



PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION 2025

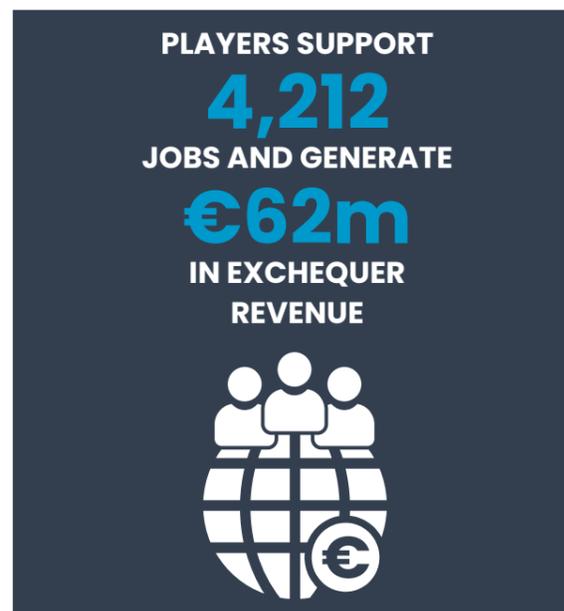
SUMMARY

This submission is made on behalf of Ireland's 4,000 inter-county Gaelic games players – elite amateur athletes who pour their hearts, bodies, and time into representing their counties at the highest level. They do so without financial reward, yet the impact they make on Irish life – culturally, socially, and economically – is nothing short of extraordinary.

Independent analysis by Indecon confirms what people across the country already know: **these players are the driving force behind a €591 million annual boost to the Irish economy.** Their commitment, talent, and profile fuel the GAA's commercial success – a success that powers an exceptional reinvestment model. According to the GAA Economic Impact and Social Value report, **83 cent of every euro generated – amounting to over €200 million – is reinvested into participation, coaching, and community infrastructure.**

This is a uniquely sustainable and community-focused model – and it stands on the shoulders of unpaid athletes who give so much physically, mentally, and personally. These players are not just competitors; they are the lifeblood of a system that delivers for every parish in the country.

Yet despite their contribution, they remain among the least supported elite athletes in Ireland. Professional players in sports like rugby and soccer benefit from a 10-year tax relief scheme, while Sport Ireland's



investment in carded athletes has increased by over 200% since 2007. In stark contrast, **inter-county players receive an average Government grant of just €1,400 – a figure that has actually fallen by 24% per player since 2007.**

Meanwhile, the personal cost of participation continues to rise. On average, **players are out of pocket by over €4,600 each year and face a net professional loss of €5,500.** Despite driving enormous economic and social value, they receive up to 10 times less support than peers in other elite sports.

The amateur model they uphold enables the GAA to reinvest in communities nationwide – but it is under increasing pressure. Support for amateur status is declining as financial strain grows among players.

This submission calls on the Government to recognise inter-county players as elite athletes, restore parity with other high-performance cohorts, and invest in a model that delivers unmatched returns for Irish sport.

This is not just a matter of fairness – it is a necessary step to protect the future of Gaelic games.

THE TIME TO ACT IS NOW.



INTRODUCTION

Founded in 1999 and officially recognised in 2010, the GPA is the official representative body for elite Gaelic games Inter-county players. Our mission is to promote and protect all aspects of player welfare and to provide an independent voice for players. We are a not-for-profit, membership organisation representing over 4,000 past and present Inter-county players.

This submission is about the community of Inter-county Gaelic players across the country. It is evidence based and derived from the Report: *Assessment of Economic and Social Impacts of Inter-County Gaelic Football, Camogie and Hurling Players in Ireland* commissioned from Indecon International Economic and Strategic Consultants which accompanies this submission.

The Inter-county game is the core of the viability of our Gaelic Games which are a unique Irish cultural and sporting heritage. The games



THE SOCIAL VALUE OF GAELIC GAMES IS ESTIMATED TO BE WORTH **€2.87bn** TO IRISH SOCIETY

OVER **€200m** GAA REVENUE GENERATED AND **83%** REINVESTED BACK TO GRASSROOTS

IN 2023 THERE WERE OVER **320,000** PLAYERS ON **21,500** REGISTERED TEAMS PLAYING GAELIC FOOTBALL OR HURLING/CAMOGIE

are an essential part of Irish identity globally, and at home and abroad they are a national differentiator in an increasingly homogenous world.

