

# Comhaltas in Britain Annual Convention 2024

Linton Hotel, Luton: 2nd & 3rd March

**Attendees:** Theresa Gallagher, Patrick Ballantyne, Michael Fitzgerald (MF), David Browne, Calum McGregor, John Goulding (JG), Moira Callaghan, Julie O'Hare, Michael Nevin (MN), Matthew Mayes, Mary Walsh, Siobhán Kelly, Orlagh Reilly, Jim Teevan (JT), Bridie Teevan, Mairi Campbell, Wendy Doherty, Paul McCormack, Jim McKenna (JM), Michelle Hemmingway, Sarah Wade, Fiona Hoey, Rosaleen Duddy-Owens, Ena Doocey, John Burke (JB), Carmel Burke, Donal Murphy, Owen Condon, Michael Nixon, Evin Downey, Colleen Langan, Conor Walsh.

**Staff:** Paddy Callaghan, Elske Simpson, Erin Brown, Brendan McAleer, Siobhan Ni Chonóraín, Éamonn O'hArgáin, Majella Bartley.

**Apologies:** Kathleen Collins (Cambridge), Mairi Docherty (Irish Minstrels), Declan Dillon-Connolly (Tara O'Carolan), Alan Worswick & Declan Bibby (Ashton), Catriona McHale (Tara O'Carolan), Marian Dwyer (Birmingham).

**Votes of Sympathy:** Mary Healy (Luton), Jimmy Greaney (Nottingham), Mike Leash (Amairgin Na Gael), Terry Madden (Manchester), Brendan Quinn (Leeds), Kitty Quinn (St Patrick's), Danny McKendry Sr. (St James the Great), Kathleen Nicholas (Ashton).

**Conflicts of Interest:** Moira Callaghan indicated that Paddy Callaghan and Calum McGregor are her nephews.

## Action Points

Action Point	Who
1. Request update on email that was sent to Dublin about Echoes of Erin tour concert	Patrick Ballantyne
2. Organise transfer of funds to branches who have received online membership applications	Paddy Callaghan, Michael Fitzgerald
3. Distribute audited accounts (once ready) to members and Comhaltas HQ	Paddy Callaghan, Michael Fitzgerald, Patrick Ballantyne
4. Distribute Fleadh pack and summary of All Britain 2024 to members	Patrick Ballantyne
5. Organise a site visit to All Britain Fleadh venue 2025 for September 2024	Carmel Burke
6. Distribute TTCT and SCT information with meeting minutes	Patrick Ballantyne
7. Transfer £250 for Music Sub-Committee levy	Cathleen Armstrong, Carmel Burke, Sarah Wade and John Goulding

## Meeting Minutes

### *Welcome & Introduction*

Theresa opened the meeting at 11.15AM on Saturday 2nd March with a welcome and introduction. We gathered a series of apologies from the floor, and people were encouraged to submit their votes of sympathy at the sign-in desk.

### *Previous Minutes & Action Points*

Patrick went through action points & minutes from last year's convention, all of which have been resolved. Paddy raised a query with last year's minutes - a hard copy of the IIP report was not circulated as too large, so the minutes were adjusted to reflect dissemination of a digital copy of the IIP report. Minutes were proposed and seconded by Michelle Hemmingway & Mairi Campbell.

### *Consideration of Annual Report*

Attendees were given the opportunity to explore this year's Annual Report. Theresa thanked Paddy Callaghan for his efforts in putting together this year's Annual Report, as well as thanking Uachtarán Éamonn O'hArgain for this report. Theresa asked for comments and feedback on the annual reports, but everyone in the room seemed happy with the document in its current form. The annual report was proposed and seconded by Michael Nevin and Wendy Doherty.

### *Runáí Report & Correspondence*

Patrick provided a high-level overview of the secretary's report, thanking volunteers and Elske for maintaining lines of communication over the previous year, with newsletters and branch leaders' newsletters. Paddy thanked Elske again for all the efforts getting this set up, and the new email octopus. Patrick gave a high level overview of correspondence from the last year, which can be found in the Appendix.

Michelle Hemmingway discussed new position on the Northern Region board, for diversity and inclusivity. First position in any province in this vein! Michelle discussed the importance of having this role to keep members included. Theresa raised a query about diversity and inclusivity which has come through from within the province. Our approach is to build up from grass roots, and as a province we will listen to our members to help guide our diversity/inclusivity strategy going forward.

Julie O'Hare queried Echoes of Erin response from Dublin, but nothing has been received as of yet.

### *Discussion: Communication, Membership & Financial Reporting*

Theresa Gallagher asked the room to discuss how we can better communicate as an organisation. Most regions represented but not all, and queried where we are going wrong in terms of communication. Room began an active discussion about how we can improve communication. Theresa framed the importance of discussions of this nature, particularly given recent social media discussions which have been particularly negative/passive/aggressive from some branches towards their members. Reiterated the importance of social media.

Colleen Langan said having workshops at Convention is a good way to get engaged with Convention activities; actually didn't know about convention until last year's workshop with Rebecca McCarthy-Kent! Reiterated the importance of Instagram as a communication tool.

