

## Tuairisc Bliantúil 2023

### Annual Trustees' Report

*Prepared by: Gearóid Ó Machail, Ard Rúnaí, Aonach Mhacha, 15-12-2023*

#### Réamhra

Fáilte romhaibh agus Nollaig shona daoibh go léir a chairde Gaeil. It's now 4 years since we moved into what still feels like our new home. It's been another eventful 12 months since we last came together here, during which time, difficulties notwithstanding, Aonach Mhacha has once again consolidated and delivered on many of our key objectives.

High profile cultural events such as sell-out concerts and exhibitions stole the show during 2023 and reaffirmed our belief in the potential of the Cultúrlann to be a first class and successful community arts venue; that despite the challenges of the deepening 'cost of living crises' and inadequate government support for cultural arts.

Among the many highlights of 2023 for me , the restoration of Club Óige in Ard Mhacha for the first time since 2019 and the departure of Seán Ó Maoilsté, was the most satisfying - a notable achievement by our outgoing Oifigeach Forbartha Gaeilge, Ciarán Withers.

In addition, the development of our new partnership with Ollscoil Uladh that has delivered Diplóma sa Ghaeilge in Ard Mhacha was no inconsiderable achievement and garnered a large amount of local and national attention. We witnessed record numbers of adult learners attending Irish classes in the Cultúrlann in 2023 and we had an excellent end of term party and awards presentation in here last night with ceol and a superb spread of bia from Caifé Mhacha. It was a lovely gathering of eager learners of the language and it felt like a proper little community.

Campa Mhacha also attracted record numbers of young people to our summer camp this summer. Our attendance numbers in these categories vastly outstripped those in every other town and city across the country. No glittery awards or tiaras or fancy dinners for us though. Just the satisfaction of knowing that we do is valued and treasured by our local community. This has been much in evidence throughout the year. Armagh I said that the articles that they do about Aonach Mhacha receive way more engagement than any others.

It's easy sometimes to take all of our myriad achievements for granted and to reflect

disproportionately on the challenges and obstacles that we often face on a daily basis. While it is important to celebrate all of our successes, I pointed out to the Board of Directors in last year's report that there was an urgent need for medium to longer term strategic planning and strong strategic leadership from the Board to ensure the safety and survival of the Cultúrlann beyond my tenure.

Other than the commissioning of an excellent strategic review and plan from Barr Feabhais (that I proposed in a motion at last year's CCB), I'm not sure that any other substantive progress was made on future planning in 2023.

As a gesture of loyalty and commitment to the Aonach Mhacha project, I reluctantly agreed at the Bord Stiúrtha meeting in February 2023 to postpone my decision to reduce my number of roles within the organisation by March 31st in order to allow the Board more time to recruit a new Facilities/General Manager. One year since my announcement, I see little evidence that the Board took that announcement seriously and this has now made the task of strategic planning critical! The decision by the Directors to switch from monthly to bi-monthly or was it quarterly meetings in 2023 (one of which was sub-quorate) despite the obvious need to oversee critically important transitions and changes, has left me feeling anxious about the future of Cultúrlann Aonach Mhacha beyond the end of my tenure as Bainistoir Ginearálta and Rúnaí Comhlachta in 2024.

## **Ag Tógáil Foirne - HRM**

It was an extremely topsy-turvy year in terms of HR and employment. The spirit of cooperation and initial enthusiasm of the employees recruited in 2022 disintegrated in early 2023 into mé féinism, tantrums, factionalism, absenteeism, refusal to engage with the new strategic planning process in January, aversion to community development work and failure to adhere to the most basic contractual commitments. These failures were embarrassingly reflected in a terrible performance at the annual Glór na Gael awards in April of this year.

The 'class of 22' moved on in early summer 2023, during planning for Campa Mhacha, and the short term stay of Síle as Fáilteoir, while she waited for a full-time teaching position, meant that a huge chunk of my year was taken up with HR management, readjustment, recruitment and retraining. (Despite the fact that this was a role that the Directors agreed to relieve me of in April 2023!).

Taking all these setbacks in our stride, the remaining team stepped up to the mark and delivered the most successful and best-run Campa Mhacha in its 17 year history! I owe a huge debt of gratitude to Ciarán Withers who moved into the role of OFG and gave it serious commitment and honest endeavour. His imminent departure to sail the seven seas means that the Board must again seek a new Oifigeach Forbartha Gaeilge (OFG) in 2024. (I say the board as I'm retiring from my HR Management duties with effect from 31-12-2023). I've prepared the recruitment materials for the OFG position and had them approved by

Foras na Gaeilge.