At home the Gaelic Players who play on inter-county teams underpin the entire ecosystem of the games. They are also the heart of a volunteer and amateur movement that is not just a sporting movement; it is a community and cultural phenomenon.

This is about protecting and

sustaining all that is special about our National games and fostering a shared connection that is at the heart of communities nationally.

Community spirit is translated into economic value. **The economic impact of the senior inter-county fixtures now stands at €591m**, a figure which has increased since by over 51% since 2018.

A separate report from the GAA (November 2024), found that the Social Value of Gaelic games (i.e., the entirety of the sport including underage participation, and, significantly, volunteering) is estimated to be worth at least €2.87 billion to Irish society.

In 2023 there were over 320,000 players on 21,500 registered teams playing Gaelic Football or Hurling/Camogie.

The Inter-county game is at the heart of the GAA, it is the focus of the community, and the highest expression of the games. It is also the guiding light for the games in every parish and on every underage team.

Inter-county players not only wear the county colours on the pitch, they are the emblems of the game in their home community, where the GAA club is a hub not just for sport, but for community activity and solidarity.



THE PLAYERS

It is also to tell you that the players have played their part. Women and men volunteer, train and play for the honour of their community and county. There is the thrill and excitement of the sport, the pride in being selected and the responsibility of carrying the expectations of your county onto the field. There are certainly moments of great excitement, and for some there are occasions that draw crowds and accolades.

But before every match, over seasons and years is a life of **incredible physical, psychological, personal, and financial commitment.**

This is amateur sport with professional levels of commitment, and on which intense levels of expectation are visited.

This submission is about the financial commitment. It is made in the context of support for players provided by Government since 2008 and of independent research commissioned by us from Indecon Economic Consultants about the level of that support now. It highlights the scale of the **increasing economic impact on inter-county players, and the financial burden they personally shoulder.**

This document outlines the rationale for increasing grants and proposes a sustainable funding model to ensure fair recognition of players' contributions in Budget 2026.