Feedback:

- TABLE 1 (Mick Nevin's Table): Everyone only had one email address historically, but nowadays we all have a lot of email addresses. Secretaries should send a Whatsapp after an email to direct attention to it. Not everyone is so strong at e-mail. World is changing, communication is challenging.
- TABLE 2 (Wendy Doherty's Table): Getting to a certain position is when you unlock all the information about what is going on. Provincial councils could share information into a branch-level WhatsApp, but it is important to be aware of the volume of communication. It is important to be aware that you don't need to be on a committee to access the information. Elske asked what is good versus bad communication? Wendy asked about potentially putting together an idiot's guide to running a Fleadh or other branch activities.
- TABLE 3 (Calum McGregor's Table): It is a fine art to get people to engage with social media content, is the stuff we are putting out valuable? Orlagh and JT talked about the importance of personal touches, given the diversity of members (ages, backgrounds), but that it is very difficult to manage. We need to be mindful of the importance of picking up the phone to touch base with our older generations, and the need to build from grass roots. Mairi discussed a potential policy for communication/social media to get the right comms to the right people, too much communication can be overwhelming. Different communications at different levels is the way to go! Paddy said we already have a provincial policy for branches and members to use to inform communication strategy. We probably need to use this conversation to feed into the updating of this communication strategy.

Michelle Hemmingway opened a discussion about how useful the Provincial Council has been in recent times on behalf of the Northern Region. Theresa said we are here to support as part of the wider Comhaltas in Britain family. Wendy said we know that the Provincial Council is there, and that the information is available, and thanked the Provincial Council for being there to support. Michelle thanked the Provincial Council for keeping up a corporate appearance but also being familiar, friendly faces. MF reminded everyone that the Provincial Council are volunteers, teachers, and we've always kept up communications, and that communications need to be two-way, not one-way.

Paddy chatted about the Google Form for committee members, to gather up to date contact information for all branch committee members. 7 or 8 branches queried why we need this, and he explained that it is vital as the membership system doesn't give us access to the information we need. Gave an example about how annual report compiling was much easier this year as we had all of the information for people.

Theresa welcomed a second phase of discussion about Elske's question: *what information would you like to hear?*

Feedback:

- TABLE 1 (Fiona's Table): Importance of considering the relevance of communications to the people who are receiving them. Colleen discussed that information needs to be presented in a format that works for different audiences (parents vs committee members). Who's receiving the information determines what kind of information goes out.
- TABLE 2 (Orlagh's Table): Listening to what's going on in the different branches will help to inspire new ways of thinking in branches, so hearing these stories is really important. Mairi Campbell discussed a seminar that Frank McArdle ran 9 years ago about how he runs classes to impart his way of thinking/teaching.
- TABLE 3 (Siobhán's Table): Emails are important for committee members, older branch members just need prompts for current & upcoming events, rather than the wider pool of communications, reports etc.

Theresa opened a phase of discussion about membership & financial reporting: *what is working, what is not working?*

Feedback:

- TABLE 1 (MF's Table): In St Patrick's a few young kids joined, leveraging strong connections with the GAA, but still trying to build our membership. Theresa discussed an initiative that tried to 'teach the teachers', but was rejected by North Lanarkshire Council.
- TABLE 2 (Erin's Table): Building members since COVID-19 has been tricky, especially given the fragmented nature of lessons (+ teachers), building up membership by having after-school lessons - we need to be flexible.
- TABLE 3 (Paul's Table): Showing people the benefits of their membership and the value of being involved with Comhaltas as a member, particularly since COVID-19. Question is how do we do this? Social media is good for getting kids involved with it, especially when they see their friends. Orlagh discussed the importance of connections made between kids at branch classes, and using that to try and increase membership. Youth Officer's are very important in that realm. Erin discussed that there is a WhatsApp for Youth Officer's now, and we are using that to tap into what is happening for Youth across the Province.

*Lunch, 1.00PM*

*Meeting resumed at 2.00PM*

Theresa kicked off another discussion about membership.

MN flagged an issue with membership and the online portal for membership - members are continuing to sign up on the online portal and this creates significant barriers for branches who want to find out who these people are. Paddy said he is aware of this, but only 7 new members have joined via the online portal, so a marginally small number. Comhaltas re-launch of the website will have facilities to allow branches to sell their wares on.

Julie O'Hare said that this is also the case for St Wilfrids, who are owed membership. Paddy said we will transfer this, but we don't have bank account details. Again, just to reiterate how minor this money is, but it will get sorted when bank account details have been shared.

Patrick raised a discussion point about how different branches collect their membership:

- MF suggested that branch leaders should be as open to receiving the money and the membership in whatever format people want to send it!
- Wendy said that in St James the Great it is done by Paypal (but they accept whatever payment format), and also uses SumUp machines to collect membership at the branch, and then an accompanying paper form to collect information on the new branch members (e.g., name, allergies, disabilities).
- David outlined how Irish Minstrels combine the fee of lessons and Comhaltas membership on an online website, including all the data and information that is needed, and use that to build a database of members.
- MF raised why some branches are still using paper forms, when Comhaltas in Britain can make Google Suite available to collect membership information. Wendy said it is a way of ensuring that they get the information filled in, as online forms often lack a bit of accountability in this sense.

