

**Comhaltas in Britain Convention 2023
(Holiday Inn, Kenilworth: 18/19th February)**

Meeting Minutes

Actions

Action	Contact
Template for applications to deliver workshops in care homes	Paddy Callaghan
Information for youth about TTCT on the CinB website	Michael Fitzgerald
Translation of CinB mission statement and key IIP objectives for dissemination to younger members and general membership	Calum McGregor / Mairi Doherty
Hard copy of Investors in People report to be circulated to regions	Paddy Callaghan
Information about funding for Irish language workshop	Evin Downey / Theresa C Gallagher
Dissemination of YouTube episodes for Irish language	Michael Nevin / Evin Downey
A copy of the recent financial statement to be provided alongside these minutes	Patrick Morrison
Copy of Safeguarding document for anyone interested, get in contact with Paddy	Paddy Callaghan

Please address all correspondence to Comhaltas in Britain Rúnaí Patrick Ballantyne (patrickballantyne@comhaltas.co.uk)

Attendees

Provincial Council: *Theresa Gallagher (TG), Patrick Ballantyne (PB), David Browne (DB), Michael Fitzgerald (MF), Calum McGregor (CM), Mairi Docherty (MD), Evin Downey (ED), Julie O'Hare (JOH), Moira Callaghan (MC).*

Staff: *Paddy Callaghan (PC), Patrick Morrison (PM).*

Membership: *Ann Connelly, Lukas Connelly, Pete Cunningham, Jim McKenna, Paul McCormack, Rosemarie Cassidy, Mairi Campbell, Michael Nevin, Patrick Gallagher, Margo Gallagher, Tony Gallagher, Brian Carmichael, Donal Murphy, John Goulding, Mick Nixon, Siobhan Kelly, Marian Dwyer, Syl Cullen, Boo Cullen, Rosaleen Duddy Owens, Al Owens, Wendy Doherty, Carmel Burke, Ellen Hynes, Michelle Hemmingway, John Burke, Anna-Marie Jordan, Jarlath Mulhern.*

Total Attendees: 40.

Apologies

Peter Fawcett, Majella Bartley, Chris Boland, Sarah Wade, Maureen Martin, Alan Worswick, Debbie Lynch, Anne Conne, Ben Goodyear.

Welcome & Introduction

TG opened the meeting at 13:40, summarised key changes that have taken place over the last 6 months. Lack of minutes acknowledged. TG paid tribute to Maire Doolin, Margaret Webster, Patrick Morrison and Siubhan Macauley, all of whom are/have left Comhaltas in Britain.

Previous Minutes

TG reviewed agenda of last convention in place of lack of minutes. No matters arising.

Current Annual Report

TG opened the floor to comments. Rosaleen Duddy Owens acknowledged the great effort of this year's annual report – better than first class! TG thanked PM for compiling.

TG did a quick overview of last year's annual report, again in place of a lack of previous AGM minutes. Paid tribute to Seamus Brogan, and wished the family all the best in Ireland.

PM took the lead on an overview of current annual report, did a quick review of it. PM reminded branches to send in anything relating to activities that they have been involved in. Acknowledged funding sources for Comhaltas in Britain activities – ESP, Investors in People, European Folk Network, Irish in Britain.
Annual report proposed by RD, seconded by CB.

Funding Update (Dementia Money)

TG reminded all attendees to get their funding sorting this weekend. Good news about money - from the funding we have £500 per region for workshops/music

workshops in care homes. Funds can be used however each region sees fit, but we recommend £100 per session in care homes. Regions must complete project application form before this money can be issued, it is still subject to the ESP terms and conditions and regions must report back on the activity after it is completed.

Marian Dwyer queried receipts and impact statement, what does this mean? PB suggested setting up a template, to be designed by PC and circulated to regions. PM said the first step is to request for money, before doing the workshop.

Question from ED about how to run these kind of workshops? Is there a template available to us? PM confirmed no template available, but Josie Nugents case studies could be very helpful to people. Marian Dwyer queried how performances and workshops can be differentiated, PM confirmed funding cannot be used for performance and must be educational/participatory.