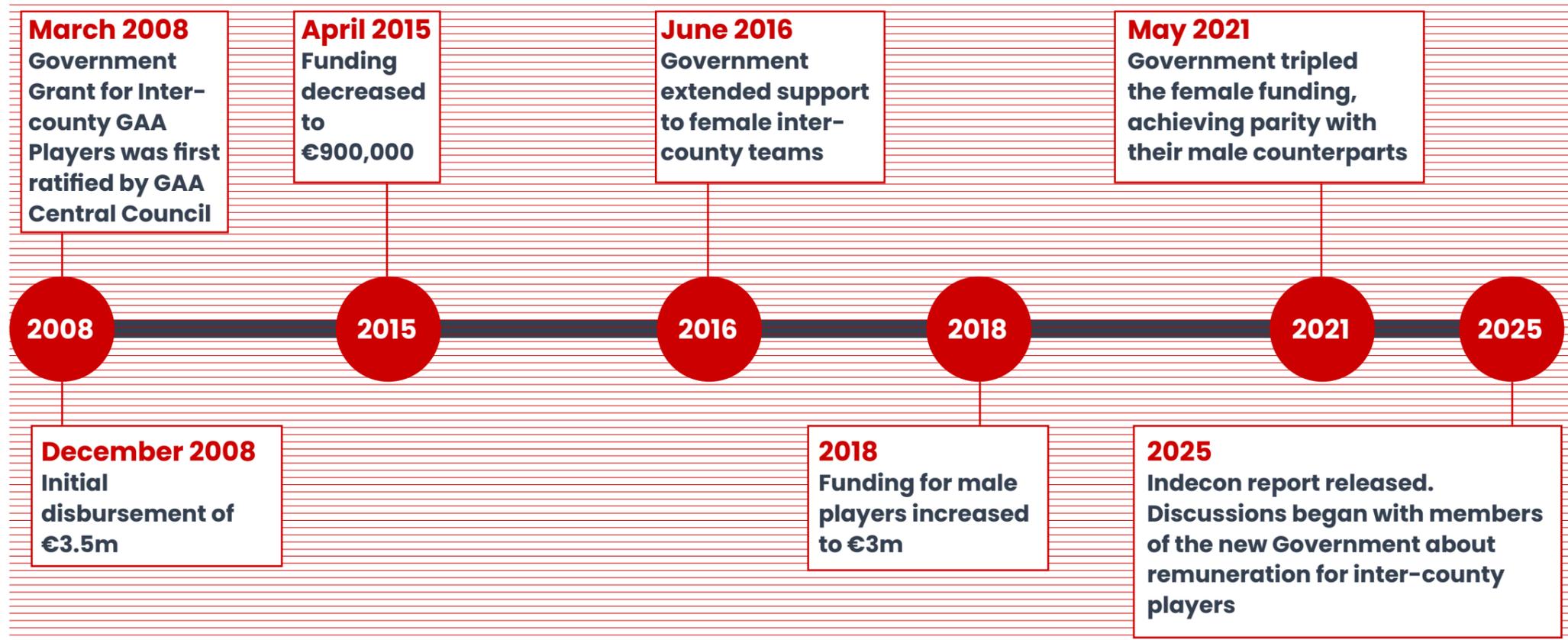
BACKGROUND TO PLAYER GRANTS

The Government Grant for inter-county GAA players was first ratified by the GAA Central Council in March 2008, leading to an **initial disbursement of €3.5m** (€1,944 per player) in December of that year. However, the scheme faced challenges, including threats to its continuation in November 2008 and subsequent reductions, with **funding decreasing to €900,000 by April 2015**.

In the economic downturn much changed but what continued was the passion and commitment of the players. In June 2016, in a positive move the government extended support to female inter-county teams, supporting the playing environment, and marking a significant step towards inclusivity. The grant, albeit diminished, had continued for male players and in funding being extended to female teams underlined a commitment to progress on supporting an inter-county game that young girls and boys could aspire to.

By May 2021, efforts to equalise male and female funding culminated in the Government trebling the female funding, to include a direct contribution to female inter-county players for the first time and achieving parity with their male counterparts.

In 2024, the Government inter-county Support Scheme confirmed **an investment of €2,641,791 for female inter-county camogie and ladies'**



football players and teams.

In early 2025, discussions began with members of the new Government about remuneration for inter-county players, that would better support these athletes' contributions to Gaelic games, at a greater cost financially and professionally to themselves. In 2025 the grants to players are worth 24% less than they were in 2008, but the costs of playing have increased enormously. In contrast athletes on the International Carding Scheme received around €9,055 per athlete in 2008, but the equivalent figure in 2023 was over €27,000 – a 203% increase.



1. The Economic Impact of Inter-county Players

Independent research by Indecon Economic Consultants confirms that Inter-county players generated a **total economic impact of €591 million in 2023, representing a 51% increase from 2018.**

This includes:

- €353 million in Gross Value Added to the Irish economy.
- €62.3 million in Exchequer contributions through taxation and economic activity.
- Direct support for 4,212 jobs, a 50% increase since 2018.

The continued growth of the game has resulted in increasing demands on players in terms of financial pressures, time commitment and performance expectations.

TOTAL ECONOMIC
IMPACT OF

€591m

AN INCREASE OF

51%

FROM 2018

€353m

GROSS VALUE ADDED TO
THE IRISH ECONOMY

€62.3m

IN EXCHEQUER
CONTRIBUTIONS THROUGH
TAXATION & ECONOMIC
ACTIVITY

DIRECT SUPPORT FOR

4,212

JOBS

2. The Current Government Grant Structure

- Inter-county players receive Government Grants worth approximately **€1,471 per player per year**, or €4.03 per day, from a total annual investment of **€5.6 million.**
- These grants serve as recognition of players' contribution to Irish sport and are an alternative to professional Sportsperson Tax Relief, which is available to other elite athletes.

- However, **since 2008, player grants have decreased by 24% per player**, while costs have risen significantly.
- **Female players saw an increase in recognition in 2021**, which was a positive step, but overall investment remains insufficient relative to players' contributions and expenses.
- The individual grant amounts are **tiered based on level of activity** (grade of competition and length of time in competition) with awards ranging from €2,133 to €1,067 in 2024 (based on a panel of 30 players).

