, this was not a particularly serious problem for two main reasons:

- i. The training and time commitments for participation at inter-county level were relatively small (at most teams trained twice a week and played a game at the weekend), and
- ii. Inter-county championships were played on a strictly knock-out basis.

The lower level time commitment ensured that county players still spent plenty of time with their clubs, while “knock-out” championships ensured that the majority of county players were free to play summer football and hurling with their clubs. County teams were either eliminated from competition early in the summer or, for those who progressed to Provincial Finals and the All-Ireland Series, there were sufficient gaps between successive rounds of the inter-county championships to allow club activity to proceed unaffected.

¹ Each grade, irrespective of its level, will generally consist of just two competitions – league and championship

Not a new issue

The need for change has been recognised for many years and was identified in the 2002 report of the GAA's Strategic Review Committee (SRC) which observed that:

“Club competitions are being badly disrupted by inter-county games (including challenge games) and the preparation of county teams... the emphasis appears to have swung even further in favour of the inter-county game and the current championship structures have accentuated this trend”.

The report went on to further observe that

“County games are seen as the Association’s ‘show piece’ and county players as its ‘stars’, but the overwhelming majority of active members (both playing and non-playing) give their first allegiance to their club”.

This expansion of the profile of the inter-county game had many benefits for the Association – primarily from a promotional and financial perspective. But it also had its downside in terms of the negative effect on the availability of county players to their clubs.

By extension the absence of county players from clubs began to seriously affect club fixture programmes as many clubs were understandably reluctant to play competitive games without their better players.

Situation today

In 2019, club championships across the country were scheduled around the progress of the county team and on when county players would be available. Very often county players are not available to clubs for non-championship games, except during the “club window” between the conclusion of the National Leagues and inter-county championships, or after the county team’s elimination from the championship itself.

Understandably, club managers can often be reluctant to play any games – even league games – without their county players, and this reluctance adds to the challenge of providing an effective fixture programme.

Consequences

This is an understandable source of frustration that can lead to:

- a lack of predictability in club fixture programmes because of the “knock-out” nature of the inter-county championships
- the failure to implement rules governing the playing of club fixtures and the availability of county players to their clubs,
- the cancellation of entire rounds of club fixtures to facilitate inter-county teams, and
- a reduced level of club championship activity in the summer months.

Issues still not resolved

Notwithstanding the numerous reports and discussion papers commissioned by the GAA over the years and the more recent changes introduced, there remains widespread concerns about the national fixtures calendar and how that impacts at club level in terms of providing a fair schedule of matches for each team, while at the same time recognising the burden on individuals.

The need for a review of the national fixtures calendar was identified as one of the top priorities in Fís Shóiléir 2021 (the GAA's Strategic Plan 2018-2021). In establishing the Task Force Uachtarán CLG John Horan indicated that this review was "*one of the most important projects*" that the Association would undertake while also recognising that much progress had already taken place.

Balancing competing demands

It is important to note that the perceived "needs" of club and inter-county games are quite different and, in many ways, mutually exclusive.

From the inter-county player perspective, the main priorities centre around:

- an improved "games to training" ratio,
- competition structures that deliver greater competitive balance, and
- an effective closed season.

For the club player, the priorities centre around:

- providing greater certainty in the scheduling of club games
- more time in the calendar when county players are available to clubs and
- maximising the time in the season when the club game is prioritised.

There is a delicate and difficult balance to be struck between these respective priorities. Any analysis of the needs of the club game that does not take cognisance of the inter-county game and vice versa is flawed and incomplete.

The Task Force has been keenly aware of this and has attempted in its analysis to strike an appropriate balance.

3. Current Landscape

Current Senior Football and Hurling championship structures

Following the adoption of the recommended Football Championship structures (the introduction of round robin Football Championship quarter finals) on a three-year trial basis (2018 – 2020) at Annual Congress in 2017, a Special Congress of the GAA in September of that year also agreed to trial a new round robin provincial Hurling Championship during the same time period.

In October of 2019, a Special Congress voted to adopt a second tier Football Championship that provides for counties from Divisions 3 and 4 of the National Leagues to enter a knock-out second Tier championship instead of the qualifiers, once they are eliminated from their provincial championship (and unless they have reached their respective Provincial finals).

Both the football and hurling championships for 2018 and 2019 have been completed under the trial systems. The 2020 championships will proceed on the same basis with the addition of the second-tier football championship but no decision has yet been taken as to the format of the championships for the 2021 season and beyond.

Overall strategy

The current Football Championship proposals arose from the “*Player Overtraining and Burnout and the GAA Fixtures Calendar*” discussion paper². That report also contained other fixture-related proposals and many of these have been introduced with the ultimate intention of generating additional time in the calendar for counties to facilitate club games.

The report and its recommendations were part of an overall strategy on club fixtures that sought to generate two significant club windows in the calendar year – one in April before the commencement of the inter-county championships, and the second at the end of the inter-county season - making August, September and October an enhanced period of intense activity for the club game at adult level.

To re-cap, among the policies/rules that made up the strategy that allowed for the positive impact on time available to the club game were:

- advancing the All-Ireland Football and Hurling Finals forward to the end of August/start of September
- bringing the U20 Hurling championship forward in tandem with this
- decoupling Minor from Adult in both inter-county football and hurling by changing age eligibility to under 17 years
- re-scheduling U20 Football to run in parallel with Senior Inter-county championships
- introduction of “finish on the day” in certain competitions
- the inclusion of a sanction in Rule for breaches of closed-period training bans
- restrictions on inter-county challenge games in April
- reduction to 10 days of the “13-day Rule” (the period during which county players cannot play club championship games before a county championship game)

² Prepared in 2015 by Iar Ard-Stiúrthóir, Paraic Duffy

- removal of National Football League semi-finals and
- condensing of the National Leagues to ensure April is free from inter-county competitions.

It is worth noting that in the 2015 playing season only five weekends in the period from the beginning of April to the end of October in the national GAA calendar were totally free from inter-county activity. In 2019 the number of weekends free for use by clubs in that period had risen to 11, with only two Counties – those traveling to London and New York, having fixtures on a 12th.

This strategy has been the most focussed and radical attempt by the GAA to address the club fixtures problem to date.

Central Fixtures Analysts Committee

Another positive development that had its roots in changes agreed at Congress in 2016 was the creation of fixture analysts at both county and provincial levels. The establishment of a Central Fixtures Analysis Committee to provide evidence-based analysis of fixture programmes in individual counties and to compare existing programmes with what can be considered best practice was also completed.

The latest report from that Committee identified an increase in the number of weeks available for club fixtures on a county by county basis but also asserted that the challenge now is for counties to examine their structures – both league and championship, as well as whatever competitions may exist and are played without county players – and match them to the time that has been created. That report also identified positive instances of Counties adapting to change through seeking deviation from general rule to facilitate the playing of club games.

While there are certainly positive indications from a number of counties, it is also clear, as mentioned earlier, that many club players are still unhappy with the irregularity and uncertainty of the fixture programmes, and most of all with the lack of face time with their county players.

For example, in the questionnaire conducted as part of this report, 42% of those who responded felt the 'April club window' had not had a positive effect for club fixtures in their county. This may well be due to the fact the required complementary changes have not been made at county committee level in both mindset and regulation e.g. competition structures, positioning in the club calendar, rules on availability of county players and so on.

Those changes have clearly been made in some counties, but not in others. A further stand-out statistic from the questionnaire is that 74% of those who responded still felt that the GAA needs to make more time available in the calendar for club fixtures.

4. Methodology – Task Force Approach

The previous section briefly sets out the context in which the Task Force was established viz,

- the conclusion of the trial period for the new inter-county championship structures, and
- the need to protect and expand the club periods in the national calendar.

As mentioned earlier, the Task Force was asked to bring forward proposals which would have regard to the current situation and the recommendations and proposals of the various fixture-related reports prepared in recent times.

In addition, it was requested to elicit a range of views from specialist interested parties including, but not restricted to, the Central Competitions Control Committee (CCCC), the National Fixtures Analysis Committee and, more widely, from other interested individuals or groups.

Submissions, Questionnaire and comments

The Task Force felt that it was vital that the GAA membership be given the opportunity to make their voice heard, and accordingly two initiatives were taken. GAA members were invited

- to contribute by making written submissions, and
- to also engage via an online questionnaire – the results of which are included as an Appendix to this document.

The invitation to make submissions and to participate in an online questionnaire was issued on 5 July 2019 and resulted in over 50 written submissions and nearly 1,300 people participating in the survey with additional comments in the majority of cases. All of these submissions were circulated to members of the Task Force who were asked to study them and highlight key issues and potential solutions that could be considered.

The Task Force is very grateful to everyone who participated and provided feedback. It was hugely impressed with the level and depth of understanding shown by many people of the range and complexity of the various challenges being faced. The Task Force also noted that there was much shared understanding of the issues.

Presentations

In addition, the Task Force received presentations from different groups including:

- Talent Academy and Player Development Review Committee
- National Fixture Analysts Committee
- Club Players Association
- Gaelic Players Association
- Comhairle Ard Oideachais (3rd level)
- Central Competitions Control Committee

Previous Reports

The Task Force was also mindful of the significant body of work and research that had been completed over the years by various groups and had regard to the various recommendations and proposals that had been made. Many of these were implemented.

Among the reports considered were:

- Competitions Review Task Force (2003)
- Player Burnout Report (2007)
- Football Review Committee (2012)
- Football Review Committee, Part 2 (2013)
- GPA Student Report “Never Enough Time” (2015)
- Hurling 2020 Committee Report (2015)
- Player Overtraining, Burnout and the GAA Fixtures Calendar (2015)
- Report of the GAA Minor Review Workgroup (2015)
- Report of the Talent Academy and Player Development Review Committee (2019)

5. Guidance Framework

The Task Force received many suggestions and proposals for change. Some were very general in nature while others were very specific. The terms of reference of the Task Force cover a wide range of complex issues many of which are inter-related and changes in one area impact on another.

Challenges and complexities

The current fixtures arrangements have evolved over many years with numerous changes and additions which have contributed to the current challenges and complexities. Clearly, in terms of proposing new arrangements, a 'one-size fits all' solution is not possible and the Task Force was conscious of the need to balance conflicting views and positions. At the end of the day, decisions had to be made which involved elements of compromise and practicality.

Accordingly, the Task Force identified a framework within which to examine and analyse the various proposals and to make recommendations. The framework consists of a number of elements or principles which are set out below and with which there was common ground within the Task Force.

Equity

All players, clubs and counties should be treated fairly based on their performance or progression on the field with no structural long-term disadvantages arising from the way competitions are organised.

Certainty

There should be a fixed schedule, insofar as possible, for club, county and education competitions at the start of every year.

Competitiveness and Consequence

Competitions should be structured where possible on the basis that teams or individuals of roughly equal strength compete against each other. Ideally, all games should be 'meaningful' from a competitive perspective. Ensuring there is consequence enhances competitiveness.

Unambiguous Priority

There should be clarity as to which unit of the association has first call over player during given times of the year. This will help ensure that potential 'burnout' issues are managed more effectively.

Consistency and regularity in the games programme

The number of games that a team plays annually should not be overly dictated by success or failure of that year alone. Ideally, there should be consistency in the time gaps between games

Simplicity where possible, complexity when necessary

Revised proposals should be straightforward and easy to understand while accepting that there will be a necessity for some degree of nuance and detail.

Commerciality

Proposals in relation to the main inter county championships in particular should be cognisant of the need to be commercially viable.

Tradition and identity

There should be respect for the tradition and identity of the GAA based on its long history and culture while accepting the need for adaptation and change.

Sustainability

A restructured games programme and calendar must account for the ebb and flow of counties' strength. Counties should not be locked into a structure that leaves them out of their depth permanently

These elements/principles are inter-related and can give rise to specific trade-offs, but they also provide useful guidance in considering the proposals and recommendations for change.

6. Governance and Oversight

The Task Force identified actions that the Association can take that will lead to more time being created in the National Fixture Calendar for the playing of club games.

However, this is predicated on ensuring that fixture makers within counties are able to utilise all of the time available. For this to happen there needs to be a significant change in mindset. This can begin with a consistent application of the fixture and county team related rules in the GAA's Official Guide across all counties.

Many of the existing rules have emanated from previous club fixture related reports. They made good sense at the time and, in the main, still do today. But it is clear from experience and from comments received, that in many instances, club games with county players are not being scheduled on all of the dates available to counties (and by extension county players are not participating with their clubs in all of the fixtures for which they could be available).

Inter-county managers/County Committees

Some commentators take the view that inter-county managers on occasion are not particularly mindful of the needs of the club game. On the other hand, it must be remembered that county management teams have their own pressures and priorities to achieve results. At the end of the day, if the rules are not being adhered to it can only be with the tacit approval of those who have appointed them.

Clubs and club delegates have a responsibility to hold their county committees to account, but a culture has developed where, frequently, the short-term needs of the few (the county panel) are being placed before the needs of the many (club players) at county committee level.

If there is to be significant progress in improving the situation of club players and providing greater consistency and certainty there needs to be, in the Task Force's view, a fresh approach by the GAA in terms of governance and oversight arrangements and we make recommendations in this regard at the end of this section.

Existing Rules

There is a strong belief that if the rules already in place were applied consistently, they would play a significant role in addressing the balance between the time made available for the club and county games. There are two main provisions directly relating to the senior inter-county game.

