



Reference: JCM – I – 1780

Opening statement

Mary McAleese

Chairperson, Steering Group on Integration

A Chairde,

Good afternoon and thank you for this opportunity to update your committee and gather your support for the most historic 21st century development in Gaelic games which is the planned Integration of the Camogie Association (CA), the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), and the Ladies Gaelic Football Association (LGFA).

I am here as the Independent Chairperson of the Steering Group on Integration along with the other group members namely Uachtaráin of the Camogie Association, (Brian Molloy) the GAA (Jarlath Burns) and the LGFA (Mícheál Naughton) in addition to the Ard Stiúrtóirí from each of the three associations namely (Sinéad McNulty, Tom Ryan and Helen O' Rourke) along with the Project Manager, Mark Dorman, Head of Organisation Change and Project Coordinator, Aoibhe Dunne.

The Steering Group on Integration was formed in the autumn of 2022 at the request of all three associations following motions passed earlier that year at the Congresses of GAA, LGFA and CA, which stated that ***Integration of the Gaelic Athletic Association, the Camogie Association, and the Ladies Gaelic Football Association would be prioritised.***

It is important at the outset to underscore the remit of the SGI. We are a **recommending body**. Our role is to deliver a proposed pathway towards One Association for Gaelic Games which we hope and indeed believe after broad and deep consultation, will be widely supported and enthusiastically implemented by all stakeholders, in the most transformative project undertaken by all three Associations since they were formed.

As you are aware, the CA, GAA and LGFA are each overseen by their individual governing authorities- An Chomhdháil / Congress and Ard Comhairle / Central Council. Each Congress (An Chomhdháil) oversees rule changes, while each Central Council (Ard Comhairle) is the governing body of the associations between Congresses.

Over time, any proposed changes put forward by the SGI with regards to the proposed pathway to Integration, will need to be brought forward to, and ratified by the governing bodies (An Chomhdháil, Congress / Ard Comhairle, Central Council) in advance of being implemented.

With almost one million members between the three associations and thousands of clubs all over Ireland and abroad you can imagine that the integration project is complex and will take



time to work through. For the Steering Group that means considerable ongoing engagement with stakeholders at all levels of the three Associations so that Integration can be brought to fruition in a smooth and timely way.

I am delighted to be here today, on behalf of the SGI to give an update on the very significant progress made since I had the privilege of first chairing the group in September 2022. At that first meeting it was unanimously agreed that a wide and deep listening exercise across all three associations was a paramount first step. We needed to be sure we fully understood the viewpoints of all those who will be impacted by integration. Their insight and wisdom, their expertise and experience, their ambition for Gaelic Games distilled into our lodestar and helped us move towards consensus on a navigable pathway to integration with its challenges, benefits, its opportunities and its vision for the future of Gaelic Games

This listening exercise involved extensive engagement with the following groups across the associations and beyond, including Congresses, Ard Chomairle, Provincial Councils, County Boards, Clubs, staff and members.

Through focus groups, workshops, surveys and presentations, the SGI heard from each of these stakeholders. They guided our thinking on a wide range of important issues. In fact it was with their help we felt a clear pathway towards One Association was not only possible but the express will of the vast majority of those we listened to. The feedback from each of these groups was remarkably consistent in delineating the areas of priority and anticipated challenge ahead. No-one thought integration impossible. All thought it essential. The difficulties ahead often condensed into Facilities, Finance and Fixtures were seen as obstacles that an integrated organisation would be best placed to resolve, for in a time when our populations is growing, when participation in our games is growing, these are developmental problems associated with the phenomenal success of the three organisations and they are issues we believe can be and will be best addressed by one association working with members, supporters, national and local government and sponsors. Integration will bring the formidable energy and drive of the three integrated associations into a dynamic partnership in which all will be members of the same association. Those who engaged with the Group drew attention time and again to the obvious immediate benefits in terms of gender equality, aligned membership, sharing of resources and knowledge, inclusivity, improvements for dual players experience and much more.