### *Treasurer's Report*

Theresa invited MF to provide this year's treasurers' report. MF outlined the issue with accounts and a recent misunderstanding with the accountants, describing that we have an unaudited financial summary to present to the membership.

MF thanked Paddy for pulling this together, and outlined that we have multi-year funding from ESP. ESP is listed as £95,000 but this reflects a clawback from an under-spend on a last year's ESP grant (staff vacancies) - which means our deficit this year is £10,000 less than it was last year.

The heavy recruitment costs will not be happening every year, and a couple of other pots of money.

Orla queried whether we will be penalised for the under-spend going forward. Paddy clarified that we were able to explain why this underspend happened, and shouldn't affect our offer letters going forward. Paddy outlined the situation with Jude Thomas, why she left and the implications of that on the overall ESP underspend. Theresa said it got very confusing with the movement of Patrick, Siubhan and Jude over the last financial period.

MF outlined the Clover HR situation. We have had lengthy conversations about potentially ending the relationship with Clover HR as they are very expensive. Mairi asked about what we will put in place as regards HR: we will put in place a pay-as-you-go system to protect our staff. Siobhan gave an overview of the importance of Clover HR and protecting the reputation of Comhaltas as an international organisation. Siobhan Ni Chonóraín praised the management of Comhaltas in Britain for maintaining integrity and accountability, and the work of Paddy, Theresa, MF and Patrick.

MN queried Soldo - MF outlined what the Soldo is and how it is used to support staff's day-to-day expenditure.

MF thanked Paddy for his work, especially in the challenging year that we've had.

Financial report was proposed and seconded by Calum McGregor and Orlagh Reilly.

#### *Additional Regional Fleadh Funding*

Theresa gave an update on the additional Fleadh funding, to try and promote Irish language in Britain, and the two existing proposals underway. Theresa outlined our aspirations for an attractive application to generate a bit of “buzz” about speaking Irish; just before U12 band competitions have a 5-10 minute exercise in Irish.

Theresa, Orlagh, Éamonn and MN got people interacting with a round of Heads, Shoulders, Knees & Toes in Irish. This should inspire everyone to do something similar at their regional fleadh, and encouraged the Regional Fleadh to incorporate something like this into their bids for regional fleadh funding.

Wendy outlined their plan in the Scottish region to use two Gaeilgoeir's to run something at the Scottish Fleadh. Deadline for these applications is just before your Regional Fleadh.

#### *Financial Reporting*

MF introduced a quick discussion on financial reporting, to consider how branches are struggling with financial reporting. Divided up into groups to discuss some of the problems branches are facing.

Paddy outlined what Glasgow St Patrick's festivals are doing to manage their banking. Paddy set up an account for the festival with Virgin Money for 6 days. Specific account is called 'Clubs & Societies', free of charge and limited to 10 transactions per month.

Julie stated that once you pay a fee, you will continue to pay a fee. Ashton Branch uses Virgin and they get charged. Patrick queried what the charges actually translate to. Michelle expressed delight with this conversation given problems in the Northern Region. JG stated the importance of having at least three signatories on an account.

Paddy outlined fee is £6.50 a month if you go over 10 transactions. 70p fee on Debit transactions. Registered charities will receive no charges.

Theresa outlined our approach to auditing regions, we've started with the Northern Region. We're moving to London next - it will be relatively informal, taking place over a couple of hours with provincial officers just taking a look at some financial statements. From July onwards we're in London, and then next year it will be in the Scottish region.

#### *Comhaltas Staffing Update*

Theresa outlined our happiness with our current staff team. She handed over to Paddy as Operations Manager to give an update.

Paddy outlined the restructuring which took place from last year's convention. Loss of Patrick and Siubhan after last year's convention. We were very aware that the staffing structure previously was based on the previous staff (and their strengths), which makes it difficult to advertise for new staff members. Thus, we built new roles to attract talent and new ways of thinking.

We have two new excellent staff members on board with us since the summer. Elske Simpson previously worked in the charity sector, bringing wider sector knowledge and new thinking to the team. Then we brought in Jude Thomas, who came from charities too, and was an excellent person for social media and generating interactions with our members. We were sad to lose Jude to a more permanent role, so we went back to a recruitment process. Over 60 applications were received for this post; the outstanding candidate came from within our organisation - Erin Brown - who has a fantastic background in music education, extensive knowledge of the organisation and another invaluable asset to the team. Erin loves a phone call and a personal touch!

Paddy said he's never felt like we've had such a strong team in terms of organisation and communication, between the Management Team and Staff. It has been a pleasure to work with this team, and has been really refreshing given where we were after last year's Convention.