Firstly, the "10 day" rule allows counties to schedule club fixtures up to 10 days before the county team is in championship action in the same code. In reality this ensures that county players and team managements have a two-week or 13-day exclusive preparation period for major championship games as few club championship games are scheduled mid-week.

When used effectively, the "10-day" Rule can ensure club games continue to be played and are not put in abeyance because of a county team seeking an inordinately lengthy

preparation period ahead of their championship games. The Task Force makes one recommendation in this regard however – the Rule currently states that players shall not be asked to fulfil “club championship” fixtures within 10-days – we believe this should be extended to cover club league fixtures also.

Secondly, the “*Closed Periods for Collective Training*” defines when various inter-county panels may return to collective training and/or games for the following year. It also includes a restriction on collective training for all Senior inter-county team panels with any training period after the conclusion of the national leagues that involves an overnight stay prohibited, except during the 10 days prior to that team playing in a championship game. Penalty is forfeiture of home venue for a league game.

This restriction on collective training in the period after the National Leagues was introduced for similar reasons to the 10-day Rule, while the stipulation on when counties can return to pre-season training was introduced to ensure a meaningful break for inter-county players.

Beneficial impact

These two rules should have a beneficial impact for the club game. However, the “10-day” rule does not compel counties to schedule club fixtures; it merely allows them to do so. In terms of the restrictions on collective training, some counties have either chosen to ignore or simply failed to deliver adherence from their county management teams on this issue.

Other rules

Other rules have been introduced over the years with the general goal of trying to restrict the adverse or negative impact of inter-county activity on club fixtures. These include:

- That players, who are not included in an inter-county senior panel of twenty-six players, must be available to their clubs on the weekends of National League and Senior Championship games (penalty for breach is loss of home venue for next home league game)
- Under-age inter-county teams (i.e. U20 or U17) are restricted to a maximum of three collective sessions - training and/or games - per week.
- Senior challenge games can only take place on a Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday after the conclusion of the Allianz Leagues and before the commencement of the championships, except within periods when inter-county players are not expected to fulfil inter-club championship games (penalty is loss of home venue for a National League game)

It has been represented to the Task Force that the application of these rules in counties is at best mixed and frequently simply ignored.

The Task Force does not believe any major change is required, with one exception (the exception relates to where inter-county championships are starting mid-May in which case inter-county challenge games should not be allowed in the month of April) but as

mentioned previously, it is in the oversight and implementation of the provisions already in place that change is required.

Current oversight provisions

The county committee has the ultimate power to manage club hurling and football competitions, but it is the CCC in a county that has the day to day responsibility for games under the jurisdiction of the county committee. Each county also must appoint at least one Fixture Analyst whose role is to monitor and analyse the county fixtures programme annually.

Provincial Councils have extensive supervisory powers over each county in the Province. This includes the power to *“monitor, supervise and advise a County Committee within its jurisdiction on its performance.....”* with regard to competitions and fixtures administration as well as the power to carry out a games audit and examine the fixtures programme in each of the counties and to *“make recommendations or take any action deemed necessary in relation to same”*³.

The rule also requires counties to submit their fixture programmes to the Provincial Council by the end of February each year for approval.

The Task Force is of the view that this should be changed to the end of December annually and recommends accordingly.

Provincial Councils are required to monitor the progress of each county’s championships on a monthly basis. The appointing of Provincial Fixture Analysts, the establishment of a sub-committee to ensure club fixture responsibilities are met and the organising of an annual seminar for counties on the subject of effective fixture making are also among the Provincial responsibilities outlined in general rule.

Finally, any postponements of club championship games must be notified to the Provincial Council along with a reason for the postponement.

Rule 3.31 Monitoring of County Fixtures Programme states that *“Club games shall not be postponed because of a County’s involvement in an Inter-County Championship”* with the penalties available including loss of Championship expenses or disqualification from the Championship concerns. Non-compliance is the responsibility of the Provincial Council during the inter-county provincial championships and of the Central Council’s management committee during the qualifiers or All-Ireland Series.

New Governance and Oversight Structure

Clearly there is no lack of rules in place to address the issues at hand. The problem, in the view of the Task Force, is that within the Provincial Council, the ultimate responsibility for club fixtures has not been clearly allocated.

³ GAA Official Guide 2019, Chapter 3

Furthermore, the Provinces have not been adequately equipped with the personnel to allow them to properly discharge their responsibilities in this context. In an Association that runs in excess of 100,000 club fixtures annually, it seems a major weakness that the proper resources have not been put in place to support the plethora of fixture-related Rules allocated to the Provincial Councils.

In the words of the National Club Committee: *“The current role of Provincial Councils in monitoring county fixtures does not seem to be effective and this area must be revisited and beefed up”*⁴

Opportunity

The Task Force is of the view that the opportunity must be taken to address these issues which are so fundamental to the operation and management of games and competitions.

In our view, a new oversight unit needs to be established in the Official Guide with specific responsibility on behalf of Central Council for implementation of the existing rules on monitoring of club fixtures programmes, policing of the closed season and other governance matters at inter-county level that affect club fixtures.

A full-time resource should be engaged in each Province as the cornerstone of this new structure and each Provincial representative would report into a national group that would include the GAA’s Director of Games Administration. The new group would be responsible for ensuring compliance with existing rules and implementing sanctions on behalf of the GAA’s Management Committee/Central Council where appropriate.

The new resource would also become that Province’s representative on the National Fixtures Analysis Committee (the roll of the Fixture Analysis Committee in analysing the national fixtures programme, suggesting change and in coordinating the training of fixtures analysts would be unchanged).

At provincial level, the new resource would be required to ensure counties use all available dates for club games with county players (while respecting the provisions of the 10-day rule) and would work with individual Counties to review and approve club fixture programmes before the start of the season while monitoring adherence throughout the year. The resource should also sit on the Provincial C.C.C. and would become one of the Fixture Analysts appointed by each province.

We believe that such an approach would ensure clearer allocation of responsibility for the implementation of rules and sanctions. It would also allow for a more joined-up proactive approach to club fixture issues across the provinces.

The Task Force consider that this revised organisational approach is one of the most important recommendation in this report. We believe it is imperative to meet the desire to see an improvement in how club fixture programmes are designed and run-off within Counties. Adequate resources, properly trained, must be put in place to ensure it happens.

⁴ Written Submission of National Club Committee to the Fixture Calendar Review Task Force, July 2019

Recommendations on Governance and Oversight:

- *A new oversight unit consisting of full time provincial personnel and feeding into a national grouping to be established.*
- *Club Fixtures to be the remit (or part remit) of at least one employee in each province*
 - *this person to be a member of the new oversight unit at national level, of the Provincial C.C.C and of the Central Fixtures Analysis Committee*
 - *remit will be to ensure Counties use all available dates to play games with County players (while respecting provisions of the 10-day rule)*
 - *responsibilities to including reviewing – and approving - club fixture programmes at start of season on county by county basis and monitoring adherence throughout*
 - *monitor adherence to Closed Season*
 - *unit to be given authority in Rule to establish appropriate sanctions for breaches*
- *The new oversight unit should be set the immediate task of reviewing the effectiveness, sanctions, practicality of what is already in place and to bring recommendations as necessary to Central Council for change.*
- *“10 Day Rule” to cover all club games (not just club championship)*
- *No inter-county challenge games to be permitted in the month of April – sanction to be proposed by new oversight unit*
- *Fixtures programmes in a prescribed format, to be submitted to Provincial Councils by end of December (not February as currently) – sanction to be proposed by new oversight unit.*

7. National Fixtures Calendar – Scheduling Models

The previous section of the report focused on the need for better oversight to ensure more consistent application of rules relating to fixtures.

In terms of how the national calendar is scheduled, the Task Force identified three different types of calendar arrangements that could be pursued to facilitate the dual responsibility of the inter-county player to his club and county. These are:

- A **Split season** model where the first portion of the year would be dedicated solely to the inter-county game and the second portion solely to the club game
- A **Multiple Windows** model, where after the conclusion of Spring inter-county competitions, the season is divided up into multiple club and county only weekends.
- A **‘Spring Window’ model** (essentially the current system) where a window is opened for the exclusive playing of club games in counties post National League and pre-Championship. In this model club activity concludes once counties are eliminated from the main All-Ireland Championships

Split Season Model

The idea of splitting the GAA season – allocating the first six months to inter-county activity and the second six months of the year exclusively to clubs – is one that is advocated from time to time and which featured in a number of the submissions made to the Task Force.

The clear advantage of doing so is that there would be no crossover between the inter-county and club seasons. County players would spend the first half of the year playing exclusively with the County team and the second half exclusively with their clubs. It would mean that once the club season commenced, there would be no interruptions because of the county game and no ambiguity over player availability.

From a scheduling perspective, it would allow club fixture makers to provide much more regularity and certainty to fixture programmes in counties, something that club players continuously seek.

However, there are a number of obvious challenges presented by this approach also.

Firstly, separating players entirely from their clubs for over half the year would not be desirable. County players need to stay connected to their community and need breaks from the inter-county set up. Neither would clubs be likely to support such a move – whatever the drawbacks of the current “windows” approach may be, at least it ensures some visibility of the county player with his club in the Spring.

Secondly, any such move would require playing the All-Ireland Finals at the end of June (or mid-July at the latest). In a promotional context, this would not be in the best interests of

the Association overall. It would mean over half of the season without any inter-county GAA action.

But most importantly, having looked at various samples of how a split season might work, the Task Force did not see how any extra weekends for the club game (between the end of April and the commencement of provincial club championships in October) would be created by doing so.

Having considered, at some length, the implications of split season scheduling, the Task Force concluded that it would not be the best solution for the fixture challenges faced by the GAA.

Multiple Windows Model

A multiple windows model, whereby the county and club calendars weave together through the summer, is attractive for many reasons. It keeps county players connected to their clubs and club championships can be played through the summer months. A number of definite club weekends – evenly spread from April to October – can be scheduled so that there is no significant period where County players are unavailable to their clubs.

The Task Force spent a considerable amount of time in examining how national competitions could be scheduled in such a calendar. It is certainly possible to do so but does give rise to some practical considerations.

For example, the intercounty championships might struggle to maintain momentum with 2 and 3 week gaps where there would be no inter-county activity at all. It is likely that similar stop-start scheduling for club players would be equally disruptive. There is also a view that expecting county players to play club championship games a short time before high profile inter-county games might be problematic, and ultimately clubs might lose more than they gain.

Given that club games would be interspersed throughout the inter county championships, the Task Force also identified that the level of oversight required to ensure games fixed were played and not called off for frivolous reasons would be a major challenge. Such cancellations would see the ordinary club player losing out and postponements would increase the risk of uncertain club scheduling. Strong dual counties where county players play both codes at club level would be most vulnerable.

Despite these concerns, the Task Force was attracted to the idea of a season with multiple club windows. However, the view was that the timing for such a change might not be right but that the issue is one that should be reviewed in the future. That review would have the benefit of the experience of the new oversight arrangements that we have recommended.

The Task Force also felt that the new intercounty season at U17 level could be scheduled on a multiple-windows basis as a trial and that this could prove a good starting point to properly analyse the effectiveness of such a model.

We have also illustrated in Section 9 how the various changes and options we are recommending for national adult competitions could be incorporated into a scheduling model with multiple club windows.

'Spring Window' Model

A 'Spring Window' Model for clubs best describes the current scheduling format used in the national calendar.

Pre-season and national league competitions are played in the early part of the year with a pause for inter-county competitions as attention – and priority – turns to the club game for a number of weeks beginning in April. Focus reverts to the county game from early May onwards and as counties are eliminated from the championship, club competitions begin to take priority once again.

This ensures there are two significant and defined periods in the calendar when the club becomes the priority for all.

The major challenges with this system include:

- ensuring the time created for the club game is used effectively by each county
- creating consistency in terms of how much "club time" is available to each county in the Spring period.
- expanding the current window to increase the time available for clubs.

The Task Force recommendations on Governance and Oversight are designed to address the first and second of these issues. In the section that follows, the various recommendations we have made with regard to inter-county competitions should ensure an increase in the number of weekends available to clubs and address the third of those challenges.

Following considerable deliberations and debate, this approach is the one that found most favour with the Task Force. The calendars that accompany the options for change in the next section are illustrated using both 'Spring Window' and Multiple Window scheduling.

8. Current National Competitions and Recommendations

A large part of the work of the Task Force centered around examining the competitions currently in the national calendar, what they bring from an inter-county perspective and how they could be modified to create more room in the calendar for clubs.

In doing so, issues such as reducing the instances in the calendar where players are eligible for more than one team (as well as their club), the need to reduce the strain on inter-county players, more certainty in a scheduling context and above all creating periods where the club game alone can be prioritised were foremost.

This section addresses key areas that were identified as areas of concern and requiring particular consideration viz

- Closed Season/Pre-Season Competitions
- 3rd Level Competitions
- 2nd Level Schools
- All-Ireland Club Championship
- National Leagues
- U20 Football
- U20 Hurling
- Minor Hurling and Football Championships
- Junior Football Championship
- Senior Hurling Championship
- Senior Football Championship

These issues featured strongly in the views and comments submitted to the Task Force. There was common ground on many of them but, as already mentioned, there were widely differing views on others.

