



A GOOD NEWS STORY

The integration of the Gaelic Players Association, the (unfinished) journey to equality, and lessons learned

FOREWORD

In 2020, when I was first approached about taking on the role of Chair of the Board of the Gaelic Players Association, I requested an overview of the values of the organisation and of its vision over the years ahead. On receipt of this overview, what struck me immediately was that the GPA is a values-driven organisation and that its commitment, at that time, to embark on a journey to merge the Women's Gaelic Players Association and the then all-male Gaelic Players Association into a single, unified organisation, with equality for all, was a highly admirable one that I would be proud to support.

The merging of the two players' associations was based on a powerful principle: that female and male inter-county players deserve the same standards, protections, voice, and respect. Put simply, they deserve full equality. In 2020, we chose to move

beyond symbolism and to embed that principle structurally, constitutionally, and, most importantly, culturally into our new, integrated association.

This report documents the remarkable journey from that initial commitment to merge the two players' associations through to the situation that pertains today. It highlights not only the significant progress achieved since 2020 but it also provides an honest account of the challenges encountered along the way: governance, resources, legacy systems, and ingrained ways of thinking. What matters most is that those challenges were faced together, with a shared vision and a clarity of purpose. Change is never easy and requires courage, trust and commitment, and both female and male players exhibited those strengths. From the outset, equality became a constitutional pillar, reflected in





a 50:50 representation on both the National Executive Committee and on the GPA Board.

There is no doubt that the integration process, while challenging, has strengthened the GPA significantly. It has enhanced our ability to advocate effectively for all players and has made clear to all stakeholders that equality is not just a stated value of the GPA, but a lived reality in how our decisions are made and how our standards are set. Tangible gains for female players included equal access to scholarships, funding and support, while male players benefited from new commercial opportunities and richer cross-gender understanding.

While this report looks back on an important journey, it has significant implications for the future. The profound values-led change that has taken place successfully offers a critical blueprint for gender parity

across the sporting world, in Ireland and beyond. As the Gaelic Games family move towards the completion of its own important, integration process, the lessons captured here will resonate strongly.

In conclusion, we have learned that equality is not a destination. Rather it is a continuous journey, a journey that, however challenging, enhances all that embark upon it with sincere conviction.

Prof. Brian MacCraith

Chair, Gaelic Players Association



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2020 integration of the Gaelic Players Association (GPA) and the Women's Gaelic Players Association (WGPA) stands as a landmark moment in Irish sport, defined by an overwhelmingly positive emotional landscape. This research looked to capture the key lessons learned throughout the integration process; the facilitators, the challenges, and an exploration of values-led change.

Key stakeholders in the integration process were interviewed (11 participants), and their stories were shared. In capturing the emotions of stories shared, participants described the process and outcome using words like 'proud', 'happy', 'elation', and 'inspiring', underscoring the success of this unified approach to player association.

This merger was not merely an administrative alignment but a profound values-led change that offers a critical blueprint for gender parity across the sporting world. The central theme motivating the integration was the moral conviction to "do the right thing". This ethos superseded concerns about funding division and existing hierarchical structures.

Leaders and players were driven by personal relationships and family ties, seeing the integration as a non-negotiable step to support their "sisters or daughters or mothers". This collective spirit of unity and desire for equality ultimately won out against the financial challenges present in a

neoliberal sporting environment.

The success of the merger was cemented by key strategic and interpersonal factors:

Commercial Advantage: The unified GPA became a uniquely attractive proposition for commercial partners whose corporate values aligned with the organisation's new commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI). This positioned the GPA as a leader, influencing the wider landscape by highlighting that major sponsors may no longer support bodies that represented only one gender.

The Jim Madden Leadership Programme: This initiative, funded with the stipulation that it be offered equally to male and female players, fostered deep, influential relationships. Its alumni, many of whom held leadership roles in the GPA, created a strong bond that was critical to driving the integration forward.

Authentic Male Allyship: A strong connection existed between "doing the right thing" and the indispensable role of male allies. Male players, witnessing the stark comparison in treatment of their female peers, utilised their existing power and professional experience to champion the integration. This allyship, born from observed lived experience, was crucial in moving the process beyond advocacy and into tangible change.

While equality (broadly defined as the state of providing the same resources) was chosen as the constitutional pillar, some participants recognised the need to strategically apply equity. Equity, defined as providing resources based on need to achieve a level outcome, may be viewed as the more practical tool required to overcome historical underinvestment and cultural gender imbalance.

The consensus is evolving toward a mixed approach: Equality must be the goal between genders, while Equity should be applied across the entire membership to support historically disadvantaged players and smaller counties. Educational initiatives are recommended to clarify these distinct yet complementary concepts.

The GPA integration's impact extends well beyond the association itself. It is already influencing broader policy by contributing to the push for gender balancing mandates on other sporting boards. More profoundly, the visibility of male and female Gaelic Games players as equal role models in local communities is seen as a powerful force for shaping the values of young people.

The integration also offers a practical, values-led roadmap for the wider Gaelic Games integration and even for broader societal issues, such as leveraging the GAA's community presence to welcome and integrate new immigrant populations.

The GPA's success serves as a clear message: that coming together to do the right thing can dramatically

change the lifepaths of disadvantaged populations.

SUMMARY OF THE KEY FINDINGS – SEVEN THEMES

1. A desire to merge for equality

The merger between the GPA and WGPA was characterised by a societal push for gender equality and the rising profile of women's sports. Though the GPA initially provided funding, leaders concluded that only a full merger could achieve "real change. WGPA members feared a loss of voice and identity to the larger GPA, but leadership guaranteed a 50/50 merger to ensure equality. The merger received overwhelming support, including a 99% favourable vote from GPA male members. The main hurdles were external, facing resistance and funding issues from the GAA. By proceeding, the unified body demonstrated authentic allyship, ultimately creating a stronger organisation for lobbying the government for equal player funding.

2. Lessons learned from integration

The smooth GPA/WGPA integration yielded six key lessons for other associations. Success hinged on good communication—transparent, clear, and consistent—to manage member anxieties and secure the final vote. Decisions were data-driven, using surveys and research to justify changes. Intentional understanding and listening prevented the dialogue from becoming a competition, requiring leaders to reflect on their own

biases. Effective change management meant embracing uncertainty and being brave. Finally, strong leadership with the right mindset, a history of inequality awareness, and the “right people”—especially male allies with personal ties to the women’s game—provided crucial energy and urgency.

3. The importance of equality in the constitution

The integrated GPA made equality a constitutional pillar, establishing equal decision-making power. This commitment was formalised by quickly moving the National Executive Committee (NEC) to a 50/50 gender balance from an initial 60/40 split. This demonstrated authentic male allyship, as they risked existing funding for the minority female players. This structural equality led to significant tangible improvements for female players, including access to scholarships, funding, and resources, which drastically improved their self-worth and leverage. Male players benefited indirectly through new commercial opportunities and invaluable cross-gender interaction, fostering greater understanding within the organisation.

4. Doing the right thing: values-led change

The GPA integration was overwhelmingly driven by the conviction to “do the right thing,” a values-led ethos rooted in family and friendship ties and the inherent desire for equality among sportspeople. This

moral imperative transcended the major challenge of dividing funding. The process was strongly aided by the Jim Madden Leadership Programme, which fostered shared understanding and deep relationships between male and female players. Furthermore, the unified GPA offered a unique commercial incentive, aligning with sponsors’ demands for Diversity and Inclusion. Crucially, the success depended on authentic male allyship, as male leaders, often motivated by their observed lived experience of inequality faced by female family and teammates, used their position to champion the merger.

5. An opportunity for progression: Varying interpretations of equality and equity

While some felt equity (needs-based resources) was necessary to quickly counter historic underinvestment in the female game, the GPA adopted equality as a more commonly understood and effective “sell”. Participants acknowledged the organisation operates somewhat equitably, providing disproportionate support to the female side without framing it as such to avoid losing buy-in. Fear of alienating male allies by appearing to “take” from them was a key reason to maintain the focus on equality between genders. The emerging consensus advocates for equality as the goal between sexes, but equity as a tool within the entire membership (e.g., smaller counties) to ensure fair treatment.

6. GPA integration could (should) influence wider Gaelic Games integration

Participants strongly desired Gaelic Games integration but acknowledged the it's greater complexity due to its larger scale, bureaucratic structures, and temporary, elected leadership. However, the successful GPA integration serves as proof that it can work, highlighting the necessity of strong leadership and the "right people."

A major current challenge for the GAA is the lack of transparency and positive communication, leading to "scaremongering." Participants urged the GAA to adopt the GPA's philosophy—focusing on the "why" and publicly selling the benefits—to fulfil its values of inclusion and become a world leader in gender equality.

7. GPA integration has (can have) influencing impact on wider society

The GPA integration is inspiring other organisations. This commitment moves beyond performative gestures toward authentic allyship. The GPA's most profound influence is its public impact and the creation of visible male and female role models across all four codes. This visual unity powerfully communicates equality to young people, positively influencing their values and participation.

Participants agree that a successful GAA integration would have a "game-changing" effect, influencing broader societal expectations for equality in

all areas of life and even offering a unique structure to aid in immigrant integration.

SUMMARY OF KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Key considerations from this report are made for different readers of the report including:

1. For other sporting associations and potential mergers:

- a.** The importance of male authentic allyship
- b.** Visibility of male and female players together is crucial.
- c.** Relationships are at the core of the success of this integration.

2. For the wider Gaelic Games and associated NGOs (GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Association):

- a.** Aspects of this report – lessons learned and principles of the GPA integration – are transferrable to wider Gaelic Games integration and values-led change should be the driver of such integration.

3. For GPA:

- a.** Education needed on equality and equity which may shine a light on a tangible path forward.
- b.** A possible expansion on equality – while continuing to focus on gender equality – may be possible.

