

# **the inclusive GAA club**

## AN CLUB CUIMSITHEACH

### why this is important

The first line of the GAA's Official Guide spells out how the GAA reaches into every corner of the land. That means it reaches out to every person in every corner of the land. In doing this, the GAA works as an anti-sectarian and anti-racist organisation and is fully committed to principles of inclusion and diversity at all levels. This is what the GAA believes in and expects its members to live up to: opting out of these responsibilities isn't an option.

Since the vast bulk of the GAA's work is done at Club level then it follows that we must bring life to these principles of inclusion and diversity at Club level too. They're not just something for our provincial or national leaders: they're something for us to work on and deliver on a daily basis at Club level. If the Clubs don't drive this work forward, then not much is going to happen.

### what do we mean by all this?

The words "Inclusion" and "Diversity" tend to get bandied about a lot. To keep things simple, we should work to these definitions:

-  Inclusion essentially means people having a sense of belonging, of being comfortable in being part of something they value.
-  Diversity means being aware of, accommodating and celebrating difference.

Making people feel included is absolutely central to what the GAA does: we talk about "our" Club and "our" County, about "our" teams and

"our" players. What's more, we actually mean it. But we need to take it to the next level and offer that wonderful sense of belonging to others out there. The great thing about belonging is that no matter how many people we offer it to, it's never watered down!

Inclusion and Diversity in many ways go hand-in-hand. Real Inclusion reflects Diversity, i.e. it's interested in offering that sense of belonging to everyone, irrespective of age, gender, religion, race, sexual orientation and/or disability.

One place where we still have a particular back-log of work is in bringing women, and women's gaelic games, fully on board within the GAA. This is maybe the best starting point for a lot of Clubs.

### what this doesn't mean for the GAA club

Some people worry that by focussing on Inclusion and Diversity we will water down the GAA, making it into something that caters for everything and stands for nothing. This is most definitely not what Inclusion and Diversity are about.

The GAA remains the Gaelic Athletic Association. That means we're proud of and celebrate our Irishness; that we focus on gaelic games and activities; that we're community-based; and that we cherish our amateur and volunteer bases. We don't compromise on those fundamentals. The GAA Club doesn't become a one-size-fits-all organisation. We remain and are proud of what we are: but in doing and remaining true to all that, we should be open and welcoming to others.



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## taking inclusion and diversity forward in the GAA club

Comhairle Uladh has been working to the statement below for some time now:

*“Ulster GAA adheres to the principle that all gaelic games should be fun; fair; delivered in a safe environment; and accessible for all and that coaches, administrators and spectators should adhere to these principles in all areas of GAA activity.”*

Experience tells us that there are a number of straightforward, practical things we can do to take Inclusion and Diversity forward within our Clubs.

The first and most important is to give someone in the Club the role of overseeing this work. That Club Inclusion Co-ordinator should:

- Sit as a member of the Club Executive Committee.
- Establish an Inclusion/Integration Committee if appropriate, involving representatives of all the gaelic codes in the Club.
- Communicate and co-operate with County and Provincial Integration Officers.
- Actively promote and publicise, from the outset, the mutual benefits of working together in the development of gaelic games as a whole.
- Attend workshops and seminars relating to inclusion/integration.
- Begin to identify local groups or communities of people who historically haven't had much to do with the GAA.

- Make a connection with those groups and invite them to “taster” sessions/events run by the Club.
- Look at how the Club might contribute to the work of those groups, e.g. older person's Clubs; women's groups; local disability initiatives; and so on.
- Oversee the development and implementation of the Club inclusion or equality policy .

Once Inclusion and Diversity are on the Club's agenda, then among the things that we know have worked well elsewhere are:

### Disability Games

All people with special needs and/ or a disability should have an equal opportunity to partake in gaelic games to their full potential. A series of County-level events have been organised to encourage Clubs to run activities to cater for members with disabilities. Some of the activities that your Club can run are:

- Adapted FUNdamentals
- Wheelchair hurling and camogie
- Wheelchair football
- Adapted Rounders

The Ulster Council also organises specialist workshops to train coaches in dealing with participants with special needs and/or disabilities. For details see [www.ulstergaa.ie](http://www.ulstergaa.ie)

### Have-a-Go Blitzes

In order to introduce community members who traditionally have not been involved in the GAA the Club can organise “have-a-go” events in conjunction with local schools or



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community groups. "Have-a-Go" events are fun/recreational games events and are usually followed by a social occasion hosted by the Club.

