



Trustees' Annual Report for the period

Period start date				Period end date			
	Day	Month	Year		Day	Month	Year
From	1	April	2023	To	31	March	2024

Reference and administration details

Charity name	BelfastTrad (Traditional Music and Dance Society)		
Registered charity number	NIC 100872		
Charity's principal address	Blick Shared Studios		
	65 Great Northern Street		
	Belfast		
Postcode:	BT9 7FL		

Names of the charity trustees on date of approval of Trustees' Annual Report

	Trustee name	Office (if any)	Date joined	Name of person (or body) entitled to appoint trustee (if any)
1	Tom Clarke	Chairperson	Over 25 years ago	
2	Deirdre Kearns	Deputy Chairperson	Jun 2007	
3	Martin Dowling	Treasurer	Dec 2012	
4	Anne Marie Walsh	Safeguarding Officer	Jun 2018	
5	Berni Corr	Solo Dance Co-ordinator	Jun 2018	
6	Pat O'Hagan	Set Dance Co-ordinator	Jun 2019	
7	Kevin McCullagh	Music Co-ordinator	Jun 2022	
8	Conor Diamond	Data Visualisation Officer	Jun 2022	
11	Christine Dowling	Officer	Jun 2022	
12	Tom Clarke	Officer	Over 25 years ago	
	Nuala McBride	Administrator (Acting Secretary)	Nov 2023	

Structure, governance and management

How is the charity constituted?

The Society was formally constituted in 1991. It is a non-profit making organisation.

Trustee recruitment and appointment

Under the Society Constitution the number of trustees for the purpose of law shall not be less than three and is not subject to any maximum. Trustees are elected to serve only until the next Annual General Meeting, at which they shall be eligible for re-election.

The charity's organisational structure and any wider network with which the charity works

The executive committee members, who are also trustees for the purpose of charity law, and served during the year are listed in the table on page one. During the period under review the Committee met monthly and the present Committee was approved by the membership at the Annual General Meeting.

A regular project that we expanded on this year was our annual Belfast Piping Tionól, we partnered with An Droichead and An Chomharchumann Phíobaireachta to deliver an enhanced programme with more events and an increased participation.

Objectives and Activities

Summary of the main activities in relation to those purposes for the public benefit.

The goals and ethos of the society from its inception in 1991 have been to ensure that the shared traditions of Irish music, song and dance are available to anyone who wants to learn, with classes provided in a welcoming and neutral setting. Our students are aged 5-90 years, with the majority of our students being young adult and upwards in age.

We have now completed a full year of classes at Stranmillis University College. This prestigious institution provides the perfect environment for BelfastTrad's traditional arts programme and its custom-designed music and dance spaces.

BelfastTrad aims to:

- a) Promote and develop a knowledge and love of the traditional arts of traditional Irish music, song and dance, amongst the public in the area of benefit;
- b) Provide workshops, classes and training in all aspects of traditional Irish music skills and traditional Irish dancing;
- c) Organise performances of traditional music, song and dance and promote active participation in such arts;
- d) Advance the understanding and public appreciation of the links between Irish traditional music and dance and other genres of traditional music and dance.

The benefit which flows from the provision of traditional arts of Irish music and dance include education, social inclusion and artistic expression to the people through Northern Ireland that participate in the activities. The provision of workshops, classes, lectures and training in all aspects of traditional music and dancing skills to anyone in the area of benefit who wants to learn also provides the benefit of education, greater understanding of our shared culture and traditions and the attainment of musical skills.

We welcome people of all abilities. Through the organisation of the performance of traditional music, song and dance and promoting active participation in such arts provides direct benefits in supporting the arts, social cohesion and better health.

Summary of the purposes and principal activity of the charity as set out in its governing document

BelfastTrad was originally founded as Belfast and District Set Dancing and Traditional Music Society. Constituted in 1991, it was formed by a small cohort of like-minded dancers and musicians led by set dancer Mary Fox. The principal activity of the Society is to promote and develop a knowledge and love of the traditional arts of Irish Music and dance, and to advance its education and appreciation in the greater Belfast and district area.

Confirm trustees have had regard to the guidance issued by the Charity Commission on public benefit

BelfastTrad Trustees confirm they have complied with their duty under charity law to have regard to the Commission's public benefit guidance when exercising any powers or duties to which the guidance is relevant.