CONTENTS

Executive Summary	2
Introduction	7
Equality as a core principle of the integration	9
Methodology	10
Findings	12
1. A desire to merge for equality	13
2. Lessons learned from integration	21
3. The importance of equality in the constitution	26
4. Doing the right thing: Values led change	32
5. An opportunity for progression: varying interpretations of equality and equity	38
6. GPA integration could (should) influence wider Gaelic Games integration	44
7. GPA integration has (can have) influencing impact on wider society	48
Consideration points	51
Acknowledgements	53
References	54



INTRODUCTION

The 2020 merger of the Gaelic Players Associations (GPA) and the Women's Gaelic Players Association (WGPA) stands as a landmark even in the Irish sporting context. This integration was not merely an administrative or financial alignment; it was a profound, valued led transformation that embodies the essence of equality in the sporting world.

From the establishment of the GPA to the WGPA to the merger (see timeline on next page), this research report captures key stakeholders' experiences, lessons learned, and stories of the integration process. This research report explores the multifaceted journey of the integration, beginning with an examination of the wider societal and sporting influence that positively positioned the integration. Key

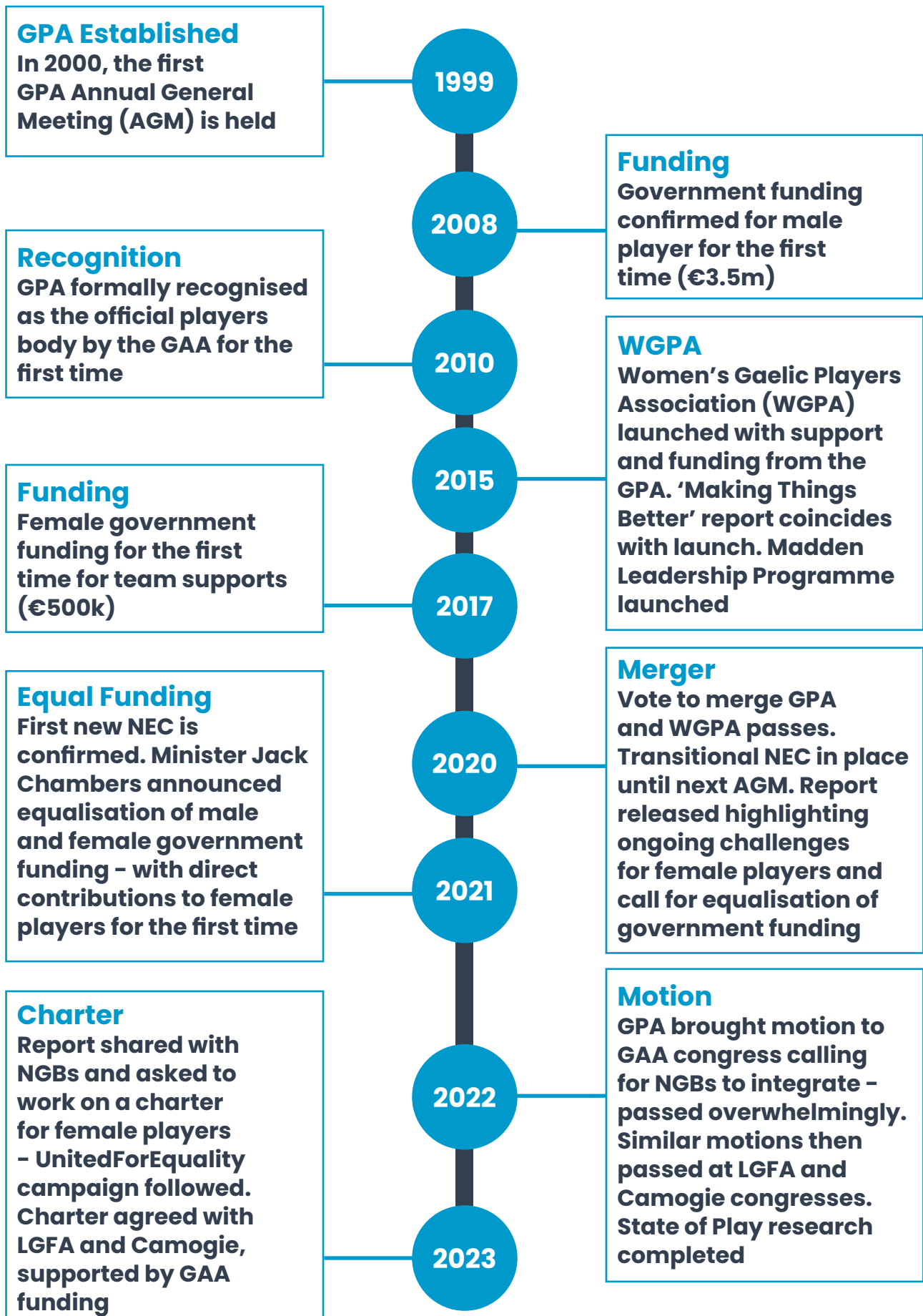


lessons learned for the integration are then shared, including transparent communication and having the 'right people'. The importance of equality in the constitution is unpacked, and tangible outcomes are outlined. The report moves onto a dedicated discussion on whether equality or equity is a more suitable pathway forward for the GPA. Finally, the report addresses the influence the GPA integration is having / can have on wider Gaelic Games integration and Irish society.

Overall, this is a 'a good news story' that is worth sharing and learning from. By sharing the narratives of the key stakeholders, this research report aims to provide an essential resource for any association seeking to implement meaningful change.



GPA TIMELINE



EQUALITY AS A CORE PRINCIPLE OF THE INTEGRATION

The WPGA, founded in 2015 to serve female players, laid the groundwork for positioning equality as a core principle of the integration. Its initial work secured support for female athletes in areas like scholarships, counselling, and personal development. The WPGA also used a data-driven approach to identify key player needs and advocate for their interests, including influencing a pivotal report in 2020 that highlighted the challenges faced by female players. This work was instrumental in achieving equal state funding in 2021.



Following the merger with the WPGA in 2020, the GPA established equality as a core principle. This led to a formal constitutional commitment to promote gender equality and ensure equal opportunities, recognition, and investment. The integration of the two organisations accelerated efforts to achieve gender equality within the sport. Here are some of the key outcomes:

Organisational Equality:

The GPA implemented equal gender representation across its leadership, including its Board and committees, and equalised all of its programs and supports, such as its scholarship program.

Funding and Visibility:

The GPA secured equal state funding for male and female players in 2021. It also pushed for policies to ensure equal visibility and recognition, including joint “Player of the Month” awards and equal pay for commercial work.

Influencing Wider Change:

The GPA successfully advocated for the full integration of the GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations to unify the sport under a single governing body. This process, initiated in 2022, is a major step toward addressing structural barriers and is expected to be completed in 2027.

Player Welfare:

The GPA continues to champion player welfare. In 2023, it advocated for a “Player Charter” to guarantee minimum standards of care for female players. When progress stalled, a public #UnitedForEquality campaign by female players, supported by their male counterparts, led to an agreement to implement the charter for the 2024 season.

METHODOLOGY

This research is situated in the qualitative sphere of research; in particular, a narrative inquiry which was complimented with a storytelling approach (Chiu-Ching & Chan, 2009). Narrative inquiry is regarded as “the best way of representing and understanding experience” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.18).

Data collection

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews which was followed three sections:

1. **Storytelling:** Reflecting on the GPA’s journey of integration, what is one moment / experience that acts as a personal milestone in the journey to equality?
2. **Photo:** Reflect on a photo that captures what equality means to you in the GPA’s journey of integration.

3. Interview questions – for example:

- a. Can you talk me through how the integration of the GPA with the WPGA occurred? What were the key moments in this journey? What was your role in this?
- b. One of the key pieces of that integration was adding equality to the constitution, how do you believe that has played out since its inclusion?
- c. Thinking of the bigger picture, to what extent do you believe this integration has or can set an example for wider society in Ireland?

The story and photo segments of the data collection enabled participants “to tell stories of our own lives concerning how we make personal connections and recover meaning from our lived experiences and resonate with even more stories” (Chiu-Ching & Chan, 2009, p.23).



Participants

29 potential participants were contacted through email and 11 responded. In line with ethical guidelines, the participants' identity is not shared and as such, pseudonyms are used. Their roles in the integration process are outlined in Table 1. The participants' pseudonyms are not aligned with their role, which are described in broad terms and not allocated a time/date/duration of role, to further protect the participants' identity.

Participants' roles in the integration process

- Founding member of the WPGA
- Chair of WPGA
- CEO of GPA
- Current employee of the GPA
- Founding member of the WPGA
- CEO of GPA
- President of GPA
- External advisor
- Chair of GPA
- Current male player
- Current female player

Table 1: Participants' roles in the integration process

Data analysis

Data analysis occurred through a combination of traditional (Charmaz, 2014) and live coding (Parameswaran et al., 2020) approach. This approach to data analysis resulted in seven themes which are discussed in the findings section.



FINDINGS

The findings of this report are categorised into seven themes – each theme is descriptive and supported by empirical quotes from the participants. Some of the themes begin and/or end with a story or reflection on a photo on their critical moments in the integration journey.

Sharing a story or reflection can prompt certain emotions or feelings. After these stories (and implicitly throughout the interview), the participants were explicitly prompted to reflect on their own emotions and feelings when telling stories. These explicit emotions and feelings (i.e., the explicitly named emotions and feelings) were extracted and entered into a word cloud – please see Figure 1. This word cloud captures the overwhelming emotions and feelings and emphasises the emotional journey this integration process has been.

As seen in Figure 1, in reflecting on the process, the participants predominantly felt ‘proud’ and ‘happy’. The integration outcome left the female participants with feelings of ‘elation’, ‘inspiring’, ‘sense of belonging’, ‘fulfilling’ and ‘feeling heard and valid’. The overwhelming named emotions and feelings are in the positive and this emphasises the nature and outcome of the GPA integration journey. I strongly encourage the reader to read the findings through the emotional lens of this word cloud; revisit it and interpret the findings through these emotions and feelings.

To repeat, the GPA integration process was an emotional journey, and the findings below are reported in the context of these emotions and feelings. It is crucial we acknowledge this and understand what this integration meant to the participants and by extension, the players.



