

Gaelic Players Association

Pre-Budget Submission 2027

Progressing Government Support for Inter-County Players

Summary

Founded in 1999 and formally recognised in 2010, the GPA is the official representative body for elite Gaelic games inter-county players. Our mission is to promote and protect all aspects of player welfare and to provide an independent voice for players.

This submission for Budget 2027 is our proposal to deepen the partnership with Government begun in the last budget and significantly broaden it.

Budget 2027 is the Government's opportunity to deliver further on the positive vision it embraced for Ireland's 4,000 inter-county Gaelic games players in last years budget. It's decision to increase investment in inter-county player supports by €1.6 million in 2026, bringing total annual funding to €7.2 million was welcome.

It was a step towards realisation of an annual investment of €10 million, which would reflect the impact generated by inter-county players, the rising personal cost of participation, and the increased level of State investment in other elite athlete cohorts over the past two decades, which we welcome.

It was also recognition of the evidence-based research in the Indecon Report of December 2024, which was commissioned by the GPA. It set out how inter-county players generate an annual economic impact of €591 million, support more than 4,200 jobs and contribute over €62 million annually to the Exchequer.

Budget 2027 should build on the progress made and recognise as has happened in other sectors, that cost-of-living increases have been a big factor in the interim. It is also an opportunity to deepen the partnership with Ireland's inter-county players, not only to support them as amateurs playing the sport they love to professional standards, but to build on the social dividend players contribute to the community. Inter-county players are immensely proud of their connection to their local people, and they have much more to give back to their communities.

Budget 2027 Proposal

- The GPA seek a further increase of €2.8 million in inter-county player support funding in Budget 2027. This forms part of a clear multi-annual pathway to €10 million annual investment during the lifetime of the current Government. It would also establish the principle that future funding will increase annually and, at minimum, keep pace with inflation and rising participation costs.
- The GPA also seeks continued Government support for the development of the Memorandum of Understanding between the GPA and the Department of Sport.

This would recognise the social contribution of players and create a framework to enhance their contribution to Government public policy objectives across issues and departments.

These proposals are modest, practical and evidence based. They support the amateur status of Inter-county Games and protect it by ensuring that the burden on players does not become unsustainable. This is about supporting a uniquely Irish sporting code on the field, the vibrant community life that fosters it, and is supported by it.

This submission is about money, and it also is about supporting community. It is about developing the partnership between the GPA and the Government in ways that supports players, and the wider public good.

The Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Sport, which is committed to and which we seek delivery of, would formally recognise the role of players in supporting Government priorities across health, wellbeing, education, equality, inclusion, civic responsibility and community development. This builds on a partnership that enhances the positive impact already being delivered by players in communities across Ireland.

The GPA is therefore seeking a further increase in Budget 2027 as the next step towards €10 million annual investment, with future increases at minimum linked to inflation and rising player costs. This increase in investment, modest in the context of the enhanced partnership we seek, will deliver a lot more for our Gaelic games and communities. Our position is based on evidence, not assertion. It is about supporting and securing the amateur code in games where professional standards are the norm.

The Economic Contribution of Inter-County Players

Independent analysis by Indecon confirms the scale of the contribution made by inter-county players. In 2023, inter-county players generated an annual economic impact of €591 million. This included €353 million in Gross Value Added to the Irish economy, more than €62 million in Exchequer contributions and support for over 4,200 jobs nationally.

The economic impact of the inter-county game has increased by more than 50% since 2018. This growth reflects the continuing strength of Gaelic Games and the central role played by county teams and county players in sustaining public engagement.

The inter-county game drives match attendances, broadcasting revenues, sponsorship, tourism, hospitality and local economic activity. This is a uniquely Irish model. It is rooted in amateurism, community and volunteerism. But it is also a model that depends heavily on the willingness of players to absorb the personal and financial cost of performing at elite level without the income associated with professional sport.

That balance is becoming harder to sustain and that is why in an amateur game, money to support players meeting their costs matters.

The Indecon report found that the average player is out of pocket by more than €4,600 annually through travel, nutrition and participation costs. Players also experience lost earning opportunities, reduced overtime, missed career progression and wider professional impacts because of their inter-county commitments. They are real costs incurred by young men and women who are representing their counties at the highest level of Irish sport.

Government support reduces that burden. It helps ensure that elite amateur participation remains sustainable.

Progress and Challenges since Budget 2026

The GPA welcomed the Government's decision to increase player support funding by €1.6 million this year, bringing total annual investment to €7.2 million. It was a meaningful and positive step.

It acknowledged the findings of the Indecon report. It recognised that player costs had increased. It accepted that the value generated by inter-county players was not adequately reflected in the level of support available to them.

However, the increase has not yet delivered on the reasonable level of investment sought by players. The GPA's proposal is for annual investment of €10 million. That figure was modest when set against the €591 million economic impact generated by players and the level of investment afforded to other elite athlete cohorts.

The GPA understands the 2025 increase to have been the beginning of a process. The Minister has indicated that support for players would continue to progress over the lifetime of the Government. Budget 2027 should now deliver on that commitment.

Since the previous Budget, the financial pressures on players have risen. Fuel and transport costs remain a particular concern. Inter-county players routinely travel long distances several times a week for collective training, matches, gym sessions, recovery, analysis, medical appointments and squad activity.

For many players, travel is the largest recurring cost associated with playing inter-county sport. This is particularly true for players who live, work or study away from their county but continue to represent it. The increase in fuel costs has therefore had a direct and immediate impact on the affordability of participation.

