

# Gaelic4Teens Programme Evaluation Donegal December 2022

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SPORT  
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**Gaelic4Teens**

**Report compiled by Dr. Wesley O’Brien and Dr. Irene Hogan**

### **Evaluation Acknowledgements:**

The Gaelic4Teens programme is led by the **Ladies Gaelic Football Association** and is funded by the dormant accounts funding through **Sport Ireland**. The programme aims to assist clubs in retaining their current playing participant numbers, while also recruiting players in the 13-17 years of age bracket, which has been identified as a group with a high drop-out rate. The 2022 Gaelic4Teens programme was led by William Harmon and colleagues in the **Ladies Gaelic Football Association (LGFA)**, in partnership with the Donegal Local Sports Partnership.

Both the Cavan (2020) and Wicklow (2018) Gaelic4Teens evaluations focused on the coaches’ experiences of the programmes, which resulted in changing both content and delivery methods for subsequent iterations. The most recent evaluation completed on the Cavan Gaelic4Teens programme strongly recommended that future Gaelic4Teens evaluations would include the player’s voice, which is the cornerstone of the current report.

In the current evaluation, there were nine clubs involved in the Gaelic4Teens programme, with the table below outlining the breakdown of the 115 players from Donegal that took part in the evaluation process. It is unknown why there is such a disparity between the clubs in terms of participants contributing to the evaluation, however, such disparate participant numbers are not uncommon in data collection..

**Table 1: Number of participants from each Gaelic4Teens Club**

<b>Club</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>
Cardonagh	1
Four Masters	53
Kilcar	11
Moville	2
Naomh Columba	10
Naomh Muire	4
Red Hughs	15
Sean Mac Cumhaill	10
Urris	9

The 115 players were representative of teams at the following age levels - 29% U14, 55% U16 and 53% Minor. Players had the opportunity to tick all age groups they play with, therefore, the total percentage values listed in the sentence previously is greater than 100%.

This evaluation focuses firstly on the quantitative responses from the players, as derived from the participant self-report survey questions. The survey was distributed via a survey monkey link, as sent to the club co-ordinator – this survey was then forwarded to the parents/guardians/care givers of the participating club players involved. All parents/guardians/care givers were asked to fill in the questionnaire with their daughters present.

The second section of this evaluation focuses on the qualitative data, as gleaned from the rich responses which highlight the players voice and experiences, following their involvement in the 2022 Gaelic4Teens programme. The term Gaelic4Teens will be shortened to G4T from this point forward within the report.

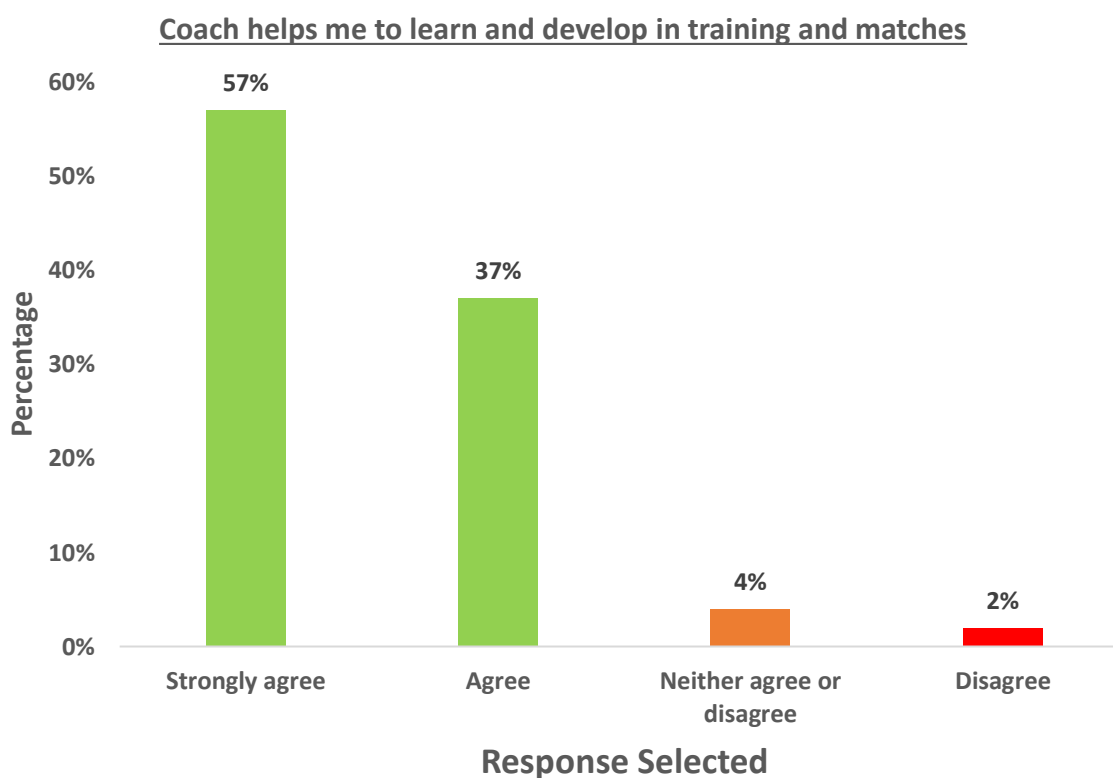
## Quantitative Results for G4T Programme