Figure 1: Word cloud of captured explicitly named emotions and feelings

1: A DESIRE TO MERGE FOR EQUALITY

"So we ran this campaign called on her side. We were still separate organisations at this point... when we started the WPGA, the players wanted the women's only association, and we felt it would best represent our values...there was definitely trepidation on their side going, 'geez, we're not taking this on. It cost us a bit of money. Geez, we don't know where we're going here. We don't know enough about the game'...They were amazing people, and they were so helpful, but I think they were quite happy that we did our own thing too...We worked very hard then to build a really good relationship [with the GPA], and I suppose for them to trust us, and for them to get to know the players, and for them to probably realise what we did, or I suppose realise it to a great extent, that this is all one community..."

"So we were always building a case around, the girls are doing just as much here...they really commit, put in an awful lot of effort, and like, they wear the same colours... it was captured in this campaign called 'on her side'; where we were really trying to build up that notion of male allyship, and really trying to put that relationship between the male and female players to the forefront, to show that they respect each

other, they value each other, and they need the system to step up..."

"And there's a lot of complexities in that, and it's not that straightforward, but it had to start somewhere...So there was always kind of like that underpinning piece of us, trying to build up that solidarity, and most of that happens through friendships and relationships and joint initiatives and joint programs...for me, it [on her side campaign] just really captures the principle of where you're at in sport, around the fact that it is very gendered...I think it was very much a strategy and I've seen it [when] any of the guys and girls who spend time together, the lads are way better allies. Then they're like 'Jesus. They're [females] lovely. They put in a lot of work. Of course, I back them. Of course, I would say, yes, I'll support their strikes and so on."

- Robyn



Wider societal and sporting influence

This theme explores the desire to merge for equality, the WPGA concerns, the crucial vote, and the challenges and resistance in the merger. It is important to understand the wider societal processes which were (and continue to) occur which positively positioned this merger. In wider society, in the previous decades' pre-merger, there was a shift in power balances between men and women in Ireland and this shift was also recognisable in sport as women's sport was on the rise. Ellen reflects,

"The success achieved by big teams, women's teams, probably in the mid to late 2000s raised the profile of what was going on for female players in a way that hadn't been done prior to them...there had to be a shift in Irish society over time, a shift in the imbalance there was in power between males and females. And that's really what I was getting to when I talked about the recognition of the success of prominent women's teams in the 2000s... power imbalance was starting to shift a bit more in favour of women."

- Ellen

This also captured the attention of commercial opportunities, as Megan alludes to,

"A factor is the growth in female games around the world, and the growth on the female sport and the commercial opportunity that that presents."

- Megan

It is important to understand this wider societal and sporting influence on the merger and keep that context in mind as we work through these findings.

GPA support for WPGA on potential merger

In reflecting on the period pre-merger, there was a consistent message of how the GPA (at the time, the male's organisation) were fully supportive of the WPGA. Robyn's story above captures how the WPGA had strategic campaigns in building relationships and allyship between the male and female players. Megan reflects on this time,

"Initially there was an element of 'prove yourselves'...but they did commit funding to get the WPGA up and running so they contributed annually a small budget so that is why there were two separate associations but there was always a close alignment. The GPA were fully behind what we were doing [in the WPGA]."

- Megan

Despite this, it was admitted that the progress in the initial years was 'slow' and stagnated when the conversations moved to cost and funding. Robyn discusses,

"It was frustrating, and it was slow...I remember feeling a lot of, I don't know what the word is, maybe worry or uncertain...it wasn't smooth sailing there for a year, like it was tricky. And while there were still always good relationships, as I said, and

there were always conversations, it was never, you never felt like the door wasn't open. It was just we weren't going anywhere, we weren't getting anywhere....the big thing with all the mergers, and especially with this gender based one is the cost, and when it gets caught up in the fact that this is going to cost us, you know, you're struggling to get people to think, 'let's not think about that. Let's think about what the right thing to do is'."

-Robyn

When the interest rose in the possible merger, the GPA sought to make 'real change' by moving beyond monetary funding for the WPGA and move towards a merger of the two organisations. Joey reflects,

"For change to really occur, we can give them an extra 20, 30, 50, 100 grand just by writing a new contract, but is that really going to move the dial? I think we all accepted that it the only way we will really be able to make a difference is if we were one organisation."

-Joey

Possible and perceived concerns in integration

Despite the support of this merger, there were possible and perceived concerns – particularly from the WPGA perspective. Megan captures the possible concerns:

"Speaking from the female perspective, it was that there was a





discussion around the perceived loss of voice or loss of control. If you're a minority within a bigger committee or decision-making group, are you going to be overruled? Are you going to be forced to do things against your will. Will you lose out your ability to speak out publicly when you want to criticise something?

-Megan

There were fears that the WPGA would be integrated under the GPA umbrella and be seen as a section of the GPA, rather than one organisation. In unpacking these concerns, it became obvious they revolved around the loss of voice and identity. Rose reflects,

"We went on a process of over two years of working out how and what does this [merger] look like? And

during those two years, there was a lot of honest conversations. There was [concerns] on our side, the fear of our voice being lost and being consumed in a larger association that had been more established, more financial resources, more staff resources and more formal processes."

-Rose

Finance became a source of concern as questions were raised on how the GPA would react to dividing their finances with the WPGA despite the former organisation continuing to the majority of the income:

"To an extent, with women in sporting mergers, you do have less to offer. You're not coming with more money so you have to figure out, what can

you contribute? And I think the girls have contributed massively, but not in the real, I suppose, tangible things like money, which is a thing that everybody's obsessed with."

-Robyn

There were also perceived concerns from the WPGA; in other words, concerns which they assumed may be barriers to merging. The most prominent one in this case was the male membership's desire to merge. Robyn reflects,

"When it got to the brass tacks of it, and it was like, will we do it? And how will we do it? The 'why', you were always able to explain from our [WPGA] side, but it probably was a harder why for the lads [GPA], what was the win there for them? What was the motive beyond it being the right thing to do?"

-Robyn

Despite this, and why it can be classified as perceived, at the AGM meeting where the vote took place to integrate or not, the male membership fully supported the integration and was seen as a pleasant surprise to some. Megan reflects,

"I think 97% of the female players voted in favour for it and 99% of the male players voted in favour of it which is huge and probably the most surprising aspect of it like there was such buy-in from the male players."

- Megan

'Doing the right thing' was consistently alluded to and we return to this point

later. Despite perceived concerns (as reflected in the vote to merge – please see story after this theme), leadership in the GPA were adamant on the merger and taking an equality-focused approach in such. Matt discusses,

"I also think it needed to be totally 50/50, and it couldn't be seen as an acquisition, or that the WPGA was being was now falling under the umbrella of the GPA. It needed to be seen as a merger. So I don't think it would have worked if we didn't go for a complete 50/50...and embed equality into our Constitution of the GPA... I think that was very that was very important, because that might have alleviated some of the fears of female players that their independent voice might be lost."

-Matt

Challenges in the merger

In discussing challenges in the merger, the participants could not recall major roadblocks. Interestingly, the emotive challenges were the ones which were discussed, for instance, the National Executive Committee (NEC) formation. Given the commitment to equality, the NEC needed to represent both male and female players (a 60 male / 40 female split initially) and as such, male NEC representatives needed to be replaced on the existing GPA NEC. Rose recalls,

"So I would say one of the main challenges was when we combined into one association, we had a Transitional National Executive

Committee whereby for six months... of 36 people and that then had to be whittled down to 16. So that was a really difficult process... it had to be gender equal, it had to be grade and code and location equal as well. So there's a lot of different variables that went in to select and who would remain on the National Executive Committee, and that's really hard, because you're basically turning around to people who have been such good volunteers and have helped the organisation up to this date to say 'thank you, but your services are no longer required'."

- Rose

When pushed further about challenges, it seems that the challenges were from the external rather than internal of the GPA merger. Matt explains,

"I think anything that was within our control was managed well. We could control our own AGM. We could control how we redrafted our constitution. We control, you know, the conversations and our leadership within our own membership. We could control our internal team and how we deliver services. The big challenges were aspects of this that was outside of our control and that continues to be the big challenge...a lot of our relationships is with stakeholders and sport Ireland and government and the national governing bodies that we don't control."

- Matt

One of these relationships was with the Gaelic Games national body – the Gaelic Games Association (GAA). The

central issue here was the allocation of funding as Matt explains,

"The funding that the GPA received from the GAA is stipulated to be from male players only, because that's who the GAA represent, and how were the GPA going to honour our commitments to the GAA now that we serve female players....as a membership organisation, it's important that, you know, we had no business to consult with anybody else, and certainly didn't want to be deterred by anybody to integrate with our with our female players."

- Matt

Actions such as the above (i.e., proceeding with the merger despite potential consequences to funding) demonstrates a move from performative allyship to authentic allyship – we return to the importance of allyship later.

The GPA felt resistance from the GAA – Joey reflects,

"I think the key point for me was when we just realised that we couldn't give any more because we were restricted, and the only way maybe we could do more was by merging and I remember a call we had with the GAA when, after one of our annual reports was released, the GAA contacted me in relation to funding being allocated from our organisation to the WPGA. And there was a clear feeling that these are our members. These are your [GAA] members. But it just, it was a real stimulus for me to say, 'right, we need to do more.'"

-Joey

GPA seen as stronger as one organisation which represented both males and females

The participants – particularly the females – considered the integrated GPA to be a strong association. This was predominantly evident in the support and funding they were able to provide the female membership: we have more earning power. We'll have greater potential as an organisation, if, if we're if we're mixed gender, rather than being single sex (Robyn). Jade reflects on the quick action taken by the integrated GPA,

*"They [GPA] were very quick in using the strength of the union of the GPA to lobby the government for better funding and there was a huge amount done. They did a **Levelling The Field** playing report, which was about the lack of support for female players in comparison to male players, to increase team funding directly to teams and to also introduce female government grant to players individually...and then also to increase the amount of funding that the now GPA was receiving per player..."*

"So they were able to lobby the fact that they had a bigger association for better funding and support from the government, which in turn allowed them quite quickly increase the financial resources that were there to support players."

