

# Circusful

## Company Limited by Guarantee

### Trustees' Annual Report (Incorporating the Director's Report)

#### Year ended 31 March 2025

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The trustees, who are also the directors for the purposes of company law, present their report and the financial statements of the charity for the year ended 31 March 2025.

#### Reference and administrative details

<b>Registered charity name</b>	Circusful
<b>Charity registration number</b>	NI100116
<b>Company registration number</b>	NI026212
<b>Principal office and registered office</b>	23/25 Gordon Street Belfast BT1 2LG

#### The trustees

A Malone	
C McGuicken	(Appointed 23 September 2024)
C Traynor	
G Erskine	
H Mullan	(Appointed 23 September 2024)
L Kelly	
O Lehané	(Appointed 23 September 2024)
R Lynas	
S Patterson	

<b>Auditor</b>	Finegan Gibson Ltd Chartered accountants & statutory auditor Causeway Tower 9 James Street South Belfast BT2 8DN
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<b>Bankers</b>	Unity Trust Bank 9 Brindley Place Birmingham B1 2HB
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# **Circusful**

## **Company Limited by Guarantee**

### **Trustees' Annual Report (Incorporating the Director's Report) *(continued)***

**Year ended 31 March 2025**

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#### **Structure, governance and management**

Circusful is a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity governed by its Articles of Association. The Board of Trustees provides strategic direction and oversight.

#### **Trustee Recruitment and Training**

Trustees are recruited through open calls and sector recommendations, approved by the Board following interview and skills assessment. Induction includes training in governance, safeguarding, finance, and the charity's mission.

#### **Decision-Making**

The Board delegates operational management to the CEO and senior team, while retaining oversight of finance, risk, and strategy. Subcommittees, including Audit & Risk and Fundraising, report directly to the full Board.

#### **Remuneration Policy**

The remuneration of key management personnel is determined by the Board, with benchmarking against comparable arts and charitable organisations.

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### Trustees' Annual Report (Incorporating the Director's Report) *(continued)*

Year ended 31 March 2025

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#### Objectives and activities

##### Introduction

Circusful delivers high quality, participatory circus, professional performance, training, and professional development across Northern Ireland. In 2024/25 we celebrated our 40th anniversary, marking four decades of artistic innovation, community engagement, and creative empowerment. Our year was characterised by high levels of participation across classes, outreach, and performance programmes, alongside a smooth transition in leadership and continued growth in our social circus work.

##### Our Purpose and Activities

Circusful is a charity registered with HMRC and the Northern Ireland Charities Commission. Its purposes, as set out in the Articles and Memorandum of Association, are:

- The advancement of education and the development and promotion of circus, drama, and performance skills in Northern Ireland;
- The provision of management and facilities for the training of young people and others who wish to learn arts, drama, circus, and physical entertainment without distinction of sex, age, colour, political, or religious opinion;
- The advancement of education for all people the organisation engages with; and
- The provision of facilities in the interests of social welfare, for recreation and leisure-time activities, with the objective of improving conditions of life.

##### Aims and Strategy

Our aims are to use circus as a tool for personal and community development, empowering individuals through creativity, teamwork, and resilience. Our activities support our legal purposes by improving wellbeing, building social cohesion, and providing pathways into creative industries. We achieve these aims through:

- A structured programme of training, classes, and workshops for children, young people, families, and adults;
- Outreach and social circus projects with communities across Northern Ireland, focusing on inclusion, confidence, and peacebuilding;
- Professional development for artists and trainers, ensuring sustainability of the circus sector; and
- Public performances and events that promote the art form and showcase participants' achievements.

Circusful measures success through attendance rates, participant feedback, artistic outcomes, community impact, and partnership growth.

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### Trustees' Annual Report (Incorporating the Director's Report) *(continued)*

Year ended 31 March 2025

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#### Strategic report

The following sections for achievements and performance and financial review form the strategic report of the charity.

#### Achievements and performance

##### Leadership and Organisational Stability

2024/25 saw significant leadership transition with the departure of the previous CEO. The Board provided clear governance, appointing an Interim CEO, and leading a transparent recruitment process culminating in the appointment of Paddy Anderson as permanent CEO. This ensured operational continuity, with minimal disruption to programmes or participant engagement.

##### Youth and Family Programs

Over 2024-25, Circusful delivered a diverse programme of term-time classes, summer schools, and special events for children, young people, and families.

- Average class occupancy remained high at 90% (Itty Bitty 95%, Youth 89%, Adult 86%).
- Over 300+ registered participants engaged across weekly and seasonal programmes, supported by our dedicated freelance trainers and staff.
- Showcase events, including Itty Bitty performances and Youth Circus showcases, celebrated participants' progress and creativity.
- Participation in Carnival of Colours and Galway's Mayhem Festival provided further performance experience.
- Scratch Nights were introduced for older youth and adults, and sell-out events in Q2 demonstrated strong demand for our creative platform.