### Result 1 Coach helps me to learn and develop

At the end of the G4T programme, when participating teenagers were posed with the question ‘*My coach helps me to learn and develop in all training sessions and matches*’, **57%** of participants strongly agreed with this statement, which reflects very well on athlete development upon completing the G4T programme.

Furthermore, a noteworthy **37%** of participants tended to also agree with this statement. A small **4%** of participants neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement, and a very minimal percentage (**2%**) of participants disagreed that their coach actually helped them to learn and develop in all training sessions and matches.

Overall, it can be reported that **94%** of participants either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement ‘*My coach helps me to learn and develop in all training sessions and matches*’, which reflects very well on the overall outcomes of the G4T programme.



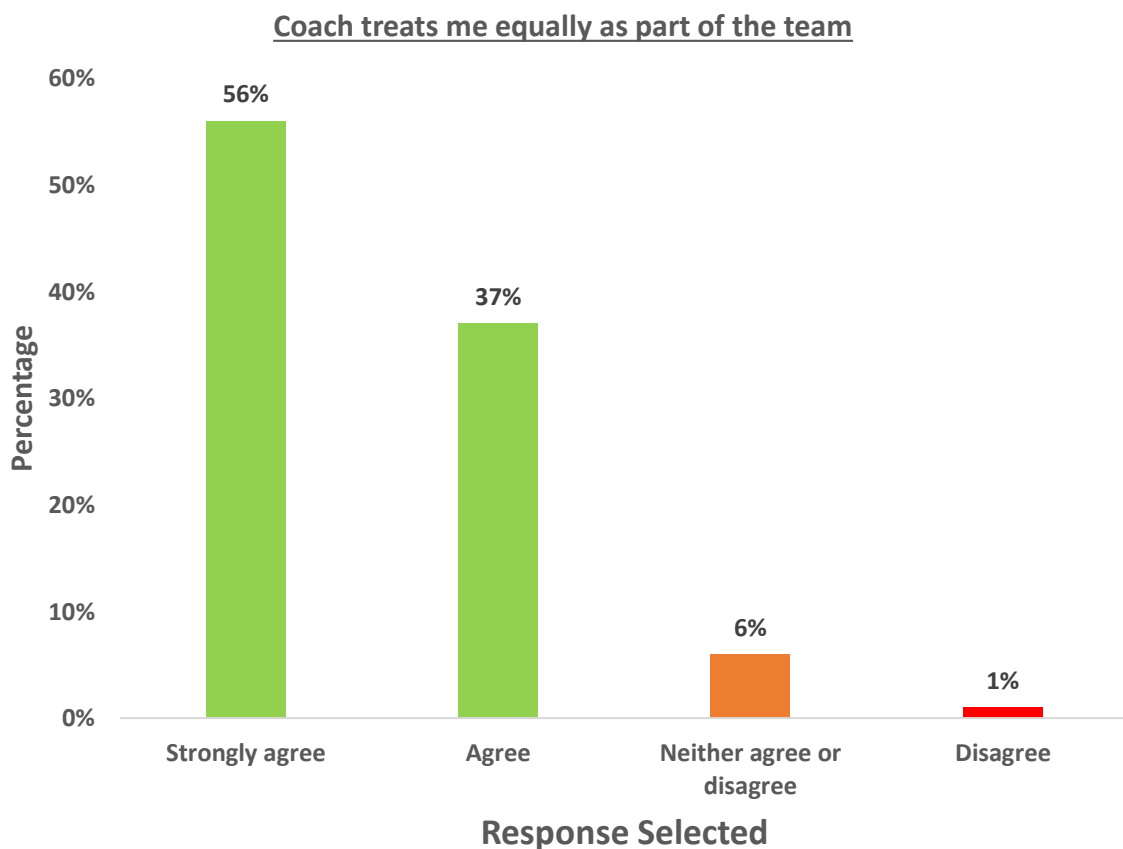
**Figure 1. Percentage of participants who reported that their coach helps them to learn and develop in all training sessions and matches**

## Result 2 Coach treats me equally as part of the team

At the end of the G4T programme, when participating teenagers were posed with the question ‘*My coach treats me equally as part of the team*’, **56%** of participants strongly agreed with this statement, which reflects very well on the inclusion aspect of the G4T programme.