**Health and Wellness Programme**

The Ulster Council's Health and Wellness programme is run out over a series of events across Counties in conjunction with the Ulster Cancer Society. Specific men's and women's health nights are run with a focus on those Club members who have retired from playing and are now focused on Club administration or maybe not actively involved in the Club at all. Additionally, a Drugs and Alcohol programme has been run at County level and in schools providing information on drugs and alcohol-related issues.

Personal health and well-being is an increasing issue for most people. But often people don't want to go to traditional health settings or events. In the past couple of years we've discovered that events run in/by GAA Clubs are much more appealing to many people. By running such events Clubs are being Inclusive and Diverse

... whilst contributing significantly to their local communities. And that was always core GAA business!

To organise a Health and Wellness night in your Club contact the Ulster Council at [www.ulstergaa.ie](http://www.ulstergaa.ie)

**Being Good Neighbours**

Our Official Guide clearly states that GAA Club grounds are solely for the promotion of gaelic games. This however does not prevent Clubs from allowing local community or youth groups to use GAA facilities at otherwise slack times. Such arrangements reflect the GAA Club's role as the anchor in many of our communities and will only strengthen the Club's place in its locality.

**Welcoming the New Irish**

Many, many Ulster GAA people have direct personal or family experience of emigration. They know what it's like to have to go abroad for work, simply because the opportunities don't exist at home. That experience should leave us well-placed to appreciate the plight of the many migrants who now live in our



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The minimum any GAA Club should do under this heading is:

- ↳ Find out how many migrants live and/or work in the local community.
- ↳ Get an idea of where they're from
- ↳ Make contact with them and invite them to a Club function/event/game.
- ↳ Run a migrants-only "Have-a-Go" blitz.
- ↳ Run a cultural evening which mixes-and-matches Irish culture/music/song/dance with theirs.
- ↳ Welcome them into the local community/the GAA.

A number of local migrant support groups and networks are now in place across Ulster. They can give GAA Clubs good advice on language/translation and cultural issues. For more details contact [www.ulstergaa.ie](http://www.ulstergaa.ie)

### Contribute to the Community

Being Inclusive and Diverse isn't just about being reactive to others' needs. It's also about being proactive. Most GAA Clubs, especially in rural areas, act as a constant community resource. Ways in which this can and should happen include:

- ↳ Providing personnel to steward at wakes and funerals.
- ↳ Doing the same for other community events, e.g. church or school-based.
- ↳ Making Club facilities available to local groups and for local events.
- ↳ Taking part in appropriate local campaigns, e.g. re school closures; health plans or planning policies.
- ↳ Club members sitting on local boards and committees, e.g. school governors or Credit Unions.

- ↳ Club members contributing to other more strategic structures such as Local Sports Partnerships.

### Unionist Outreach

In our Province this is a fundamental issue yet is equally the one which can cause the most discomfort. The GAA is confident about its own place, ethos and values. In this, it also respects the place, values and ethos of others. But equally the GAA recognises that in terms of community relations we are where we are and are left with the legacies of several centuries of division and strife.

Recent practice has shown us that in terms of engaging with members of the wider Unionist community there is value in:

- ↳ Inviting Unionist politicians to Club events.
- ↳ Club personnel attending Council events.
- ↳ Clubs supporting EMU (Education for Mutual Understanding) events in local schools.
- ↳ Club personnel attending Ulster-Scots events.
- ↳ Joint cultural events with Ulster-Scots groups.
- ↳ Sharing of good practice in how to manage Clubs and run events with others.
- ↳ Clubs contributing to Councils' Good Relations work.
- ↳ Clubs contributing to the work of the Peace III Cluster Partnerships.
- ↳ GAA people getting involved in local cross-community history and heritage groups and projects.

Above all, the engagement which works best is that which is quiet, low key, not in-your-face and which respects the other person's traditions and perspectives.



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**Six Steps to GAA Club Inclusion**

- Integrate! Merge the local ladies' and men's Clubs into one overall community Club with each code and gender having equal ownership.
- Form links with other community groups. GAA Clubs have a key role to play in every community. It is therefore important to form links with other groups which are also interested in the overall development of your community.
- Have your own "Have-a-Go" day! Run your own blitz for the local ethnic workers in the community.
- Form links with a special school to facilitate and promote gaelic games for people with disabilities.
- Organise a Club Health and Wellness day. Invite health promotion staff into the Club who will provide health checks and advice for members.
- Run a Club "open day" so other community and sporting groups can see what the Club does.

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