



A Chairde,

my name is John Devaney and I am a member of the Bredagh club in Co Down. I am Chairperson of the National GAA Referees Development Committee and a member of the Central Referees Appointments Committee.

The Committee that I chair has responsibility for selection of referees for intercounty games, and for the development, training, and welfare of match officials. Whilst our core remit focuses on the games at intercounty level, we will also develop guidelines and best practise for refereeing across the Association. The Committee comprises of personnel with considerable experience and interest in this field - former intercounty referees who have officiated at the highest level, administrators within clubs and counties across the four provinces and beyond, and others who have an insight or interest in this area.

A key priority will be to engage as three organisations in developing a specific plan for refereeing and to bring about a model that works for all codes. The Steering Group on Integration established working groups in late 2023, as previously highlighted by the SGI. Within the plans for 2024, there will be the establishment of a working group, specifically focussed on referring and this working group will bring together representatives from each of the organisations in a formal way to develop this specific plan.

There are many reasons why amalgamation should and will happen. To all intents and purposes, we look the same, we do the same and we are the same. For children and young people joining our games for the first time, they see no distinguishable administrative and structural differences. That is how it should be for all of us as we look forward.

There are significant challenges in achieving an integrated structure that will maximise our potential in the growth in the numbers of, and the retention of, referees to officiate across all codes. Theirs is a tough job and there are high expectations from players, coaches and spectators.

The most recent GAA Strategic Plan (which has a clear eye on integration) highlights the priority of maximising participation, including referees. It sets the challenge of allocating the resources needed to grow the pool of referees, overhaul the culture of respect towards them, and improve officiating standards. It aims to achieve this by consolidating and coordinate all learning programmes under the umbrella of one training unit to ensure quality learning experiences for referees, just as it will for coaches, officers, players, and employees.

Referees will need to be recruited and retained in greater numbers. What we want to achieve is a place where they will officiate games to higher standards arising from an increased investment in training and development, and experience significantly higher levels of respect from players, managers, supporters and followers.

How do we intend to do this in an integrated model?

- Build our capacity to develop Club referees.
- Modernise committee structures and roles for referee administration, especially at County and Provincial levels.
- Resource a major annual referee recruitment campaign.
- Engage with referees and match officials to determine practical actions required to improve the culture of respect towards them.

The most significant related challenge will be around the arrangement and management of fixtures. To many officials at club, county, provincial and national level, there are simply not enough days in the week at present for our games and competitions.

But none of the challenges are insurmountable. We know that integration will require change, goodwill, and an intention to work together for the good of all