Furthermore, a noteworthy **37%** of participants tended to also agree with this statement. A small **6%** of participants neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement, and a very minimal percentage (**1%**) of participants disagreed that their coach treats them equally as part of the team.

Overall, it can be reported that **93%** of participants either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement ‘*My coach treats me equally as part of the team*’, which reflects very well on the overall inclusion component of the G4T programme.



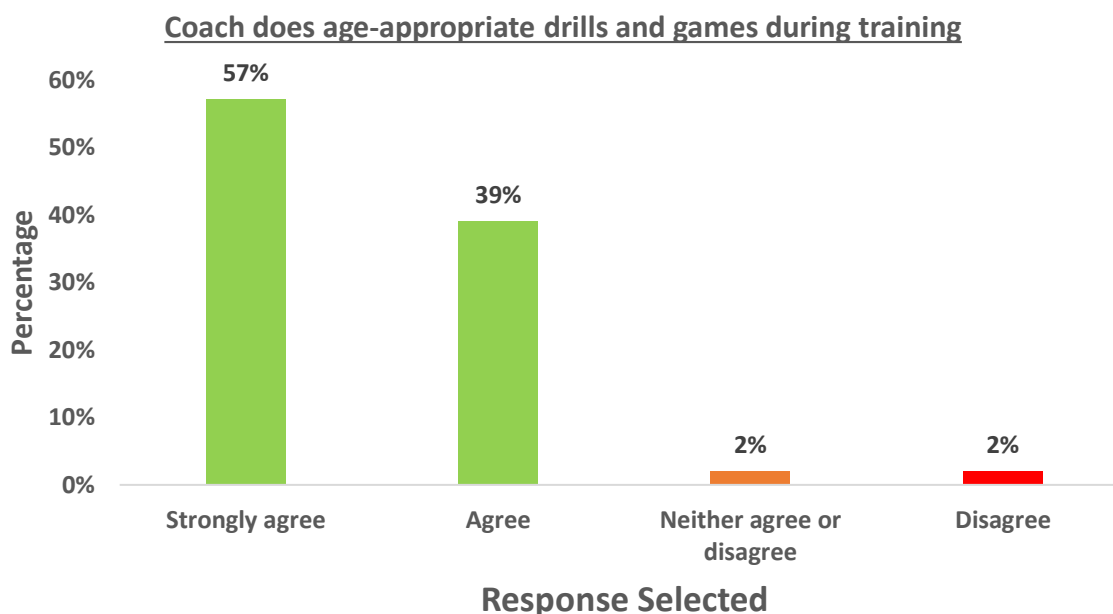
**Figure 2. Percentage of participants who reported that their coach treats them equally as part of the team’**

### Result 3 Coach does age-appropriate drills/games during training sessions

At the end of the G4T programme, when participating teenagers were posed with the question ‘*My coach does age-appropriate drills and games with us during training sessions*’, **57%** of participants strongly agreed with this statement, which reflects very well on the age-focused relevance of coaches within the G4T programme.

Furthermore, a noteworthy **39%** of participants tended to also agree with this statement. A small **2%** of participants neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement, and a further small percentage (**2%**) of participants disagreed that their coach actually does age-appropriate drills and games during training sessions.

Overall, it can be reported that **96%** of participants either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement ‘*My coach does age-appropriate drills and games with us during training sessions*’, which reflects very well on the selected teenager population of the G4T programme.



