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O'Dwyers GAA Club

Proposed amendment to 2024 Player policy

In light of recent observations and issues raised regarding players playing outside of their appropriate age group. There is a requirement for us to review the gaps in the player policy in order to provide some guidelines on how to manage outlier cases.

This policy amendment is effective from 16th Jan 2026 forward and will not be retrospective.

Why

- **The club has encountered several situations in recent seasons where players have participated outside their natural age grade or moved between teams for various reasons, including academy arrangements, school cohort friendships and practical family circumstances. In addition, the introduction of county development squads at U14 has highlighted the need for clarity around age cohort participation and the process for county nominations; this is a direct consequence of the above issue.**
- **Proposal:** To ensure fairness, consistency and transparency across all age groups, the club proposes to formally adopt an 'Age Grade Participation and Player Development

Policy’, providing clear guidance on age grade participation, exceptional circumstances and county development considerations.

- The intention of this document is to replace the Player Policy amendment dated January 2026 in its entirety. This revised amendment (March 2026) is intended to sit alongside and enhance the existing Player Policy (2024).

Proposed addition to the O’Dwyers Club Player Policy:

Age Grade Participation and Player Development Policy

1. Guiding Principles

The club is committed to supporting the development, participation and enjoyment of all players. Decisions relating to team placement, playing up an age grade and county nominations will be guided by the best interests of the player, the team and the club as a whole.

The club operates within the structures of the Gaelic Athletic Association and recognises the development opportunities provided through county development squads organised by Dublin GAA/LGFA/Camogie Assc.

The club’s primary focus at juvenile level is player development, participation and enjoyment, rather than results.

In exceptional circumstances the club reserves the right, through the Juvenile Committee (or Coaching & Games Committee where a Juvenile Committee does not exist), to make decisions that are in the best interests of the player, the team and the overall development of the club.

Note: For the purposes of this policy, “best interests” will prioritise the player’s development, welfare and enjoyment, while also taking into account fairness to their age group and the overall sustainability of teams within the club.

2. Age Grade Participation

Players should normally play within their own age grade, as determined by their year of birth.

Playing within a player's natural age group supports:

- player development
- team balance
- player retention
- fairness across teams

All players should have the opportunity to develop and enjoy Gaelic games in a positive and supportive environment. Parents should be informed from an early stage of the importance of players participating within their own age grade, particularly before progression to structured teams. This should be communicated through information provided at Nursery or Academy level, including leaflets or other guidance materials.

3. Playing Up an Age Grade

In exceptional circumstances a player may be permitted to participate at an older age grade where it is considered beneficial to the player's development or in the interests of the club.

Any such arrangement must:

- be considered appropriate for the player's development or participation
- not materially impact the ability of the player's own age group to field a viable and competitive team
- be agreed between the management teams of both age groups
- be approved by the Juvenile Committee (or Coaching & Games Committee where a Juvenile Committee does not exist)

Parents or guardians cannot independently move a player to an older age group without club approval.

Where permission is granted, the arrangement will normally be reviewed periodically and may be adjusted if necessary.

Players who are participating at an older age grade should be monitored to ensure the arrangement continues to support their development and enjoyment of the game. Where coaches feel that a player may be struggling at that level, a discussion should take place with the player's parents or guardians and the relevant team management groups to consider whether returning the player to their natural age grade would be more

appropriate. Responsibility for monitoring rests jointly with the relevant team management groups, with any changes agreed through the process outlined in this policy.

4. Playing Up at Younger Age Grades

Players will remain within their own age grade up to and including U12. Movement to an older age grade before U13 will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances and must be approved in line with this policy.

Players may occasionally guest or assist an older team where required for numbers or development, but they will remain primarily part of their own age group (as per the existing player policy). All such requests must be agreed between the relevant team management groups. Coaches should not approach players or parents directly without prior agreement between team management.

This approach helps maintain balanced teams and positive development environments.

5. Example of Exceptional Circumstance

An exception may be considered where it supports player participation, retention or the sustainable organisation of teams within the club.