"So I guess that would have been a significant challenge but the fact that we had a stronger voice by being now unified across the four

codes as players gave us kind of a foothold in making progress on that."

- Jade

In summary, the GPA/WGPA merger was partially driven by a societal shift towards gender equality and the rising profile of women's sports, which presented new commercial opportunities. While the (male) GPA was consistently supportive of the (female) WGPA and provided initial funding, leaders ultimately decided that only a full merger could achieve "real change" beyond mere monetary support.

Despite this shared goal, WGPA members expressed concerns about the loss of voice and identity, fearing they would be consumed by the larger, more established GPA, especially since they contributed less financially.

Crucially, GPA leadership was insistent on a 50/50 merger to alleviate these fears and avoid the perception of acquisition, a stance overwhelmingly endorsed by 100% of the male membership vote.

The main challenges faced were external, stemming from resistance and funding constraints imposed by the GAA, which required the GPA to proceed with the merger despite the risk to existing male-only funding, demonstrating a commitment to authentic allyship and creating a stronger, unified organisation capable of successfully lobbying the government for equal funding for all players.

A story on the AGM and the vote to merge:

"It was the AGM, where we voted to integrate the WGA and the GPA... it was during covid, so it was a virtual call, and we had to take a ballot vote by the private platform...so we needed I think 66% to pass... but I knew I had to table that in a manner to say that, 'look, we will have to share resources...the funds we have is limited. It will mean that the funds we've available for students will need to be split between male and female, and there could be some pain in the short term, but in the long run, it's the right thing to do for society and is a big leap in

leadership', and we had 99% of our male players on a virtual call vote to integrate the associations and the female call that was happening in parallel with their membership.

"For with their AGM, they had 98% so, you know, I just sometimes you question and you wonder, is the leadership really there, and are young people self-serving? But that was very memorable for me that, you know, it was very easy for people to hide behind a private vote...So that would, to me, would have been very memorable milestone that, you know, hit home that this is the right thing to do."

- Matt



2: LESSONS LEARNED FROM INTEGRATION

In looking back at the integration process, there were several key lessons learned. In other words, there were insights, strategies, and realisations which contributed to a somewhat smooth integration process. Six key lessons learned are shared below in the hope these can be adopted and adapted to other association integration processes. These included:

1. Good communication:

All the participants spoke to the transparent nature of the communication throughout the integration process which proved crucial to its success give the large membership across the two entities (WGPA and GPA). Rose reflects,

"I think you can never over communicate enough to your membership and what you're doing, why you're trying to do it, and how it's going to be done, and the steps involved, because you need to bring your members with you, because they're ultimately the people that are going to vote yes or no at the end of the process."

-Rose

It was noted how this communication needed to be clear and consistent to limit membership (mis)interpretations – Grace discusses,

"You have to be persistent with your message...and you have to make sure everyone is informed. Once people are informed, I think they're happier with the decision

and where it's going. And because of such a broad base like you've whatever 1200 or 1600 players... people [can] interpret a lot different in the translation of message."

- Grace

It was this good, clear, consistent, and transparent communication throughout the integration process which led to a smooth, successful process:

"Communication was obviously good to both sides in terms of relieving anxieties, answering questions, being clear on where we were going, and I suppose ensuring everybody that the end goal was still going to meet their needs and only create a better situation for their peers."

- Jade

2. Data driven decisions

The decisions which were discussed and taken were data driven. In other words, leadership collected data from their membership, other sporting organisations, and research and used this data to justify decision making processes. Being data driven in this process enabled a level of confidence in the decisions taken. Megan discusses,

"Everything we've done has been data driven...in terms of doing the surveys, communicating the results, proposing solutions that's really demonstrated and highlighted

the work...being data driven and... using that to challenge the status quo, to back up your arguments for challenging the way things are done."

- Megan

3. Understanding and listening to each other

One key lesson learned was engaging in respective dialogue with both parties – i.e., understanding and listening to each other. While this may be something assumed, it requires intentional action and reflection as bias, frustrations, and assumptions may cloud understanding and listening. Joey shares his experience with this lesson,

"At one point, it [conversation] got frustrated and I was half thinking, which is wrong, that I was nearly getting myself into the into the belief system that we were doing them [WGPA] a favour by doing this, which was wrong, and it became competitive. So the learning for me and the whole process was really in relation to understanding and listening to the other parties' needs, desires, wants because it can just become a competition, it can become a negotiation [where there is] one winner and one loser. So that was a big learning for me."

- Joey

Joey's honesty here emphasises the importance of reflection and intention throughout the dialogical process – understanding and listening cannot be something that can be assumed will happen.

4. Change management

The skills and emotions associated to change management were identified as key strategies. Given the monumental change in integrating the two organisations, the effective management of such change was deemed crucial. Leadership needed to embrace risk taking, being brave, and feeling comfortable in the uncomfortable situation. Matt reflects,

"Embracing change. You know, people don't like change, but you have to be a change agent. You need to be brave and be comfortable in things a little bit uncertain... for example, there was no certainty that the arrangement with the GAA would continue...I suppose that funding was probably, could have been at risk...leadership, communication and change management, I think they're the three key behaviours that were important."

- Matt

5. Leadership

The participants recognised the crucial importance of leadership throughout this integration process. Individuals in leadership positions also had key personality traits and personal experience or observed experience of inequality. The leadership also needed to embrace the proposed mission of the integration and be able to clearly articulate this through communication with members and wider public. Robyn, Rose, and Matt discuss,

"I think personalities and leadership [are key lessons learned] because so much does rest on having good



leadership and that leadership having skill sets, both in terms of their personality traits, but also just kind of particular competencies and experience."

- Robyn

"Honesty and trust [are the key lessons learned]...they [male leadership] were doing it for the right reasons, and you could see that in their behaviours, in their actions, and that comes back to their first-hand experience of the inequality that their loved ones, be it their wives or sisters, their daughters, have experienced."

- Rose

"Attitudes, beliefs and values, so that might be tagged with leadership, but just how we communicate this is really important, looking around the corner, thinking about social impact, ensuring that people in

leadership positions that are tasked with integrating the associations out of the right attitude and mindset."

- Matt

As part of leadership, and hinted at in Matt's last comment, public leadership was identified as a key strategy in the integration process. Not only did public leadership entail public speaking, but speaking in the positive, framing the integration as an opportunistic approach, and focusing on the benefits for the membership and wider public. Matt reflects on the importance of public leadership and alludes to how this may be an area in which the GAA invests in their journey of integration:

"One lesson is public leadership. So the GPA had very public leadership in our CEOs, in our chairs and presidents, and that is very important that the membership believes in

their elected leadership, and that the elected leadership is talking about publicly, talking about the positive opportunities, the importance of change, role modelling the next generation etc....so that's one lesson that the governing bodies need to take a hold of... I think we've seen that void in the GAA for example, it's filled with people in positions who publicly disclose all the challenges and not the opportunities."

- Matt

6. 'Having the right people'

The participants consistently alluded to 'having the right people' as a strategy in the successful integration. The 'right' people were individuals who had excellent communication skills who made players felt heard and were available to answer any questions or clarify situations. Jade shares an example,

"[name] would have been, obviously, a huge person in the WGPA, and has always been brilliant at establishing that kind of open communication with reps [representatives] and with players, I'd say she must have a personal relationship with every player in the country, like the amount of time she spends on the phone to me, never mind all the rest of them. She would have been great at kind of letting us know what was involved...answered any concerns or making sure that everybody understood".

- Jade

What proved crucial for this integration was male player allyship (which will be further discussed later on) and

as such, having the 'right' people translated into having male leaders who have connections, observed lived experiences, and / or family within the Women's games. Rose discusses this in relation to two crucial figures in the integration process:

"What really was a transformative part in the process was actually the appointment of [name – male] in the GPA. [name – male] is a very experienced executive in the business world, and he came in and he was new to the idea, loved it and brought a tenacity to get it done that previously wasn't there... [name – male] also has daughters who plays games, so it was an issue that was very close to his heart, and he understood the background of it, and it just it gave it a different lease of energy and urgency....the initial conversations would have been with [name – male], and like his wife would have played Intercounty [Ladies] football, and [name – male] would have seen the difference in treatment between him and his wife, so he was crucial to actually initiating the whole idea and exploring it, because you need someone with that relatability, I would say that, or has experienced the inequality firsthand to actually fully get it."

- Rose

In summary, the key lessons learned from the successful GPA integration centred on transparent and consistent communication to bring all members along and making data-driven decisions based on research and member surveys to build confidence.

Crucially, the process required intentional dialogue, emphasising understanding and listening to each other's needs to prevent the integration from becoming a win-or-lose competition.

Success was also attributed to strong change management skills—being brave and embracing uncertainty—and effective leadership with the right mindset, personal experience

of inequality, and a commitment to publicly promoting the positive opportunities.

Finally, having the “right people” involved, especially male leaders who were allies and had personal connections or direct experience with the women's game, was transformative in providing energy and urgency to the process.



3. THE IMPORTANCE OF EQUALITY IN THE CONSTITUTION

A story on equal representation in governance structures:

"I remember when I started getting more involved with the NEC and the board. The first time I was asked to think about it or get involved, I remember talking to people about it and looking at the structure and so on, and there was a bit of me that was like, 'oh, like, the GPA is brilliant, and they represent everyone. But like, in terms of strategic decision making, the male side is what's important'. I had that bias in my head, you know, they're the ones that are the shop front. They're the ones that generate all the revenue for the GPA. A lot of the big decisions that are made are surely going to have to be with male player in mind... is this more of a token thing like, 'oh, let's make sure there's a girl on the board' and I remember sitting down and chatting to the lads about it, asking more questions and trying to get an insight into it. And they were like, 'No, everything we do is about gender balance. So we have the same number of female players as male players on the NEC on the board, in the presidency positions and in the co-chair position. So every significant position that exists for a man also exists for a woman'. So there was equal input from men and women at every stage, which I thought was brilliant."