Despite the challenges, Aonach Mhacha retains its three full-time funded posts of OFG, Bainisteoir Forbartha Ghnó and Oifigeach Imeachtaí funded by Foras na Gaeilge, An Crannchur Náisiúnta, agus An Roinn Pobail respectively. I'm reporting regularly and to the satisfaction of two of the funders while the OFG reports to Foras.

The ever loyal Caifé Mhacha and SEACHT team of Mary, Róisín, Fiadhnaid agus Pearse carry out the vast bulk of duties on the public-facing, ground floor and carry out multiple duties including cleaning, reception, enquiries and greeting, conference catering, keyholding and many other duties. This is by far the hardest working section of the Cultúrlann team and the reason that our room bookings for meetings and conferences grew substantially in 2023. Their service at all our major events was highly commended by the many hundreds of patrons who attended. Tomás, I'm sure can attest to that.

Casey Ní Mhaoláin came on board in November 2023 in the Fáilteoir/Riarthóir position and, while not in the role very long at this stage, shows great enthusiasm, commitment and willingness to learn in the role, for someone so young. Casey has settled in quickly and gets on well with the rest of the team and with visitors to and clients of the Cultúrlann. She has also offered to act up and manage Club Óige in January 2024 until a new OFG is appointed. Fáilte ar bord agus míle buíochas a Casey.

Throughout 2023, Aonach Mhacha has witnessed further rebranding, revamped and upgraded websites, online booking systems, quarterly newsletters, communications, mailing lists, srl. Casey has adapted to the role of maintaining communications, newsletters, bookings and invoicing quite quickly. She requires additional training on Sage and Excel.

Our IT Consultant Eoin Lennon has proposed another rebranding exercise and upgrade of the website for a monthly service fee. Details of the proposed SLA have been forwarded to the Directors for consideration and Eoin awaits a response early in the New Year.

## **Dormant Accounts Project**

The successful Dormant Accounts application should have been a major boost to our plans to develop additional revenue streams, look at income diversification, build financial resilience and achieve long term sustainability for Aonach Mhacha. If I was permitted to focus solely on this position, as requested at the CCB last December, I might be able to do this role more justice.

In the first twelve months of our two-year Dormant Accounts project, Aonach Mhacha began by initiating recruitment for a Business Development Manager (BDM). Two candidates were appointed and shared the post from September 2022 until June 2023. In July 2023, I became the sole post holder with responsibility for oversight and delivery of the

project.

At the beginning of 2023, I appointed a Digital Production Team from the Creative Workers Cooperative (CWC) in Belfast to develop an online digital learning platform 'Teanga.ie'. Business development training for Aonach Mhacha staff also commenced in January 2023 while a business development strategy was developed over four sessions with 'Barr Feabhais' Business Development and Consultancy Agency, based in Belfast. Further preliminary digital awareness training for the Aonach Mhacha team was delivered in January 2023 by the CWC. After Aonach Mhacha invested time and precious investment, the officers we trained up took their newly learned skills to Glór na nGael.

In February 2023 I undertook a study on cost efficiencies and new revenue streams that could potentially be delivered at Cultúrlann Aonach Mhacha. I arranged a series of meetings with Acadamh na hOllscolaíochta based in Donegal to develop online learning materials for the forthcoming digital platform. In March 2023, I arranged a consultation with Action Renewables NI to examine the potential for Solar Panels and a Green Energy Awareness Programme for Aonach Mhacha. An agreement was reached to install solar panels on the roof of the Cultúrlann to reduce energy costs and carbon footprint.

In April 2023, I developed an audit of space within the cultúrlann and developed two new additional offices to rent. I entered an agreement with City Property Services Armagh to find two new core tenants for the office premises. In May 2023, I commenced a search for academic and cultural partners to work on and develop materials for the online digital learning platform. Over the next two months, I secured Ulster University, Ulster Council GAA, Raidió Fáilte, Fóram na nÓg and Sabhal Mór Ostaig ar An t-Eilean Sgitheanach as project partners on the Aonach Mhacha project.

For the duration of the project thus far, I have overseen and managed the upgrading and enhancement of our digital marketing output to attract new events, organisations and activities. I also worked to develop a new marketing strategy with leading regional media outlet Armagh I that has led to increased footfall and revenue.

## **Imeachtaí**

The scale and range of events, services and activities delivered in the Cultúrlann in 2023 was breathtaking. The agreed plan to work around an events calendar of the four quarter festivals again fell asunder as the events calendar was dictated by practical realities around funding and staffing. There were many high points in our 2023 events programme including four huge sell out concerts including Flook and the Máirtín O Connor Trio.