Achievements and performance

Summary of the main achievements of the charity during the financial period

Our annual programme for 2023-24, supported by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and Lottery funding through the Arts Council, consisted this year of an average of 43 weekly classes per term with Spring Term '23, Autumn Term '23 and Winter Term '24 all happening in-person at Stranmillis University College. We were delighted to have full range of music, song and dance classes all in-person at the same venue for the entire year. BelfastTrad also held a range of special events including twelve workshops five bursaries for additional workshops at the TradFest Winter weekend, two singing sessions, four music sessions, a piper's chair, and two 'In Conversation With' events. We also continued our collaboration with Glengormley School of Music, hosting children's sessions at the new arts venue 2 Royal Avenue, Belfast.

Participation in our classes and events saw significant growth this year, with 765 students attending our weekly classes over the three terms, up from 733 last year - our highest student enrolment to date. This represents an approximate 4.37% increase in enrolment. Additionally, approximately 800 individuals engaged with us through other events such as workshops, lectures, sessions, concerts and collaborative events with other organisations. We maintained collaborations with various organisations, including the Belfast Song Gathering with an Droichead, our Piping Tionól supported by Na Píobairí Uilleann, An Droichead, and An Chomharchumann Phíobaireachta, and the Belfast Summer School of Traditional Music. BelfastTrad sponsored a bursary to the school last year, providing five young musicians the opportunity to attend three masterclasses each. The presence of high-quality events like Belfast Tardiest greatly benefits our students.

Financial review

Brief statement of the charity's policy on reserves

The Committee considers it prudent to hold monies in reserve in the event that unforeseen circumstances should lead to financial difficulties which might put the users' well being and charitable work in jeopardy. The committee recognises that in the developing public sector funding climate, competition for future grant aid will be even more intense. Free reserves are stipulated by the Arts Council and defined by the trustees, as those funds are freely available for us as the society so determines and thereby exclude any restricted designated funds.

Review of the charity’s financial position at the end of the period

The society is a non-profit making organisation. The results are set out in detail in our Charity accounts. The Charity recorded a surplus of £3,387 in the year, (2023: deficit of £11,751).

Income generated by the society activities totalled £89,338 (2023: £83,410) of which £37,448 (2023: £35,824) was received from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. This continues to fund a part-time administrative post within the Society. The remaining income was generated by term fees for a range of instrument classes at various levels, individual and set dancing classes, workshops, oblique masterclasses and end of term concerts/céilís.

The balance of funds at the year-end was £38,969 of which £38,969 was unrestricted.

The committee have discussed strategies for reducing any unnecessary expenditure and will apply these in the forthcoming programme of events.

Details of any deficit

Donated facilities and services (if any)

Chair’s Report

Tom Clarke

First of all, I would like to thank the committee members for their commitment and support in all the work that running BelfastTrad entails. They are the reason fro its growing success and expansion, BelfastTrad couldn’t exist without them.

Secondly, the major event of the year has been the loss of Fíóna Ni Mhearáin to the arts Council of Northern Ireland. She has been the prop and support of BelfastTrad since her appointment in 2019 and has worked with diligence on all aspects of our work. Our loss is ACNI’s gain but, of course, she will be a great supporter of what we do in her present role. We are fortunate, however, to have in her replacement, Nuala McBride, a worthy successor. Nuala approaches everything she does with our core values central to her vision and works with great diligence, patience and efficiency.

Thanks are also due to our tutors who provide the very core of our tradition, teaching the music, song and dance to all who want and value it.

It has been another successful year with our established outreach partners. We have worked woith and been supported by many organisations, in particular ACNI, An Droichead, Belfast TradFest, Stranmillis University College, AccessNI and Na Píobairí Uilleann. The usual broad range of classes, workshops and concerts was provided and some of the workshops from prominent musicians, singers and dancers were truly memorable.

In these financially difficult times BelfastTrad has again secured funding from ACNI for 2024/25, illustrating that it continues to recognise the value we represent to the traditional arts sector. This ensures that we are able to offer our full programme of classes, workshops and lectures.