3. The Rising Costs for Players

- The average cost per player of Nutrition and Travel expenses to participate in Inter-county competitions is now approximately **€4,600 per year** (not reimbursed)
- Due to inflation, these player costs have increased by approximately **€1,500 per player since 2018**, yet GAA reimbursement levels have remained unchanged.
- Players also face costs indirectly through lifelong impacts on their education and career, with their **annual income reduced by €5,200.**
- The loss in overtime earnings (€ per annum) is **€3,500 per player.**

ANNUAL NUTRITION AND
TRAVEL EXPENSES OF

€4,600

PER PLAYER

€1,500

INCREASE SINCE 2018

€5,200

ANNUAL REDUCTION IN
INCOME DUE TO IMPACTS
ON EDUCATION AND
CAREER

LOSS IN OVERTIME
EARNINGS OF

€3,500

PER YEAR



INCREASE TO
€2,500
IN 2026, AN
ANNUALISED
INCREASE OF JUST
1.5%
SINCE 2008

IF GRANT WAS
REPLACED BY
SPORTSPERSON TAX
RELIEF, PLAYERS
WOULD RECEIVE
€4,290
ON AVERAGE

TOTAL ANNUAL
INVESTMENT OF
€10m
WHICH IS JUST
1.6%
OF TOTAL ECONOMIC
IMPACT GENERATED

4. Proposal for Increased Recognition and Funding

The GPA is seeking an increase in the player grant to ensure a fairer and more sustainable approach to supporting Inter-county players, in line with other elite and professional athletes in Ireland. Based on economic impact assessments and benchmark comparisons, we propose:

- A minimum increase in the player grant to €2,500 per player in 2026, as the first step in a series over the life of the Government, to deliver an annual grant of €4,000 by 2030.
- This would represent an annualised 1.5% increase since 2008 to reflect inflation and rising costs.
- A total annual investment will increase from €5.6 million to €10 million by 2026.
- This equates to just 1.6% of the total economic impact

generated by Inter-county players.

- A more structured and transparent funding model based on economic impact
- If grants had tracked the percentage of Gross Value Added to the economy since 2008, they would now be approximately €3,500 per player.
- If grants had tracked the rise in investment levels for Carded Athletes, they would now be approximately €3,950 per player.
- If grant was replaced by Sportsperson Tax Relief, players would receive an average benefit of €4,290 per year.

By implementing a structured approach to player recognition grants, the Government can ensure fairness and sustainability while reinforcing its commitment to Gaelic games and the amateur ethos of the sport.

5. Support Programme for Government

This proposal supports key objectives outlined in the Programme for Government:

- Work with the GAA, the IRFU, the FAI and all sporting organisations to drive increased participation in sport.
- Continue to support participation

in all sports from grassroots to elite level.

- Promote volunteerism and improve the vetting process for people involved in sport.
- Develop a long-term strategy to close the gap on gender inequality when it comes to funding, representation, remuneration, media coverage, sponsorship and participation at grassroots and elite levels

6. Call to Action

1.
The GPA urges the Government to commit to increasing the annual grant to a minimum of €2,500 per player by 2026, as the first step in a series over the life of the Government, to deliver an annual grant of €4,000 by 2030.

2.
The GPA is ready to engage in discussions with the Department of Sport to explore long-term solutions to ensure that Gaelic players receive appropriate recognition for their contributions to Irish society and the economy.

We look forward to discussing these proposals in further detail and working together to enhance the sustainability and success of Gaelic games.

CONCLUSION

These proposals are modest, evidence-based, and within the context of the policy of existing support since 2008. They are also a belated catch-up relative to where players were in 2008. The world, however, has changed since then.

Over two and a half million people attended senior Inter-county GAA fixtures in 2023, estimated to generate approximately €359 million directly and contribute nearly €62 million in exchequer impacts. Players, however, are paying more for transport, nutrition and all the inputs that make up their commitment as highly trained athletes.

The time and commitment given to the GAA is likely to have impacted negatively, however, on the career prospects for some GAA Inter-county players, with many feeling that they missed out on promotional opportunities due to their commitments. In addition, there is the financial cost of playing, over years. Incredible joy and substantial economic benefits for the community come at a cost to individual players in terms of reducing earnings and impact on career progression.

To be selected and to play for your county is an extraordinary honour. The supports provided, and they are appreciated, are not a proactive incentive, but they should help make ends meet in an amateur game with professional standards and levels of commitment.

OVER
€2.5m
PEOPLE ATTENDED
SENIOR INTER-
COUNTY GAA
FIXTURES IN 2023

GENERATING AN
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IN EXCHEQUER
IMPACTS

Now it is time for the Government to catch-up and meet the enthusiasm, skill, and civic spirit of Inter-county players with a contribution towards their costs that would better, if only partially, meet their outlay and commitment. This is about fairness, respect, and the opportunity to invest in what completely unique to and the very best of Ireland.





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