Nutrition and general living costs have also increased. These are not optional expenses for elite athletes. Proper nutrition, recovery and preparation are essential to performance and player welfare. Yet players are expected to maintain these standards while absorbing much of the cost themselves.

If Government funding remains static, inflation will steadily erode its value. The result will be that players fall further behind, even where headline funding has increased.

A further increase is needed to maintain momentum, protect the value of the investment already made and provide a credible pathway towards a €10 million annual support. It is also about fully delivering on partnership with Government, not simply in terms for money for players from the Department of Sport, but in what players can do as community leaders to work with Government in supporting participation and awareness of public good policies.

Fair Recognition for Elite Athletes

The case for increased investment is also about fairness. Inter-county players are elite athletes. They perform at the highest level of their sport, in front of large crowds and national audiences, under significant physical and psychological pressure. Their preparation standards are comparable to high-performance sport.

The level of support available to them, however, has fallen significantly below that available to other elite athlete cohorts.

Investment in Olympic and high-performance athletes through the International Carding Scheme has increased substantially over the past two decades. Professional athletes also continue to benefit from dedicated tax supports, including Sportsperson Tax Relief.

The GPA supports investment in Olympic, Paralympic and professional athletes. These supports are important and appropriate. But the gap between those supports and the support available to inter-county players has become increasingly difficult to justify.

Inter-county players, who are a much larger ecosystem, generate substantial economic returns, contribute to Exchequer revenue, support employment and sustain one of Ireland's most important cultural and sporting institutions. Inter-county players should not be left behind in the State's approach to elite athlete recognition.

The GPA welcomes the support and partnership from Government in last year's budget and asks that momentum is continued. This is not about pay-to-play. It is about amateurs being able to play to the highest standard without having to pay an unfair or unaffordable price.

Social Impact and Partnership with Government

The value of inter-county players extends far beyond the pitch and the scope of the partnership between inter-county players and Government should reflect that.

Players are role models, volunteers, mentors, advocates and community leaders. Their influence can support public policy objectives in ways that few other groups can.

The GPA's social impact work shows the scale of that contribution. More than 80% of players voluntarily support community initiatives, and inter-county players collectively contribute an estimated 23,000 volunteer days annually. Players are active in campaigns and programmes linked to mental health, physical activity, road safety, youth leadership, education, inclusion, equality, addiction awareness, community wellbeing and health promotion.

This work directly supports Government's public policy priorities. Players help encourage young people to stay active. They reduce stigma around mental health and help-seeking. They support public awareness campaigns. They promote inclusion, equality and responsible behaviour. They give visibility and credibility to causes that matter in communities.

The GPA welcomes the support and engagement of the Minister and the Department of Sport on the development of a Memorandum of Understanding. The purpose of this MOU is to formally recognise the social value created by players and to establish a stronger framework for collaboration between the GPA, Government Departments and State agencies.

The GPA suggests alignment across areas including:

- **Sport & Physical Activity:** participation, retention, female participation, inclusion
- **Health & Wellbeing:** mental health awareness, help-seeking, resilience, transitions
- **Addiction & Harm Prevention:** gambling harm, alcohol misuse, stigma reduction
- **Safety & Civic Responsibility:** road safety and responsible behaviour
- **Education & Life Skills:** education retention, financial literacy, employability
- **Equality & Integration:** inclusion, diversity, social cohesion and respectful behaviour
- **Sustainability & Climate Awareness:** positive everyday behaviours and leadership
- **Digital Responsibility:** online safety, abuse, and digital wellbeing

In practical terms, structured support could centre on players supporting agreed campaigns awareness amplification, storytelling of players lived experience, and the contribution of data from player engagement to help inform policy understanding.

A formal partnership can help Government better utilise the reach, credibility and leadership of inter-county players. It will also ensure that the contribution made by players is properly recognised and supported.

Budget 2027 Proposal

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These proposals are modest, practical and evidence based. They do not seek to alter the amateur status of Gaelic Games. They seek to protect it by ensuring that the burden on players does not become unsustainable.

Conclusion

The Government gave good leadership in Budget 2026, and increased investment was very warmly welcomed. What was equally important was the reimagination of the relationship with Inter-county players. Listening to and acknowledging the evidence based Indecon Report has reset how our issues are thought about.

Inter-county players are central to one of Ireland's greatest sporting, cultural and community assets. They are amateur athletes, while carrying growing personal, financial and professional costs. They generate hundreds of millions of euros in economic activity. They support jobs and Exchequer revenue. They inspire participation. They give leadership in communities. They support Government priorities across health, wellbeing, equality, education, inclusion and civic responsibility.

In a homogenous world, where sport is increasingly a spectacle swayed by enormous amounts of money, amateur inter-county players play our uniquely Irish games, to astonishingly high levels of attainment, in a volunteer and community culture.

The increase secured in Budget 2026 was a welcome first step. Now it is time to do more, and to broaden and deepen the partnership between Government and Inter-

county players. Money is important, so is parity of esteem for these elite athletes and the context of why support is justified and should be increased.

Budget 2027 provides an opportunity for Government to honour its commitment to continue progressing player supports over its term, protect the real value of investment against inflation, and move towards the GPA's objective of €10 million annual funding.

This is about fairness, recognition and sustainability. It is about supporting elite amateur athletes who continue to deliver exceptional returns for Irish sport, Irish communities and Irish society. The Memorandum of Understanding, which is committed to, would expand and underpin an exciting and fruitful partnership for the future.

The GPA looks forward to continuing to work with Government to achieve that objective.

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