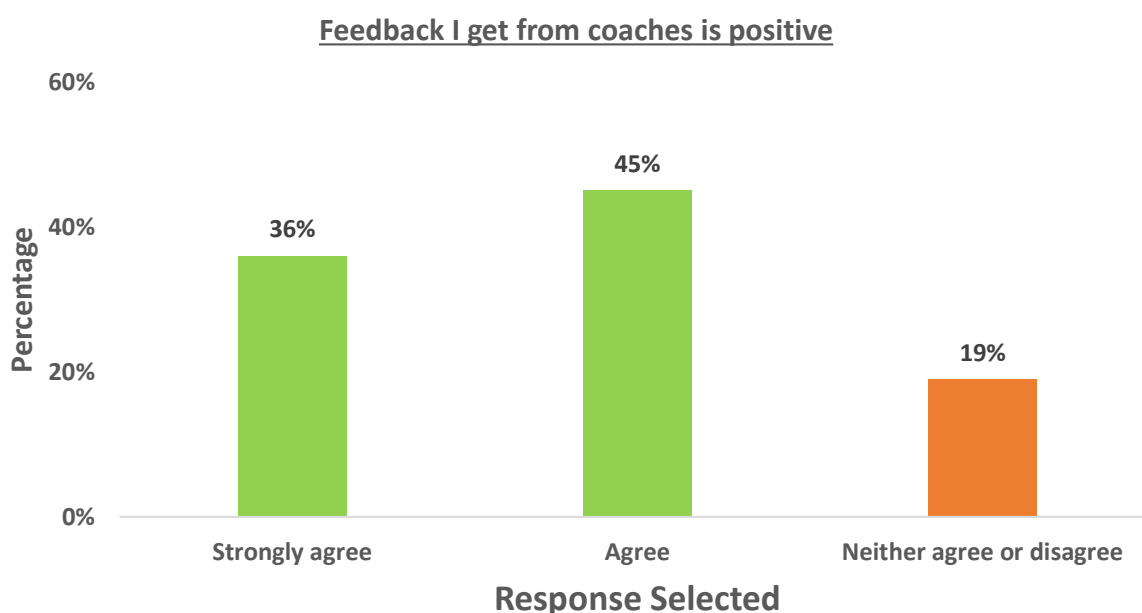
**Figure 3. Percentage of participants who reported that their coach does age-appropriate drills and games with them during training sessions**

### Result 4 Feedback I get from coaches is positive

At the end of the G4T programme, when participating teenagers were posed with the question ‘*The feedback I get from coaches is positive*’, **36%** of participants strongly agreed with this statement, which reflects optimistically on the provision and style of coach feedback offered to players within the G4T programme.

Furthermore, a noteworthy **45%** of participants tended to also agree with this statement. Interestingly, a notable **19%** of participants neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement, which does highlight that a large proportion of teenage players were unable to comment on the directional nature of feedback being offered to them by coaches.

Overall, while it can be reported that **81%** of participants either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement ‘*The feedback I get from coaches is positive*’, the research does highlight that the professional development of coaches working with female teenagers may need heightened opportunities to understand the intricacies of providing meaningful feedback to players associated with the G4T programme.



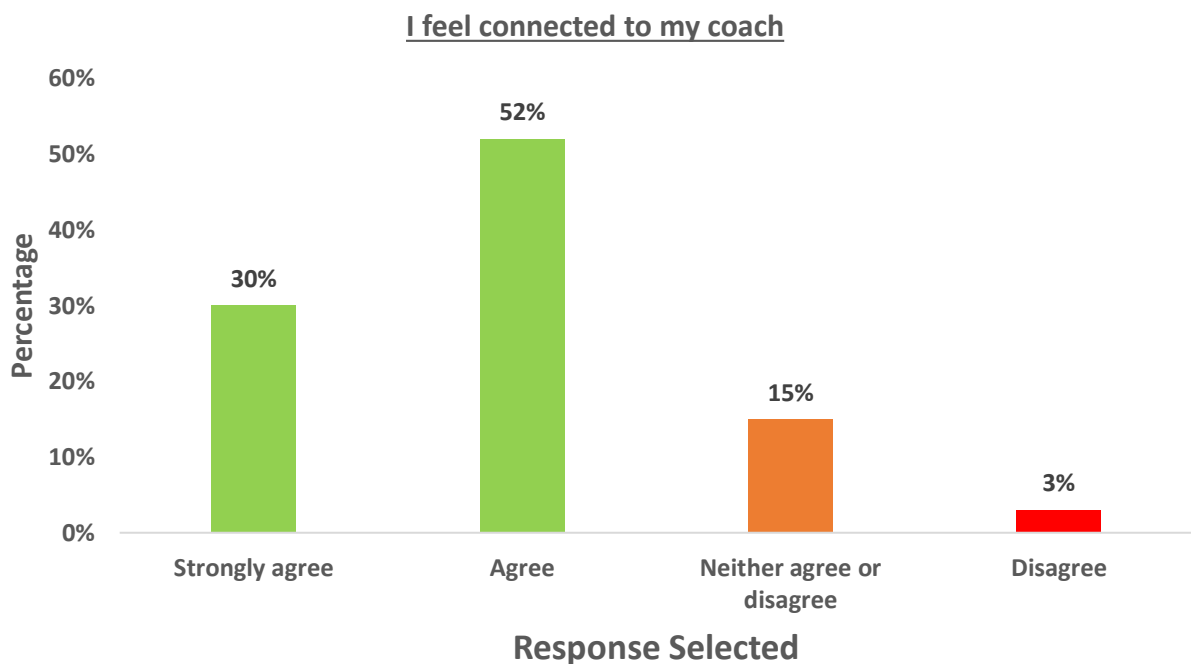
**Figure 4. Percentage of participants who reported positive coach feedback during the G4T Programme**