Closed Season/Pre-Season Competitions

A view exists that the current pre-season inter-county competitions organised at provincial level do not serve any meaningful purpose. There was a strong feeling coming through from some of the submissions that these competitions should be scrapped to allow for greater emphasis on other competitions.

On the other hand, it was argued that pre-season games play a key role, as structured competitions, that act in place of 'challenge' games. They can be regarded as preparation for the National Leagues and offer an opportunity to inter-county managers to "try out" fringe players or those who have impressed in the club championships.

These games are played primarily in January each year and, in the view of the Task Force, they do not affect club fixtures in any meaningful way and their removal from the calendar would not benefit the club game to any significant extent if at all. The Task Force notes that such games are an accepted necessity in all high-performing team sports.

If these competitions are removed from the calendar, there is every likelihood they will be replaced by a series of unregulated ‘challenge’ games which will ultimately have the same impact but without the associated promotional benefits that can accrue.⁵

The Task Force is of the view that these competitions should be retained but with a defined and restricted window in the National Fixtures Calendar and should only take place after a meaningful period where there is no on-field inter-county activity (a “closed season”). In addition here should be no return to onfield training or games pre-December 1st (challenge or trial games should be permitted in December)

In addition, no inter-county competitions or tournaments should be permitted from the end of a county team’s involvement in that year’s championship until January the 1st of the following year.

The “closed season” is something that the GAA has struggled to achieve compliance with in the past. The Task Force was strongly of the view that the Gaelic Players Association (GPA) can have a constructive and persuasive role to play in this context and in ensuring inter-county set-ups respect whatever provisions are contained in rule.

Likewise, county committees cannot ignore their responsibilities and need to play a role alongside the GPA in ensuring that county management places player welfare at the heart of their inter-county preparations.

Recommendations:

- *The Pre-season Provincial Competitions should be retained but should not commence until post January 1st (unless Football Championship Option 2 is adopted in which case only the Hurling competitions should be retained). They should be restricted to five designated dates annually. These would be determined by the national C.C.C (the 1st three weeks/weekends of the year) and the competitions restructured by each province and tailored to fit the time available*
- *There should be no Senior inter-county activity (on-field training, trials or challenge games) between a team’s exit from the Championship and Dec 1st each year – appropriate sanction (relevant to team rather than County Officers) to be proposed by new oversight unit.*

Third-Level Competitions

The Task Force was asked to consider the timing of and eligibility for third level competitions given the significant crossover between those who play on first teams at 3rd level and at inter-county level. There is a necessity to define a competition window for Comhairle Ard Oideachais during which their competitions, in particular the 3rd level championships in both Hurling and Football, can be staged.

⁵ For example, in the case of the Leinster competitions the financial support that is generated for the Province’s Benevolent Fund.

The Task Force is aware that in 2020, Comhairle Ard Oideachais is bringing forward the dates for completion of the Sigerson and Fitzgibbon Cup finals with the Sigerson being concluded before the end of January/beginning of February and Fitzgibbon in early/mid February.

These new completion dates need to be enshrined in general rule. They will ease significantly the issues of multiple eligibility and no further intervention should be required.

The Task Force was conscious that there will still be a level of crossover – albeit significantly reduced – between the end of the 3rd level competitions and the commencement of the National Football and Hurling leagues. In our view, the 3rd level Championship should take priority for a player where fixture or training clashes occur. It is crucial there is a strong line of communication between the respective inter-county and 3rd level managers during this period to ensure a player's workload is managed successfully and that best practice in terms of player welfare is maintained.

Recommendation:

- *General Rule to state that the Sigerson Cup must be completed on or before the 5th Sunday of the year; Fitzgibbon Cup to be completed on or before the 7th Sunday of the year.*

Second-Level Schools

The Task Force was asked to consider the timing of 2nd level Schools competitions in the context of the change in age grades at that level to U19. The change in age eligibility creates challenges in terms of trying to avoid clashes with inter-county competitions. This is particularly so given the recent Ard Chomhairle decision⁶ to move the U20 Football Championship back to the February/March period.

The fundamental position outlined in the extensive research conducted for the *Minor Review Work-Group Report*⁷ was that

- Senior Post-Primary competitions should commence no earlier than the second weekend in October with All-Ireland Finals to be played no later than the weekend following St Patrick's Day, and
- the Post-Primary A Finals should be played in Croke Park as a double header (Hurling and Football) each St Patrick's Day.

It was also the view of the Work Group that 2nd Level Schools should be given priority over inter-county development competitions at that time of year and that Rule 6.43 should be amended along the following lines:

“Post Primary Schools shall have ‘first call’ on players who are also involved with a Team in an inter-county Minor or Under 20 competition, and such players shall be

⁶ Decision of Ard Chomhairle, 19th October 2019

⁷ Report of the GAA Minor Review Work Group (2015)

restricted to Training/playing with a Post Primary School Team only, during such dual involvement."

This proposal was not accepted by Congress at the time.

Given that U20 Competitions are intended to be developmental in nature, the Task Force is of the view that the balance of advantage favours the recommendations of the *Minor Review Work Group* as they related to 2nd level schools.

However, recognising that this approach was not acceptable previously, the Task Force is proposing an alternative approach viz. that 2nd Level Schools A and B Finals in football should be completed by the end of January annually with the hurling competition finishing no later than the weekend following St Patrick's Day.

We acknowledge that this requires a considerable adjustment on behalf of those who run 2nd level schools football competitions and will require a major change for those working on the ground in the sector.

While it will lead to a shortening of the 2nd Level Season at Senior level (and by extension a reduction in the time available to play the main championships), we believe that it will also ensure there will be no cross-over between the scheduling of games in the 2nd Level and U20 Football championships. For the welfare of players in this age group, this would be a major gain. Where there are clashes between 2nd Level activities and U20 in a training context or in terms of challenge games, we believe that the priority for a player should be with his school until such time as they are eliminated from 2nd level competition.

The Task Force is also of the view that, because of the vast numbers of schools that opt for C and D competitions, with consequential extension of the length of time it takes to complete these competitions, these schools' competitions should be played to Provincial Final stage only from 2021 onwards.

Recommendations:

- *Rule should state that Post-Primary A and B Finals in football should be completed by the last weekend in January and in hurling by the weekend after St Patrick's Day annually.*
- *All-Ireland Finals should only be played at A and B levels – all other levels should be played on a provincial basis (i.e. to Provincial finals) only.*

All-Ireland Club Championships

The Task Force was asked to consider the 'practicalities of delivering a calendar year with club finals being played before the year end'. In their presentation to the Task Force, the Central Competitions Control Committee (CCCC) observed that recent changes to the structure of the All-Ireland club championships have paved the way for these competitions to be completed in January and, eventually, in the calendar year. The semi-finals of this year's competitions will take place in January 2020 but the semi-finals next year will move to December with the finals in mid-January.

This is a welcome development and will help create a more definite delineation between the inter-county and club seasons. It will end the lengthy wait between provincial glory and the All-Ireland series for the clubs involved. It will also allow these club players some kind of 'off season' or 'down time' before commencing their quest to reclaim a county championship.

Scheduling the finals for January diminishes the negative effect that March finals had on the availability of key club players for national league games.

While the Task Force is attracted to the proposition that the finals take place in the calendar year it does not believe that, in the current landscape, this is achievable.

Having examined the various options available it is clear that the knock-on effect of having the finals in December would be such that virtually all club championships would need to commence and conclude a full two weeks earlier than at present.

Notwithstanding this the Task Force believes that this should remain an objective for the Association to work towards. It is a matter that the Central Competitions Control Committee could revisit in due course in the context of the adoption or otherwise of the other recommendations of this report.

Two further issues

The Task Force also considered two further issues in relation to the club championship.

The first related to the future participation of the Galway hurling club champions in one of the other three provincial championships. A strong view was expressed to the Task Force that, as the Galway Champions in Hurling are the only participants in the senior club championship from Connacht, this would be a beneficial and logical move.

The Task Force accepts that this may raise various related issues, e.g. the management of the All-Ireland Series with only three Provincial Champions, but as a first step Central Council could approve such a move in principle and thereby allow the necessary discussions to commence.

Secondly, while the Task Force was primarily focussed on the national fixture calendar, it also considered the situation within counties in relation to club competitions.

Changes to the National Fixtures Calendar can create space for counties to play their competitions. However, the primary responsibility for providing certainty for club scheduling remains with individual counties. Once a settled national fixture calendar is in place, each county must reflect on the structure of the competitions they are providing and examine whether they are appropriate to the time available.

Many counties have already undertaken such reviews in the light of recent changes, and this has benefitted the club game. More counties, however, need to do likewise.

The work of the Fixture Analysis Committee⁸ has highlighted that the number of teams in each championship varies significantly from county to county. This is, in part, a reflection on the number of clubs within a county.

The Task Force noted that in 2019, of the 66 senior hurling and football club championships across the 32 Counties and London, 8 championships consisted of more than 16 teams.

It has been strongly represented to the Task Force, by fixture analysts, administrators and others that Senior or Intermediate Championship should consist of no more than 16 teams. The Task Force fully endorses this view and recognises that affected clubs could be reluctant to adopt such a change due to the immediate impact it may have on their own status. This is understandable but not in the best interest of the orderly and timely management of competitions.

Accordingly, the Task Force believes the Association needs to urgently adopt, in general rule, a restriction on the number of teams that can enter a particular championship, and that once adopted, a lead-in period of, say, two years be given to counties to allow them to properly plan for what may involve a significant change to their current structures.

Recommendations:

- *Central Council to approve, in principle, that Galway club champions participate in one of the other three provincial Senior club Hurling Championships.*
- *Rule to be introduced that county club senior and intermediate championships to consist of a maximum of 16 teams with a two-year lead-in period for counties to adjust their competition structure.*

National (Allianz) Leagues

Earlier start to season

The National Leagues currently start in the last week in January and conclude at the end of March. A number of the submissions received by the Task Force suggested that the leagues could be started earlier and in doing so allow the 'spring club window' to be expanded.

On the face of it, this is an attractive proposition. The earlier the leagues commence, the more time that can be created in spring for the club game.

However, from a sports science and indeed player welfare perspective it is clear that our inter-county teams need some kind of "pre-season" engagements as referred to earlier. Furthermore, the Task Force is of the view that if the National leagues started any earlier, it is quite likely to frustrate the Association's desire to implement a workable "closed period" for inter-county activity.

⁸ Fixture Analysis Committee Report to Annual Congress, 2019

Starting the Leagues earlier would most likely lead to counties returning to training earlier. In addition, if we are to pursue policies that will bring forward our 3rd level championships and the All-Ireland club finals to January, it would probably be self-defeating to start the leagues any earlier than currently scheduled.

In any case, it is at best questionable as to whether generating more time for clubs in March is something that clubs themselves see as a priority. For most counties an April start to the main club competitions seems acceptable. At present roughly half of counties - often those where league competitions are given greater importance or where there is only one strong code – will start their championships in late July/early August, while those who have an April start for their championships are lukewarm about this as it is (on the basis that the earlier you start, the earlier you are going to be knocked out and your championship participation for the year concluded).

Structure of leagues

In terms of the structure of the National Leagues, they are considered in many ways the GAA's most successful competitions. They provide certainty in terms of the dates counties will be playing, consistency in the number of games available, regularity and above all competitive equity with teams participating at a level equivalent to their abilities.

Recent calendar changes see the leagues concluding at the end of March rather than the end of April and they are now also played at a time of year when there is very little club activity.

Numbers of games

Broadly speaking, the Task Force is not recommending any major changes to the structure of the Leagues (unless Option 2 for a re-structure of the football championship outlined later in this document is adopted). However, it did examine the number of league games being currently provided in both the Hurling and Football leagues.

In football, we considered the number of games from the perspective of establishing if a reduction could generate more time for clubs. A re-drawing of the football leagues so that there are only 5 games guaranteed for each county could potentially generate more time in the calendar towards the end of March.

However, this is not something that the Task Force is recommending. The leagues are currently the GAA's most successful and competitive inter-county football competitions. They are structured in such a way that teams of matching quality play each other on a regular basis and are seen by so-called "weaker counties" as more important than the Championship. They are also vital in a development context and provide great promotion for the Association at a time of year (February/March) when ultimately there seems to be little desire for any major increase to activity at club level.

Later in this report, the Task Force sets out an option that would potentially see a somewhat modified version of the National Football Leagues moved to the Summer months but in terms of their structure the Task Force is of the view that no change is required.

Imbalance in number of hurling games

The Task Force did, however, identify an imbalance in the number of games provided for counties outside of Division 1 in the National Hurling Leagues. While there are quarter-finals and semi-finals provided for in Divisions 1a and 1b, the absence of semi-finals in the lower divisions is something that should be rectified.

The introduction of semi-finals in Divisions 2 and 3 would not impact negatively on the club game (county players are still involved with county football teams on the dates these games could be played) and it gives the worthwhile opportunity for an additional game to be provided for developing hurling counties. For that reason, the Task Force is recommending that semi-finals involving the top four teams in each group, are introduced in Divisions 2 and 3 of the National Hurling leagues.

Recommendations:

- *Current Structures and format to be maintained (if Options 1 or 3 for the football championship are adopted)*
- *Introduce Semi-Finals in all groups of Divisions 2 and 3 of the National Hurling Leagues*

U20 Football*Timing*

The timing of U20 Football in the national fixtures calendar provides something of a challenge for the Association.