Theresa invited Brendan to introduce himself. Brendan provided a quick summary of his background in Comhaltas, Ulster, Dun Uladh. Highlighted work of Head Office on the Comhaltas prospectus which is launched, and the need for events like this for skill sharing. Brendan said he is here to support Comhaltas in Britain, and looks forward to seeing us all in Wexford (and the Overseas Concert).

### *TTCT*

David gave a quick outline of his experience as the Caroline Fegan TTCT scholarship winner this year. Discussed the importance of doing this course if you're really grounded in teaching music, and want to develop their teaching skills to the next level. David introduced what the week looks like, practical classes, theory etc., and other elements like Child Protection and Safeguarding, and the final exam. Outlined how it relates to the SCT course, which we will be hearing more about tomorrow from Majella Bartley.

Deadline for the Caroline Fegan scholarship is the 15th March, and the main deadline is the end of March. There will be an audition and an interview to learn about the course in more detail, and whether you're the right fit for the course. Age Group is 21+. David finished by saying it is one of the best things he has ever done in his time in Comhaltas.

### *Investors in People Overview and Outlook*

Theresa handed over to Paddy to talk about the Investors in People report. Paddy thanked people in the organisation for taking part and being interviewed, and outlined the formal outcomes, including our Silver Accreditation and really encouraging scores and points seen across the different outcomes and indicators.

What we need to work on:

- "My organisation develops great leaders" - we need to do more to build better leaders, supporting and developing great people to lead us forward.
- "Need for more paid staff" - unfortunately we don't have the resources for more staff.
- "I challenge behaviours which don't match the organisation's values" - we need to more proactively challenge behaviours and views that don't link up with our overall values and goals.

IIP Report is available to read on our website. Paddy pointed out that 133 people were contacted, and how this relates to flaws with our current membership system, as some branches could not be contacted. We knew we weren't getting all of the responses we needed, which is why we are requesting up-to-date contact information from all of the branches, regions and other units. Paddy commended everyone for their efforts in getting IIP over the line.

*Coffee Break 15.30PM*

#### *Comhaltas Prospectus Launch*

Theresa invited Brendan McAleer and Éamonn O'hArgáin to introduce Comhaltas' new prospectus. Éamonn introduced the prospectus as a roadmap for Comhaltas until 2030. Comhaltas on the Island of Ireland, in Britain and globally. Eamonn suggested that Comhaltas in Britain could work towards building a prospectus which slots nicely into the Comhaltas prospectus.

Brendan gave a more detailed overview of how the Comhaltas prospectus came to be. It brings all aspects of Comhaltas together, and highlights the impact that Comhaltas has across society as the complex ecosystem that it is. Brendan talked about plans for rolling out strategic pillars, measuring impact etc.

Copies of this document have been sent to every branch secretary. Comhaltas.ie has digital copies in the downloads section.

Brendan also introduced "Global Comhaltas" - a global newsletter which covers everything that is going on around the world. Brendan will email Theresa to get a copy of this out to every branch. Next edition will be coming out shortly, to time it with St Patrick's Day celebrations across the UK.

Theresa noted stickers given out by Comhaltas HQ - another good resource for promotion of the Irish Language, and HQ will give them to us. Siobhan said the file is available for the stickers, which we can print off and distribute ourselves to our members.

#### *Belfast 2025 Bid Presentation*

Theresa invited the Belfast 2025 Fleadh Cheoil na Eirheann committee to deliver their bid presentation for the 2025 All Ireland Fleadh. A lively Q&A followed the presentation.

*Meeting concluded at 17.00PM on Saturday 2nd March.*

*Meeting resumed at 10.15 on Sunday 3rd March.*

#### *Saturday Recap*

Theresa provided a quick overview of yesterday's activities and discussions. Outlined the need to be keeping to time today as we have a busy schedule of activities.

#### *Child Protection & Safeguarding*

Paddy provided an overview of current developments in Safeguarding and Child Protection. One of the most important topics we have to manage as an organisation. Comprehensive



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safeguarding policy is available on our website, and it is a document to be used. Paddy said he deals with Safeguarding queries at least on a weekly basis, and the policy is updated each year to reflect developments/issues that arise throughout the year.

Paddy said there is always confusion about handling DBS/PVG checks - if anyone is carrying out regulated work (unsupervised w/ children or adults), so you must have a DBS/PVG check. We recommend that you have an enhanced version of these checks, with renewal every 3 years (ideally), but 5 is sufficient. Paddy reminded branches of the importance of having this in place, we cannot afford to skip these. Paddy said he is the point of contact for anything safeguarding related!

Orlagh asked a question about the PVG checks in Scotland; you still need to be PVG checked for Comhaltas even if you are PVG checked through another organisation.

Carmel asked about the situation in Leamington; three teachers have a normal DBS and queried whether they needed to upgrade these. Paddy said that because no regulated work is taking place as three teachers + one parent are in place.

Wendy asked if we can say we are a charity when applying for a PVG check. Paddy said teachers in the branch are not teaching for Comhaltas in Britain as a charity, so would not be eligible.

