

A Chairde,

In what is a difficult period for CLG Dhún na nGall we would like to inform our clubs and supporters that we are reluctantly accepting the resignation of Karl Lacey as Head of Donegal Academy, having exhausted all avenues of mediation.

In 2021 Donegal GAA approached Karl Lacey to lead out, develop and become the head of an Underage Academy. The vision was to establish a best in class environment to identify and support young players development. Donegal GAA was delighted when Karl expressed his interest and enthusiasm for the approach to develop talent within the county. His passion and experience was instantly clear to Donegal GAA. He was given a broad scope to develop his vision of how the Academy should operate and develop.

To maintain the momentum that was building up, it was agreed to start Academy activities and get up and running while governance arrangements were formalised and documented.

It is clear that the Academy achieved early on field success with young player engagement and development. This is in large part down to the hard work and dedication of the Head of Academy and the Coaches, and also the support and efforts of the players and their families.

Time and again we have learned that on field success, particularly with underage, must have proper controls that are transparent for everybody. As the on-field successes of the academy grew so too did the distance in position of the County Board and the Head of Academy on the arrangements. Good control should not interfere with or hinder success, it should provide a sound base to allow it to grow and flourish. Donegal GAA are not only bound by, but fully endorse, GAA governance standards. There has never been any question that any activity undertaken by Donegal GAA must adhere to these standards.

Donegal GAA, including the Academy, are not happy with the arrangements as implemented in the Football Academy. To be clear there is absolutely no suggestion or inference that there was any mal intent or neglect on the part of the Head of Academy or the Coaches. Donegal Management Committee approached the Head of Academy on a number of occasions to try and resolve the matters, but without success. Relations came to a critical point when the head of the Academy decided to offer his resignation. This was followed a week later by a statement by the Coaches. Donegal management greatly regrets, not only the damage that this has caused to GAA within the county, but particularly to the damage and concern it has caused our young players and families who were involved in the Academy. Members of the County Executive spoke to and met with Karl on a number of occasions to see if a meeting could be organised to address the arrangements issues. Again this did not succeed.

There are hard lessons here, that the Board will learn from and accept responsibility for. But falling down is not an excuse to not get back up. Our young players, their families, our underage coaches deserve our very best efforts to provide an environment where they can flourish as people, players and mentors. We need to foster a love for our games that will lead to lifelong participation. We need

good control that doesn't hinder, but supports achievement. This needs to be fair and transparent. To this end the board will present Academy governance arrangements that can be considered and agreed by County Committee. These arrangements are consistent with GAA standards and have been vetted by Croke Park. They deal with

- Roles and reporting arrangements within the academy
- Budgets
- Financial Governance
- Supporting underage in our clubs
- Coaches
- Data Management and Protection
- Season
- Child protection, Safeguarding, Health and Safety
- Reporting to County Committee
- Partnerships with other boards and sports
- Publicity and Social Media
- Use of GAA facilities

There are also good lessons here. The things that made the Academy a success. To the greatest extent this is down to the support it received from the young players, coaches, mentors, parents, and the wider Donegal GAA community who support our games in many ways. At this time, we all need this support more than ever. To this end the board will be seeking to meet with the players (and their families) who participated. We will also be seeking to meet coaches (including interested club coaches, and former Academy coaches). The purpose of these meetings are to identify what worked and what we can build on. We want to agree on

- The vision for the Academy
- The organisation structure of the Academy (both Football and Hurling)
- Player supports and development
- Coaches supports and development

The outcome of these meeting will again be presented to and agreed by County Committee.

We thank Karl Lacey for his outstanding and exemplary efforts, as a strong role model for all that is good in our game. We acknowledge this has been a difficult time for all concerned. The GAA in Donegal should be in a place where excellence is the standard and that we all play our part in ensuring this happens. We wish to be clear that any former Academy coach will be welcomed to participate. We wish Karl every success in his future. By working together we are committed to making our underage development best in class.

Is mise le meas,

Declan Ó'Mairtín,

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