For example, if a player introduces a friend to the club who is eligible for a younger age grade, but who will only join the club if they can play alongside their friend in the older age group, the club may allow the younger player to join the older age group.

Such an arrangement:

- must follow the approval process outlined above
- will normally apply to an individual player and will be considered on a case-by-case basis
- may be reviewed during the season

If more than one such player joins, they should normally participate in their own appropriate age grade team, rather than multiple players moving to the older group.

The intention of this exception is to encourage participation while maintaining appropriate team numbers and a positive playing environment for all players.

6. Team Allocation and Movement Between Teams

At younger age grades the club may organise players across teams to ensure:

- balanced teams
- appropriate playing opportunities
- positive development environments

Players should remain with the team to which they are assigned for the season.

Movement between teams or age grades may only occur where approved by the Juvenile Committee (or Coaching & Games Committee).

Players or parents should not move between teams based on perceived team strength or results.

7. County Development Squads (U14)

The club recognises that county development squads provide valuable opportunities for some players; however, the primary objective of juvenile sport within the club is the development, participation and enjoyment of all players, rather than progression to county squads.

County development squads generally begin at U14 level.

When considering players for nomination to county trials:

- All players within the relevant birth-year age cohort of the club shall be eligible for consideration.
- Earlier team placement or participation at an older age grade does not confer automatic preference or priority.
- Decisions taken at younger age grades (U8–U12), including playing up, will not determine eligibility for county nomination.

8. County Nomination Year Consideration (Football, Hurling & Camogie)

In the county nomination year (typically U14), the club will seek, where practical, to ensure that players participate and train primarily with their natural age cohort, as this is the group from which county nominations will be considered.

This approach supports fair assessment of players within the age range and promotes strong team development at that age grade. Where players have been participating at an older age grade, the U14 management team should engage with the relevant coaches to ensure those players are considered appropriately within their birth-year cohort.

Accordingly, the club may consider asking players who have previously been playing at an older age grade to play with their natural age group for that season, provided that doing so:

- supports fair consideration of the age cohort
- does not significantly weaken the team they have been playing with
- is agreed between the relevant management teams.

Any such decision should involve consultation between the relevant team management groups and the Juvenile Committee (or Coaching & Games Committee).

9. County Nomination Process (Football, Hurling & Camogie)

The U14 management team will be responsible for identifying and recommending players for county development squad trials, as they work most closely with the players at that age grade. Their recommendations will form the basis of the club's nominations, with oversight from the Juvenile Committee (or Coaching & Games Committee where a Juvenile Committee does not exist) to ensure the process is fair and in line with club policy. Player assessment and selection criteria are outlined in a separate club document and will be applied by the U14 management team as part of the nomination process. Assessment will be based on ongoing observation by the U14 management team throughout the season.

In making recommendations, the U14 management team may consider:

- player ability and potential
- commitment to training and matches
- attitude and teamwork
- overall development within the age group

All players within the relevant birth-year cohort must be considered eligible for nomination. It is the responsibility of older age group management teams to inform the U14 management team of any eligible players within their squads.

The Juvenile Committee (or Coaching & Games Committee, where a Juvenile Committee does not exist) will provide oversight of the process to ensure that nominations are fair, transparent and consistent with club policy.

The role of the committee is to ensure that the process is applied correctly and fairly, not to determine individual football, hurling, or camogie selections. Judgement on player ability and recommendations for county development squad nominations in football, hurling and camogie rest with the U14 management team. Oversight will involve confirming that the agreed process has been followed and that all eligible players have been considered.

Club nominations represent recommendations only and do not guarantee selection for county trials or participation in county development squads.

The principles of this policy apply across all juvenile age grades within the club. Decisions relating to age grade participation, player movement and development pathways should be applied consistently within this context and in line with the relevant governing body guidelines.

10. Club First Principle

The club's priority is the long-term development and enjoyment of all players.

Participation in county development squads is recognised as a valuable opportunity but does not determine a player's future potential. All players are encouraged to continue developing and enjoying their participation in Gaelic games at club level.