Previously it was recommended⁹ that the competition be played mid-week in the summer months. The intention was that it would be run off alongside the Senior inter-county championships and would have minimal impact on club activity; this was on the basis that senior inter-county players were unavailable during that period anyway, and therefore no serious club activity was taking place. There was also ample time in early summer to run off a developmental league in preparation for the championship.

Further advantages to this change was that it avoided clashes with 2nd level schools and 3rd level competitions, and games could be played midweek without the need for floodlights

On the other hand, the proposal clashed, to a degree, with the timing of the Leaving Certificate examinations and meant that U20 county players – as well as senior – were now unavailable to clubs which in some counties made the ability to progress Leagues or other competitions played without county players almost impossible.

In any case, Central Council recently directed that the competition should revert to being played in February and March. The clear advantage of this arrangement is that it avoids overlap with club activity but opens up the possibility of clashes with the latter stages of the main 2nd level school championships.

⁹ “Player Overtraining and Burnout and the GAA Fixtures Calendar”, Paraic Duffy 2015

As we have highlighted earlier, with 2nd level having moved to U19, this poses a challenge and hence our recommendation that the 2nd Level finals need to be completed by the end of January.

Structure & Eligibility

In terms of the structure and eligibility for U20, the Task Force is satisfied that it must remain developmental in nature. However, the current knock-out provincial championship structures do not really lend themselves to this. The recent introduction of a structured league competition preceding the championships addressed this matter. It ensured counties, whose competitive season would otherwise have consisted of one game, were at least assured of three league games at that level and against counties of approximately matching ability.

The Task Force is of the view that there would be much to be gained by the Association moving to an All-Ireland competition at U20 level. It could be based on a league-style competition in its early rounds and played in February and March. Our recommendation is that the C.C.C.C should be tasked with drawing up such a proposal for discussion that would guarantee three games for every team at this level.

With the Sigerson Cup now being completed in January, the U20 competition could be played without affecting the National Football league once eligibility criteria are adopted that ensure players are only eligible for either the National League or the U20 competition. As with the senior inter-county season, U20 football teams should not be permitted to have any collective training or games before December 1st – appropriate sanctions in this context should be proposed by the new oversight unit referenced earlier in this report.

Recommendations:

- *Rule to state that U20 football championship be played in February/March*
- *Eligibility to be restricted to players who have not played in the National Football league in that year*
- *C.C.C.C to draw up for discussion a round-robin style national championship proposal to replace the existing Provincial Championships and that will guarantee all U20 county teams a minimum of three games.*
- *No collective training or games at U20 level pre-Dec 1st - appropriate sanction to be proposed by new oversight unit*

U20 Hurling

Timing and eligibility criteria

The U20 Hurling Competition is currently played at the same time as the Senior Hurling Championship – the provincial championship games are primarily played mid-week during the summer months. The games tend to be played within 3 or 4 days of major games in the Provincial or All-Ireland Championships.

The Task Force was of the view that the U20 competition could be played with less inconvenience to clubs if similar eligibility criteria to those used for U20 Football in recent years were adopted, i.e. that any player, who plays an inter-county Senior Hurling

Championship game – i.e. Liam Mac Carthy Cup - at any stage in a current Championship Year, would be ineligible to participate in the inter-county U20 Hurling Championship until his county is eliminated from the Senior Championship (this provision would only apply to the U20 A Hurling Championship and not the 2nd Tier equivalent).

Structure

It was also the view of the Task Force that the current “back door” provision, whereby the beaten Munster and Leinster finalists re-enter at All-Ireland Semi-Final stage, should be removed as it is serving little purpose. Having won the Provincial Championship, the Munster and Leinster Champions should advance directly to the All-Ireland final.

This provision, allied to the proposed eligibility changes, would allow for U20 to be completed by the end of July/start of August, with the final potentially as a curtain-raiser to one of the All-Ireland Hurling Championship semi-finals. It would remove one further impediment to the scheduling of club fixtures in August in the ‘Liam Mac Carthy’ Hurling Counties, as from the start of August onwards, only the All-Ireland Senior finalists would remain active in inter-county hurling competition.

A similar approach should also be taken to the 2nd Tier U20 competition; the final of which is currently played in early August, but the view of the Task Force was that it should be timed to allow for the final to be played as a curtain-raiser to one of the Senior All-Ireland hurling semi-finals.

All-Ireland open draw

Finally, as with football, there was also a strong view expressed that serious consideration should be given to moving away from the current provincial model in U20 hurling and towards an All-Ireland open draw, knock-out competition (unlike in football, the staging of U20 hurling in the summer months would require that such a competition needs to be knock-out or it would have a significant impact on club activity).

Crucially the geographical location of the counties involved would allow for this competition to be played mid-week and at the same time as the inter-county Senior Hurling championships thereby minimising the impact on Club fixture schedules.

The Task Force noted that a new national U20 knock-out competition replacing the U20 Provincial Hurling Championships would likely have less than 16 teams seeking to participate and therefore would only require 4 calendar dates to complete which could have a considerably positive impact on the club scene in those counties.

Irrespective of whether such a competition is created in place of the Provincial Championships, the Task Force felt that if the eligibility and timing requirements suggested are adopted, even with the current U20 Provincial Structures in place, the All-Ireland finals should be completed by the start of August.

With 2nd level schools hurling competitions concluding in March, a return to training date of April 1st would seem sensible for these panels. As with U20 Football we believe the new

oversight unit once established would be best placed to select a meaningful sanction for breaches in this context.

Recommendations:

- *U20 Hurling championship to be restricted to players who have not played in the Liam Mac Carthy Cup in that year (until that county is eliminated from the Senior Championship)*
- *Leinster and Munster Provincial Champions to advance directly to the All-Ireland Final*
- *All-Ireland Finals to be completed no later than the 31st Sunday of the year for both U20 and U20 B Hurling competitions*
- *C.C.C to be asked to draw up a new competition structure for U20 Hurling for the consideration of Central Council based on a knock-out Open Draw national competition.*
- *No collective training or games at U20 Hurling level pre-April 1st - appropriate sanction to be proposed by new oversight unit*

Minor Football and Hurling Championships

The Talent Academy Review group recommended that *“in order to bring synergy between club and inter-county competitions all counties prioritise U-13, U-15 and U-17 levels”*. The Task Force wholeheartedly agrees with this approach for the myriad of reasons outlined in their Report¹⁰

The Task Force also strongly supports the recommendation that the U-17 or Minor Championships should become *“tiered Celtic Challenge developmental”* competitions (i.e. played in a clearly defined window, in a round-robin format that guarantees each team a minimum number of games and which has a number of Tiers ensuring teams are playing against others of a similar ability).

In our view, *“developmental”* competitions from U17 down should be run nationally by a separate Competitions Control Committee (C.C.C) membership of which should include the heads of Coaching and Games Development in each province. The Chairman and Secretary of the National C.C.C as well as the Director of Games Development should also be members and the Committee should be serviced from the Department of Games Development in Croke Park. In this way, the group would be linked to the National C.C.C but would have a strong coterie of Games Development personnel conversant with the development needs at the various age levels.

This new group should also be given responsibility for defining an appropriate window (or windows) during which the new developmental competitions at this grade can best be accommodated. The new window(s) should be based on the principle of causing as little disruption as possible to underage club fixture programmes within Counties.

¹⁰ Report of the Talent Academy and Player Development Review Committee

In terms of the fixture calendar, the move to tiered developmental competitions at Minor level should be accompanied by a de-coupling of the Minor All-Ireland Semi-Finals and Finals from their Senior equivalents. If we are to expect these competitions to have a meaningful development ethos, playing them on the biggest occasions in the GAA Calendar annually may take from that and feed into a “win at all costs” mentality. The All-Ireland Senior Hurling and Football Finals have in recent years become such huge events in their own right that the days of having any curtain-raisers have probably come to an end.

Additional inter-county age grade

There is room for one further inter-county grade between U-17 and Adult level. The Talent Academy Report suggests this should be either U19 or U20 and sides to a degree with U19. There are solid developmental reasons for this from an inter-county perspective. Ultimately though only a small fraction of our players proceed to play inter-county and from a club and national fixture perspective, it is the view of the Task Force that this grade should remain at U20 at least until such time as other recommendations in this report (particularly those around 2nd and 3rd level) are given time to bed in.

The Task Force is of the view that the majority of our promising players on leaving U17 can be catered for in a development context by either their 2nd or 3rd level colleges at aged 18 or 19, or will find ample hurling and football available to them through their adult club teams (a step up that does take a year or two to adapt to).

By placing the next inter-county development age at 20 the Task Force believes players are more mature both mentally and physically from having been introduced to adult club activity. They are also better prepared for the step-up to what will be the first real All-Ireland competition and also closer to being ready to take the next developmental step to senior inter-county.

The Task Force believe it would be prudent for the Association to leave the U20 grade in place for a longer period to allow for proper analysis (it has only been in place for two years) and for the effects of the many other changes proposed in this report to be felt.

The Task Force is of the very strong view that there should not be a return to more than one inter-county grade between U17 and Senior level. Any return to more than one inter-county grade between U17 and Senior would seriously impact the club game. The greatest strides the Association has made in a fixtures context in the last number of years have been due to the de-coupling of minor and adult i.e. moving the minor age grade to U17 and not allowing U17's playing in adult competition.

Recommendations

- *Minor (U17) intercounty championships should become tiered developmental competitions and be decoupled from Senior All-Ireland Semi Finals and Finals*
- *Separate C.C.C linked to national C.C.C.C to be put in place for inter-county activity up to and including U17. This group to identify appropriate windows during which the developmental competitions should be played.*
- *U20 grade to be retained as the only inter-county grade between U17 and Senior for the moment and until other recommendations are given time to bed in.*

All-Ireland Junior Football Championship

It is hard to make a cogent case for the retention of the All-Ireland Junior Football Championship. As referenced earlier in the report, there is a strong view that there are simply too many inter-county competitions in the GAA calendar with each having a detrimental knock-on effect on the playing of club games.

The competition has not had a provincial championship in Ulster for many years, and neither will Connacht teams participate in 2020.

Apart from the impact on club activity, the other obvious concern is the extent to which the Junior Championship has become distanced from its original objective of providing an inter-county outlet to players from Intermediate or Junior clubs. This remains the objective in only a handful of Counties – most approach it as a Reserve team championship.

A number of previous reports in relation to club fixtures recommended the removal of the Junior Football Championship – the Task Force in its considerations did not find any great reason to deviate from this view.

Recommendation

- All-Ireland Junior Football Championship to be discontinued.

All-Ireland Senior Hurling Championship

The current hurling championship provides regular games, a level of certainty in terms of when counties are playing, is hugely competitive and ensures by and large that each team is pitted at a level appropriate to their abilities. For those reasons – and given that the new system is still in its infancy – the Task Force is not recommending any alternatives to the current hurling system.

This does not mean that no concerns were expressed. For example, the CCCC would have serious concerns at the impact of the new Round Robin Senior Hurling Championship on the time available for club games. Counties that were used to having their county players available to clubs at various points in May and June under the old system, suddenly find that this simply isn't possible under the new structure.

However, although only two championship seasons have been completed there is also a feeling that the new round-robin structure has been a tremendous public success and any change that would envisage less games would not attract support.

If the Hurling Championship structures are to remain in place, it is essential that the current 'Spring Window' is expanded for clubs and the oversight mechanisms we have suggested are put in place as soon as possible to ensure clubs get more time – at least five weekends - with their county hurlers between the end of the league and the start of the provincial championships.

Provincial Groups

There are some issues with the actual structure itself that also need to be examined. The most immediate and current debate is centred around whether the Provincial Groups should have 6 rather than the current 5 teams in each. This seems to be a debate that is particularly active in Leinster, although the inclusion of Kerry in Munster to make it a six-team championship has also been raised occasionally. The argument when taken in isolation makes sense, particularly as it does not require any additional weekends for the footprint of the Provincial Championships.

The addition of a 6th team in Leinster in particular would mean that teams promoted from the tier below would have a more realistic chance of retaining their status in the Mac Carthy Cup with at least one other team of a similar standard in the competition. This would allow for potential consolidation and gradual improvement and might go some way towards addressing the current 'yo-yo' situation. It would also remove the need for the current Preliminary Quarter Finals in the Hurling Championship which in the view of the Task Force serve very little positive purpose

(Notwithstanding the success of Laois earlier in the year, the retention of the preliminary quarter finals adds to the challenge of creating more weekends for club activity. However we also acknowledge that attempts to remove these from the calendar have been strongly resisted in recent years and therefore we must accept that they are likely to remain in place for as long as the current structures are retained).

On the other hand, the addition of a 6th team would dilute the competitiveness of the Championship. There is a strong argument also that Championship is not an appropriate vehicle for furthering "development" aims (especially when the league already serves that purpose) while the inclusion of another team from the Mc Donagh Cup would have a huge knock-on effect for every tier below the Liam Mac Carthy.

It would most likely make the Meagher Cup unsustainable and while many would question its sustainability with just four teams, the reasons behind its introduction in the first place - to support the very weakest of our hurling entities – needs to be borne in mind.