Fiona queried the update service for DBS check (£16), and Paddy said that this is still the case. Paddy invited Erin to talk about her experience as a self-employed musician; use the Alliance of Music Performance to sort the application on Erin's behalf (£13).

### *Regional Reports*

JM gave a quick overview of developments in the Scottish region, a very positive report. All branches are active, good communication between branches. Congratulated St James the Great on a good All Britain Fleadh, and wished St Patrick's well in organising regional Fleadh. New branch formed in Ayr, and they are engaging well.

Michelle gave a quick overview of the Northern Regional report. Big improvements in the region, attended all branch AGMs (bar two). New diversity and inclusivity officer on the regional board, and the Northern Regional Fleadh will have a regional concert.

Carmel gave a quick overview of the Midland Regional report. Encouraged people to read the full report, 7 branches are all active, lots of classes and sessions. Went round the branches and provided some highlights of different activities. Very positive in the region! Last year's Provincial convention saw lots of stalwarts from the Midlands getting awards, which was great to see!

JG gave a quick overview of the London & Southern Regional report. Introduced the Irish In Britain oral histories project, and the North London junior fleadh; positive feedback from all. John gave a quick overview of individual branch activities to show that all branches are very active and motivated.

Theresa thanked all of the regional boards for their hard work!

### *Youth Officer Report*

Theresa welcomed Calum to give an overview of Youth-specific activities. Workshop with Rebecca McCarthy-Kent at last year's convention was a highlight. Establishing a good youth network has been very important; a WhatsApp group chat is used to have two-way communication. All Britain Fleadh saw youth sessions which were very successful. Orlaith McAuliffe's ambassador role has been great, and a 'Preparing for the Fleadh' webinar was really well received. Calum urged branch youth officers from branches to reach out and get involved; contact details on the website.

Paddy said we need to be getting branches to update their contact details; the number of branches did not give their Youth Officer's contact information, Paddy reminded people that a person is responsible for their own data from the age of 13 plus, and to pass on these contact details, as the YOs will feel isolated.

MF highlighted that quite a few branches don't have YOs, and it is vital that all branches try to put these in place. Invited Erin to talk about what is going on in Cambridge, where there are no members between 16 - 25. So the branch has two YOs in training - they are 9 and 11 and they are being encouraged to participate. Reflected on the provincial council and how they are all former YOs.

### *P.R.O Report*

JG gave a quick summary of what is going on around the Province, and the importance of Staff and Volunteers to shape the direction of Comhaltas in Britain. JG expressed his intention to support full-time staff in their roles as he is now working part-time.

### *Treorai na Gaeilge Report*

Evin provided an overview of Irish language developments, with a particular focus on engagement and competition winners in competitions with an Irish speaking element. MN engaged in a lively conversation with Evin as Gaeilge. MN also discussed opportunities for a free course in Irish, but expressed that there had been little to no uptake, but folk should be encouraged to learn Irish. Evin said he is happy to be contacted for info on Irish classes in your area, and there is lots of learning available online.

### *Music Sub*

Mairi delivered a presentation on the role of MSC and identified its members from each region. Outlined plans for an adjudicators seminar - 18th & 19th May, Leeds Irish Centre. This seminar will be entry level, and at a lower level than the course from Ireland, with a particular focus on being fun and interactive.

David queried JB on how this course relates to the course in Ireland, and the official list of adjudicators for Irish fleadh. The impression was that the MSC course will eventually allow you to adjudicate in Britain, with recommendation for provinces in Ireland. However if you want to adjudicate in Ireland then you have to do KB's course.

### *All Britain Fleadh Presentation*

Patrick gave the All Britain Fleadh presentation. A high-level summary will be sent round in an email, with a link also to the Fleadh pack, and calls for volunteers, sponsorship etc.



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### *SCT Presentation*

Theresa invited Majella to introduce the new SCT syllabus. SCT is a way for students to have a goal without getting caught up in a competition system. 75,000 exams have been completed already.

Majella outlined the SCT programme, which starts at 30 euro and ends at 100 euro, which is actually cheaper than the LCM. 12 exams already, 3 elementary, grades 1 - 8 and then the performance diploma.

Marking: performance is heavily weighted in the marking of SCT exams, but other elements include repertoire and theory skills. Performance diploma is a bit more difficult.

Number of tunes increases with grades and higher levels. You have performance tunes and then the repertoire tunes. LCM is less tunes that need to be learned, but the SCT builds a progression in the core repertoire. Having 65 tunes at Grade 8 might seem a lot, but it actually isn't.

Majella gave an overview of the aural skills and theory knowledge that is assessed as part of the SCT programme. Purpose is to build a "Well-Rounded" musician.

Research project at Grades 6 - 8 (500 words): this varies at different levels from an album review (Grade 6), profile of two musicians (Grade 7) and live concert review (Grade 8).

Accreditation was the big thing for SCT this year. Discussed how SCT are now Ofqual accredited, and from September these grades will be available online. Comhaltas Grades 6 - 8 are now eligible for UCAS points. Points are Grade 6 (8 for a Merit, 12 for a Distinction) and so on up to Grade 8.