Among the many other highlights were the International William Kennedy Piping Festival, the AE Russell Festival, the visit of the Chinese Consulate, the Bulgarian Cultural Evening and of course our massive Palestinian solidarity event where we handed over £10,000 to Medical Aid for Palestinians. Those nights and a number of others really showed what

potential the venue has to attract and serve new audiences going forward.

Under the stewardship of Ciarán, the Ciorcal Comhrá sa Chultúrlann continued to grow and develop on Friday afternoons and Sárán's regular weekend and holiday trad sessions are by far the most consistent puller of audiences to the Cultúrlann. Sárán's development of relationships with CCÉ An Port Mór, the Orchard Ukes and the Marty Rafferty Guitar School, as well as many other musical permutations, have also demonstrated the potential of Aonach Mhacha to become a hub of artistic collaboration and community development.

A cultúrlann packed at the weekends with good music, happy families, pensioners, laughing children and fledgling gaeilgeoirí, not to mention a calendar year full of Irish classes, dancing lessons, trad sessions, exhibitions, talks, launches, photoshoots, school visits, conferences, training and development courses, - all reminds us why we put so many years of unpaid effort and voluntary endeavour into creating this wonderful space. And what a shame it would be to lose it all for want of succession planning.

### **Strategic Planning Review**

I stated in my report to last year's CCB that there was increasing evidence that despite our best efforts, the ship occasionally felt rudderless, with no sense of a clear, overall direction in which we should be headed. Grant monies were successfully drawn down for projects that weren't getting fully delivered; events were being organised in quick succession with a lack of planning and commitment; community development goals and objectives were being missed; burn out in some quarters was matched with a lack of a clear sense of purpose in others. Another factor pointing towards the urgent need for a strategic review was the absence of a coordinated plan for mutual cooperation and coordination among the many and varied cultural agencies and actors, not alone within the Cultúrlann but also from across the country.

At last year's CCB, I brought a motion to the Bord Stiúrtha outlining the need for a comprehensive and strategic review of operations within the Cultúrlann. I also proposed a Strategic Planning Day in January 2023, overseen by an independent facilitator who would conduct a root and branch review of strategic objectives and priorities, officer roles, facilities, resources, opening times, tenancies, outreach initiatives, partnerships, srl.

This task was professionally undertaken by Barr Feabhais who carried out consultations with staff, directors and stakeholders during early 2023 before a comprehensive report was completed and presented to the Bord Stiúrtha and staff members for consideration and review in June 2023.

As well as the absence of any overarching strategic plan, my responsibility for multiple roles within the organisation were, as I stated this time last year partly to blame for a clear forward direction. I simply didn't have time to consider the bigger picture. As time passed, so did the amount of duties and responsibilities, not least in the area of HRM. The role of

Rúnaí Comhlachta was often a full time one and I attempted to carry it out in addition to my multiple responsibilities within the organisation.

I hereby notify the Board that I shall not be volunteering for the role of Company Secretary in 2024. Rest assured, however, all my duties in that respect are up to date and all the necessary reporting to the Charities Commission, Companies House, HMRC, etc will be completed by the end of January 2024, in order not to leave any legacy responsibilities for the new incumbent.

## **Partnerships and Cooperation**

Despite that absence of an overall strategy, we spontaneously developed a very wide range of potential partners for our work in promoting the Irish language and culture and in 2023 alone we developed partnerships with a variety of organisations including Bunscoil Ard Mhacha, Coláiste Chaitríona, Comhairle Uladh CLG, Conradh na Gaeilge, Club na bhFian, Ollscoil Uladh, Fóram na nÓg, Sabhal Mór Ostaig, the Ulster Singing Circle, Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, Comhairle Lár Uladh, Bulgarian Association of Armagh, the Social Enterprise Network and Acadamh na hOllscolaíochta i nGaoth Dobhair.

We also hosted events for visiting delegations including Lebanese Television, Muineachán na Gaeilge, Turas na nDaoine in Fear Manach, CLS from Britain, the NI Science Festival, the Peadar O Donnell Forum, Glór na nGael, Foras na Gaeilge, Education Authority, NSMC, Friends of Socialist China and other organisations who visited sporadically or unannounced.

Unfortunately though, too many Irish language organisations continue to operate in silos and in isolation from and competition with each other. If those organisations are serious about reviving the Irish language as a community language and promoting our indigenous culture, we need a reorientation from glittery dinners and awards ceremonies to honest endeavour and community investment. The Irish language could be so much more than the sum of our individual parts but the current set up in earnáil na Gaeilge appears to mitigate against this.

