

# Comhaltas in Britain Volunteer Handbook



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 COMHALTAS  
in Britain



COMHALTAS  
in Britain



# Volunteer Handbook

## Comhaltas in Britain

### Volunteer Handbook

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# Volunteer Handbook

## Volunteering with Comhaltas in Britain

Our volunteers come from a range of age groups, sources and backgrounds. All of our volunteers are hugely important to the work of Comhaltas in Britain. We are a volunteer led organization and without our volunteers we would not be able to continue to support and share our traditional music, culture and heritage.

The purpose of this information is to encourage volunteers to not only contribute to our work but also to get the most personally from doing so. However, we do work with young people and vulnerable people so their needs and safety are paramount. Consequently, Becoming a volunteer with Comhaltas in Britain also entails obligations.

For the purposes of this document:-

- “Cathaoirleach” - Refers to the head of each unit of Comhaltas
- “Volunteer” - Refers to a person who is involved in the running of Comhaltas
- “Staff” - Refers to a person who is employed by Comhaltas
- “Worker” - Refers to a person who is carrying out a task for Comhaltas and may be either a volunteer or member of staff
- “CCÉ” - Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann
- “Comhaltas” - Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann



## Bringing a community of all ages together to learn, share and experience the music and culture of Ireland

Comhaltas in Britain strives to be a positive force in the community. At local grass roots and as a global family, Comhaltas bonds together all those who have an affinity with Irish traditional culture.

The Comhaltas movement is its members, and as such at all times people will be valued and treated with dignity and respect.

*Our intangible cultural heritage is not safeguarded in the pages of a music book, in a certificate or medal but in the fingertips, feet, voice and hearts of our people and it is this which we prize and pass on, ó ghlúin go glúin (from generation to generation).*

Through celebrating our heritage, shared identity, culture and roots we are committed to treating all people equally and with respect, irrespective of their age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation. We are an open and inclusive organisation. Discrimination and harassment of any kind is not welcome in the movement. Comhaltas values authenticity, respect, creativity, community, friendship and fun.

We recognise that being accessible and being inclusive are not the same thing and we actively encourage and welcome all people into our Comhaltas family, working to reduce barriers preventing anyone's enjoyment of our traditional Irish culture.

It is the responsibility of all our members, volunteers, officers and staff to ensure these principles are upheld in all dealings with others.



# Volunteer Handbook

## About Us

Comhaltas in Britain the largest group involved in the preservation and promotion of Irish traditional music. We're a **non-profit cultural movement** with hundreds of local branches around the world, and as you can read in our history we've been working for the cause of Irish music since the middle of the last century - all the way back to 1957!

The main focus of Comhaltas is the passing on of our Irish cultural traditions and as such we have a program of weekly music classes in the local community as well as an annual cycle of concerts, festivals (Fleadhanna), sessions, competitions, Irish language activities and more, all grounded in a social, community and intergenerational context.

### Our Mission:

Bringing a community of all ages together to learn, share and experience the music and culture of Ireland.

### Our Vision:

Our vision is a world where Irish music and culture is open to all, and celebrated as a valued part of Britain's cultural heritage.



## Structures

Comhaltas in Britain is made up of branches which work to promote our Irish traditional arts and culture at local level around Britain.

*“The Branch is the fundamental and most important unit of the Comhaltas movement. It is the Branch which makes it possible for our native cultural characteristics to be propagated and strengthened in the community”.*

Branches around the country are grouped into 4 regions

- Scottish Region
- Northern Region
- Midland Region
- London & Southern Region

Regions function to bring together branches in network, collaboration and sharing best practice. Their primary function is to support branches in the region and develop new branches to further the aims of Comhaltas.

Branches and regions are entirely volunteer run with each having its own elected committee.

To co-ordinate and support the four regions there is a national elected committee (Provincial Council) which is made up of elected volunteer officers. The work of Comhaltas nationally under the direction of the provincial council is a registered charity in England & Wales.

A small staff team works under the direction of the provincial council to support the volunteer structure at all levels.



## Volunteering in General

There are many reasons why people volunteer their time and skills, and each person has their own reasons. Some of the most common reasons are:

- Enjoying Helping people
- Believing the cause is worthwhile
- Have time to spare
- Want to make friends
- Want to use skills
- Would like to learn new skills

However there are also barriers to volunteering:

- Lack of time
- Put off by bureaucracy
- Worry about risk/liability
- The way things are organised (or lack of)

The most common benefits reported by volunteers are:

- Satisfaction from seeing results
- Enjoyment
- Personal achievement
- Opportunity to do something they are good at
- Broaden horizons
- Meet people



## Recruiting volunteers

When recruiting or looking for volunteers, our message reflects the above factors. Consideration is also be given to the different types of volunteering a person might be interested in or already be skilled in. For example, some people are happy to join a committee or take up an officer role for the year, others might prefer to volunteer a specific skills (such as social media) and others might volunteer to help or fulfil a role at a specific event or on a once-off basis.

Volunteers are integral to the Comhaltas movement, and as such we recognise the importance of supporting you as part of the community we serve, and the community we wish to grow. We want you to enjoy your time volunteering with us.

When you start volunteering with Comhaltas in Britain our experienced committee officers will work with you to ensure your skills, capability and needs as a volunteer are matched with the needs of the organisation so you can fulfil your maximum potential and have the greatest benefit to the Comhaltas movement.