##### Outreach, Social Circus and Community Engagement

Our Outreach Officers delivered over 160 workshops, engaging more than 850 participants across schools, youth groups, and community organisations. Key partnerships included Glenravel REAP, Brothers Autism, DadBodsNI, and cross-border projects supported by Creative Ireland. The Circus

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### Trustees' Annual Report (Incorporating the Director's Report) *(continued)*

#### Year ended 31 March 2025

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Explored initiative continued to expand access to training and performance opportunities for young people from diverse backgrounds.

#### Local and International Activity

Circusful maintained its profile within the wider cultural ecosystem. Staff and artists contributed to:

- Caravan International Social Circus Network,
  - Festivals and Events Forum, and
  - Cross-border collaborations with partners in Galway, Cloughjordan, and Derry.
- We delivered Vertical Play workshops and the Belfast Rope Meet, attracting participants from Ireland, the UK, Europe, and Hong Kong, reinforcing Circusful's reputation as a centre of excellence in circus arts.

#### Civic Events and Grassroots Involvement

Circusful's community of professional and amateur performers contributed to a range of civic and community events throughout the year, including Scratch Nights, the St Patrick's Day Parade, and local community showcases.

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### Trustees' Annual Report (Incorporating the Director's Report) *(continued)*

**Year ended 31 March 2025**

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#### **Financial review**

Circusful's financial position at year end remained stable, reflecting prudent management and successful diversification of income streams.

#### **Principal Funding Sources**

Funding was received from a mix of public, trust, and earned income sources, supporting our key objectives. Main funders: Arts Council NI, Belfast City Council, Esmée Mitchell, Foyle Foundation, Future Screens NI, Garfield Weston Foundation and RTE Toy Fund. Earned income percentage: 34% of income is earned income through provision of classes, outreach workshops, space hire, training fees, box office income, donations and merchandise sales.

#### **Reserves Policy**

Circusful maintains a reserves policy designed to ensure sustainability and manage financial risk.

Circusful's Reserves Policy states that the charity aims to hold between three and six months of unrestricted cash reserves to provide financial stability and ensure it can continue operating in the event of unexpected income shortfalls or increases in expenditure. The Board of Trustees considers this level essential to meet core costs such as staff salaries, operational expenses, and service delivery while alternative funding is secured or other measures are implemented. Based on current expenditure levels, the target reserve equates to approximately £253,000 for six months, with unrestricted funds currently representing around 87% of that goal. Restricted, reserve, and capital funds are recorded and monitored separately, as they cannot be used for immediate operational needs. The policy is reviewed annually to ensure that the level of reserves remains appropriate to the charity's financial position and risk profile.

#### **Risk Management**

Key risks include funding volatility, building sustainability, and staff capacity. The Audit & Risk Sub-Committee actively monitors and mitigates these through regular review of the risk register, robust safeguarding policies, and financial oversight.

The organisation continues to face rising costs against standstill budgets, creating challenges in maintaining high-quality circus arts facilities and limiting our ability to support staff and trainers through cost of living and incremental pay increases. This increases the risk of losing skilled and experienced team members to better-paid roles. Several key grants are due to end in 2025/26, creating a projected funding gap that will need to be addressed through increased earned income or new grant funding secured within the year.

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##### Plans for future periods

- Consolidate leadership under the new CEO and deliver a new three-year strategic plan (2025-2028);
  - Strengthen financial sustainability through diversified income and strategic partnerships;
  - Expand our social circus outreach, targeting new communities across Northern Ireland and border regions;
  - Continue investing in artist development and youth leadership pathways, ensuring the next generation of circus professionals can thrive.
  - Proactively build sector relationships and pursue strategic partnerships and collaborations to support the organisation's sustainable future.
- These plans build on lessons learned from our 40 years, and reflect our ongoing commitment to creativity, inclusion, and community transformation through circus.

##### Acknowledgements

The Board of Trustees wishes to thank our staff team, freelance artists, volunteers, funders, and participants for their continued energy and commitment to Circusful's mission. Together we continue to inspire, include, and transform communities through the joy and power of circus.

##### Trustees' responsibilities statement

The trustees, who are also directors for the purposes of company law, are responsible for preparing the trustees' report and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

Company law requires the charity trustees to prepare financial statements for each year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charitable company and the incoming resources and application of resources, including the income and expenditure, for that period.

In preparing these financial statements, the trustees are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- observe the methods and principles in the applicable Charities SORP;
- make judgments and accounting estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- state whether applicable UK Accounting Standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements;
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charity will continue in business.

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The trustees are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that are sufficient to show and explain the charity's transactions and disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charity and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Companies Act 2006. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

#### Auditor

Each of the persons who is a trustee at the date of approval of this report confirms that:

- so far as they are aware, there is no relevant audit information of which the charity's auditor is unaware; and
- they have taken all steps that they ought to have taken as a trustee to make themselves aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the charity's auditor is aware of that information.

The trustees' annual report and the strategic report were approved on 3 November 2025 and signed on behalf of the board of trustees by:

L Kelly  
Trustee