Relevant Correspondence

No correspondence since MF installed as temporary secretary.

TTCT Caroline Fegan Scholarship

TG gave an overview of the scholarship in honour of musician Caroline Fegan, delighted to be able to honour Caroline. MF was the successful candidate this year - TG congratulated him on passing the exam successfully.

Dublin changed the date 23-29th July. Scholarship pulled forward to 17th March with application to Dublin needing to be in the week after, forms going out ASAP, we will circulate this.

The CinB scholarship entitles one recipient to a full £1000 scholarship, to help with the costs of travel and the TTCT course fee. The scholarship is only available once a year, and to one recipient at a time. Recipients are selected based on a formal application process through CinB and Comhaltas.

Marian Dwyer queried the two levels of this, pre-TTCT and main TTCT. Pre-TTCT will be held in Autumn (24th September). Pre-TTCT is online and one day, designed for people online. 75 euro.

MF gave an overview of the week he spent doing the TTCT. MF thanked Comhaltas in Britain for the funding, acknowledged as one of the best things he's done as a teacher and musician.

TG asked about age restrictions. MF responded minimum age is 21 and candidates are mostly in 20's but there were some 'more experienced' participants.

John asked what biggest learning point was. MF said gained appreciation of ITM as a concept - History/Composers/Regional styles.

Anna-Marie Jordan asked what assessment entails. MF explained observed practical teaching session with feedback, plus 2.5hr exam. MF encouraged potential participants not to be put off by assessment.

PC shared his experience. Very intense 9am-9pm. Lectures with observed teaching in the middle of the day. The week is over before you know it and feels he is still digesting the material 4 years on. Even as an experienced teacher, he felt that he still got an immense amount from the course - not just on his own instrument but on various others too.

Marian Dwyer asked fee. PC - around 700 euro.

Rosemarie Cassidy asked for info to be collated for younger members - MF to create but info available on website.

Funding update.

PM highlighted since 2005 have been funded by ESP. Funding applied for CCE Dublin for activities overseas - split between diaspora worldwide. Application submitted in Feb, find out if successful in July. Funding year runs from start of July 2023 - end of June 2024. Differs from educational year and PC year. When thinking about funding need to be thinking 18m in advance. Encouraged fleadh teams to be thinking about funding for fleadh 2025 in Feb 2024. PM ran through some of the activities funding covers - fleadhs/staff/branch and regional events. While funding is available only to specific projects and activities, this allows the province to use its unrestricted funds for other activities which we cannot use the funding for. i.e. volunteer expenses, Convention etc.

Specific funding available around St Patrick's day and local branch festivals. Anything that could be described as festival. Encouraged branches to submit ideas as soon as possible for activities which will be completed before the end of June 2023.

Funding available for teaching in schools. Info sent to all units. Should be a core branch activity and will benefit the branch in long run. PM encouraged units to come with a project idea rather than ask for money and design a project later.

PM explained project forms available to assist in planning project before submitting for funding. Will send out again today to all units. Funding is audited. We have been audited recently. ESP want to see paper trail of money being disseminated from head office through the structures and out to the local activities in support of the community. Need proof in form of receipts and invoices, but also evidence of impact to your branch community. Encouraged units to submit balance sheet at end of project to satisfy this requirement.

From 1st July we should receive more funding. Highlighted what we have applied for funding for this year. Fleadh, Branch activity, Education etc.

Wendy Doherty asked about who should apply for funding for teaching in schools branch vs individual teacher. PM explained all activity should be related to a branch, he encouraged teachers going into schools to feedback via branch on impact this is having. There is a separate form for this project.

ED explained funding available for projects as gaeilge. Contact him if you have ideas. Should be music/singing related as other organisations funded for language classes.

Wexford Bid

George introduced PRO Loch Garman also Chair Wexford CCÉ County council underwriting cost of fleadh. 2 Million euro. Played video.

Barbara Walsh introduced CC Loch Gorman. Thanked us for invitation. Paddy Berry president will be his 65th fleadh. Explained core activity of the branch. 'Walking Fleadh' Venues in walking distance. Thinking about a dome but tbc. 40 acre campsite within walking distance.