- Jade

Equality directing governing structures and decision-making processes

As the integrated GPA emerged, equality was added as one of the four pillars in the constitution which proved crucial in the new associations governing structures and decision-making processes. Joey emphasises this,

"So from a structural point of view, from day one...we were equal. We were we were absolutely equal in our decision making and we had certain pillars: representation, development and welfare and equality. Four pillars of what we were trying to achieve, and equality was put as one of them, because we've seen it as fundamental to what we were looking to do."

- Joey

This fundamental tenant of the constitution began its influence in the construction of governing structures – the NEC. Megan recalls how the formation of the NEC,

"We agreed that the female voice had to be included. We included a new clause of around equality being one of the objectives of the association. We included equal representation on the board of directors. There was an initial discussion around the NEC – because the male membership was 60% of the membership and the female was 40%...we landed on the

transition NEC being 60/40 but within the first year the new GPA being set up, we changed the constitution to go 50/50 because once we were in the association, we all realised we were in that together. The female players were advocating on behalf of the male players and vice versa."

- Megan

While we delved deeper into the importance of male allyship later on in this report, this formation of the NEC (starting of 60/40 and moving to 50/50) demonstrated authentic allyship – i.e., the majority putting something at risk for the benefit of the minority. In this case, the male GPA (majority) putting at risk their funding budget and relationship with GAA at risk to benefit the female WPGA (minority). Megan reflects,

"Even to get it to 60/40 [on the NEC] in the first place was huge because the lads [male GPA] had 3 million euro every year from the GAA and they had their charter; they were getting their expenses paid for their scholarships. The WPGA were on a budget of about 150-200 thousand euro so it was a big risk for them [male GPA] so if they had a different mindset, they could have seen it as a threat that we are given these females a veto on our decision making or our executive; they could totally disrupt our operations. So even to get it to 60/40 was huge – that gave females such a voice on the NEC, and we ensured our executive officers were two males and two females...even in our leadership positions, there was always going to be a female presence. So that

was foundational for us as leaders to sell it to the membership...from a female perspective, like having that reassurance around the loss of control and the loss of voice.... But in all honesty, the truth for us is the female voices only got stronger within a bigger organisation but probably without having those guarantees around the female role in decision making, guaranteed commitment to looking after the female players, guaranteed commitment around the female positions within the structures, it would have been a bigger challenge."

- Megan

Player experience of equality

While this commitment to equality was at a governance structure, the players at that time of integration also felt the influence of equality through support for "training courses, education bursaries, access to counselling, you know, career support, all that sort of stuff that have been there previously for the men" (Jade). This commitment to equality had significant impact on female players self-worth and positioning as a player. Jade captures this,

"I was friends with [men who] would have been playing Dublin senior hurling at the time, and the differences in how they were treated and the perks they got when they first came onto the team versus what you're [female] getting makes you feel insignificant or a secondary straight away, and something like college scholarship [for females and males] has such a huge impact on

a lot of college students so...I think they targeted the important things quickly."

- Jade

Interestingly, in speaking to current player, the male player does not feel any different since the merger – Vincent reflects,

"I don't feel or see a difference, to be honest, because I wasn't overly aware of it before it happened, and because I'm playing with men, then it doesn't directly benefit or hasn't directly changed things for me."

- Vincent

Despite this, Vincent recognises the value for female players and how their playing experiences have improved:

"The only value I see is that it's benefited the women massively because of the opportunities that they are able to get now that have been, as I say, available to us as men."

- Vincent

Chloe – a current female player – recognises this value in which Vincent speaks to. The extract from the conversations with Chloe about this emphasises how the integrated GPA has dramatically improved playing situations and associated experiences for the female population – Chloe discusses,

"In terms of financial [benefits, there's obviously been increased funding from the government

"We cannot truly influence wider society about respect and equality of treatment for women, if inequalities have been allowed to exist and fester in our own Gaelic games".

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in terms covering expenses and nutrition allowances and things like that so that's massive. I remember one of the years we won one the intermediate All Ireland, which was essentially a successful year, and our captain was making protein balls for the team. You know, for after training, there was no food. There was no anything and when you look at what we have now, we really do have most things that we need. There's food there, there's all of that. So there's certainly more money in terms of being able to support players a little bit better. So that's a huge thing."

- Chloe

While having more support, funding, and resources is a tangible impact of the integration, the intangible impact is as equally important (but possibly not as reported). Chloe in the following extract discusses the tangible (i.e., charters), but alludes to how self-worth and perceived importance has also increased as a result – she discusses,

"When we were in the W GPA, there was a voluntary squad charter which is a document where you outline your basic minimum standards for the year... but it was voluntary. So no matter what you put on the piece of paper, it's not like a contract. It's not official... and in the last couple of years [since integration], we are able to push for things that are on the charter, because you have more, I suppose, more leeway or more leverage to kind of push and be like, 'we need this. It's on the charter, and we're not playing without it'. And

they kind of start to take you more serious."

-Chloe

Integration benefit (or not) for male membership

We return to a point raised regarding the benefit (or not) for male membership. Starting with the tangible benefits, Megan discusses how commercial sponsors are seeking opportunities which have both male and female representation:

"Has it benefited male players? I would say it has. We've had a couple of sponsors; I suppose that want to use male and female players."

- Megan

In addition to this, while we have briefly discussed the role of male allyship, female allyship for their male counterparts is a reported benefit of integration – Megan comments,

"The females on the NEC are advocating for the male players as well. We do work together to back each other up. I'd like to think the males have benefited from the females on the NEC and the board advocating for their rights as well as just the female rights as well."

- Megan

While the monetary benefits are more obvious for female players, the integration has indirectly benefited the male players through relationality and understanding. Vincent captures this,

"Suppose that's actually one really

good benefit, is that if you were separate associations, you'd be doing a lot of things separate...I wouldn't have had the opportunity to speak to some of the people [females] that I have and met some of your best friends now...because you've had opportunities through GPA days and events to meet them and interact with them and actually hear their stories...I'm very grateful, actually, in a sense, because it's opened my eyes and broadened my horizons to the world of women in sport and as I say, you now have an opportunity then to interact with people you never would have before. You would have stayed very much in your lane, and then, in your privileged position, to keep doing what you're doing and continue to have a stranglehold on sport on the island, really... So hopefully, then through the GPA and it allows for more player voice to hear the stories and hear about the inequalities, so we can do more, from an equity point of view, to try and improve the situation."

- Vincent

This interaction between male and female players can also have benefits for the male players. Megan recalls an example of this when speaking to GPA Retirement weekends whereby players who are retiring go on retreats,

"The nature of the weekend, it tends to be very open and honest and I think people end up telling everybody their life stories...and one of the lads reported back, he was like, it's just a whole different

experience having female players in the room, because it creates emotional vulnerability that may not always, but isn't typically, in male only environments...that's a benefit as well that hopefully brings something to male players experience that they might not otherwise have had if we hadn't have done the integration."

- Megan

In all, adding equality to the constitution has been monumental in different ways for both female and male players; the importance cannot be understated. Building on this, Robyn alludes to the role of self-reflection and encourages the GPA to continue in self-reflection to seek opportunities to further enhance equality. Robyn comments,

"You would like the GPA, as with any other sporting organisation, to constantly self-reflect in a very broad way; that they wouldn't just look [and say] 'we have 50% on the executive, and we spend 50% of money', [but rather] they actually [say], 'no, let's think about everything that we do and let's apply a gendered lens'. And possibly what you're saying, maybe the equity lens too around who is being privileged here? Are there people were leaving behind? Are we representing everyone? And you'd love if people did that [self-reflect] in a more expansive way regularly. You know, it still can be very superficial. They look at a couple of things go 'tick'."

- Robyn

In taking this advice of self-reflecting

in a more expansive manner, questions could be asked around equality beyond sex: how are the GPA championing equality for different matters, for example, race, sexuality, and so on alongside sex? This – by embracing a system wide self-reflection – may be one way of pushing forward equality.

To sum, the GPA made equality a fundamental pillar in its new constitution, which was critical to its success, immediately establishing equal decision-making power. This commitment was formalised

by moving the National Executive Committee (NEC) from an initial 60/40 split (reflecting membership) to a 50/50 gender balance, demonstrating authentic male allyship by putting existing resources at risk for the benefit of the minority.

This structural equality led to significant, tangible improvements for female players, including access to funding, scholarships, and resources (like food and nutrition allowances), which dramatically increased their self-worth and leverage in demanding minimum standards.



4. DOING THE RIGHT THING: VALUES LED CHANGE

A story on realising unequal treatment of female players:

A big one that stands out for me is just the realisation that women and men weren't being treated the same, probably ignorant to it all very much before and by a lack of awareness and that male privilege on my behalf, that I didn't even realise that the two [male and female experience] were separate, and that the two weren't being given the same opportunities. I remember being up at intercounty training with men's team, and we are very well looked after: full access to pitches, and we have ice baths, hot baths in our changing room, getting warm food, and then leaving on the same night as ladies, and knowing that they didn't have that. The lights were turned off on them, they had to pay for the pitch access, and that they weren't given food, and there were no showers. So at that point, you are realising, 'shit, I didn't realise'...So then it gave me a bit of a push to do something about it, and I have been advocating, probably since then, for Ladies football and Camogie and to try and close that gender gap."

- Vincent

A common phrase throughout all the interviews was 'doing the right thing'. This was in response to how and why the integration happened, e.g., Will states in response to the 'how' question: "Do the right thing, win the heart and

minds first and all will come after that" (Will). This was also in responses to the many challenges the integration faced, Robyn comments: "I think if your overarching belief is this the right thing to do, you will, you will figure out a way to make it happen." (Robyn). 'Doing the right thing' seemed to engender from relationships and family ties – supporting and empowering each other despite sex. Will and Megan allude to this:

"Fundamentally it was the right thing to do....These are our sisters or daughters or mothers...why wouldn't you [integrate]?"

- Will

"It's the right thing to do. We're all in this together. We represent the same county we grew up together. There's an awful lot of family ties, or like people in college together, where the male players just get the experience of the female players."