Majella welcomed questions about the formal SCT syllabus, and pointed to a series of contact details. - [majella@comhaltas.ie](mailto:majella@comhaltas.ie), [sct@comhaltas.ie](mailto:sct@comhaltas.ie), [director.sctexams@gmail.com](mailto:director.sctexams@gmail.com).

MF thanked Majella and Paddy for getting the SCT recognised in the UK; Irish music wasn't held to the standard as classical music historically in this country, and said this is a really positive change!

Paddy acknowledged that Majella is well respected within Music Education, and noted that this profile is really important when developing resources such as the SCT. Paddy said this has huge potential in Britain, and is great to see Comhaltas branding all over it! Paddy encouraged everyone to take copies home, and hand it to every teacher we know to drive the standard in an upwards direction.

Colleen queried removal of a specific accreditation, but Majella outlined that this had to happen to receive the Ofqual accreditation.

David reiterated that the application process for the Caroline Fegan scholarship is still open for the 15th March. He asked people to approach Fleadh committee about any questions on volunteering.

Theresa thanked Majella for the presentation, and invited everyone to enjoy lunch.

*Lunch 12.30PM*

*Meeting resumed at 13:45.*

#### *Election of Officers*

Theresa welcomed everyone back! The afternoon session began with the Election of Officers to the Provincial Council.

First, we indicated our conflicts of interest, and Paddy reiterated the importance of declaring conflicts given that public money is used to fund the day-to-day operations of Comhaltas in Britain.

As most provincial officers were proposed in their current positions by all four regions, most were elected back into post. Éamonn O'hArgáin deputised until Theresa could be put back into post. However, as three regional nominations came in for a new Auditor, a vote was held to decide who will stand as Auditor 2. Midlands, London and Scotland nominated Michael Nixon from Coventry, and the Northern Region proposed Julie O'Hare. Total number of voting delegates was 28. Theresa presented the results of the vote for Auditor 2, where Michael Nixon was successful in securing the majority of the votes.

<b>Role</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Proposed &amp; Seconded</b>
Chair	Theresa Gallagher	Mairi Campbell, Calum McGregor
Vice-Chair	David Browne	Mairi Campbell, Michael Nevin
Secretary	Patrick Ballantyne	Wendy Doherty, Michelle Hemmingway
Treasurer	Michael Fitzgerald	Rosaleen Duddy-Owens, Julie O'Hare
P.R.O.	John Goulding	Michael Nevin, Carmel Burke
Youth Officer	Calum McGregor, Mairi Docherty	Paul McCormick, John Goulding
Irish Language Officer	Evin Downey	Michelle Hemmingway, Al Owens
Auditor 1	Moira Callaghan	Michael Nevin, Siobhan Kelly
Auditor 2	Michael Nixon	Wendy Doherty, Al Owens
Ard Comhairle Delegate	Michael Nevin	Wendy Doherty, Fiona Hoey



Theresa then introduced the next round of voting, for various positions in Ireland.

#### *Youth Officer*

Theresa provided a brief overview of the Youth Officers that wish to stand this year - Ciara Horan, Eilé Smith and Brid Gleeson. Noted that Mollie Tobin originally intended to stand, but has since withdrawn her application.

A vote was held with 28 voting delegates. The votes were in favour of Ciara Horan and Eilé Smith.

#### *Uachtarán*

Theresa introduced the two names who have indicated their intention to stand Eamon Graham (Ulster), Attracta Brady (Leinster). A vote was held with 28 voting delegates, and the attendees nominated Attracta Brady by a majority vote.

#### *Buanchoiste*

Eamonn O'hArgain is standing uncontested as Ard-Cisteor for the Buanchoiste (proposed by Conor Walsh, seconded by Siobhán Kelly). The remainder of the Buanchoiste (Ard-Chlaraitheoir, Ard-Runai) were proposed and seconded by:

- Ard-Runai - Julie O'Hare, John Burke.
- Ard-Chlaraitheoir - Mick Nixon, Calum McGregor.

#### *Fleadh Cheoil na hEireann*

A vote was held with 28 voting delegates to decide whether Belfast or Wexford should receive the All Ireland Fleadh in 2025. Attendees voted for Belfast for Fleadh 2025.

#### *Upcoming Dates*

Theresa noted that this year's Convention was costly for attendees, so we may move to an alternative venue next year. We are in St Helens for Fleadh Cheoil na Breataine 2024. Praised efforts of Midlands and London & Southern Region Fleadh for getting themselves organised early for subsequent All Britain Fleadh.

#### *Next Meetings*

Theresa and Patrick discussed dates for the next series of provincial council meetings, and agreed on:

- Thursday 16th May 19:00 PM - Online Meeting [ZOOM].
- Saturday 21st September 21st - Site visit to All Britain 2025 [IN PERSON].
- Thursday 14th November 19:00 PM - Online Meeting [ZOOM]
- Sunday 1st- 2nd March 2025 - Annual Convention in London & Southern Region [IN PERSON].