Opera house will be a key venue for Wexford fleadh, Gig Rig will be on The Quays where national opera festival opening ceremony takes place. Lots of churches around Wexford town, around 1,400 volunteers needed.

Wellbeing and inclusivity elements will be front and centre of Wexford fleadh.

George thanked everyone for their attention, Sinead introduced the nature of branches in Wexford County - full backing of all nine branches for Craobh Loch Gorman.

Strategic Plan

Update on staffing. Recent resignations. Looked at tasks undertaken by staff and created new job descriptions (funded by ESP). Need approval from funders for change of use due to this change in job descriptions. No questions

PM - Strategic plan quick overview. Informed delegates that strategic plan and mission statement were created after a period of consultation. Ties into charity and IIP. Full strategic plan will be sent to regions and branches.

Dementia and Autism Awareness

John Goulding invited to present interactive workshop.

John Goulding gave an overview of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and how it is a golden thread running through our 3-year strategic plan. He is an ambassador for the Alzheimer's Society and delivered a dementia awareness session. He highlighted that they can be delivered free to branches by the society and will be writing to regional secretaries to explain.

PB thanked all attendees and speakers for joining us for the first day of convention. Outlined plan for rest of the evening, meeting to resume tomorrow at half 10.

Day 1 closed at 17:00.

Meeting resumed on Sunday (10:30).

Regional Reports

Theresa invited regional chairs to give brief reports from each region - Jim McKenna (Scotland), Michelle Hemmingway (Northern), Carmel Burke (Midlands), John Goulding (London & Southern). Reports available to read in this year's annual report. TG thanked all regional representatives for their contributions.

Music Sub-Committee

John Burke gave an overview of the purpose of music sub committee. Planning to run an adjudicators seminar on the 11/12th November, although still to be confirmed as waiting for information about the budget for this event.

Fleadh Cheoil na Breataine 2023 Presentation

TG invited Mairi Campbell and Wendy Doherty (Fleadh chair) to give a short presentation on the upcoming All Britain fleadh. Hosted by St James the Great in Stirling University the last weekend in June.

Some issues were raised about venues at Stirling relating to fixed ICT desks - some unavoidable venue changes since last time in Stirling.

Accommodation options are available; single occupancy en-suite, other options available including chalets and Stirling Court Hotel (free parking). Important to note that accommodation is full board only; only package Stirling would allow. Full weekend will cost about £130.00 for a full occupancy room with breakfast, lunch and dinner. Double occupancy increases the price to £170.00. Six person flat priced for the full weekend in chalets, slightly further off campus - £417.00.

Lunch and dinner packages per day for visitors will be £22.50. Advice is to pre-book in advance, as lots of surplus catering will not be available.

Saturday night event last time went slightly wrong due to issues with licensing and children. Stirling university will provide snacks in venues to allow the kids to stay late into Saturday evening.

Everything will be bookable through the Comhaltas in Britain website, all packages and information will be available to access.

Call to sponsor a competition and/or venue to help with costs of running this year's fleadh. Call also for adverts for the fleadh programme. Volunteers needed as well, speak to Wendy and Mairi if you have time to help out.

TG thanked Wendy and Mairi for their presentation, emphasised the importance of getting information out promptly. This is very important given current issues with budgeting and cost of living.

Votes of Sympathy

TG expressed deepest condolences for those members who have sadly passed away in the previous year.

- Mairead Ni Argain
- Farrigal (Fred) Sweeney
- Mary McKendry
- Andrew Dinan
- Tommy Farrell
- Harry Howard
- Ann Berry

It was acknowledged that these people helped to make CinB a better place, and will be sadly missed.

Youth Officers Report

TG invited Calum and Mairi D to give a short report on Youth activities over the last year - first for our new youth officers. Report available to read in this year's annual report. Acknowledged activities including All Britain Fleadh, Convention 2023 and future activities.

Mairi asked attendees to talk to their youth officers and prepare them for lots of communications from provincial council in the near future, including on social media and newsletters. Mairi and Calum thanked everyone for their support.