We took on board the many comments regarding access to facilities / resources, finances being shared fairly and fixture clashes. We took on board the concerns of staff in the three associations about job security and role/status maintenance and agreed with the feedback that insisted on the need for regular communication.

The Steering Group were hugely encouraged by the willing engagement across all groups included within the listening exercise. The passion and pride demonstrated by membership was evident and with so many practical proposals put forward it was evident that the push for Integration of the three associations meant its time had come after many years of discussion. An essential highlight of this listening exercise was the Steering Groups decision to commission the largest ever sporting survey undertaken in Ireland. Every member over



eighteen had a chance to participate. The survey produced a resounding endorsement from members of all three associations, regardless of age or code, over 90 percent of respondents cited the Positive Impact of Integration. It was clear to us that Integration had to be, has to be, will be the future.

Equipped with that feedback we also knew there was no magic wand up ahead but rather a painstaking process. Our next step was the establishment of the first tranche in what will be a series of expert working groups. The first six of these cross – organisational groups have looked in detail at Facilities, Finance, Fixtures, HR/Staffing, Membership and Player Welfare. Their members were appointed by each of the associations and draw on women and men with vast experience within each of the associations. Each working groups collaborated to submit proposals to the SGI in December which detailed practical steps needed to move the three associations to Integration. Each groups a highlighted the opportunities, the barriers and the realisable ways to overcome the barriers ahead.

Some examples of proposals put forward by these groups are as follows:

- Implementation of an Integrated Fixtures Oversight Working Group
- A comprehensive audit of existing facilities
- A review of the One Club Model and updated guidance on One Club set up
- One Membership
- One staffing structure

The SGI ratified some of these proposals for inclusion in the proposed pathway to Integration, and where necessary requested further follow up from the working groups. That follow up is ongoing with some proposals needing additional work, within and across the working groups, to move forward. In terms of next steps proposals ratified by the SGI in December have begun in earnest, some examples being; an extensive audit of existing facilities is ongoing with results expected in the coming weeks and a review of the One Club Model to commence with the goal of development of updated guidance to be soon published.

The culmination of the listening exercise and working groups thus far has been the development of a thoroughly consensual detailed timeline and vision for Integration shared across all three associations. On the 20th February 2024 we published the broad outline of that consensus and a proposed timeline which all agree on, believe in and will work to realise. put forward by the Steering Group on Integration. **By 2027, there will be One Association for Gaelic Games . That announcement** was positively received, with endorsement clear from the public sentiment following the announcement. We are particularly gratified to see how much support and excitement was generated at each Association's Congress held since that announcement.

These details were presented at each Congress, with opportunity for feedback and input from delegates and with the caveat of course that following further outputs from existing working groups, and the establishment of further rounds of working groups there may be need for adjustments as we move through the detail of the timeline. To ensure we arrive at One Association in 2027 throughout 2024, 2025 and 2026 we will continue to work towards



integration with all stakeholders and through the efforts of all stakeholders for this is their process, the One Association for Gaelic Games is their idea, their ambition their destination. Within the three Associations there is reservoir of support, advice, mentoring, help and guidance which will be harnessed and harvested in the continuous development and refinement of the pathway towards Integration and achievement of One Association.

The old saying “Ní neart go cur le chéile” is about to reveal itself in a new and powerful way for it is not just that we are stronger when we work together but rather that we cannot fully know what we are capable of unless and until we work together. That will be the gift to Ireland and Gaelic Games of One Association for all.

The Steering Group on Integration are encouraged to be invited today, knowing how interested you all have in our work, knowing that Gaelic Games are an essential part of the bedrock of the communities you represent, knowing we will need your help as political leaders locally and nationally to secure the resources to pave the road to the best integration possible. You know better than most the benefits it will bring to the generations to come, the vibrancy it will add, the opportunities it will promote. I am happy to have had this chance to give an update on the considerable advances made in the Integration process and look forward to discussing any queries you may have.