In short, there are positives and negatives to expanding the Championship groups, but given the unique needs of hurling nationally, the view of the Task Force is that this is something the Hurling Development Committee should be charged with examining in more detail and bringing forward a proposal – if necessary - on the matter.

From the perspective of the Task Force, the only recommendation it would make is that whatever solution is brought forward, must live within the footprint of what is currently available calendar wise for the Provincial Hurling Championships.

Recommendation

- Hurling Development Committee to consider whether Liam Mac Carthy group(s) should expand to 6 teams – any recommendation must not expand current calendar footprint for Provincial Hurling Championship and should take account of knock-on effects for lower tiers

All-Ireland Senior Football Championship

Recent changes

The reaction to the introduction of a Round Robin element in the Quarter Finals of the Football Championship two years ago has been mixed. There is no question that it has generated more high-profile games at the latter end of the Championship but for the counties who make it to the Round Robin quarter finals, it has certainly posed some challenges in a club fixture context. In addition, with no relegation option, some final group games have no consequence.

It is also a relatively new departure and it is quite difficult to definitively judge its success or failure based on only two iterations of the system. One thing that is abundantly clear however, is that it does little for the so called “weaker” counties. The introduction of the new 2nd Tier Championship may in time provide the outlet these Counties need but that is dependent on how they engage with the competition. Unless Counties, players, supporters and management embrace the concept of a tiered football championship they are less likely to seize the opportunities it presents.

Competition Formats

The consultation process undertaken in compiling this report clearly identified issues with the current football championship structures. For those proposing change, it is largely on the basis that there should be more games earlier in the championship for every county.

A variety of competition formats and structures were submitted and there is a virtually unlimited number of formats that could be adapted for the Senior inter-county football season. However, they are in the main based on two broad themes viz:

- Round robin provincial championships based on 8 groups of 4 teams
- Using the National League structure – four graded divisions – as the basis for a summer championship and moving the Provincial championships to the Spring period.

The Task Force has developed what it considers to be practical iterations of these options which are set out later in this section.

Provincial championships

A sizeable minority – 46% - of those who participated in the questionnaire felt that the GAA should not retain the provincial championships in football. In addition, some of the written submissions questioned their retention into the future, in their current format at least.

It was clearly felt that the disparity in quality between the strongest and weakest counties in each province is a major flaw while reference was also made to the imbalance in numbers across the four provinces. The dominance of particular counties was also cited as a reason why the GAA should dispense with the provincial system.

The consultation process also highlighted a desire on the part of many to retain provincial competitions in a meaningful but revised format. Many contributions acknowledged that the best chance of success for many counties is either via the National Leagues or in shocking a “big gun” in their own provincial championship (because of its knock-out nature). This is borne out by hard facts – in the last 30 years 28 Counties have played in a Provincial Senior Football Championship final.

Progress in the provincial championships is seen as an attainable goal for the majority of counties with all of the historical significance, tradition and promotional benefits it can bring.

For that reason, the Task Force has taken the view that some form of Provincial championships with Provincial finals should be retained.

The Task Force options put forward work off the principle that no county should be excluded from competing for the Sam Maguire Cup and that a 2nd Tier competition should be a key part of any new proposals.

Scheduling

The Task Force acknowledges that a tighter scheduling approach to inter-county competitions could deliver additional weekends for the club game in any of the proposals. However, the approach to scheduling in the examples we have provided attempts to maintain a balance between reasonable scheduling of inter-county competitions and generating more time for clubs. To that end the Task Force has adopted the following as a scheduling approach:

1. County players should not be asked to play on more than four successive weekends where possible.
2. “Gap” weekends need to be built into any competitions played in February and March to minimise disruption to the master schedule due to postponements
3. The “10-day Rule” is strictly applied.

The Task Force is putting forward and analysing two new options in terms of the Football Championship which it believes could address shortcomings in the current inter-county games programme while increasing the guaranteed time available for the club game.

We have also identified, as a third option, how the other changes identified in this report – if implemented – can improve the current situation for club players even if the current trial structures in Football and Hurling are retained.

Option 1 – 8 Team Provincial Football Championships

As previously mentioned, a number of those who submitted draft proposals to the Task Force expressed the desire to retain the Provincial Championships. At the same time, it was felt that a re-drawing of the provincial structures was necessary in football and that a structure which would have four equal sections of eight teams in each would be a much preferable starting point than the current imbalance in county numbers (Connacht – 7, Leinster – 11, Munster – 6 and Ulster – 9).

Clearly, deciding on the rebalancing mechanism would need to be addressed having regard to different sensitivities. This does not detract from the merits of the approach in terms of providing an improved fixture calendar.

A provincial structure that has as its starting point 8 teams in each province:

- could ensure the long-term retention of the provincial championships, albeit with some amendments to both timings and membership
- provide a more balanced game programme for all counties,
- allow a greater period of time for counties to progress club competitions in April and May.

It could also provide a greater degree of certainty and clarity for club players in terms of defined and extended windows, while also, in the case of the weaker counties, increasing the minimum number of championship games in the main Championship and a follow-on 2nd Tier competition.

Crucially, this can be achieved without extending the footprint of the existing inter-county season.

The proposal would narrow the gap between the potential minimum and maximum number of games each county plays in the Championship (increasing the minimum from 2 to 4 while decreasing the maximum from 11 to 8) and in so doing would create a more equitable base of games from which counties can seek to develop.

Key Features

The features underpinning the proposal are:

- The national football league would retain its current timing and structure and finishing positions could be used to determine seedings in the Provincial Championships.
- Each provincial championship would consist of 8 teams with potentially final league positions (or whatever other mechanisms that can be agreed) determining those counties moving from Ulster and Leinster to Connacht and Munster each year to create four even provinces
- Each province to have two groups of four teams, who would be seeded from the National league and who would play each other in a round robin system guaranteeing a minimum of three group stage games for all teams.

- The winner of each group would progress to the relevant Provincial final, the 2nd and 3rd placed teams would progress to the qualifiers, with the fourth placed participating in a 2nd Tier championship

This approach would ensure both a minimum of four championship games for every county and a doorway to the All-Ireland series or qualification for a 2nd Tier championship.

The option retains the broad provincial structures, with all the history and emotional attachment they hold for many people, while developing and protecting them in such a way as to create a more rounded and meaningful championship for all participants.

Impact on clubs

No. of club only weekends currently	12
No. of club only weekends Apr to Oct in option 1 (if scheduled in 'Spring Window' Model)	15
No. of club only weekends Apr to Oct in option 1 (if scheduled in Multiple Windows Model)	14

In terms of the club game, it would ensure that – using the current 'Spring Window' model - by the end of the first week in August, only four teams would remain in both the Senior Hurling and Football Championships, effectively making August available for the majority of counties to progress their club championships.

The sample calendars included with this report demonstrate how additional weeks can also be created in the calendar in the Spring period under such a model. This would allow for meaningful engagement in club competitions in that period (assuming the governance and oversight provisions, set out earlier are adhered to and the "10-day" rule is strictly applied across the board).

Challenges

Acceptance of the proposal will be a challenge for those counties who do not want to be placed in another province, however temporarily.

It could be argued also that the differing strengths of the Counties in each province would make certain provincial groups much easier to progress from than others. There could also be an imbalance in the 2nd Tier Championship (i.e. the 4th placed team in an Ulster Championship group could easily be a Division 1 or 2 side, whereas in Connacht or Munster the 4th placed teams are likely to be from Division 4).

These reservations should not be dismissed lightly. However, the Task Force is of the view that the proposal would go a long way to addressing some of the current issues around the suitability of the provincial championships.

Summary

The proposal delivers a guaranteed 15 "club only" weekends between the start of April and the end of October when scheduled around a 'Spring Window' for clubs.

As mentioned above it also can provide greater clarity and certainty on timings for club and county players alike, striking the balance between the needs of both and ensuring there is limited overlap while reducing the likelihood of friction between clubs and county management.

OPTION 1 Calendar 2021 – 8 Team Provincial Championship (Spring Window Scheduling)

January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Week 1 2/3	Week 6 6/7	Week 10 6/7	Week 14 3/4	Week 18 1/2	Week 23 5/6	Week 27 3/4	Week 31 31/1	Week 36 4/5	Week 40 2/3	Week 45 6/7	Week 49 4/5
PROVINCIAL COMPETITIONS WEEK 1	AFL Rd 3	AHL Div 1 Quarter-Finals AHL Semi Finals – all other Divisions	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	LSHC Rd 3A McDonagh Rd 3A Meagher Rd 2	LSFC Final MSFC Final SFC Quals R1 Tier 2 Qtr Finals Ring, Rackard, Meagher Finals	SFC Qtr Finals Tier 2 Final U20 hurling SFs (if required)	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Provincial Club Championship	Provincial Club Championship/Some All-Ireland Club Championship Semi Finals Return to Collective Inter Co Training
Week 2 9/10	Week 7 13/14	Week 11 13/14	Week 15 10/11	Week 19 8/9	Week 24 12/13	Week 28 10/11	Week 32 7/8	Week 37 11/12	Week 41 9/10	Week 46 13/14	Week 50 11/12
PROVINCIAL COMPETITIONS WEEK 2 All Ireland Club Finals	AHL Rd 3 Fitzgibbon Final	AFL Rd 6 AHL Div 1 Semi-Finals AHL Finals – all other Divisions	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	MSHC Rd 3 LSHC Rd 3B McDonagh Rd 3B Ring, Rackard R3 Prov SFC RR Rd3	LSHC Final MSHC Final SFC Quals R2	SHC Semi Finals U20 Hurling Finals (A & B)	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Provincial Club Championship	All-Ireland Club Championship Semi Finals
Week 3 16/17	Week 8 20/21	Week 12 20/21	Week 16 17/18	Week 20 15/16	Week 25 19/20	Week 29 17/18	Week 33 14/15	Week 38 18/19	Week 42 16/17	Week 47 20/21	Week 51 18/19
PROVINCIAL COMPETITIONS WEEK 3	AFL Rd 4 AHL Rd 4	AHL Div 1 Final AFL Rd 7 PPS Hurling Finals U20 F S-Finals	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Inter-County Preparation (Club Games without County Players)	MSHC Rd 4 LSHC Rd 4 McDonagh Rd 4 Ring & Rackard Semi-Finals & Rel Play-offs Meagher Rd 3	SHC Prelim QFs SFC Quals R3 Tier 2 Semi Final	SFC Semi-Finals	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Provincial Club Championship	
Week 4 23/24	Week 9 27/28	Week 13 27/28	Week 17 24/25	Week 21 22/23	Week 26 26/27	Week 30 24/25	Week 34 21/22	Week 39 25/26	Week 43 23/24	Week 48 27/28	Week 52 25/26
AFL Rd 1 AHL Rd 1	AFL Rd 5 AHL Rd 5	AFL League Finals PPS Hurling Finals U20 Football Final	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	LSHC Rd 1 MSHC Rd 1 McDonagh, Ring, Rackard Rd 1 Prov SFC RR Rd1	USFC Final CSFC Final LSHC Rd 5 MSHC Rd 5 McDonagh Rd5	SHC Qtr Finals	All Ireland Hurling Final	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Provincial Club Championship	
Week 5 30/31				Week 22 29/30			Week 35 28/29		Week 44 30/31		
AFL Rd 2 AHL Rd 2 Sigerson Final 2 nd Level Schools Football Finals				LSHC, MSHC Rd 2 McDonagh, Ring, Rackard Rd 2 Meagher Rd 1 Prov SFC RR Rd2			All Ireland Football Final		Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]		

OPTION 1a Calendar 2021 – 8 Team Provincial Championship (Multiple window Scheduling)