MD reminded branches/regions/youth officers of the importance of communication and asked everyone to get in touch with the Provincial Youth Officers to assemble a list of contact details.

TG acknowledged the stellar contributions of our youth, in particular Michael Dudgeon for the painting of Stirling.

Investors in People

PC took the lead on a brief overview of what Investors in People and why it is important for Comhaltas in Britain/Department of Foreign Affairs.

IIP is up for review again, the survey is going to be released again this week. Reviewed previous recommendations and steps taken to fulfil these.

Acknowledged the stellar contributions of St Patrick's CCE for communication efforts on social media. Communication in CinB has never been so strong; whatsapp and monthly Zoom meetings provide plenty of opportunities to deal with matters arising.

Questions raised from the floor about bringing the core values of CinB and IIP to younger children; could the youth officers directly translate our key missions and objectives into 'shop floor' terms? CM and MD happy to facilitate whenever needed. Michelle Hemmingway asked if a full report could be made available; PC to do this.

PC to return later on this afternoon for a roundup on IIP report.

Comhaltas in Britain Website

TG gave an overview of the CinB strategic 3-year plan, which is our mission statement and goals.

Gaelic Officer

ED took the lead on a short interactive workshop on the use of the Irish language. Emphasising the importance of Seomra Gaeilge at the Fleadh, get in touch with ED if you need any help getting resources for the use of the Irish language at upcoming events. Michael Nevin raised a question about the Irish language workshop funding, ED gave a status update.

Michael Nevin suggested use of resources by a guy from Belfast on YouTube; attention grabbing episodes; to send to PB and ED for dissemination.

Happy Birthday to John Burke

All attendees wished John Burke a happy birthday.

Treasurer's Report

PM gave an overview of the financial situation in place of a lack of a treasurer at the meeting. Balance sheet is a draft. PM to provide a copy of the statement to accompany these minutes. Total capital and reserves sitting around 150k (all ringfenced for projects etc.).

Overall in a very healthy position, the accountant is working closely with us to deliver on a full set of accounts in the next week or two.

Marian Dwyer raised an issue with bank accounts, what systems are branches using for banking across the country. Issue with AIB pulling out is causing lots of problems. PM suggested looking to the Co-Op as a potential source for banking: dual transaction authentication is available. Although be aware of the time it takes to set everything up, mandates, trusteeship etc.

Ellen Hynes described a process undertaken recently by London & Southern Region, easily set up with Lloyds about a year ago. Although it seems to have changed recently, it's not as easy as it used to be. Michelle Hemmingway gave reflections on banking in their branch, and difficulties with communication with the banks; lots of issues setting up accounts for branches.

TG stressed the importance of getting bank accounts sorted, we cannot issue funding without a bank account to pay funds into.

TG gave an update on trusteeship in Comhaltas in Britain; moved from three trustees to all members of PC. Marian Dwyer said lots of difficulty identifying trustees given the complexity of CinB and individual branch relationships; who are the trustees? PC and MF outlined key differences between charities and branches, individual branches are not charities so should have their own trustees.

PM outlined donations of Facebook portal TVs; issued to each region.

Belfast Fleadh 2024

TG gave an outline of where CinB is at with regards to Belfast 2024. Wexford delegates asked to step outside temporarily.

Summarised key points from the Belfast bid based on our visit from Ards CCE earlier this year, giving an overview of some of the key points relating to the running of the All-Ireland fleadh in Belfast, to help delegation with their decision-making process.

A formal vote took place to allocate CinB's voting intentions by delegates to Ard Comhairle at Congress this year. 19 voted in favour of Belfast, 3 voted in favour of Wexford. Belfast will receive two votes from CinB for Fleadh 2024.

Nominations to Provincial Council

Led by two independents (Patrick Morrison and Paddy Callaghan).

Chair

Theresa Gallagher elected (proposed by Mairi Campbell & Rosaleen Duddy Owens)

Vice Chair

A vote took place for Vice-Chair between David Browne and Ellen Hynes - 21/3 in favour of David Browne.

