

Ulster-Scots Community Network

Company Limited by Guarantee

Directors' Annual Report (Incorporating the Director's Report)

Year ended 31 March 2023

The directors, 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 2023.

Reference and administrative details

Registered charity name Ulster-Scots Community Network

Charity registration number NIC100986

Company registration number NI043631

Principal office and registered office Corn Exchange
1-9 Victoria Street
Belfast
BT1 3GA

The directors

Mrs. E. Cameron
Mrs. L. Mulholland
Mrs. A. Smyth
Mr. N. McCausland
Mr. G. Campbell
Mrs. C. Evans
Mr. W. Carlile
Mr M. Smyth (Appointed 6 April 2022)

Company secretary Mr D Gilliland

Auditor Aubrey Campbell & Company
Chartered accountants & statutory auditor
631 Lisburn Road
Belfast
BT9 7GT

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Structure, governance and management

Management

The Ulster-Scots Community Network (USCN) is overseen by a Board of Directors who are responsible for setting the strategic direction of the organisation, with the day to day management undertaken by the Operations Director who also implements all necessary policies as agreed by the Board.

The Operations Director is responsible for ensuring that the organisation delivers on agreed targets and objectives. He is also responsible for the supervision of the staff team.

Public Benefit Statement

The trustees confirm that they have had due regard for the guidance produced on public benefit by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland and are pleased to report that during the period the charitable company has continued to provide public benefits through the programmes and services we offer.

Current Structure and Staffing

Chairman
Board of Directors
Operations Director
Education Development Officer
Publications Officer
Community Development Officer
Community Development Officer
Community Development Officer
Community Development Officer (vacant)

Corporate Governance

The Ulster-Scots Community Network is committed to high standards of corporate governance. Although the organisation does not have shareholders, the staff and Board have a responsibility to provide clear evidence of a transparent and efficient organisation to its stakeholders who include the Ulster-Scots community, funding bodies and government.

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Structure, governance and management *(continued)*

The Board of Directors

As detailed in the USCN Articles and Memorandum of Association, the Board directs the organisation's strategic planning, financial management and operational issues. The Board meets, on average, 7 times a year with a full General Meeting to be held at least once every 15 months.

The Chairman leads the Board and the Operations Director leads the management of the organisation. The Chairman's responsibilities include setting the Board Agenda and with the Operations Director, is responsible for the distribution of accurate, timely and clear information pertaining to the activities of the organisation.

The diversity of interest groups from within the wider Ulster-Scots sector, represented by the Board is seen as a key strength of the organisation. The Operations Director attends Board meetings as a linkage between the staff of the organisation and the Board. The Operations Director plays a full role at Board Meetings but does not have voting rights at such meetings.

The USCN Board are responsible for scrutinising the performance of the management in order to be satisfied as to the integrity and strength of financial information controls and risk management of the organisation.

Internal Controls

The Directors (Trustees) are responsible for the organisation's systems of internal control which are designed to provide reasonable assurance to safeguard the organisation's assets against unauthorised use or disposition and the maintenance of proper accounting records and the reliability of financial information used within the organisation.

The Ulster-Scots Community Network recognises that effective corporate governance remains key to maintaining a strong organisational ethos in which the Ulster-Scots community, Government and funders can be confident. Policies and controls are reviewed regularly by relevant personnel and actions to address non-conformance are undertaken without delay.

The financial procedures of the organisation are specifically governed by a Financial Procedures Policy and the Procurement Policy.

A management accounting system is in place providing management with financial and operational performance measurement indicators. Detailed account summaries are prepared monthly and combined with up to date banking records, are regularly presented to the USCN Board in clear and concise formats.

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Objectives and activities

Objectives

The Ulster-Scots Community Network (USCN) was established in 1995 to promote awareness and understanding of the Ulster-Scots tradition in language, literature, music and dance as well as the contribution of the Ulster-Scots community to the development of life in Northern Ireland, the border counties of the Republic of Ireland and the Ulster-Scots diaspora.

As a representative body of many Ulster-Scots with around 650 member groups, the USCN is committed to a comprehensive exploration of the interaction between Ulster and Scotland, which has been a constant factor in the history of the British Isles.

The Ulster-Scots Community Network aims to preserve, promote and develop Ulster-Scots heritage and culture in all its forms and to make a constructive and progressive contribution to delivering a fully inclusive society in which mutual understanding and tolerance are accepted as the norm - a society at peace with itself. We seek to work to develop a culturally confident and creative community capable of playing a key role in our society in future.

We aim to achieve this by: -

Providing an umbrella organisation for all interest groups engaging in Ulster-Scots activities - language, culture and history;

Increasing capacity and building relevant skills with the Ulster-Scots community;

Promoting Ulster-Scots activities and aiming to increase community confidence;

Acting as a focal point for dissemination of information concerning Ulster-Scots;

Developing Ulster-Scots culture and heritage throughout the education and tourism sectors and throughout the wider community.

Strategic report

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

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Achievements and performance

Membership and Member Groups

The USCN has continued to support our core member organisations. The Network currently supports approximately 650 registered groups throughout Northern Ireland, the border counties of the Republic of Ireland and the wider Ulster-Scots diaspora. These groups include Ulster-Scots cultural groups, marching bands, local history societies, education groups, churches, and schools amongst others.

Activities, Publications and Events during 2022 and into 2023

Based in the Discover Ulster-Scots Centre within the historic Corn Exchange building in Belfast are the Ulster-Scots Community Network's office. The Network also manages the visitors centre, performance space and shop unit there. This space provides a visible presence for the Ulster-Scots community in Belfast and showcases their role, impact and contribution to wider society including within Northern Ireland, the Border Counties, and the impact the diaspora has had on world history. It also allows us to showcase the role that the Ulster-Scots community played in the development of Belfast and its industrial contribution to the world. The Board and staff view the centre as an opportunity to heighten awareness of this contribution and to maintain the visibility of the Ulster-Scots community.