January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Week 1 2/3	Week 6 6/7	Week 10 6/7	Week 14 3/4	Week 18 1/2	Week 23 5/6	Week 27 3/4	Week 31 31/1	Week 36 4/5	Week 40 2/3	Week 45 6/7	Week 49 4/5
PROVINCIAL COMPETITIONS WEEK 1	AFL Rd 3 AHL Rd 3	AFL Rd 6 AHL Div 1 Quarter-Finals AHL SFs – all other Divisions	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	LSFC Final MSFC Final SFC Quals R1 Tier 2 Qtr Finals Ring, Rackard, Meagher Finals	Inter-County Preparation (Club Games without County Players)	SHC Semi Finals U20 Hurling Finals (A & B)	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Provincial Club Championship	Provincial Club Championship/ Some All-Ireland Club Semi Finals Return to Collective Inter Co Training
Week 2 9/10	Week 7 13/14	Week 11 13/14	Week 15 10/11	Week 19 8/9	Week 24 12/13	Week 28 10/11	Week 32 7/8	Week 37 11/12	Week 41 9/10	Week 46 13/14	Week 50 11/12
PROVINCIAL COMPETITIONS WEEK 2 All Ireland Club Finals H&F	AFL Rd 4 Fitzgibbon Final	AFL Rd 7 AHL Div 1 Semi-Finals	Inter-County Preparation (Club Games without County Players) U20 Football Final	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	LSHC Final MSHC Final SFC Quals R2	SHC Qtr Finals SFC Quals R3 Tier 2 Semi Final	SFC Semi-Finals	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Provincial Club Championship	All-Ireland Club Championship Semi Finals
Week 3 16/17	Week 8 20/21	Week 12 20/21	Week 16 17/18	Week 20 15/16	Week 25 19/20	Week 29 17/18	Week 33 14/15	Week 38 18/19	Week 42 16/17	Week 47 20/21	Week 51 18/19
PROVINCIAL COMPETITIONS WEEK 3	AHL Rd 4	AFL League Finals AHL Finals U20 F S-Finals PPS Hurling Finals	LSHC Rd 1 MSHC Rd 1 McDonagh, Ring, Rackard Rd 1 Prov SFC RR Rd1	Inter-County Preparation (Club Games without County Players)	Inter-County Preparation (Club Games without County Players)	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	SFC Qtr Finals Tier 2 Final U20 hurling SFs (if required)	All Ireland Hurling Final	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Provincial Club Championship	
Week 4 23/24	Week 9 27/28	Week 13 27/28	Week 17 24/25	Week 21 22/23	Week 26 26/27	Week 30 24/25	Week 34 21/22	Week 39 25/26	Week 43 23/24	Week 48 27/28	Week 52 25/26
AFL Rd 1 AHL Rd 1	AHL Rd 5 AFL Rd 5	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	LSHC, MSHC Rd 2 McDonagh, Ring, Rackard Rd 2 Meagher Rd 1 Prov SFC RR Rd2	MSHC Rd 3 LSHC Rd 3 McDonagh Rd 3 Ring, Rackard, Meagher R3 Prov SFC RR Rd3	USFC Final CSFC Final LSHC Rd 5 MSHC Rd 5 McDonagh Rd5	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	All Ireland Football Final	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Provincial Club Championship	
Week 5 30/31				Week 22 29/30			Week 35 28/29		Week 44 30/31		
AFL Rd 2 AHL Rd 2 Sigerson Final 2 nd Level Schools Football Finals				MSHC Rd 4 LSHC Rd 4 McDonagh Rd 4 Ring & Rackard Semi-Finals & Rel Play-offs Meagher Rd 3			Inter-County Preparation (SFC & SHC Semi Finalists only) Club Week All other Counties		Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]		

Option 2: National League Format for Championship

The second option involves the repositioning of the National Football League to the Summer months as a basis for the football Championship and playing Provincial Competitions in the February/March period.

Key Features

The main provisions of this option would involve:

- Spring: The Provincial championships would be played in the Spring as round robin competitions with semi-finals and finals,
 - Munster & Connacht - round robin groups of 6,
 - Leinster - 2 x round robin groups of 5,
 - Ulster - 2 x round robin groups of 5
- The top team in Connacht and the top in Munster would progress straight to their respective Provincial finals, with the 2nd and 3rd placed teams after the round robin stage meeting in semi-finals.
- In Leinster and Ulster, the top two teams in each group would meet in semi-finals with the winners advancing to the provincial final to play each other.
- As with option 1, a mechanism would need to be agreed to determine which Leinster team would play in the Ulster competition.
- Summer: The national league divisions 1 to 4 would move to the summer months and determine qualification for the All-Ireland series.
 - Top four in Division 1 and top two in Division 2 go to All-Ireland quarter finals (6 teams).
 - Top team in Division 3 and 4, along with teams placed 3rd and 4th in division 2 (4 teams) to go into qualifier games to play against the top 2 teams in Division 1 in quarter finals,
 - Relegation on a 2 up, 2 down basis would continue
 - Follow on Tier 2 knock out competition for some teams from Division 3 & 4
 - Tier 2 Final played with All-Ireland Football Semi Final

Whilst provincial championship would no longer offer a short route to the latter stages of the All-Ireland series (the back door has long since removed provincial honours as a pre-requisite for All-Ireland success), provincial competition would be retained, and local county rivalries would remain a part of the national calendar. There would be an opportunity for weaker counties to compete against local Division 1 opposition without the risk of it ending their season.

As with option 1, this option is consistent with the principles outlined in the guidance framework with every county playing a minimum guaranteed number of championship games at their level at the same time and there is a route for every team to win the All-Ireland no matter how unlikely it might seem.

The proposed championship structure resembles the hurling championship revamp (league then knock out) although not exactly the same. It would guarantee every county at least

three home games in the summer competition with all of the potential promotional benefits that would bring.

It is a competition format familiar to the Association and one that has been proven to function well. The streamed groups of eight mean games should remain competitive and relegation and promotion should ensure most games will have something at stake.¹¹

Club Impact

No. of club only weekends currently	12
No. of club only weekends Apr to Oct in option 2 (if scheduled in 'Spring Window' Model)	15
No. of club only weekends Apr to Oct in option 2 (if scheduled in Multiple Windows Model)	14

A league based inter-county championship means club championship games can be fixed with certainty. As with Option 1, if scheduled in a 'Spring Window' format, a 6-week club fixtures window can be created between the end of the Provincial Competitions and the commencement of the Championship. There would be a total of 15 guaranteed club weekends from April to the end of October available.

It is also worth noting that the provincial competitions would be finished in mid-March for a lot of participating Counties which would further aid opportunities for county players to be with their clubs.

Challenges

While the format proposed would boost the number of senior inter-county games played under the auspices of our Provincial councils (from 8 to 23 in Ulster, 9 to 23 in Leinster and 5 to 17 in Munster and Connacht) there may be a concern that the traditional "knock out" value of the Provincial Championships would be undermined. Provincial attendances would be unlikely to match those of knock-out games played in the summer and league competitions reduce the benefits of a one-off shock victory for a weaker county.

It could be argued that this option is too rewarding to teams in Division 2, 3 and 4 and harsh on teams that finish in the bottom half of division 1. It is true that the format does advantage counties down the ladder a little more. All teams in Division 1 will have played seven games against the best teams and will have had ample opportunity to stake a claim for All-Ireland progression.

Allowing for teams from all divisions to qualify for the knockout stages of the All-Ireland series can be viewed as inclusive and equitable.

Summary

In addition to providing 15 weeks for clubs and a more regular summer inter-county games programme, this option would also provide greater certainty for club fixture makers within

¹¹ The bottom of Division 4 is the only part of the National League that has no consequence in terms of promotion/relegation.

Counties. There would be clarity in terms of when counties are playing and by extension when club league or championship games can be fixed, with none of the problems of postponements or rescheduling that can be a side-effect of Counties progressing unexpectedly in the current predominantly knock-out championships.

New York

The absence of New York from the summer Championships in Options 1 and 2 needs to be considered. The logistical challenges centred around travel make their inclusion in any type of Round Robin Championship a real challenge. However, the Task Force acknowledged the importance of playing a game of significance in the City annually.

Some interesting options were examined in terms of trying to achieve this and in alleviating any concerns that New York might be forgotten in these proposals. One such is that New York would play the winners of the 2nd Tier Championship in New York for a new intercontinental type championship at the end of October each year. The coverage and promotion for the new Tier 2 competition could be extended to this inter-continental cup. Appropriately, it would dovetail with the end of the counties' club season in both New York and Ireland and the Tour for the 2nd Tier Winners would clearly be seen as a reward for their endeavours.

Obviously, any progression of Options 1 and 2 for the football season would require consultation with New York and reaching a suitable accommodation in this context before being finalised.

OPTION 2 Calendar 2021 – National league structure for Championship (Spring Window Scheduling)

January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Week 1 2/3	Week 6 6/7	Week 10 6/7	Week 14 3/4	Week 18 1/2	Week 23 5/6	Week 27 3/4	Week 31 31/1	Week 36 4/5	Week 40 2/3	Week 45 6/7	Week 49 4/5
	AHL R3	Provincial Football R5 AHL QF's Div 1 AHL Semi Finals all other Divs	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	SFC R3 Provincial Hurling, JMCD R3 Meagher R2	SFC R6 Ring, Rackard, Meagher Finals	SFC QF's Tier 2 SF's U20 Hurling Semi Finals (if required)	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Provincial Club Championship	Provincial Club Championship/Some All-Ireland Club Championship Semi Finals Return to Collective Inter Co Training
Week 2 9/10 All Ireland Club Championship Finals	Week 7 13/14 Provincial Football R3 Fitzgibbon Final	Week 11 13/14 AHL SF's Div 1 AHL Finals all other Divs	Week 15 10/11 Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Week 19 8/9 Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Week 24 12/13 Provincial Hurling, JMCD R3 Ring, Rackard R3	Week 28 10/11 Provincial Hurling Leinster, Munster & McDonagh Finals	Week 32 7/8 SHC SF's U20 Hurling Finals (A & B)	Week 37 11/12 Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Week 41 9/10 Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Week 46 13/14 Provincial Club Championship	Week 50 11/12 All-Ireland Club Championship Semi Finals
Week 3 16/17	Week 8 20/21 Provincial Football R4 AHL R4	Week 12 20/21 Provincial Football Semi- Finals AHL Final U20 F S-Finals PPS Hurling Finals	Week 16 17/18 Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Week 20 15/16 Inter-County Preparation (Club Games without County Players)	Week 25 19/20 SFC R4 Provincial Hurling, JMCD R4 Ring, Rackard SF's & Rel Playoff Meagher R3	Week 29 17/18 SFC R7 SHC Pre QF's	Week 33 14/15 SFC SF's Tier 2 Final	Week 38 18/19 Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Week 42 16/17 Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Week 47 20/21 Provincial Club Championship	Week 51 18/19
Week 4 23/24 Provincial Football R1 AHL R1	Week 9 27/28 AHL R5	Week 13 27/28 Provincial Football Finals U20 Football Final	Week 17 24/25 Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Week 21 22/23 SFC R1 Provincial Hurling R1 McDonagh, Ring, Rackard Rd 1	Week 26 26/27 SFC R5 Provincial Hurling, JMCD R5	Week 30 24/25 SFC Pre QF's Tier 2 QF's SHC QF's	Week 34 21/22 All Ireland Hurling Final	Week 39 25/26 Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Week 43 23/24 Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Week 48 27/28 Provincial Club Championship	Week 52 25/26
Week 5 30/31 Provincial Football R2 AHL R2 Sigerson Final PPS Football Finals A & B				Week 22 29/30 SFC R2 Provincial Hurling, JMCD R2 Ring, Rackard R2 Meagher R1			Week 35 28/29 All Ireland Football Final		Week 44 30/31 Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]		

OPTION 2a Calendar 2021 – National league structure for Championship (Multiple Window Scheduling)

January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Week 1 2/3	Week 6 6/7	Week 10 6/7	Week 14 3/4	Week 18 1/2	Week 23 5/6	Week 27 3/4	Week 31 31/1	Week 36 4/5	Week 40 2/3	Week 45 6/7	Week 49 4/5
	AHL R4 Fitzgibbon Final	AHL SF's Div 1 AHL Finals all other Divisions Provincial Football Semi-Finals	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	SFC R6 LSHC, MSHC & McDonagh Finals Ring, Rackard, Meagher Finals	SFC R7 SHC Pre QF's	SHC SF's U20 Hurling Finals (A & B)	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Provincial Club Championship	Provincial Club Championship/All-Ireland Club Championship Semi Finals Return to Collective Inter Co Training
Week 2 9/10	Week 7 13/14	Week 11 13/14	Week 15 10/11	Week 19 8/9	Week 24 12/13	Week 28 10/11	Week 32 7/8	Week 37 11/12	Week 41 9/10	Week 46 13/14	Week 50 11/12
All Ireland Club Championship Finals	Provincial Football R5	Provincial Football Finals (2) U20 Football Semi-Final	Inter-County Preparation (Club Games without County Players)	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	SFC Pre QF's Tier 2 QF's SHC QF's	SFC SF's Tier 2 Final	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Provincial Club Championship	All-Ireland Club Championship Semi Finals
Week 3 16/17	Week 8 20/21	Week 12 20/21	Week 16 17/18	Week 20 15/16	Week 25 19/20	Week 29 17/18	Week 33 14/15	Week 38 18/19	Week 42 16/17	Week 47 20/21	Week 51 18/19
Provincial Football R1 AHL R1	AHL R5 Provincial Football R4	AHL Final Provincial Football Finals (2) PPS Hurling Finals U20 Football Final	SFC R1 Provincial Hurling R1 McDonagh, Ring, Rackard Rd 1	Inter-County Preparation (Club Games without County Players)	Inter-County Preparation (Club Games without County Players)	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	SFC QF's Tier 2 SF's U20 hurling SFs (if required)	All Ireland Hurling Final	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Provincial Club Championship	
Week 4 23/24	Week 9 27/28	Week 13 27/28	Week 17 24/25	Week 21 22/23	Week 26 26/27	Week 30 24/25	Week 34 21/22	Week 39 25/26	Week 43 23/24	Week 48 27/28	Week 52 25/26
Provincial Football R2 AHL R2	AHL QF's Div 1 Semi Finals all other Divisions	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	SFC R2 Provincial Hurling, JMCD R2 Ring, Rackard R2 Meagher R1	SFC R3 Provincial Hurling, JMCD R3 Ring, Rackard R3 Meagher R2	SFC R5 Provincial Hurling, JMCD R5	Inter-County Preparation (Club Games without County Players)	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	All Ireland Football Final	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Provincial Club Championship	
Week 5 30/31				Week 22 29/30			Week 35 28/29		Week 44 30/31		
Provincial Football R3 AHL R3 Sigerson Final PPS Football Finals				SFC R4 Provincial Hurling, JMCD R4 Ring, Rackard SF's & Rel Playoff Meagher R3			Inter-County Preparation (SFC, SHC Semi Finalists & Tier 2 finalists only) Club Week All other Counties		Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]		

Option 3: Retention of the Current trial structures (with extended club Windows)

A third option would be to retain the present Senior Hurling and Football Championship structures (i.e. the Round Robin provincial Hurling championships and All-Ireland Football quarter finals) while simultaneously taking action to improve the overall balance between the time currently available for club and inter-county games.