- Megan

One of the main reported challenges was the division of funding. As previously discussed, the male GPA – who had the majority of funding and generated the income – now had to divide the funds between both male and female counterparts in the integrated GPA. Money – a tangible resource – may have been a major roadblock to this integration given the neoliberal society in which sport exists, but values (i.e., 'doing the right thing')

– an intangible construct – seemed to win this battle. The GPA seemed to embrace the opportunity for values led change, as Ellen points out:

“I think the GPA were willing to address, for instance, duplication of services or roles and so on. And instead of seeing that duplication as a zero-sum game, they actually looked on it as an opportunity to bring through values led change...”

– Ellen

Grace captures how GPA did not allow money to be the central focus of this integration, but rather shifted the narrative to values by focusing on players and their love of the game:

“I think, in terms for a lot of the players, and their values, who are playing, it’s not about money, it’s about what they love and what they want to do. And I think the [GPA] organisation in itself probably made the values piece a lot, a lot bigger...I think the values are probably the strongest thing that came through, because that’s a lot of the reason people have huge values on why they play, why they want to play, why they wear their jersey, what it means to them. And I think the values in terms of what we should stand for was very strong and...that probably drove that a lot... I don’t think money was the bigger driver in some sense, or it hasn’t been allowed be the bigger driver in this.”

– Grace

Will expands on this – commenting on the nature of sportspeople:

“I think it’s that spirit would win out during innately inside the sports person...From my experience of players over the years dealing with them, the biggest force [is] that they are very generous. They want equality. They want the best for themselves, and they want the best for everybody else around them and that’s probably kind of a, I don’t know, something innately inside them that drives them to be such good sports people....And I keep referring back to the spirit Dylan, because I think that’s the most important part, that if you’ve got that spirit...everything else is just a problem that has to be solved, or can be solved.”

– Will

This case – the integration of the GPA – may be unique in terms of values led change given current sports players are those in leadership driving the integration. Matt suggests: “they need to be values driven people and really believe in the integration process” (Matt). As we zoomed in on who these key people were in the integration, the Madden leadership programme became a prevalent discussion point.

Significance of the Jim Madden leadership programme and commercial incentives

The Jim Madden Leadership Programme is a professional development initiative designed to develop leadership skills in county-level players. The programme is accredited by Maynooth University, offering a qualification in professional leadership. Importantly, in the context of this report, the programme needs

to be offered to both male and female players equally. Matt reflects on the programme and its influence,

"A very progressive businessman called Michael Madden decided to fund the Jim Madden Leadership Program, because he's seen visibility of male and female athletes going out to the US [United States] in some of our fundraising activities. He stipulated that the program must be [offered to] male and female players equally... I think that helped bond both player associations in understanding the challenges that male and female players face... So I think that program was really important because the alumni of the Jim Madden leadership programme is in its hundreds, and there's a real strong relationship built up between male and female players through that programme."

- Matt

Notable here is how having male and female players fundraise in the United States may have stimulated the equality conditions of this programme; visibility matters. It is also important to explicate relationships between male and female players were cultivated on this programme and its alumni held leadership positions in the integration process.

Another key driver in the success of this integration was commercial incentives. The GPA became an attractive opportunity for commercial incentives given it represented both males and females unlike the GAA, LFGA, and Camogie associations – positioning the GPA as an "unique proposition" (Megan).

The GPA and its constitution began to reflect the diversity of its membership which aligned with growing equality, diversity, and inclusion initiatives of



commercial organisations. Megan reflects,

"The sponsors, for example, PwC, wanted to reflect that diversity in their portfolio and there was an opportunity...it was going to make us more attractive to commercial sponsors going forward to have male and females in our membership."

- Megan

Comparing this to the large organisations who only represent one sex, Matt discusses:

"Most large organisations have values that include diversity and inclusion because of the change in landscape of our world today those commercial partners...will no longer spend seven figures on being the championship sponsor if it only represents boys and men because that's at odds with their own values as an organisation [where] diversity and inclusion is really important...if we look at [sponsor], for example, their adverts clearly have shown diversity and inclusion far beyond equality for male and females, but they're looking into other aspects of life: let it be the LGBTQ+ community, the black community, different religions that we see in Ireland."

- Matt

Matt's comment here may act as a discussion point for a roadmap in how the GPA may look to further expand equality beyond gender – questioning how the GPA enhance their commitment to equality.

The importance of male allyship

There seemed to be a strong connection between 'doing the right thing' and male allyship:

"It [integration] was [about doing] the right thing to do and maybe that's where it comes back to male allyship, like the lads just saying that's the right thing to do."

- Megan

This relationship between 'doing the right thing' and male allyship warranted further exploration. Despite the WPGA advocacy for integration, it seemed there was a level of dependency on their male counterparts to push the momentum further. The male membership seemed to be the gatekeeper of integration. In looking at more long-term society processes and a resifting in power balances in men and women (as discussed in theme one), we can find an explanation for why this dependency existed. Ellen explains,

"Women are getting greater recognition. Men come and say, 'we have come to a point where we can no longer accept this for our sisters, our fellow players, our daughters, for all the women around us'...we have to acknowledge that we need male allyship because that power imbalance still favours men in sport, both institutionally, at organisational level and individually."

- Ellen

It was acknowledged by the participants the importance of this male allyship in standing up

for and championing their female counterparts. Megan discusses how certain male individuals drew on their personal and professional experience in advocating on behalf of the female membership,

"The male allies is a big thing...[list of male names] their experience from the commercial world in terms of equality and their values in terms of the way you do things; that is the way things that got done...[they saw] things could have been done differently in a commercial world and I think bringing that into GAA land is like another planet, they [GAA] just accept the way things are done, but to really challenge that comes back to male allies standing up and doing this for the right reasons."

- Megan

As acknowledged throughout this report, the latter part of Megan's comments pinpoints the authenticity of allyship, moving beyond performative allyship, but standing up for those who are less advantaged. In exploring the 'why' behind the allyship, some observations were made, but the overwhelming consensus was male observed lived experience of female players. Will reflects on this,

"I would have seen...compared to the way that the men's game and the treatment they would have gotten, they [female players] were treated as second class citizens from a sporting point of view."

- Will

Jade discusses the male observed

lived experiences and the relationship influence on the development of male empathy and advocacy (i.e., values):

"Every family who's involved in the GAA, the chances are they have more than one member of the family who's playing like I know there's a lot of kind of stories around where one of the lads who's playing senior into County has a sister or a girlfriend or a cousin who's playing the equivalent level with the women's team and or at least playing, you know, adult senior LGFA or adult senior Camogie with the club. And loads of them will talk about the even now still the stark comparison between the treatment of the female player and the male player...They [male players] are always going to be brought back to their local parish to play, and they're always going to, I guess, see the treatment of their sister or their girlfriend or their friend in that same club and I do think that makes it difficult to ignore the comparison between the two. I'd like to think that gives you that values piece, or gives you that morals piece of saying, 'No, what's more important is that my sister can afford to go up to Dublin and work her job and when she's driving back down to Cork to play matches and train every weekend'."

- Jade

This theme shared how the successful GPA merger was overwhelmingly driven by the conviction to "do the right thing," a values-led approach that transcended financial concerns and structural challenges. This ethos was deeply rooted in family ties and the inherent "spirit" of sportspeople



who value equality and generosity. The process was further aided by the Jim Madden Leadership Programme, which fostered strong relationships and shared understanding between hundreds of male and female players. Crucially, the unified GPA presented a unique and attractive commercial proposition that aligned with the Diversity and Inclusion values of major sponsors, thereby providing an incentive for integration. The entire initiative was heavily reliant on authentic male allyship, where male leaders, often motivated by their observed lived experience of the inequality faced by their female family members and peers, used their position of power to champion the merger, moving beyond performative support.

A story on observed lived experience and male allyship:

"My wife plays Gaelic football. She played for Dublin. In 2017, we both got married, and at that time, she won the all-Ireland with Dublin Ladies, and I won the all-Ireland with Dublin Men's. And we were at our wedding that year, we both had both cups there and it was it was magical. But

we always spoke about the fact that she would have got more out of me being a Dublin footballer and her being my partner, than her being, on her own right, a Dublin footballer. And I always carried that in with me...when I would have looked at what she would have put into it, I would absolutely have believed, and still believe this is the case, that the top tier of women's football and Camogie, the commitment levels are greater than most of the teams...and the levels that they are performing at, they are passing a lot of the male teams... I just felt that watching that my wife and I just had twins, a boy and a girl, and I was like...I don't want my daughter to grow up in an unequal world so I think that when you asked me that question about the photograph, it was personal stuff that was my motivator even though I was seeing all the inequalities in how we couldn't offer them [WGPA] the full suite of services that we were offering the lads and that pissed me off, excuse my language, but it just did and we didn't have the ability to be able to just cut it [the funding] in half at the time."

- Joey

5. AN OPPORTUNITY FOR PROGRESSION: VARYING INTERPRETATIONS OF EQUALITY AND EQUITY

A story on realising unequal treatment of female players:

"Drafting the constitution became very real...jeez the lads [males] actually committing to equal resources and equal representation on the board...it was surprising how easy it was, just the actual integrity of them saying 'we do really believe in equality and we are going to do this because it was the right thing to do, even though it was a challenge'. It was probably a risk for them in some respects because they didn't know if the male membership would buy into it and if there would be any issues with the GAA. But that process gave us reassurance that the female voices weren't going to be lost, and we were going to be genuinely treated equally – that was huge."

- Megan

Across the conversations with the participants, there were varying interpretations of what equality meant – from how it was conceptualisation, its intention in the constitution, and its ongoing outcomes. Ellen comments: "I think there are different interpretations of what equality means, and it's only now that we're seeing that come to fruition" (Ellen). Based on this, and in pushing the boundaries of equality, the participants were questioned asked if 'equity' would have been a more suitable term than equality to

have as a pillar in the constitution. To clarify, equality can be defined as a state of being equal: every individual is given the same resources and opportunities regardless of their personal identity (e.g., sex, race, social class etc.). Whereas equity recognises this personal identity and resources and opportunities are provided based on a needs basis to reach an equal and fair outcome. Ellen builds on this,

"Equality is a philosophical term; I would argue equity is more of a strategic and a practical term that has arisen out of a number of different ways. People could argue we could achieve equality, and equity is one of them. And equity is more grounded because it has built into it this notion of prioritising the needs of the groups that have been excluded or whatever, whereas equality is philosophical meant to be broad, encompassing, inclusive, all of the, you know, diverse needs that it would try to re-address."