### Result 5 I feel connected to my coach

At the end of the G4T programme, when participating teenagers were posed with the question ‘*I feel connected to my coach*’, **30%** of participants strongly agreed with this statement, which again reflects optimistically on the possibility of establishing connected relationships between the coaches and players working within the G4T programme.

Furthermore, a strong **52%** of participants tended to also agree with this statement. Interestingly, a notable **15%** of participants neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement, which does highlight that a sizeable proportion of teenage players were unable to comment on whether they felt connected (or not) with their coached. Additionally, a small percentage (3%) of participants disagreed with the statement of feeling connected to their coach at the end of programme.

Overall, while it can be reported that **82%** of participants either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement ‘*I feel connected to my coach*’, the research does highlight that the connection and establishment of relationships between coaches and players within club level Ladies Gaelic Football is not that apparent for 18% of participants, who specifically engaged within this iteration of the G4T programme.



**Figure 5. Percentage of participants who reported that they feel connected to their coach during the G4T Programme**

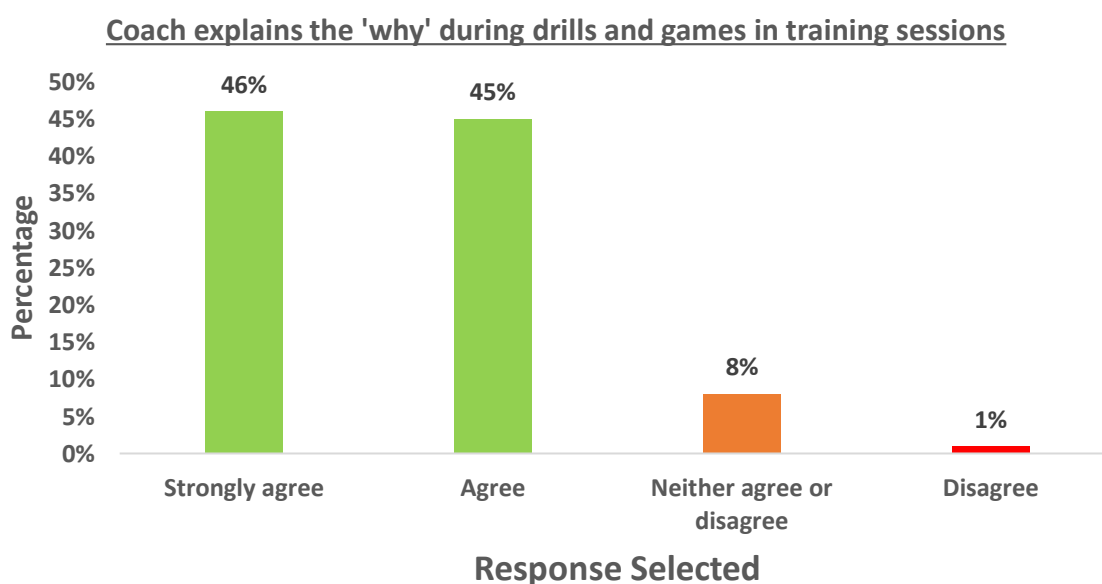


### Result 6 Coach explains the 'why' during drills and games in training sessions

At the end of the G4T programme, when participating teenagers were posed with the question *'My coach regularly explains why we are doing a particular drill or game in training sessions'*, **46%** of participants strongly agreed with this statement, which highlights the value that coaches are placing on the 'why' explanation elements of technical and tactical components of Ladies Gaelic Football with players participating within the G4T programme.