Carmel queried the site visit for the Midlands Fleadh. David reiterated that the meeting can be anywhere, but there does need to be a visit to the Fleadh site.

Paddy said the Provincial Council meets once a month on Zoom on Wednesday evenings, to check in how we are getting on with different projects and tasks. Paddy noted that this has significantly improved the overall efficiency of the Provincial Council, and recommended

branches and regions do the same. Theresa echoed this - it keeps communication moving between the different officers.

#### *AOB*

MN welcomed a large contingent from the Scottish Region to the Fleadh, and made a joke about the Willy Wonka experience in Glasgow.

Wendy thanked St Patrick's for taking the mantle to run the Scottish Fleadh this year, after St James the Great had just finished delivering the All Britain Fleadh.

Paddy raised a discussion point about adjudication sheets not being distributed at the regional fleadh. Paddy said adjudication sheets must be held for 10 days after a regional fleadh. He also reminded committees that batches of adjudication sheets should not be permitted; breach of GDPR.

Pricing structures for Fleadhs are different around the country. Paddy said we all do it differently, but it is worth looking at how others are doing it. In Scotland, introducing the fee to compete has worked out well, despite being opposed initially.

#### *Closing Remarks*

Theresa thanked everyone for attending and supporting the Annual Convention this year. Theresa paid particular tribute to the Provincial Council and Staff for helping deliver another successful Annual Convention.

*Meeting concluded: 14.40.*

## **APPENDIX - Relevant Correspondence**

Below outlines a summary of all the relevant correspondence covering key themes of interest to branches and regions. General correspondence won't be covered (e.g. between branch



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and regional secretaries), and all the official AGM paperwork has been distributed to your branches and regions.

### **Scoil Eigse**

50th Anniversary of Scoil Eigse is this year. It will be running in Wexford from the 4th - 9th August, and you can register at [scoileigse.ie](http://scoileigse.ie).

### **TTCT and Aisling Murphy Scholarships**

Some correspondence came in this week from Majella, thanking provinces for continued support and advertisement for the TTCT and Aisling Murphy scholarship. TTCT: Application deadline for TTCT (by normal application process is 29th March), our Caroline Fegan scholarship is still open. TTCT will take place from the 21st of July. If anyone needs forms or further information, please get in touch. Aisling Murphy Scholarships document will be circulated with the minutes of the meeting.

### **Provincial Accounts**

We will need Signed, Audited, Provincial CCÉ Accounts in for 2023 as soon as possible. These need to be collated and sent out for bulk printing in good time for Congress in Sligo. You might let me know when we can expect to receive them ? Thank you (Liza O'Shea).

### **Regional Fleadh Funding**

As you are all aware, additional funding is being made available for regions to run their fleadh, with a specific focus on how to incorporate Irish language into your regional Fleadhs. Thus far, we've had applications in from two regions, and are working with the regions to maximise the potential of these, and distribute funds. Speak to Paddy or Elske for more information on this.

### **Irish Minstrels CCÉ**

Application for funding came in from Irish Minstrels CCÉ for desperately needed funds to set up and compete in the Marching Bands competition this year. As a Meitheal committee, we are reviewing this application, building a new legacy of Marching Bands over the next three years. Michelle Hemmingway queried what is involved with a Marching Band - DB said all information needed are in the Fleadh rules. JOH queried adjudicators for Marching Bands - three are available.

### **Congress 2024**

This year Comhdháil 2024 will be held in Sligo. The venue is the Clayton Hotel. The theme of the Comhdháil will be "A SHARED ISLAND". A number of elements during the weekend will encapsulate this theme. The Comhdháil, in addition to the usual items, will have a number of other sections including the launch of the new Comhaltas website, etc. It is planned to have the new Comhaltas Prospectus 2030 CONNECTING COMMUNITIES THROUGH OUR CULTURE central to the proceedings. This is the Comhaltas roadmap to 2030 and is relevant to all members and units of our cultural movement. Comhdháil 2024 is an opportunity for all branches to share in the fast moving and significant developments in Comhaltas and to have ownership of an exciting future for Irish culture. Don't miss this very special occasion. Organise and enable your delegates to be present. It promises to be very special. There will be céilithe, recitals, sessions. Bring along your instruments.

### **Research & Participation**



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We received a call for research participation from a Master's student at the University of Cambridge. Matthew Mayes is here with us this weekend (there are some flyers kicking about), so please chat to him about your experiences of Comhaltas, to help with his research.

### **Regional Monies Owed**

Just to reiterate the email I sent out on 12th Jan (2024), requesting regions to submit their annual payment for the music sub-committee. This is £250 per year. As far as I am aware, we have received no payments from regional boards for this money.

### **Competition Enquiry - Non-Binary Competitors**

Theresa led an enquiry about non-binary competitors for this year's Fleadhanna - "In the spirit of Cothromaíocht, and in the light of the positive steps taken by Comhaltas, in addressing equality issues in recent times, Comhaltas in Britain would like to request clarification on a situation we are anticipating, prior to fleadh season 2024. One of our regions has a Senior singer who identifies as non binary, and therefore we require your guidance and clarification on which competition they should enter".