The Network has resumed their work with groups across Ulster both in the real world, as confidence returns to the sector and people want to interact at a personal level again after spending so long connecting via technology. We do continue as well to work virtually with those groups who still haven't the confidence to bring groups of people together.

USCN also continued to build upon opportunities for providing Ulster-Scots materials into the community as part of our outreach work and our collaboration with member groups. This year, also saw a return to working with our member groups in the Border Counties and assisting them as they sought to develop their connections on a broader basis than had been possible for the last few years.

Other notable activities include:

Maintaining membership engagement - 66 groups either joined or renewed their membership of the Network over the course of the year, keeping membership around 650 groups.

USCN staff provided assistance to member groups across the year with over 350 meetings and 2500 responses to various queries groups had. We also assisted groups to secure nearly £450k in financial assistance in the period.

Throughout the year staff delivered a range of talks to groups, as well as exhibition materials in a variety of venues with a near doubling year on year - partly driven by the removal of restrictions - to 112 sessions.

The Education Officer provided talks to schools on a further 125 occasions during the year, and USCN staff distributed almost 20k items of literature and promotional material during the period covered by this report. USCN also undertook promotional work at a range of cultural and information events this year including festivals, conferences and cultural showcases.

USCN processed almost 200 Access NI certificates this year for member groups as well as assisting over 50 member groups with policy advice and guidance as we seek to enhance the capacity of the community.

USCN also continue to develop their online presence through a variety of social media channels as

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they look to broaden the reach of their message particularly as they look to engage with the Ulster-Scots diaspora.

As part of its ongoing programme of work USCN also delivered Open College Network NI accredited courses in Ulster-Scots History and Identity with 11 courses being delivered across Northern Ireland.

The Publications Officer was extremely productive with articles being produced and carried in a range of newspapers and magazines throughout the year, as well as researching articles on other famous Ulster-Scots as the basis for future publications.

Financial review

We are grateful to the following organisations who provided support to the USCN during the period under review:

Ulster-Scots Agency - Core Funding support including salaries, establishment costs and project monies.

Ulster-Scots Agency under their Small Grants Scheme for delivery of events in the community.

Arts Council of Northern Ireland - Salary support (Publications Officer) under their AFP scheme, as well as programming costs for our artistic programme.

Heritage Lottery - under the CRESI scheme administering funding on behalf of Department for Communities to recruit staff to assist the future development of the organisation within the sector.

Scottish Book Trust - a grant to allow us to publish an anthology of Scots poetry by Stuart A Paterson. We are the first organisation outside Scotland to receive this grant from the Scots Government.

RESERVES POLICY

Reserves are required by any organisation to help offset the inherent risk potential of reliance on funding applications and the processes they entail.

USCN aims to hold three months core operating costs as a Business Reserve at all times. This ensures an effective salary net exists to cover fixed costs and staff salaries as well as successfully completing any outstanding project commitments.

The actual financial amount held in reserve is reviewed regularly and is dependent on the availability of assets and the mean monthly operating total as calculated at each review.

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Plans for future periods

USCN is committed to the delivery of the Key Performance Indicators as set out in the current 2023 Business Plan of the organisation. These include:

- Help secure £500k in financial assistance for member groups.
- Provide 400 advice sessions to member groups on a range of relevant issues. Deliver a range of geographically diverse information sessions on funding. Support at least 40 member groups with policy development
- Facilitate 100 Disclosure certificates through Access NI
- Recruit at least 100 participants for the OCN NI Accredited Courses offered by USCN. Deliver talks/Presentations to at least 60 groups
- Grow the Network by 5% during the year
- Increase walk-in visitors to the Discover Ulster-Scots Centre by 10%. Deliver a range of cultural activities through the centre
- Meet regularly with key member organisations and maintain a strong and visible online and media presence

Future Grant Funding

The USCN has secured core funding from the Ulster-Scots Agency for the 2023 calendar year. This agreement expires in December 2023. Negotiations will commence to secure a financial package from the Ulster-Scots Agency for 2024, with a business plan being submitted in late 2023. It is also hoped that during 2024 we will be submitting a multi-year business plan which will assist us to move away from the current funding model.

The Directors are confident that the Ulster-Scots Agency will agree to provide sufficient core funding to allow the Network to continue in existence and are not aware of any reason why the Ulster-Scots Agency's financial support might be withdrawn.

Arts Council funding has been secured for the current financial year 2023/24 to support the post of Publications Officer and other financial support has been received from Heritage Lottery Fund to support an additional post within the Network through until 2025.

Directors' responsibilities statement

The directors, who are also directors for the purposes of company law, are responsible for preparing the directors' 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 directors 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.

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In preparing these financial statements, the directors 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.

The directors 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 director 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 director to make themselves aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the charity's auditor is aware of that information.

The auditor is deemed to have been re-appointed in accordance with section 487 of the Companies Act 2006.

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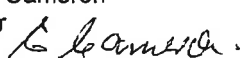
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Year ended 31 March 2023

The directors' annual report and the strategic report were approved on 28 November 2023 and signed on behalf of the board of trustees by:

Mrs. E. Cameron

Director



Mrs. L. Mulholland

Director



Mrs. A. Smyth

Director

Mr. N. McCausland

Chairman



Mr. G. Campbell

Director

Mrs. C. Evans

Director

Mr. W. Carlile

Director



Mr M. Smyth

Director