Key Features

The Task Force has already identified the necessity to implement a system of governance and oversight that will ensure county players are made available for all club fixtures up to 10 days before an inter-county game. If this happens and the new oversight measures prove effective, this should significantly enhance the amount of time that players spend with their clubs, even in the event that the current inter-county championship structures are retained.

The compressing of the footprint of the Provincial Football championships in the last number of years, has been positive but it is hard to see how much more time can be squeezed from the limited summer calendar to aid the club game.

Nonetheless, there are two areas that could potentially deliver additional gains using the current championship structures:

- aligning the start of the Connacht Football Championship (specifically the New York and London games) with the start dates for the rest of the provincial championships, and
- playing the All-Ireland Hurling and Football Finals on consecutive weekends.

Connacht championship

The Connacht games featuring New York and London have in recent years been staged on the May Bank Holiday weekend largely to accommodate players, match officials and supporters who are traveling to those cities. However the negative effect of this is that it unnecessarily shortens the Spring club period for the clubs of the counties involved and gives a perceived advantage to the counties travelling, over their provincial rivals, in that their preparation for the inter-county championship can begin earlier (as by definition their club activity in the Spring period will end earlier).

All-Ireland finals on consecutive week-ends

The Association has also always maintained a two-week gap between the staging of the Senior All-Ireland Hurling and Football Finals – there are good reasons for this;

- It maximises media coverage for showpiece events
- It provides necessary time for ticket distribution (which remains primarily the responsibility of volunteers) at both club and county level
- It accommodates the playing of the U20 (and previously U21) hurling final on the middle weekend.

However, this ‘extra’ weekend in August (taken up by leaving a weekend free of inter-county fixtures between the two All-Ireland Finals) could be given back to clubs and counties in May.

Combined with aligning the start of the Connacht Football Championships with all other inter-county championships, this could generate the extended club window at that time of year that many of the contributions to the Task Force have sought.

Club Impact

No. of club only weekends currently	12
No. of club only weekends Apr to Oct if changes adopted (if scheduled in ‘Spring Window’ Model)	14

The combined effect of these changes would be to ensure a 5-week spring club window can be created (a week less than is available in Options 1 and 2).

It is also worth noting, if the current structures are retained, they can only really be scheduled in a ‘Spring Window’ model – a multiple windows for clubs model only works when the early rounds of the Championship are played on a round robin basis. For that reason, the sample scheduling we have included for retention of the current structures, is based on a ‘Spring Window’ model only.

Summary

The changes suggested would bring the number of club-useable weekends free from inter-county activity, between April and October, to 14 by 2021 (from the 5 that were available annually up to 2015).

With an effective oversight structure that would ensure county players are available to clubs when they are supposed to be, even without significant structural change to the inter county championships, this could deliver a better playing season for the adult club game across the country.

Option 3: GAA Calendar 2021 – Retention of trial structures (extended Club Window)

January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Week 1 2/3	Week 6 6/7	Week 10 6/7	Week 14 3/4	Week 18 1/2	Week 23 5/6	Week 27 3/4	Week 31 31/1	Week 36 4/5	Week 40 2/3	Week 45 6/7	Week 49 4/5
PROVINCIAL COMPETITIONS WEEK 1	AHL Rd 3	AHL Div 1 Quarter-Finals AHL Semi Finals – all other Divs AFL Rd 6	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	MSHC Rd 3 LSHC Rd 3B McDonagh Rd 3B Ring, Rackard R3 Prov SFC SFs (#1)	LSHC Final MSHC Final Mc Donagh Final Tier 2 Qtr Finals	Senior Hurling Semi Finals U20 Hurling Finals (A&B)	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Provincial Club Championship	Provincial/All- Ireland Club Championship Return to Collective Inter Co Training
Week 2 9/10	Week 7 13/14	Week 11 13/14	Week 15 10/11	Week 19 8/9	Week 24 12/13	Week 28 10/11	Week 32 7/8	Week 37 11/12	Week 41 9/10	Week 46 13/14	Week 50 11/12
PROVINCIAL COMPETITIONS WEEK 2 All Ireland Club Championship Finals	AFL Rd 3 Fitzgibbon Final	AHL Div 1 Semi- Finals AHL Finals all other Divisions	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Inter-County Preparation (Club Games without County Players)	MSHC Rd 4 LSHC Rd 4 McDonagh Rd 4 Ring & Rackard Semi-Finals & Rel Play-offs Meagher Rd 3 Prov SFC SFs (#2)	SHC Prelim QFs SFC Quals R2 Tier 2 Semi Finals	SFC Qtr Finals #3	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Provincial Club Championship	All-Ireland Club Championship Semi Finals
Week 3 16/17	Week 8 20/21	Week 12 20/21	Week 16 17/18	Week 20 15/16	Week 25 19/20	Week 29 17/18	Week 33 14/15	Week 38 18/19	Week 42 16/17	Week 47 20/21	Week 51 18/19
PROVINCIAL COMPETITIONS WEEK 3	AFL Rd 4 AHL Rd 4 Fitzgibbon Final	AHL Div 1 Final Hurling PPS Finals AFL Rd 7 U20 F S-Finals	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	LSHC Rd 1 MSHC Rd 1 McDonagh, Ring, Rackard Rd 1 Prov SFC Prelim	CSFC Final LSHC Rd 5 MSHC Rd 5 McDonagh Rd5 Ring, Rackard, Meagher Finals	SHC QFs SFC Qtr Finals#1	SFC Semi-Finals	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Provincial Club Championship	
Week 4 23/24	Week 9 27/28	Week 13 27/28	Week 17 24/25	Week 21 22/23	Week 26 26/27	Week 30 24/25	Week 34 21/22	Week 39 25/26	Week 43 23/24	Week 48 27/28	Week 52 25/26
AFL Rd 1 AHL Rd 1	AFL Rd 5 AHL Rd 5	AFL League Finals PPS Hurling Finals U20 Football Final	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	LSHC Rd 2 MSHC Rd 2 McDonagh Rd 2 Ring/Rackard Rd2 & LM Rd 1 Prov SFC Prelim QFS	USFC Final MSFC Final LSFC Final SFC Quals R1 Tier 2 Rd 1	U20 hurling SFs (if required) SFC Qtr Finals#2 Tier 2 Final	All Ireland Senior Hurling Finals	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]	Provincial Club Championship	
Week 5 30/31				Week 22 29/30			Week 35 28/29		Week 44 30/31		
AFL Rd 2 AHL Rd 2 Sigerson Final PPS Football Finals				LSHC Rd 3A McDonagh Rd 3A Meagher Rd 2 Prov SFC QFs			All Ireland Football Final		Club Week [All Inter-County Players available to their clubs]		

Appendix I – Summary of Recommendations

Summary of Recommendations:

Governance and Oversight

1. *A new oversight unit consisting of full-time provincial personnel and feeding into a national grouping to be established. Club fixtures to be the remit (or part remit) of at least one employee in each province*
 - *this person to be a member of the new oversight unit at national level, of the Provincial C.C.C and of the Central Fixtures Analysis Committee*
 - *remit will be to ensure Counties use all available dates to play games with county players (while respecting provisions of the 10-day rule)*
 - *responsibilities to including reviewing – and approving - club fixture programmes at start of season on county by county basis and monitoring adherence throughout*
 - *monitor adherence to Closed Season*
 - *unit to be given authority in Rule to establish appropriate sanctions for breaches*
2. *The new oversight unit should be set the immediate task of reviewing the effectiveness, sanctions, practicality of what is already in place and to bring recommendations as necessary to Central Council for change.*
3. *“10 Day Rule” to cover all club games (not just club championship)*
4. *No inter-county challenge games to be permitted in the month of April – sanction to be proposed by new oversight unit*
5. *Fixtures programmes in a prescribed format, to be submitted to Provincial Councils by end of December (not February as currently) – sanction to be proposed by new oversight unit.*

Scheduling Models

6. *U17 season to be scheduled on a pilot basis as a Multiple Windows model*

Closed Season/Pre-Season:

7. *The Pre-season Provincial Competitions should be retained but not commence until post January 1st (unless Football Championship Option 2 is adopted in which case only the Hurling competitions should be retained). They should be restricted to five designated dates annually. These would be determined by the national C.C.C.C (the 1st three weeks/weekends of the year) and the competitions restructured by each province and tailored to fit the time available*
8. *There should be no Senior inter-county activity (on-field training, trials or challenge games) between a team’s exit from the Championship and Dec 1st each year – penalty (relevant to team rather than county Officers) to be included in Rule for breaches*

3rd Level Competitions

9. *General Rule to state that the Sigerson Cup must be completed on or before the 5th Sunday of the year; Fitzgibbon Cup to be completed on or before the 7th Sunday of the year.*

2nd Level Schools

10. Rule should state that Post-Primary A and B Finals in football should be completed by the last weekend in January and in hurling by the weekend after St Patrick's Day annually.
11. All-Ireland Finals should only be played at A and B levels – all other levels should be played on a provincial basis (i.e. to Provincial finals) only.

Club Championships

12. Central Council to approve, in principle, that Galway club champions participate in one of the other three provincial Senior club Hurling Championships.
13. Rule to be introduced that county club senior and intermediate Championships to consist of a maximum of 16 teams with a two-year lead-in period for counties to adjust their competition structure.

Allianz Leagues

14. Current Structures and format to be maintained (if Options 1 or 3 for the football championship are adopted)
15. Introduce Semi-Finals in all groups of Divisions 2 and 3 of the National Hurling Leagues

U20 Football

16. Rule to state that U20 football championship be played in February/March
17. Eligibility to be restricted to players who have not played in the National Football league in that year
18. C.C.C.C to draw up for discussion a round-robin style national championship proposal to replace the existing Provincial Championships and that will guarantee all U20 county teams a minimum of three games.
19. No collective training or games at U20 level pre-Dec 1st - appropriate sanction to be proposed by new oversight unit

U20 Hurling

20. U20 Hurling championship to be restricted to players who have not played in the Liam Mac Carthy Cup in that year (until that county is eliminated from the Senior Championship)
21. Leinster and Munster Provincial Champions to advance directly to the All-Ireland Final
22. All-Ireland Finals to be completed no later than the 31st Sunday of the year for both U20 and U20 B Hurling competitions
23. C.C.C.C to be asked to draw up a new competition structure for U20 Hurling for the consideration of Central Council based on a knock-out Open Draw national competition.
24. No collective training or games at U20 Hurling level pre-April 1st - appropriate sanction to be proposed by new oversight unit

Minor Football and Hurling Championships

25. *Minor (U17) intercounty championships should become tiered developmental competitions and be decoupled from Senior All-Ireland Semi Finals and Finals*
26. *Separate C.C.C linked to national C.C.C.C to be put in place for inter-county activity up to and including U17. This group to identify appropriate windows during which the developmental competitions should be played.*
27. *U20 grade to be retained as the only inter-county grade between U17 and Senior for the moment and until other recommendations are given time to bed in.*

All-Ireland Junior Football Championship

28. *All-Ireland Junior Football Championship to be discontinued.*

All-Ireland Senior Hurling Championships

29. *Hurling Development Committee to consider whether Liam Mac Carthy group(s) should expand to 6 teams – any recommendation must not expand current calendar footprint for Provincial Hurling Championship and should take account of knock-on effects for lower tiers*

All-Ireland Senior Football Championships

30. *Align the start of the Connacht Football Championship with the start dates for the rest of the provincial championships (relevant only if current football championship structures are retained)*
31. *Play the Senior All-Ireland Hurling and Football Finals on consecutive weekends*
32. *3 potential options for consideration in Football Championship:*
- *Provincial Restructure based on 8 teams in each province*
 - *National League format for championship played in summer months/Provincial championships in Spring*
 - *Retention of current trial structures with extended Spring club window*

Appendix II Task Force Membership and Terms of Reference

Eddie Sullivan (Chairman)
 Michael Martin (Wexford)
 Kevin O'Donovan (Cork)
 Stephen Barker (Derry)
 John Costello (Dublin)
 John Prenty (Mayo)
 Michael Higgins/Micheál Briody (CPA – until Nov. 18th)
 Ronan Sheehan (Down & GPA)
 Michael Hyland (Galway)
 Seamus Woods (Tyrone)
 Conor O'Donoghue (Meath)
 Feargal Mc Gill (Secretary)

Terms of Reference:

- To consider current significant issues affecting the GAA Fixtures Calendar, including the current positioning and footprint of inter-county competitions and the time available for clubs.
- To examine current national competition structures and their timing in the context of the time available for the inter-county game.
- To make recommendations, by November 2019, on options for change for consideration by Ard Chomhairle and Congress, outlining the likely implications of each for the Association.