Furthermore, a strong **45%** of participants further tended to also agree with this statement. Only **8%** of participants neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement, which positively highlights the value that coaches are placing on the 'why' explanations within training during the G4T programme for teenage players. Additionally, a very small percentage (1%) of participants disagreed with the statement of coaches regularly explaining why they are doing a particular drill or game in training sessions at the end of programme.

Overall, it can be reported that **91%** of participants either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement *'my coach regularly explains why we are doing a particular drill or game in training sessions'*. This research highlights that following the completion of the G4T programme, coaches are placing a consistent integrated focus on explaining the 'why' drills and games within training sessions for players.



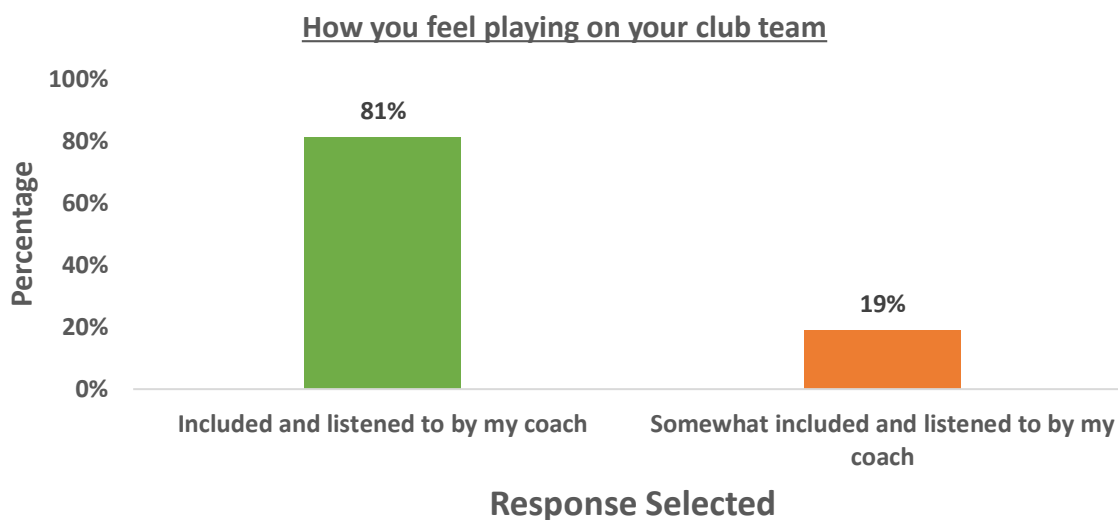
**Figure 6. Percentage of participants who reported that their coach explains the 'why' during drills and games in training sessions**

### Result 7 How you feel playing on your club team

At the end of the G4T programme, when participating teenagers were posed with the question ‘Which of the following best describes how you feel playing on your club team’, **81%** of participants stated that ‘I feel included and listened to by my coach’ within the G4T programme.

Interestingly, **19%** of participants opted to state that ‘I have felt somewhat included and listened to by my coach’ within the G4T programme, which suggests that almost one fifth of playing teenage participants did not feel fully included and listened to within the programme.

Overall, while it can be reported that **81%** of participants self-disclosed that they felt fully included and listened to by their coach, this research does suggest that a sizeable 19% of participants felt only somewhat included and listened to by their coach during the G4T programme. This is an important area for coach education professional development within the next iteration of the G4T programme.



**Figure 7. Percentage of participants who reported how they feel playing on their club team**

### Summary Overview of the G4T Findings

In summary, positive findings over time were generally observed across the 7 x measured quantitative variables and domains of interest within the G4T programme in Donegal 2022 – these are denoted in the table below with a green tick identifiable on 4 x occasions below. Three findings regarding challenges to consider for the G4T programme in 2023 were identified from coach feedback, coach connection and coach inclusion perspective - these are denoted in the table below with a red X identifiable. In sum, quantitative self-report measurements were taken at upon completion of this G4T programme. The data presented below suggests a positive programme rollout in Donegal 2022, however, with specific targeted areas for improvement in 2023.

**Table 2: Summary of the questionnaire indicators, which resulted in specific changes over time (green tick = positive; red x = challenges to consider)**

Coach helps learning and development	✓
Coach treats me equally as part of the team	✓
Coach does age-appropriate drills/games	✓
Feedback from coach is positive	✗
Feel connected to by my coach	✗
Coach explains the ‘why’ in drills/games	✓
Feel included and listened to by my coach	✗



For the most part, the players were happy with what their coaches were doing and many reported on the elements they wanted their coaches to continue as outlined below.