We continue to need volunteers in an active role in BelfastTrad. By joining the committee, organising student events and sessions, and helping out at events and workshops, volunteers can play a vital role in the activities of BelfastTrad.

Treasurer's Report

Martin Dowling

From the treasurer's perspective, the year under review (2023-2024) saw BelfastTrad returning to levels of income and expenditure that were typical of the years preceding the Covid pandemic. In recent post-pandemic years, which also included our transition to Stranmillis University College, a full programme with lower than average enrolments, pre-pandemic fees, and higher rental costs cut significantly into the organisation's reserves. This year we returned to a more careful control of costs with a goal of returning to a pre-pandemic pattern of augmenting our reserves each year. In the year we also opened new accounts with the Charities Aid Foundation (CAF), an online bank for registered charities in the UK, with a separate interest-bearing account for our reserves funds. We are maintaining our account with Ulster Bank because of its superior functionality for handling euro/ sterling transactions.

The result has been that, for the first time in many years, we were able to add very significantly to reserves. The accompanying table of quarterly income and expenditure shows a solid box office return (via the Stripe application embedded into the BelfastTrad website) and overall a net income of nearly £7,000. At the end of the year we transferred £10,000 to the savings account, the balance of which now stands at just over £35,000. This is roughly equivalent to the level of annual support received from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. The organisation is therefore in a strong position to weather any unexpected future storms with regard to public support we have received for many decades. It is envisioned to tailor our future programming to maintain reserves at this level.

The financial standing of the Society remains strong in an inflationary environment. We are in a position to expand our programme of weekend workshops in the coming year. However, the committee must continue to diligently monitor enrolment income for classes and workshops, and aggressively advertise our programme to the community to keep income at sustainable levels. Maintaining a financially healthy organisation is a collective effort. I would like to thank our new administrator, Nuala McBride, my fellow committee members, our dedicated tutors, our accountant, Bradley Accounting and Taxation, our members and sponsors, and especially the Arts Council of Northern Ireland for their support.

Safeguarding Report

Anne Marie Walsh

1. Background

Safeguarding is included as a reporting item at BelfastTrad AGM. This includes updates on training, policy review and notification of any incidents which may have arisen throughout the previous year.

2. Update on Activities - Summary

2.1 Volunteer Now continued to offer an annual programme of training in the area of Safeguarding throughout the past year using both the Zoom platform and in-person training. Our newly appointed administration officer attended Safeguarding Training on keeping Children and Adults Safe: Introduction (November 2023) and Keeping Children and Adults Safe: creating a Safe Environment (December 2023). BelfastTrad has a policy priority of mandatory attendance at Safeguarding training on a three year cycle and this year completes year 1 of the cycle with tutors having undertaken training during 2023. Copies of certificates of attendance are retained on record for audit purposes.

2.2 All tutors are requested to complete Access NI checks on a three year cycle and these were completed in June 2024.

2.3 Following a review of our policies by Volunteer Now in May 2023 we reported that there were six statements where it was reported that our policies did not show sufficient evidence to meet compliance. We have since engaged with Volunteer Now and met with their representative to check our understanding of compliance - this meeting was attended by the Safeguarding Officer and Administration Officer. We were able to provide additional evidence and the number of statements of non-compliance were reduced to four thereby increasing our compliance rating to 94% (88.5% reported in our last annual report). The four areas where we are now including additional detail are as follows: listing what constitutes abuse; further information on confidentiality; reference to First Aid and reference to procedures to deal with emergencies. It was also advised by Volunteer Now that we develop an anti-bullying policy. Our policies will be reviewed next in 2026/27.

2.4 We have a meeting schedule in June with representatives of Stranmillis University College to review any emerging areas of risk and to agree mitigations where necessary.



3 Reporting of Safeguarding Incidents and or Concerns

One issue was reported during the year and an Incident record form completed. This was in relation o inappropriate communication rom a student which breached the Code of Conduct. The matter was Brought to the attention of the Committee and action was taken to suspend the student.

Declaration

The trustees declare that they have approved the trustees' report above.

Signed on behalf of the charity's trustees

Signature(s)		
Full name(s)	Tom Clarke	Martin Dowling
Position	Chairperson	Treasurer
Date	11/12/2024	11/12/2024