## Expectations as a Volunteer

We expect you as a volunteer:

- To treat others with respect and courtesy
- To perform your volunteering role to the best of your ability
- To follow Comhaltas in Britain's' procedures and standards, including Health and Safety, Safeguarding, Equal opportunities, diversity and data protection (GDPR).
- To respond to attempts to contact you within a reasonable timeframe
- To attend on time, or to give at least 24 hours notice to cancel or rearrange meetings with members.
- To complete risk assessments with the support of staff for any events or activities
- To let Comhaltas in Britain know of any problems or difficulties you experience during your volunteering role
- Report any safeguarding issues you notice immediately
- Attend all training
- Not to purchase any goods or services on behalf of Comhaltas without speaking to the relevant officer or committee first.
- To act professionally as a representative of Comhaltas



## Expectations of Us as a Volunteer

You can expect Comhaltas in Britain:

- To always treat you with respect and courtesy
- To respond to any contact from you within a reasonable timeframe
- To support you in conducting risk assessments
- To provide training, support and resources to help you conduct your volunteering role.
- Ensure you are never out of pocket due to your volunteering, providing this has been approved by the appropriate officer in advance.
- To support you in raising and reporting safeguarding issues when they arise
- To act on your complaints and concerns in a timely and professional manner
- To deliver any materials or support on time as agreed with you.



## Recognition of Volunteers

Comhaltas in Britain values all the work that our volunteers do to continue to support and make our community as vibrant and celebrated as it is, and as such we appreciate that all our volunteers deserve to be recognised by the fantastic work you do and the time you contribute.

We operate various systems of awards to recognise our volunteers from local level right up to national and international awards and presentations.

Comhaltas in Britain is committed to ensuring you feel valued and aim to support our volunteers in reaching their own professional and personal goals.



## Training and Development

Comhaltas in Britain is committed to training our volunteers so they can fulfil their potential in whatever role they choose.

We aim to develop the skills, knowledge, values and conduct that Volunteers need to fulfil their roles well.

This includes an induction program that covers our key policies and procedures and full staff/officer support to help you with any questions you have or support you need.

Ensuring you have the skills and knowledge to perform your role to the best of your abilities is very important to Comhaltas in Britain and so we will continue to offer opportunities for personal and professional development after your initial induction.

If you feel you would like more information on a subject, or would like access to further training opportunities please contact your committee chair or member of the staff team and they will be happy to help you.

Comhaltas In Britain aims to help Officers and Volunteers to make effective arrangements to identify and meet learning needs.



## Health & Safety

A large part of ensuring our volunteers find their time in Comhaltas fulfilling and enjoyable is guaranteeing people can volunteer safely.

Comhaltas in Britain maintains insurance policies that cover public liability for its staff and volunteers in the course of Comhaltas in Britain's activities. It is important that you follow all policies and procedures to maintain your safety and the safety of others.

When running events and activities you may be required to produce or assist with producing risk assessments to minimise the risk to yourself and others.

Particular care must be taken by all volunteers to avoid hazardous or potentially unsafe practices or situations. No volunteer should be placed in, or feel vulnerable because they are volunteering with Comhaltas in Britain.



## Safeguarding

Because Comhaltas in Britain's activity often involves working with young people and/or vulnerable adults we operate a strict safeguarding policy for the protection of everyone involved in a Comhaltas activity.

Copies of this policy are available from your branch or can be found online at <https://www.comhaltas.co.uk/resources>

Our safeguarding policy also includes expectations and procedures for all staff and volunteers around issues of harassment, bullying and abuse.

Each unit of Comhaltas in Britain has 2 designated Liaison persons (DLPs) who are responsible for overseeing the safeguarding practices of the unit. They can be contacted directly in-branch should you have any concerns or would like to ask any questions around safeguarding and your responsibilities.

If through the course of your time volunteering for Comhaltas you are required to regularly supervise young people or vulnerable adults, or if you are responsible for managing a volunteer who is regularly supervising young people or vulnerable adults then we are required by law to carry out a background check on you.

This is done through the Government Disclose and Barring Service in England and Wales, and Disclosure Scotland for those based in Scotland. This process is both confidential and regulated. The cost of checks is covered by the organisation.





## Data Protection (GDPR)

As an organisation which holds sensitive and personal information (i.e. Members details) we are fully compliant with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). Procedures and practices are in place to safeguard and protect peoples personal information, including that of our volunteers.

Comhaltas in Britain operates to maintain the principles of data protection.

We hold the minimal amount of data required for the running of Comhaltas, that data is collected lawfully, fairly and in a transparent manner, the data is accurate, only available to those who need it, it is held in a secure manner and only retained for the period of time it is needed.

We have a detailed policy on Data protection which is available here <https://www.comhaltas.co.uk/resources> and as a volunteer you are expected to be familiar with and follow these guidelines.

We have a designated national Data Protection officer, Paddy Callaghan, [paddy@comhaltas.co.uk](mailto:paddy@comhaltas.co.uk) who can be contacted should you have any questions or concerns with regard to data protection.



## Further Policies & Information

Our operating policies are all available freely to view on our website ([www.comhaltas.co.uk/resources](http://www.comhaltas.co.uk/resources)) and we would encourage volunteers to be familiar with the content of these policies and guidelines as they are designed to assist in the process of volunteering with Comhaltas in Britain.

Additionally, as we are part of the wider Comhaltas organisation (Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann) we are bound by the constitution of the organisation which is called 'An Bunreacht'. This document can also be found via the link above



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