*“Keep doing everything they are doing”*

*“Continue encouraging us”*

*“Continue being positive after each game, keep our heads up”*

*“Keep encouraging us to come to trainings to improve ourselves singly so when we are a team, we are all improving together”*

These generic terms were added to with sport specific examples that the players wanted their coaches to continue doing.

*“Keep doing skill improving drills”*

*“Keep playing small games during training”*

*“I would like to continue doing new drills that help us improve our skills”*

This is an encouraging outcome, as positive coaching behaviours are focused on in many of the self-directed and directed modules during the G4T programme.

The players were clear on elements that they wanted their coaches to stop doing also.

*“Stop trying to stop a play or drill to talk over it as we are standing about getting cold”*

*“Stop doing some drills that might not benefit us”*

In terms of what players wanted their coaches to start doing next season, the following sum up the most common sentiments.

*“Changing up the drills every week instead of the same stuff”,*

*“Tell me where I go wrong or if I can do something right”,*

*“Trying new drills, motivating the team”,*

*“Allowing more time for questions”*

For many players, they wanted their coaches to give more personalised feedback that would aid their development as players, which would ultimately benefit the team as alluded to below.

*“Include personal feedback*

*“Keep encouraging us to come to trainings to improve ourselves singly so when we are a team, we are all improving together”*

*“Tell me where I go wrong or if I can do something right”*

Such curiosity to want to develop and improve was also cemented by their request for more questioning in training sessions, along with clear explanations on the drills being used.

*“Continue giving feedback and explaining why we do the drills we do explaining why we do certain drills and the importance of them”*

*“Complex drills that requires us to think”*

*“I would like my coaches to keep listening to all the players so that everyone is heard”*

*“Listen to players point of view”*

*“New ideas, more player feedback”*

Allowing for players to make decisions as is implied in these quotes above is evidence of good coaching practice within the current G4T programme.

With regards to players’ thoughts and perceptions on being valued by their coaches many had positive affirmations.

*“Very supportive and nice people”*

*“They care a lot about us”*

*“He makes me feel like I am a part of the team and doesn’t leave anyone out”*

*“Positive feedback when training well”*

*“They recognise my efforts”*

This positive reinforcement bodes well for the messaging from the G4T programme and webinar content. One standout message within this section was from one specific player, who valued enjoyment over winning, which is evidently encouraged by her club and should be commended in this report.

*“We are all equally valued on the team and although it is lovely to win, we enjoy the game whatever the result is.”*

Contrary to this, however, were a small group of players that reported areas their coaches could improve on.

*“They can value the players who play better more”*

*“More structured management”*

Additionally, one player commented they would like their coach to *“calm down”* while others wanted to see an increase in motivational activities.

*“Push players a little bit more to show them what they can do, try to help them to gain motivation”*

*“Be more motivating and inclusive of all members of team”*

*“Instil confidence in players”*

In relation to the content of sessions, it was alluded to by a significant number of players that they require more ideas and drills at training rather than doing the same thing continuously. The following sample of quotes reiterates this point.

*“I would like my coaches to add in new drills”*

*“Don’t always have the same drills”*

*“Like her to have some new drills and warm-ups”*

*“More simple and interesting drill”*

*“Better drills to help the team play better”*

A number of the players mentioned small-sided games and game time as something they sought more of.

*“More small games at training”*

*“To continue having game time at training, you learn from your mistakes during game time.”*

*“Do more little games at training for practice.”*

*“Continue small sided games.”*

Along with this sport specific content at training, there was an emphasis placed on the need for the physical attributes of the game to be developed and implemented. Several players wanted an increase in stamina and physical fitness work, alongside increased intensity levels and strength training.

*“Continue with the drills that include plenty of running and ball work because it helps us become fitter without even noticing that much”.*

While the terms used were general, the onus is on the coaches to ensure that all aspects of the game are being coached in an age-appropriate manner. The overarching positive coach athlete relationship that the responses suggest is very important to ensure that the players continue in the sport and do not drop out, as is so prevalent within the teenage cohort in Ireland.

The final question asked of the players was to determine what the Gaelic4Teens programme means to them. The majority of responses at this point were extremely positive and ranged from gaining more confidence, to having more opportunities to play matches, with one player extremely tuned into the aim of the G4T programme.

*“An education system allowing coaches to get the initiative and trying to add in fun coaching sessions to keep teenagers interested in the sport and not put them off”*

For many, it meant that they were part of a positive environment *“It means a positive environment for us to improve and adds variety”* and really benefited from the intercounty players visit.

