

Provincial Championship Groups (Football)

Format

- The Provincial Championship Groups are an amalgamation of the existing competitions, the pre-season tournaments and the National League.
- The Provincial structures are adjusted so that each Province has 8 teams. Please see Box 1.
- The Provincial Championships would run in February and March on a round robin basis, each team playing each other once.
- The Top 4 teams in each Group would progress to Tier 1 of the All-Ireland Series, to be played in June and July. The bottom 4 teams in each Group would progress to Tier 2 of the All-Ireland series, to be played in tandem with the Tier 1. Please see Box 2.
- The top 2 teams in each Group would play in a Provincial Final towards the end of March. No replays, extra time to be used & if required, some form of shootout would decide the winner

Benefits

- It maintains the Provincial structure, while also enhancing their importance by linking them to the All-Ireland series.
- It maintains local rivalries, offering a chance to play your neighbours at least once a year.
- It's provides simplicity & certainty for the scheduling of games; everyone knows when they start and finish and all teams start at the same time.
- All counties are guaranteed a minimum of 7 games and a maximum of 8.
- Most of the games would be competitive as there is an incentive to finish in the Top two and an incentive to avoid the bottom four.
- All teams at the start of the season have a chance to compete for Sam Maguire.
- For “weaker counties”, they can develop within the provincial structures, to enable them to progress to Tier 1.
- All gate receipts to be ring-fenced for the Provincial Council.

Challenges

- Convincing four teams to move from their current Provincial competition
- The groups could be re-named ‘Districts’ or ‘Conferences’ to distinguish their identity
- New York would no longer play in the Provincial championship or the subsequent All-Ireland series. The GAA should devise other mechanisms to showcase our sport & culture abroad e.g. an annual international tournament, involving the UK, Europe, Asia, Australia and US.

Box 1 – Sample of new Provincial structures

Connacht	Ulster	Leinster	Munster
Galway	Donegal	Carlow	Clare
Leitrim	Derry	Wexford	Limerick
Roscommon	Antrim	Wicklow	Kerry
Sligo	Armagh	Dublin	Laois
Mayo	Down	Meath	Offaly
Cavan	Tyrone	Westmeath	Cork
London	Monaghan	Louth	Waterford
Longford	Fermanagh	Kildare	Tipperary

Box 2 - Sample of final League standings

	Seeds	Connacht	Ulster	Leinster	Munster
Tier 1	1	Galway	Donegal	Kildare	Clare
	2	Mayo	Monaghan	Wexford	Cork
	3	Roscommon	Tyrone	Meath	Kerry
	4	Cavan	Armagh	Dublin	Laois
Tier 2	1	Leitrim	Down	Wicklow	Offaly
	2	Sligo	Derry	Westmeath	Limerick
	3	London	Antrim	Louth	Waterford
	4	Longford	Fermanagh	Carlow	Tipperary

All-Ireland Football Series

Format

- The top 4 teams from each Provincial Group compete in the Tier 1 championship (Sam Maguire). The bottom 4 teams from each Provincial Group compete in the Tier 2 championship (name TBC). They both operate to the same format.
- There are 4 Groups of 4, each team playing each other once. The groups will be decided based on how teams finish in the Provincial Groups i.e. The Provincial champions will be No.1 seeds, the runners up No. 2, 3rd place No. 3 and 4th place No. 4. They would be put in separate pots and drawn accordingly. Teams who played each other in their provincial final would not be allowed to be drawn against each other in the All-Ireland series.
- Examples using the above draft include: Galway could be drawn to play Tyrone, Meath and Clare. Leitrim could be drawn to play Derry, Louth and Tipperary.