The Task Force was also asked to give particular consideration to:

- The timing and structure of the main senior inter-county competitions (pre-season, league and championship) including the need for a closed season
- The rules governing the monitoring and governance of fixtures at club level as well as the structure of championships
- The practicalities of delivering a 'Calendar Year' with club finals being played before year end
- The timing of and eligibility for 3rd Level competitions
- The timing of and eligibility for U20 inter-county competitions in the context of the Talent Academy Review recommendations
- The timing of 2nd Level competitions in the context of the change in age grade to U19
- The present Minor (U17) competitions

The Task Force, was asked to review the various fixture-related reports in recent times and recommendations and proposals therein. In addition, it was asked to elicit a range of views from specialist interested parties including, but not restricted to, the Central Competitions Control Committee and the National Fixtures Analysis Committee, and more widely from other interested individuals.

Appendix III – Written Submissions Received

The Task Force would like to place on record its thanks to the following individuals and groups who provided written submissions. These played a huge role in informing debate and shaping the outcome of our final recommendations:

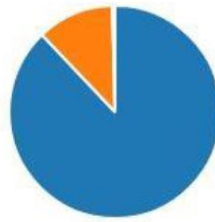
- Colm Dwyer
- Niall Kelly
- Paudge Doody
- John Paul Heaney
- Paul Teague, Tyrone
- Wayne Fitzgerald, Gerald Griffins GAA, Limerick
- Mark Byrne, O Toole's GAA, Dublin
- Ed O'Brien, Co Clare
- Paul Tansey
- Shane Mangan
- Michael Cunningham, St Ita's GAA, Cork
- Pat Mc Hale, Co Mayo
- M G Downes
- Conor Gillespie, Meath
- John Paul Moyna, Scotstown, Co Monaghan
- Colm Keyes, Simonstown Gaels
- Conor Burke, Athenry GAA, Galway
- Mark Mc Garry
- Clontarf GAA club, Dublin
- Jordan Cassidy, Westmeath
- Ger Fitzgerald, Inane Rovers GAA, Co Tipperary
- Kilmore GAA club, Co Roscommon
- Gerry Mc Namara
- Paraic Farrelly, Co Cavan
- John Arnold, Co Cork
- Dicksboro GAA club, Co Kilkenny
- Sean Og Mc Ateer, Rúnaí CLG An Dún
- Joe Tuohy
- John O Flynn, Charleville, Co Cork
- Turlough O'Brien, Carlow
- Joe O Brien
- Slane GAA club, Co Meath
- Michael Mc Enery
- Declan Hickey, Clashmore Kinsalebeg GAA, Waterford
- Mick Mullen, Kildare GAA
- Martin Delaney
- John Greene
- Fergus Mc Grath, St Mary's GAA, Clonmel

Written submissions received continued.....

- MJ Delaney, Lisdowney GAA, Co Kilkenny
- John Dunphy, Kilkenny
- Ciaran Henson
- Peter Mullan, Killybegs, Co Donegal
- John Moore, Thomastown, Co Kilkenny
- Management Committee, Munster Council GAA
- Noel Mc Caffrey, Clontarf GAA
- Comhairle Laighean CLG
- National Club Committee
- Ronan Farrell
- S Hunt, Portarlinton
- Sean Burke, Donegal
- Comhairle Uladh CLG

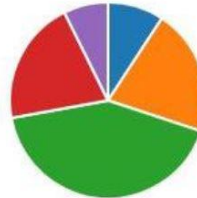
Appendix IV – Questionnaire Results

4. Gender



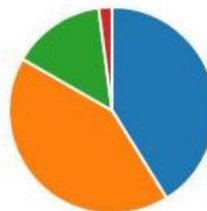
● Male	1105	88%
● Female	147	12%
● Prefer Not to Answer	4	
● Other	1	

5. Age



● 16-20	116	9%
● 21-30	262	21%
● 31-45	529	42%
● 46-60	258	21%
● Age 61 and Older	92	7%

6. Which of these would best describe you? (Pick one)



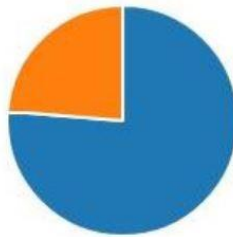
● Current GAA Player	517	41%
● Club Member	530	42%
● GAA Supporter	184	15%
● None of the above	26	2%

7. In terms of GAA fixtures and the GAA Fixture Calendar generally are you primarily interested in:



● Football fixtures only	397	32%
● Hurling fixtures only	221	18%
● Both football and hurling fixtures	639	51%

8. Have you attended an intercounty Allianz Hurling League or Championship game in either 2018 or 2019?



● Yes	959	76%
● No	298	24%





9. Do you believe the GAA should continue to run the Hurling Championship on a Provincial basis initially?



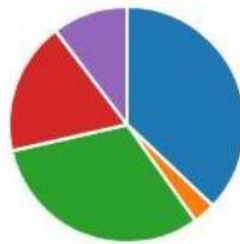
● Yes	944	75%
● No	313	25%






10. Which statement best describes your opinion on the new, Round-Robin Hurling Championship



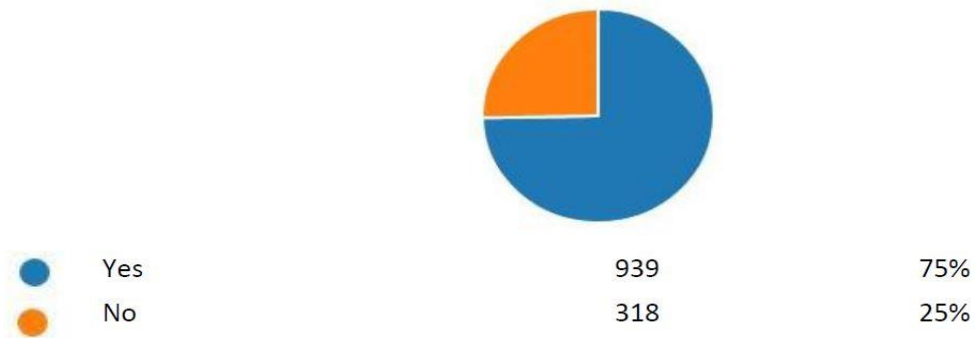
	I like the new Round Robin format and I think it should be retained	652	52%
	I like the new Round Robin format but it is having too much of a negative impact on Club Fixtures and should not be retained	266	21%
	I prefer the old system of knock-out provincial championships and one 2 nd chance for each County	207	16%
	Other	132	11%

11. Which of these statements best describes your opinion of the Allianz Hurling Leagues?

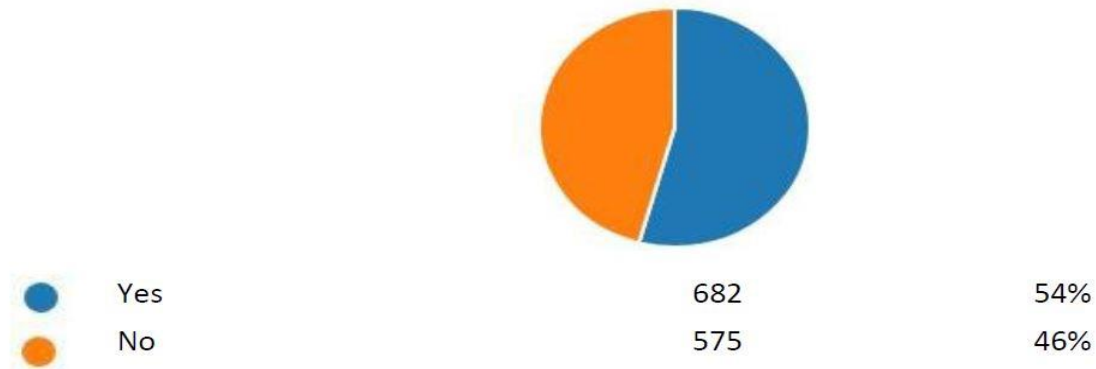


	They provide meaningful preparation for the Championship, do not impact on the playing of Club Competitions, and broadly speaking should be retained in their current format	466	37%
	They do not provide enough games and should be restructured to ensure more games are provided, even if this is at the expense of the time available to the Club game	39	3%
	I do not have a strong opinion on the current structure of the Allianz Hurling Leagues	393	31%
	The broad structures should be retained, the league moved to the Summer months and adapted as the basis for a replacement of the current Hurling championships	229	18%
	Other	130	10%

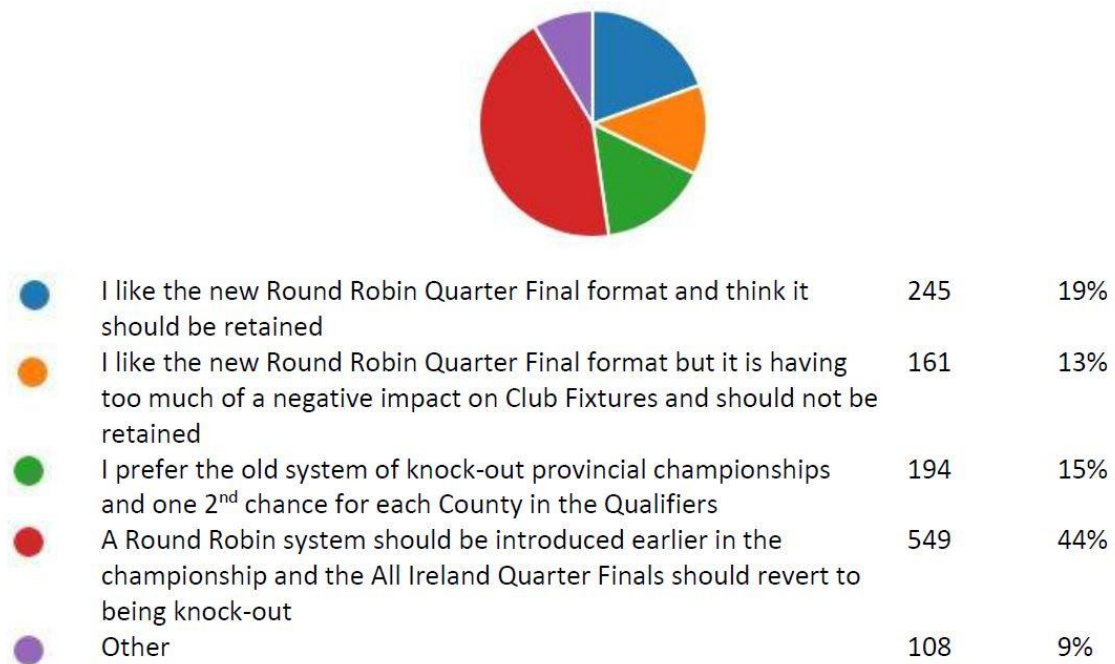
12. Have you attended an inter county Allianz Football league or Football Championship game in either 2018 or 2019?



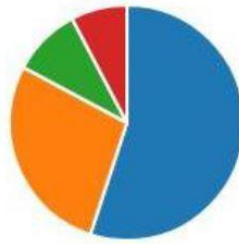
13. Do you believe the GAA should retain the Provincial Championships in Football?



14. Broadly speaking, which statement best describes your opinion on the Round Robin All Ireland Football Championship Quarter Finals








15. In your view, how important is it for the GAA to introduce a 2nd Tier Football Championship?



	Very Important	682	55%
	Somewhat Important	349	28%
	Not that important	119	9%
	Not important at all	97	8%

16. Which of these statements best describes your opinion of the Allianz Football Leagues?



	They provide meaningful preparation for the Championship, do not impact on the playing of Club Competitions, and broadly speaking should be retained in their current format	555	44%
	They do not provide enough games and should be restructured to ensure more games are provided, even if this is at the expense of the time available to the Club game	34	3%
	I do not have a strong opinion on the current structure of the Allianz Football Leagues	209	17%
	The broad structures should be retained, the league moved to the Summer months and adapted as the basis for a replacement of the current football championship	342	27%
	Other	117	9%

17. Have you attended, or played in, a Club Hurling Championship game in 2018 or 2019?



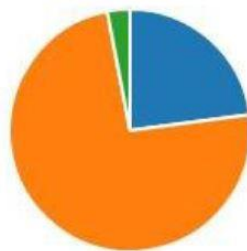
	Yes	815	65%
	No	442	35%




18. Have you attended, or played in, a Club Football Championship game in 2018 or 2019?



	Yes	1006	80%
	No	251	20%





19. Which of these statements do you most agree with:



	There is, generally speaking, enough time available in the National Fixtures Calendar for the playing of Club Fixtures	288	23%
	The GAA need to make more time available in the calendar annually for Club Fixtures, even if it is at the expense of the time available to the inter county game	931	74%
	There needs to be more games played at inter county level, even if this is at the expense of the time available for club fixtures	38	3%





20. Do you think the April Club Window has had a positive effect for Club Fixtures in your county?



	Yes	211	17%
	No	528	42%
	Too early to say	190	15%
	Has made no real difference one way or the other	328	26%





21. Do you think bringing forward the Senior All Ireland Finals by a fortnight has created additional time for club championship fixtures in your county?



	Yes	463	37%
	No	318	25%
	Too early to say	211	17%
	Has made no real difference one way or the other	265	21%

22. Were you aware that various changes to the GAA National fixture calendar between 2016 and 2018 have increased by approximately 25% the number of weekends available to Counties to play club games between April and the end of October?



	Yes, I was aware and it has improved the situation with regard to Club fixtures in my county	233	19%
	Yes, I was aware but it has not made any difference to the playing of club fixtures in my county	621	49%
	No, I was not aware of this	349	28%
	This is not relevant to me	54	4%



officialgaa

WHERE WE
ALL BELONG