- Ellen

Interestingly, it was acknowledged how equality was the term chosen as it was a more commonly understood term. Robyn and Megan discuss,

"I don't know if it's [equity] a better word. I think sometimes we can become a little bit notional or academic around these things when you almost have to go with

the word that will land well while understanding the principle then in the boardrooms.... Maybe equality is the acceptable term at the minute, while understanding in principle that it actually does need more."

- Robyn

"Equality is probably an easier sell as well; in the short term for us, equality is an easier sell – that we just want to treat everybody equally with the things that were within our control."

- Megan

Despite this, there are signs that the GPA does operate in more equitable manner, but framing it as equality may be the path of less resistance – Megan explains,

"Some people would say the male game generates 95% of the funds. This has just been twisted probably, but you could say we're already over investing [in the female side]...the girls are being treated equitably, because if you look at it as a proportion of the revenue generated, they are getting an awful lot more than the male players. But like, once you start trying to explain or get into arguments about that with people, you're losing. I think it's just the simplicity of messaging around: we treat everybody equally. Everybody deserves minimum standards, at the very least. That's the point that we are at now and then...we can evolve to the point whereby we'll have to start looking at different solution."

- Megan



As we delved deeper into the conversations on equality and equity, it became clear that there were mixed opinions on the prioritisation of equality or equity in the context of the GPA.

A case to be made for equity or equality as a pathway forward

Some participants suggested the need to prioritise equity which can lead to equality. Robyn discusses how the less privileged group (in this case, the female players) need more support – making an argument for equitable treatment:

“Equity is obviously [what] you need to do more to bring them [females] [to the same level as the males], and there is definitely an element of that...I do know with girls, we need more support, because sport is so gendered.”

- Robyn

Vincent and Grace acknowledged the personal identity and cultural influence piece in suggesting equity may be a more suitable pathway:

“Trying to define what equality is and what it looks like in practice, because it’s probably not equality that you need first...equity before equality, because the opportunities, as I say, haven’t been the same.”

- Vincent

“To get there quicker, I think equity would probably have to come into play in terms of bringing the ladies side up to the male side...culture has driven the male dominance over

years and years and years and it’s very hard, as we all know, to change cultures and so equity probably could be of value and could be used to balance it a lot quicker.”

- Grace

In the context of funding, Joey suggests an equitable approach is taken:

“I do [think equity would have been more suitable than equality], because I think it would have right, and I think there was, though, when it came to funding, there was an equitable stance.”

- Joey

Interestingly, when proposing equity as a more desired approach, there was a level of hesitancy amongst some female participants. Some feared that an equity approach may damage existing relationships with male players and diminish the strong allyship which has developed over the years. Jade discusses,

“I guess equity is always more suitable for everyone everywhere, right? But I don’t know. I don’t know if you can jump straight to that, because then you probably are talking about taking things off the men to give to the women and I don’t know if that’s right. I don’t know if that’s appropriate. I don’t know if that’s something that encourages positive relationships....”

“I guess you don’t want to burn bridges with people who are important in the process, right? You don’t want to, I don’t like saying this, I don’t want to piss off the lads and



make them stop being involved or enthusiastic about it."

- Jade

It was in this context that equality was more favourable. Chloe builds on Jade's comment and puts forward a way forward embracing an equality approach:

up alongside the male game and grow both games, and I know that's really, really difficult."

- Chloe

Chloe's comment places the emphasis on building a case for equality as the way forward. Rose also agrees and comments:

"It's [equity] an interesting concept... you have to be very careful with things like that, because it's not that we don't want the lads to have as much as they have. That's not what it is. I'm totally happy for the Tipp[erary] hurlers to get all what they deserve, because they put so much into it...sometimes when things like that are kind of thrown around, it is a case of, 'oh, well, if the men had less money and we gave that money to the women, then wouldn't that be great', but it's not that we want to take away from the men either...and if we start that kind of conversation, then I think that actually may effect allyship, and should it? No, it shouldn't, but I do think it would. So I think we should be putting more of our energy into how we can bring the female game

"For a long time, my initial thought was that equity should come first before equality. But in the last number of years, I've changed that thought process, and that's because, how are we ever going to get to equality if we only start with equity. And what I mean by that is the GAA is 140 years old this year, and it has invested in male Gaelic Games for that amount of time. We have an LGFA Association, which is 50 years old, and we have a Camogie Association that's 120 years old, but is probably, you know, struggling to a large degree. There has been such a historic under investment in females in Gaelic Games that how are we ever going to bridge the gap if we don't push for equality."

- Rose

Challenges with equality in the GPA were recognised given the governing bodies (GAA, LGFA, and Camogie) are not embracing equality in its membership and structure. Vincent reflects,

"So it's a nice phrase [equality], but it's not being lived out, probably by the associations. From a GPA point of view, they're probably doing as best they can to make it equal, but because it's all different associations, and that's where it gets tricky, because that's where the imbalance is....I think the GPA itself do a pretty good job in terms of equality, though, in terms of giving players access to their pool of resource."

- Vincent

Equity beyond gender

Interestingly, equity beyond gender was discussed with regards to the hierarchical levels of County teams and this was something that was advocated for. Robyn comments,

"I think it's a very good principle in the GPA around, not so much even the gender piece, but also there's a hierarchy piece in terms of the elite players and the top-level players, and then the smaller counties and the ones that are struggling. So you could look at equity being needed to be considered across the whole organisation, rather than just from a gendered lens...Like should it not be that Carlow camogie and Carlow hurlers not get more than Galway because they don't have as much to work with? So I think the whole system

is going to be challenged around that piece...around the privilege and some people getting left behind, because there is an element, even at the women's games, that were making the strong ones stronger in terms of how we set ourselves up."

- Robyn

Matt agrees and puts forward an argument that gender equality is needed, and an equity approach is needed in the membership. Matt reflects,

"In terms of minimum standards, it's really important that the pathway to equality is true and exists...equality should exist between our genders, but equity should exist between our membership. So equity has to exist across membership of male and female players. And of course, the male and female players who are bearing a bigger responsibility, in terms of, the public pressures that's on them being in All Ireland Finals [for example], they need to be treated differently than, in some respects, players that aren't subject to that that that environment. So equity has its place, of course, but it should be positioned as a tool for equitable treatment across all inter county players and not siloed between genders."

- Matt

This mixed approach – equality and equity – may be the pathway forward. Vincent sums this up,

"Not necessarily in every instance, but in some instances, yes, you have to have equity before you can get

to equality. And there are still things now that we can do which we can look to make equal.”

- Vincent

In whichever approach is taken going forward, it is evident that more education is needed in what equality and equity is, what it can be, and how it can look in practice. Ellen suggests an education package is needed in this space,

“I think there is an educational package that would probably take us to a discussion around equality and equity and where people place themselves on that continuum, whether they place themselves there because they fully understand it, and whether or not they might change as they actually really get to grips with what that means in practice to bring about equality [and/or equity].”

- Ellen

In all, while some participants argued that equity must precede equality to quickly balance years of underinvestment in the female game and address cultural biases, others favoured the continued focus on equality. The reluctance to prioritise equity stemmed from a fear of damaging male allyship by creating the perception of “taking things off the men” and shifting the conversation from growth to resource division. Ultimately, the dominant view settled on a mixed approach: Equality must be the goal between genders to force progress, while equity should be the strategic tool used across the entire membership (male and female) to support disadvantaged groups, such as those from smaller or less resourced counties, ensuring a fair treatment pathway forward. The conversation underscored the immediate need for education on both concepts to align the organisation’s theoretical values with its practical actions.



6. GPA INTEGRATION COULD (SHOULD) INFLUENCE WIDER GAELIC GAMES INTEGRATION



A photo on advocating for Gaelic Games integration:

"That is me in front of a microphone, and that is at GAA Congress in 2021 over in Mayo...I was first female representative from the GPA going to GAA Congress – the decision-making body for the male game. We proposed the motion to prioritise the integration of the three governing bodies...and the GPA asked me to speak on that on the floor and to propose it. On that day, they wanted me, and asked me to actually stand up and address the GAA Congress...I

stood up, and some of them didn't even know my name, so I was asked 'please introduce yourself'. I gave a speech around my experience of being a female Gaelic Games player and how I had watched my brother, who's two years older, get different treatment in our national sport, purely because of his gender and purely because of an inefficient and outdated organisational structure... it's something that I love looking back on, and for me, it represents the whole essence of why we did what we did."

- Rose

A motivation to integrate, but acknowledgement of challenges

In speaking to the Gaelic Games integration, there was a clear desire on the participants behalf for integration, but they also acknowledged the challenges with such an integration. Joey reflects on how GAA is a much bigger association than the GPA with more complexity in terms of structures,

"The systems and structures they [GAA] have in place are much more embedded, much more complex and bureaucratic than what we [GPA] have...so it's not a like for like...I think where you can gain the most influences is learning around the philosophy of what we were trying to achieve, why we were trying to do it at that early stage, but it was a lot easier for us to bring the stakeholders on board than it is for them. So it's a decent bit more complex...I'm not underplaying how hard it is for them to do it, but if you can get the philosophy right and get people understanding the 'why', then the 'how', it is always that bit easier."

- Joey

Alongside the size and structures, Robyn points the governances and leadership as a potential roadblock to integration,

"One of the challenges with Gaelic Games [is that]...you have elections every three years...[as such, it is] very transitionary leadership, very temporary leadership, which I think is a challenge, to be fair to them, they don't have that consistency....I

do accept as well...everything is amplified. They are a much bigger organisation. They have much more to look after than elite players. But I think the same principle applies."

- Robyn

The last part of Robyn's comment alludes to how the GAA can still apply the lessons learned (i.e., theme two in this report) from the GPA integration. Will and Vincent agree,

I understand that it's not as easy as waving a magic wand, but it wasn't totally straightforward for the players either...and I also think...it's almost putting down a challenge to them [GAA] as well that if the players [GPA] can do it, then why can't you [GAA] do it also."