A reply came from the ArdRunai - "Like yourselves in our work in CCÉ, we are in recent times being asked to address issues which we never had to consider. I accept that in line with our Diversity, Equality and Inclusion documentation, recently being addressed arising out of our publication of COTHROMAÍOCHT and more importantly complying with guidelines and legal requirements under equality laws issued by various government agencies, we have to be seen to comply with all. On the specific query from you, our advice (after consultation/discussion with other CCÉ persons) is that you are obliged to include the non-binary person in their choice of singing competition".

### **Irish in Britain Heritage Project**

John Goulding led on our role in the IIB Heritage project, and this came from John: I submitted 6 names to IIB of people who were prepared to be interviewed. 3 from L&S region (Pat Connolly, Marian Turner & Mike Nevin) and 3 from Midland region (Pat Kenny, Vince Jordan & Rosaleen Duddy Owens).

The exhibitions started last week;

1st to 5th November: LONDON. Irish Cultural Centre, Hammersmith

8th to 12th November: LIVERPOOL. The Florrie, Dingle

15th to 19th November: LEEDS. Slung Low, Holbeck

22nd to 26th November: BIRMINGHAM. Think Tank, Birmingham Science Museum.

Last Friday I attended the London exhibition which was very interesting and well presented. I spoke to the director who stated that the oral histories are a work in progress and will continue into the new year. If anyone has not yet been interviewed then it would appear you are not forgotten. There was an opportunity to listen to oral histories and to see a video on the stage. There were numerous themes; emigration from Ireland, hardship, working in construction, challenges and many others. Full details on IIB website. Worth a visit.

### **Big Draw**



We received regular dialogue with Leeds CCÉ who were using the Big Draw to raise well-needed funds for their branch. This is what the latest communication said, highlighting the creative way of using these tickets to raise funds:

- Buy a raffle ticket and this allows you a free lesson.
- Buy 9 raffle tickets and this allows you 1 free dinner dance ticket for the CCE dinner and dance.

### **Awards**

We received a request from Cambridge CCÉ to provide a stalwart member of the branch with a Gradam for an awards ceremony in the branch. We corresponded with Dublin and got this organised, and encouraged branches and regions to contact us with any similar enquiries.

We also received a thanks from Ena Doocey on receipt of her Tionol award;

MANY MANY THANKS TO EVERYONE IN COMHALTAS IN BRITIAN FOR THE BEAUTIFUL GIFT I RECIEVED LAST WEEKEND, ALSO FOR THE KINDNESS GENEROUSITY AND FRIENDSHIP I RECIEVED FROM YOU ALL,I REALLY APPRECIATE IT. AGAIN MANY THANKS FOR EVERYTHING ,  
SLÁN AGUS BEANNACHT,  
ENA DOOCEY.

### **All Ireland Fleadh Complaints**

We received a complaint from Leeds CCÉ about the rising costs of attending the All-Ireland Fleadh, specifically around the spiralling costs of accommodation and catering. This letter was sent forward to Comhaltas HQ.

### **Fleadh Rule Changes**

Old Rule (Rule 36)

36. Competitors must perform in person, unless in Newly Composed Song, Amhráin Nua Cheaptha and Newly Composed Tunes, at the competition venue as far as possible, compete in the order in which they are called by the Call Steward. A competitor who fails to present him / herself when called for a specific competition, and who has not notified the Call Steward on duty, of a just cause for his / her absence, shall be disqualified from the competition.

New Rule (Rule 36)

36. Competitors must perform in person at the competition venue and compete in the order in which they are called by the Call Steward. A competitor who fails to present himself/herself when called for a specific competition, and who has not notified the Call Steward on duty, of a just cause for his/her absence, shall be disqualified from the competition.

### **Adjudicators**

From Kathryn Browne: I take this opportunity to wish you the very best with your upcoming Provincial Fleadhanna and hope you have an enjoyable weekend as I know how busy you have been preparing for the events. Following your provincial Fleadh could you forward a list of the adjudicators you used and the competitions they adjudicated; this is in an attempt to not have adjudicators judging the same competitions at Provincial and All-Ireland Fleadh, where



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possible. Also, when submitting a copy of the qualifying newly composed tunes/songs to HQ if you could also send them to me at: adjudicators@comhaltas.net I can easily forward them to the adjudicators in question prior to the All-Ireland.

### **Echoes of Erin**

Last March we put forward a plan for how to run the Echoes of Erin concert in Britain, which will work financially for our branches.

We are proposing the following:

October for 2 weekends and week in-between: e.g. Friday 20 th October to Sunday 29 th October inclusive. (9 shows in 10 days)

Tour Group: 5 Musicians (where possible, musicians who also have the ability to sing, or dance too are to be considered favourable. 2 Dancers 1 Tour manager who doubles as Fear an Tí

This email was sent to Comhaltas HQ.



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