*“Loved having X at the club, wish we saw more of our county players and have them at our trainings more often”*

The overarching feeling among the participants was that the G4T programme was a great initiative to keep teenage players in the game as summarised in the following statements.

*“I think it’s very important to encourage young girls to keep at sport*

*“It will help me throughout my Gaelic journey.”*

*“It is a way for Gaelic to be improved for teens and aids development in training and matches”.*

*“It was a great incentive to continue playing my Gaelic football”*

Having such a positive experience throughout the G4T programme means the players saw the benefit of continuing to play ladies gaelic football and potentially reduce the attrition rates from the sport in these nine clubs.

*“When we get to teens that is when most people stop playing Gaelic”*

However, for one player she did not know about the G4T programme until the survey was sent out to her as she mentions below.



*“Nothing, first time I heard about it was when my mum asked me to do this survey”*

### **Gaelic4Teens Future Recommendations**

- Seek to ensure that the coach education provided to coaches in 2023 places a meaningful emphasis of the importance of ‘coaches providing positive feedback’ to all participating teenage players. Such coach education examples could include ‘role play’ or ‘applied case study practice’ in 2023.
- As part of the future Gaelic4Teens programme rollout, this research report recommends that additional coach education development opportunities are provided to coaches in terms of connecting with their teenage players. While tactical and technical elements of Ladies Gaelic Football are essential components of the sport, this Gaelic4Teens programme should strive for meaningful ‘coach/player’ connections at club level (which will indirectly contributing to preventing the age-related decline in female teenager sport dropout).
- Given the recent policy level developments across the island of Ireland towards inclusive sport engagement for all, it is of the utmost importance that the 2023 iterations of the Gaelic4Teens programme build coaches confidence towards including teenagers of all abilities (e.g. physically, intellectually, psychologically, emotionally etc...) in community club-level sport. The coach has the potential to be a real ‘active agent’ in this domain of meaningful and fully inclusive Ladies Gaelic Football participation for teenage players.
- Continue to provide resources to the coaches with new ideas, drills and games for training sessions, as the players want this variety. Additionally, encourage coaches to develop their own additional drills and games outside of their regular items.
- It is apparent from the responses that the psychosocial aspect of player development is getting ample consideration by the coaches, which must be commended as an invaluable aspect of player retention for these age groups. Yet, the players demand an increase in physical training. The G4T programme could include a greater emphasis on the physical demands of the game and training for coaches in the sport specific and age-appropriate content.

- Ensure that all clubs actively promote the G4T initiative to all club members, especially those players and parents of the teams that have their respective coaches involved in the programme. A suggestion might be for the LGFA to hold a webinar with all club members at the start of the programme outlining what the aims and demands of the programme are.
- The intercounty player visiting the clubs to do a best practice coaching session has always proved popular with the coaches and now the players also. There is an opportunity for a wider roll out of a similar model in all counties outside of the G4T programme. Once a link is established with relevant intercounty players, the clubs can continue with this approach each season.
- Consider seeking the players voice from the individual clubs involved in the G4T programme prior to it starting so that meaningful comparisons could be made of the influence of the course content on coaching behaviours and actions following completion.
- Given the success of this G4T programme in Donegal and the previous groups in Cavan and Wicklow, it is imperative that the LGFA promote these positive findings along with making the relevant resources available to as many clubs as possible, so the coaches and ultimately the players can reap the benefits of this programme. Continue to promote the key messages for coaching the teenage player for all coaches, not just those in clubs that are taking part in the G4T programme.

### **Gaelic4Teens Conclusion**

The player’s voice was a very positive part of this current report evaluation, as the majority of participants were happy with the coaching environment they were (and will be continue) to be involved in. The overall sentiment of the players is that the G4T programme is beneficial to them as players and to their coaches. Many of the key areas that the coaches covered in the G4T content focused on the positive environment for players, allowing the players to have a voice and ensuring that age-appropriate activities are conducted during the training sessions. The players are eager to continue playing ladies football which is a valuable outcome of the programme for this age cohort, that often struggle with high dropout rates. By targeting elements in 2023 specific to the provision of coach feedback to players, coach and player connections, and player inclusivity, the G4T programme will continue to

strengthen its profile across the island in terms of female teenager sport participation. This evaluation continues to validate that the G4T programme is effective in reaching its aim. This is summed up very nicely using the words of one of the players, which shows the alignment between the aims of the G4T programme and the players’ experiences.

*“It’s a really good programme that listens to teenage Gaelic players”*