- Will

From what the GPA have done, they've probably shown how easily it can work if you have the right people and the right leadership driving it...you put good structures in place, and you have structures and policies there that are going to promote and encourage women to get involved... first thing is it [GPA integration] shows an integrated body can work...anyone who had concerns prior that this was going to be awkward or difficult, it wasn't and the men don't see the women any different and I hope that the women don't see the men any different. You see yourselves as equal counterparts. You're both putting in the same work."

- Vincent

In comparison to the GPA integration

process, the participants had issues with the lack of transparency and communication in the GAA integration process:

"I don't know how much transparency there's been with the integration process."

- Jade

"Not a huge amount of communication of what's happening...it's like a conclave with the Gaelic Games at the minute around what's actually happening."

- Robyn

In taking the lessons learned from the GPA, the GAA, as suggested by the participants, need to encourage a positive message through open communication, public leadership, and controlling the narrative (please see theme two). Robyn and Megan

discuss,

"I think there's a lot of scaremongering. There's a lot of kind of headlines around how much is then this going to cost, and I don't think there's any controlling the narrative."

- Robyn

"There's no leadership around selling the benefits of this. I think that's what's missing from the Gaelic games integration piece: I don't hear anyone selling the benefits of it. The leadership should be going out there singing from the rooftops about just how positive this could be, and we have an opportunity to be world leading in this, you know, Gaelic Games could be a world leader in gender equality if we get it right."

- Megan





An opportunity for the GAA to further enhance equality

As Megan points out in the last part of the above comment, the potential GAA integration is an opportunity for the GAA to further enhance equality and be a national and international leader in this space. Vincent speaks to how a potential integration can amplify the core values of the GAA,

"On the wider scale, everybody benefits from an integrated association. There's [a message that] men don't want to lose out. I don't really think men care. You know, it's been made out to be something bigger than it is. As men, we just want to have a functioning association and with women involved, absolutely, because, you know, that's the right thing to do. If we're going to talk about these values of belonging, inclusion, respect, like we're not living them, because we're segregating half our

population in terms of opportunities being given to them."

- Vincent

Chloe talks to how an integrated GAA would magnify unity and cooperation – hinting at a well-known Irish seanfhocal (proverb) – 'Ní neart go cur le chéile' (strength in numbers):

"I think the GPA has only grown from strength to strength since we've integrated, so that should be like a positive thing for the steering group that are working on the wider [GAA] integration."

- Chloe

The overall message in this theme is that while the scale of GAA integration is complex, the successful philosophy, structures, and leadership demonstrated by the GPA's own integration should inform and guide the GAA's current efforts, particularly by fostering open communication and positive public advocacy.

7. GPA INTEGRATION HAS (CAN HAVE) INFLUENCING IMPACT ON WIDER SOCIETY

The GPA integration, and focus on equality, is, and further can, influence other sporting organisations. Matt reflects on how other sporting organisations have increased their gender balancing governance structures which can only lead to further advocacy for equality:

"We indirectly believe that the government and Sport Ireland have mandated since that the gender diversity on all boards for sporting associations around the country must have a 60/40 gender split... so it's hard to measure that impact. But again, getting more women in administration positions, strategic positions can only help with advocating for equal treatment across men and women."

- Matt

Chloe discusses how the GPA as an organisation is working towards

authentic allyship and can be inspiration for other companies:

"You'll see big companies that just splash up a pride logo in June, and they'll say, 'Happy Pride' from whatever company it is, but do they do anything else other than that? Are they equal for whatever it is, genders or anything beyond that? Probably not. But I think the GPA is one of the organisations where we can actually say that it is, and if everything's not perfect, it is working towards that."

- Chloe

Public impact and the importance of role models for young people

It was acknowledged how the GPA were behind society, but in working towards equality, the GPA can greatly influence society given its public impact – particularly for young



people. Joey reflects,

"[The GPA] was catching up with [wider society] too...I felt we were behind the 8 ball, I don't think we were leading the way globally, even nationally...but at least we did it, we were not sitting on it...however the doing wasn't as impactful as seeing it now...every photograph I seen there are male and female players across four codes, that's powerful...where that makes the biggest impact in society is young people, and young people are the future and I think is a profound impact...even though we may have been behind the 8 ball, we can soon lead the way [because the GPA has the public impact]...you want to see men and women together playing our sports, participation at a young age is impacted by that."

- Joey

This public impact is increased in the context of Gaelic Games as the amateur players have direct contact with communities and the general public. Matt speaks to this unique relationship,

"Most of the role models for players around the world are athletes that aren't within their reach, but we have a very unique opportunity where our role models are in communities, our teachers, our guards [Irish police force], their local schools, and often shows values of the association so that can have a very positive footprint on Irish society."

- Matt

The role models piece here is

particularly important. It is widely known the positive influence role models can have for young people and in shaping their understandings, values, and beliefs. Megan and Matt discuss how the GPA integration can have direct impact on the young people through role modelling and visibility:

"It [benefits of the integration] was that role model piece as well. It was the impact of wider society to say, 'men and women are equal', and we're taking that as a leadership position and if we can communicate that to other parts of Irish society and Irish communities and young boys and girls, that is a really positive message to send out there, because the intercounty players are such role models for young kids, and they make such an impression on the kids in every club and county across Ireland."

- Megan

"We know there is evidence that suggests role modelling does help with participation in sports and for young boys and girls to have positive role models of their of their sex is really important."

- Matt

The potential 'game changing' influence the GAA integration could have on wider society

While the GPA is having a positive influence on wider society, there was a consensus amongst the participants that if the GAA integrated, it could have a game changing positive effect on different aspects of society. Rose



provides an example of how equality in the GAA would influence players to seek equality in other aspects of their lives,

"If we had a Gaelic Games governing body where there was equal investment and opportunity for females, it [would have] a knock-on impact on society, because it automatically changes the expectations of people in other areas. If they are experiencing it in their GAA club, then they will carry that expectation forward with them into other parts of life. I actually think we are probably lagging behind in that, because in education system in Ireland, you're not treated any differently regardless of whether you are male or female. The vast majority of families no longer treating you differently regardless of whether you are male or female. You go into employment; you are treated the exact same to a large degree. So I actually think Gaelic Games has lagged behind the advancements of society and now it needs play catch up, but it has a huge ability to influence society."

- Rose

Expanding on the 'huge ability to influence society', Rose provides an

example of potential influence on immigration:

"One of the recent hot topics in Ireland is immigration and I think the GAA has an incredible opportunity there, because it [GAA] is located in every community in Ireland to actually be the welcome door to Ireland, and to open it, and to bring those people into GAA clubs, into a sense of community when they get to know people, teach them our sport, and give them a sense of identity, and perhaps even an Irish sense of identity."

- Rose

Rather than waiting for the GAA integration for such an influence as identified above, questions can be asked of the GPA – what role do they have in wider society influences? If equality is at the core of the constitution, how can equality be expanded to reach issues and positively influence disadvantaged populations (e.g., immigration as identified above)? While some may argue this is beyond the remit of the GPA, one thing the GPA integration has taught us is that coming together to do the right thing can positively and dramatically change the lifepaths of disadvantaged populations.

CONSIDERATION POINTS

With the above findings in mind, some consideration points are put forward for different readers of this report. allyship will be sown.

For other sporting associations and potential mergers:

1. This research has highlighted the importance of male *authentic* allyship. For a potential female and male association integration, *authentic* allyship is crucial. While allyship from both female and male populations is needed, male *authentic* allyship was the key to this GPA integration. The emphasis here is on the 'authentic'; this is opposite to 'performative' allyship where is it self-serving with a lack of tangible, consistent action. Authentic allyship is action-orientated and uses one's privilege and power to support, advocate for, and work in solidarity with the disadvantaged population to create equity and achieve equality.
2. Visibility of male and female players together is crucial. In the lead up to the GPA integration, this visibility had profound positive effects on the success of the integration, for example, this visibility in fund raising activities in the USA led to the gender equality conditions of the Madden Leadership programme which further had a positive knock-on effect in the integration process.
3. Relationships are at the core of the success of this integration. As pointed out by the participants throughout this report, the

relationships built between male and female players acted as the catalyst for allyship. Invest in relationship building activities, promote relationships between male and females through campaigns, and the seeds of allyship will be sown.

For the wider Gaelic Games and associated NGOs (GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Association):

1. While the complexities of a wider integration (e.g., size, governance structures, multiple organisations etc.) are acknowledged, this research report may act as a blueprint to such an integration. The lessons learned (theme 2) and the principles of the GPA integration are transferrable. As this research report suggests, value-led change is possible. It is this – values – we believe should be the driver of wider integration.

For the GPA:

1. As this report outlines, the integration of the GPA is 'a good news story' and progress is evident throughout. This should not be a stagnant win, and progress can always be further built on. This report shed light on a level of discomfort and uncertainty

with the meaning and intention of equality. This highlights a need for more education around the newest addition to the constitution. While this may seem somewhat theoretical, understanding the differences between equality and equity may reveal a path forward for the GPA. It may be possible that a blend of equality and equity could be next step for the GPA in their goal of equality.

2. As reported, the GPA can have / is having influence on wider society and given its progression in gender equality, an expansion of equality beyond (but continuing to include) gender may be possible. It is crucial to continue to invest in the goal of gender equality as much work needs to be done and as Meyler et al.'s (2024) research, which reviewed mergers of male and female national

sporting organisations, points out: there have been instances of reproduction of real and perceived gender inequalities post-mergers internationally. Alongside this continued investment into gender equality, a possible expansion on equality is not an 'or' situation, but an 'and' situation – gender equality and. A positive example of this has been the GPA LGBTQ+ Pride Brunch held in June (please see picture below). Interestingly, this year (2025), this event held an all-male panel with representatives from the LGBTQ+ male community who are the (visible) minority in Gaelic Games. This is a perfect example of allyship: elevating marginalised voices and using the GPA platform for advocacy. The question, the challenge, the invitation for the GPA now is: how else can they proliferate equality?



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