Benefits

- It would be consistent with the Uachtarán’s vision to pursue a Two-Tier option next year, paving the way for a revised version in 2021.
- There’s no ambiguity about when county teams will play. It removes the uncertainty, which currently exists with the Qualifiers.
- Every county team is guaranteed 3 games in the All-Ireland Series
- “Weaker” counties would have the opportunity to play against “stronger” counties.
- Seeding is dependent on performance in the Provincial Groups, offering fair and transparent competition.
- It provides opportunities to play counties that might not normally meet, throwing up interesting matches across the country.
- Tier 1 and Tier 2 matches could be played together at the same venue, offering a bonanza of games to promote.
- Supporters could buy season tickets for the Provincial Groups and/or the All-Ireland series, providing the GAA with a stable and lucrative income stream.

All-Ireland Football Play Offs

Format

- For both Tier 1 & Tier 2, there are four groups of two. The winners of the All-Ireland series groups are put in one pot, the runners up in another pot and then drawn accordingly.
- Teams from the same All-Ireland series group cannot be drawn to meet each other in the Quarter finals.
- Teams play each other in knock-out Quarter Finals of the All-Ireland Championship Play Offs, continuing with a straight knock-out to the Semi-finals and Final.
- No replays would be allowed and after extra time, some form of shootout would decide the winner.

Benefits

- Re-introduces the drama of knock-out competition to the Quarter Final stage.
- The maximum amount of county games the All-Ireland finalists would have to play is 13

Challenges

- The All-Ireland Football final would be played before the Hurling final, which might be an issue for some.

U20 – Hurling & Football

Format

- To be played at the same time as the Provincial Football Groups and Hurling League, offering several weeks to complete the tournaments
- No U20 player will be eligible to play for their senior county team in the Provincial Championship Groups or Hurling League

Benefits

- It re-asserts the Developmental nature of the U20 competition, offering elite young players the opportunity to showcase their talents, without the risk of burnout
- U20 matches could be played as curtain raisers to the Provincial Group & Hurling League games, allowing young players the chance to play in front of large crowds, giving the GAA further marketing opportunities
- Those in their final year of U20 could be eligible to play for their senior county team in the All-Ireland Football and Hurling series later in the year.

Club Season

Format

- There are two significant windows for ALL club players in the country, regardless of success, to play with their county players. i.e. April & May and August/September.
- Games from October onwards depend on how successful a club team is.
- The new Provincial Group structure would also be used for clubs, offering certainty and fairness. All County champions will have to play 3 knock-out matches to win their Provincial title.
- No replays would be allowed for any club games, including County, Provincial and All-Ireland finals. Extra time would be used and if necessary, some form of shootout would decide the winner.
- A pre-season tournament between local neighbours in other counties would provide an interesting way to prepare for the competitive county competitions.

Benefits

- ALL club players, regardless of success in the knock-out stages of their county championship, will have a defined season from February to September which provides certainty, meaning and regularity.
- With certainty of fixtures, County Boards can actively and effectively promote their county competitions, generating more interest and income e.g. selling club season tickets, offering stronger engagement with local sponsors, etc.
- With a guaranteed schedule, clubs will be better able to develop their talent over a number of seasons, which will ultimately benefit the county team as new talent emerges.
- Regardless of success, ALL clubs in the country would be guaranteed to have 11 weekends with their county players.
- For counties who don't progress to the All-Ireland Playoff's, county players will be available for League games in July & August.
- With meaningful games played on a regular basis across the summer, it will decrease the incentive for players to travel abroad for the summer.
- All club and county competitions would be completed within the calendar year. Teams involved in the final stages of the Club All-Ireland will be able to enjoy their Christmas.
- Clubs will have their county players for the majority of League and all championship games

Challenges

- County Boards must ensure they use the 11 guaranteed weekends with county players for meaningful matches i.e. League or Championship.
- County boards must be mandated to play at least 5 club league games [designated Club (a) – (e)] in June, July and August, so that non-County club players are not idle during these months.
- Dual counties would have to reconfigure their schedule but there are enough weekends to offer sufficient games for both codes.
- The Governance Taskforce currently being discussed should have the capacity to effectively sanction counties who do not use the schedule properly.