David Browne elected (proposed by Mick Nixon & Ellen Hynes)

Treasurer

Michael Fitzgerald elected (proposed by Julie O'Hare & Ellen Hynes)

Secretary

Patrick Ballantyne elected (proposed by Michael Nevin & Marian Dwyer)

Treorai na Gaeilge

Evin Downey elected (proposed by David Browne & Rosaleen Duddy Owens)

P.R.O

A vote took place for P.R.O between John Goulding and Rosemarie Cassidy.

John Goulding elected (proposed by Mairi Campbell & Marian Dwyer)

Delegates to Ard Comhairle

David Browne elected (proposed by Wendy Doherty & Siobhan Kelly)

Michael Nevin elected (proposed by Rosaleen Duddy Owens & Julie O'Hare)

Youth Officers

Calum McGregor & Mairi Docherty elected (proposed by Jim McKenna & Ellen Hynes)

Auditors

Moira Callaghan & Julie O'Hare elected (proposed by Siobhan Kelly & Michael Nevin)

Nominations to Ireland

Provincial council voted in favour of the current committee in Dublin, no one standing against them. Brid Gleeson asked for our support in trying to secure the National Youth Officer role (*proposed by Julie O'Hare & Marian Dwyer*).

TG noted the importance of getting the Provincial Council all to Dublin soon for congress to get a flavour of higher-level stuff in Comhaltas and engage with other provinces.

Child Protection

PC noted our updated safeguarding policy, it has been trimmed down significantly on previous versions (50% reduction). PC acknowledged contributions of Siubhan in

getting training for branches with the NSPCC. Email Paddy for a copy of the policy and/or any more information on issues relating to safeguarding.

Policy adopted (*proposed by Jim McKenna & Mick Nixon*).

John Burke raised a query about branches not making use of the NSPCC training, can other branches make use of the NSPCC training licenses? PC can keep track of when licences are issued, 12 months valid.

Two DLPs for Province:

David Browne & Theresa Gallagher elected (proposed by Marian Dwyer & Ellen Hynes).

Motions for Comhaltas in Britain

None raised.

Motions for Congress

None raised.

Chairs Address

TG acknowledged length of meeting thus far and long journeys that were to be made following the meeting, therefore encouraged members to read her full chairs address in this years annual report.

Investors in People Part II

Paddy did an exercise on Menti for IIP, getting attendees to reflect on some important big picture ideas in CinB.

Activities for 2023

June we are in Stirling, Mullingar in the summer.

Echoes of Erin hopefully returning in October, TG noted our initial concerns about it returning in its current format. Provincial council meeting with the team from Dublin to discuss how Echoes of Erin might look in the future. Emphasis is on making the concert work for volunteers of Comhaltas, rather than putting all the work on individual branches.

Donal Murphy noted that Leamington would like to host the event in October to celebrate the 60th anniversary of St Patrick's Irish Centre. PM noted this will be the 50th anniversary of the first tour of Britain.

Michelle Hemmingway noted the need for communication between branches to encourage and support each other in running these events. Everything is about timing and cost before a decision is made about the upcoming tour of Britain.

Rosaleen Duddy Owens talked about mini-tour years ago, and it worked well because smaller venues saved a lot of money.

A lively discussion ensued about the need for a concert tour - do we need a concert tour? MF suggested it's vital for encouraging our kids and future generations.

PB reminded everyone of upcoming dates and deadlines: 17th March for TTCT, dementia projects.

TG reminded everyone of the pressure that PC is under, please be aware of how busy Paddy is going to be now that he is working alone. PM reminded everyone of the structure of Comhaltas in Britain; branches should speak to regions before approaching provincial council or officers.

Closing remarks

TG asked everyone to thank PM for his contributions to CinB over the years.

Convention is going to be in London & Southern next year and the year after.

PC encouraged every branch and region to send their delegates next year; remind everyone how much fun you had and hopefully we will have more people here next year.

TG thanked everyone for travelling to convention this year, particularly those that have travelled far including the delegation from Wexford.

Next Meeting (via Zoom)

Wednesday 17th May, 2023 @ 8.15pm.