



BelfastTrad

Trustees' Annual Report for the period

Period start date				Period end date		
Day	Month	Year		Day	Month	Year
From	1	April	2024	To	31	March 2025

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	Kevin McCullagh	Chairperson	Jun 2022	
2	Deirdre Kearns	Co-Deputy Chairperson	Jun 2007	
3	Christine Dowling	Co-Deputy Chairperson	Jun 2022	
4	Catherine O'Neill	Treasurer	Jun 2024	
5	Berni Corr	Dance Co-ordinator	Jun 2018	
6	Cecilia Mcwhirter	Deputy Dance Co-Ordinator	Jun 2025	
7	Sile Martin	Tutor liaison	Jun 2024	
8	Anne Marie Walsh	Safeguarding Officer	Jun 2018	
9	Conor Diamond	Data Visualisation Officer	Jun 2022	
10	Naomhán O'Connor	Social Media and Branding Officer	May 2025	
11	Conor Muldoon	Assistant Instrument Hire Co-Ordinator	Jun 2025	
12	Marcella Marais	Officer	Jun 2025	
13	Davy Maguire	Officer	Jun 2025	
14	Ciara Maguire	Administrator (Temporary cover)	Feb 2025	
15	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 Tíonól. 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. Weekly classes take place 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 2024-25, 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 '24, Autumn Term '24 and Winter Term '25 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 sixteen workshops in music, dance & song, three illustrated lectures, two singing sessions, four music sessions, a Piper's Chair and one 'In Conversation With' events. We also continued our collaboration with Glengormley School of Music to host monthly children's sessions at the new arts venue 2 Royal Avenue.

The level of participation in our classes and events grew significantly this year with 807 enrolments in our weekly classes over the three terms. This is a growth of 5.4% on last year's numbers and our highest student enrolment yet, higher even than our pre-Covid enrolments. Almost 800 more people engaged with us at our other events such as workshops, lectures, sessions, concerts and collaborative events with other organisations. A regular project that we expanded on this year was our annual Belfast Piping Tionól, as we partnered with An Droichead and An Chomharchumann Phíobaireachta to deliver an enhanced programme with more events and an increased participation.

BelfastTrad looks forward to growing our programme and audience over the next year as we build on the success of this year. 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 three young musicians the opportunity to attend three masterclasses each. The presence of high-quality events like Belfast Tradfest 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 deficit of £8,797 in the year (2024: surplus of £3,387).

Income generated by the society activities totalled £99,378 (2024: £89,338) of which £35,824 (2024: £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 £42,371 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

Deirdre Kearns

I would like to begin by expressing my sincere gratitude to the committee members for their dedication and support in managing the many aspects of BelfastTrad. Their commitment is the driving force behind our continued growth and success. This year, we welcomed several new members to the committee, each of whom have taken on active roles. BelfastTrad simply wouldn't thrive without their contributions. A heartfelt thank you also goes to our tutors, who are at the heart of our tradition. Through their teaching of music, song and dance they pass on the cultural heritage to all who seek and cherish it.

This year has been another fruitful one for our outreach efforts. We've continued to collaborate with and receive support from a range of valued partners, including ACNI, An Droichead, Tradfest, Stranmillis University College, AccessNI and Na Píobairí Uilleann. Our programme remained rich and varied, offering a wide selection of classes, workshops and concerts. Some of the workshops led by renowned musicians, singers and dancers were particularly unforgettable.

Despite the challenging financial climate, we are pleased that BelfastTrad has once again secured funding from The Arts Council of Northern Ireland for 2025-26. This endorsement highlights the continued recognition of our value within the traditional arts sector and enables us to deliver our full programme of classes, workshops and lectures.

Looking ahead, we continue to rely on volunteers to play an active role in BelfastTrad. Whether by joining the committee, organising student events and sessions, or assisting at workshops and concerts, volunteers are essential to the vitality of our organisation.

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. During the year we appointed a Deputy Safeguarding Officer, Sile Martin, to ensure that we had full access to a safeguarding officer, should the Safeguarding Officer be unavailable. Sile has undertaken/ 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 2 of the cycle with the tutors having undertaken training during 2023. Copies of certificates of attendance are retained on record for audit purpose.

2.2 All tutors are requested to complete Access NI checks on a three year cycle and these were completed in late 2023. The next update will be 2026.

2.3 We undertake to review our policies every three years. Our policies were last reviewed by Volunteer Now in May 2023. We are continuing to update detail on the four areas outlined in our last annual report - listing what constitutes abuse; further information on confidentiality; reference to First Aid and reference to procedures to deal with emergencies. We are also progressing with an anti-bullying policy. Our policies will be reviewed next in 2026/27.

2.4 We met 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: No issues were reported during the period June 2024 - June 2025 and no incidents arose. We continue to facilitate an arrangement for one student who receives music materials outside of in-person classes. This arrangement is reviewed on an annual basis. All information relating to students is managed in line with GDPR guidelines.

Treasurer's Report

Catherine O'Neill

This year has been one of renewed growth and momentum for BelfastTrad. The organisation generated a total of £102k in income during the financial year, a 14% increase on the previous year. This growth was driven by a surge in class enrolments and is a clear indicator of the organisation's growing popularity and relevance within the community.

The organisation's growth also prompted an increase in costs, with total expenditure reaching £95k, an increase of 9%. This increase is largely attributable to higher classroom rental costs and tutor wages, and again reflects the charity's success this year as we responded to public demand by expending our offering of classes and workshops.

At year end, BelfastTrad reports an income and expenditure surplus of £11,560. When adjusted for income relating to maternity pay and to account for outstanding costs at year end and receivable monies, the underlying or 'true' surplus stands at £8,797. The organisation's net assets total £51k, including undesignated cash resources of £62k.

This financial surplus has allowed us to focus on our cash reserves, which decreased in previous years and are now slowly being built back up to pre-pandemic levels. At year end we transferred £5k to the savings account, the balance of which stands at just over £40k. The organisation is therefore in a strong position to weather any unexpected storms with regard to public funding.

We are delighted to have received an uplift of £27,575 in our core funding from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland for the coming financial year and will soon begin the process of recruiting a full-time Administrative Officer, who will be supported by a part-time Administrative Assistant. This funding uplift marks a transformative moment for the organisation. To date, we have relied heavily on the dedication of volunteers and the efforts of a single part-time employee to administer what has become a dynamic and demanding programme. This setup has placed considerable strain on our resources and we are pleased to be in a position to proceed into the coming year with greater ambition and increased financial resilience.

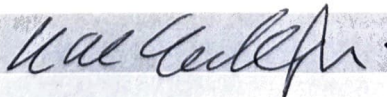
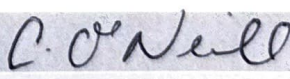
However, while our core funding has increased, we have not received an uplift in our programming funding. BelfastTrad continues to operate in a turbulent and inflationary financial environment, and while we hope to build on the public interest in our programme, we must remain cautious and ensure that our ambitions are met with sustainable financial management.

BelfastTrad's financial health is a testament to the collaborative efforts of our members and supporters, and I would like to thank my fellow committee members, our administrative assistant, Nuala McBride, her temporary replacement, Ciara Maguire, our dedicated tutors, our sponsors, including Cairdeas na bhFidiléirí and Na Píobairí Uilleann, our accountants, Bradley Accounting and Taxation, for their worthwhile assistance, and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland for their generous and ongoing support.

Declaration

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

Signed on behalf of the charity's trustees

Signature		
Full name	Kevin McCullagh	Catherine O'Neill
Position	Chairperson	Treasurer
Date	25/08/2025	25/08/2025