## **Dúshláin**

Irish is sporadic and English is often the lingua franca of the ground floor - most customers and user groups of the ground floor facilities are English speaking organisations and individuals.

Among our most regular and repeat business clients are SVDP, Sean Cavanagh & Co, Western Health Trust, Simon Community, Belfast Health Trust, NIHE, LP Counselling, CLG, Taris Enterprises, Southern Health Trust, Barnardos, Wave Trauma Centre, Central Belfast Mission, East Belfast Mission, Lorraine Scallan Dance School, Super You, . It's also evident that word of mouth has been extremely positive, judging by the NGOs repeated use of our facilities.

As you can see, if we were relying solely for survival on Irish speaking organisations, we'd definitely be closed already. There is an important lesson here in terms of business development going forward. Targeted marketing campaigns among public sector organisations, businesses, sports associations, NGOs, church groups, trade unions, etc will be a fundamental element of future business development (if I could only get at it!).

Sponsorship - build the wall, Cairde Aonach Mhacha, room sponsorship, research new and innovative fundraising methods

## **Replacing SEACHT on the Ground Floor**

SEACHT informed Aonach Mhacha at our last CCB in 2022 that they would be withdrawing from the Cultúrlann in 2023. Again, loyalty and commitment to the Aonach Mhacha project has prevented them from acting on their intentions this year. They have again postponed their decision until August/September 2023 to allow more time for the Board to seek new tenants.

Among the options presented to the Directors of Aonach Mhacha at the 2022 CCB were:

- (a) - purchase the equipment from SEACHT and run the caifé directly;
- (b) - close the caifé and install self-service vending machines
- (c) - engage external catering companies for bookings, events and conferences

The Directors opted for Option A and the caifé continues to be sustainable thanks to a regular English speaking customer base and the English speaking NGOs and .

## **Airgeadais**

Despite all the macro and micro challenges faced by Aonach Mhacha, I am again able to report that Aonach Mhacha is in a relatively good place financially as we head into our fifth year of operations in 2024. The organisation remains debt free and is currently meeting day to day costs. We hold reserve funds that currently stand around £35k. (Liam's Report)

Funding from Foras na Gaeilge via the Ciste Tionscadal was successfully re-applied for again in late 2023 and will assist with running costs and limited project funding in 2024. In other words, the key components of successful future development are all in place.

## **Tionscadal Caipitil & Events Licence**

Last year, I reported very positively on the eventual completion of the Aonach Mhacha capital build and the acquisition of building control approval. While a significant milestone, Tomás you'd agree that when it comes to a building of this nature, the work is never done! The ingress of water to the Pat Finucane Office and other areas on the first floor that I've highlighted at every CCB since the building opened in 2020 has not yet been rectified.

In addition, the heavy rain back in October poured through the ceiling of the Deasca Teo office and rendered that office unusable until further notice. CPS has withdrawn it from the market. This has obvious revenue implications going forward.

Tomás will provide an assessment of where we are construction wise and the wider implications of the water damage to the electrical system, etc.

Other than that there are issues of wear and tear, depreciation, minor breakdowns which came to the fore during our application to ABC Council for an events license. It turns out that many of the original inspection certificates are now out of date and there's a big bill on the way from PMK for replacement of worn emergency and other lighting. Fire risk assessments are now also out of date and fire alarm inspections are also outdated. These are being updated and will also cost. Part of the significant maintenance and upkeep costs of the building I'm afraid.

## **Areas For Improvement and Development in 2023**

Hire of Offices

Facilities Hire

Online Learning Platform

Subscription & Donations

Events and Conferences

Childrens Play Area

## Achoimre

I hope that the Directors of Aonach Mhacha are keen to protect the significant public and personal investment in our Irish Language & Cultural Arts Centre on behalf of the local community in Armagh City. This place is a treasure and a crowning achievement and Mary and I have given it everything for the last ten or more years. It was the culmination of our 25 years spent at the coalface of community development in Armagh City from our humble origins, setting up the Drumbreda and St Brigids Hill Community Association in 1999, progressing that through to the foundation of the West Armagh Consortium in 2002 and from there the formation of CAIRDE teo in 2009 and SEACHT in 2014.

As I say, we've given it our all and are beginning to run out of steam. We are keen to assist a transition to the next generation of community and cultural activists and in the autumn of this year, we shall ourselves be going travelling in China and SE Asia for a prolonged and welcome break. That will also mark the end of SEACHT's tenure at the Cultúrlann and will leave space for new ideas and creativity to revitalise the Cultúrlann's offering.

The services that we provide are unique and are vital to community development in a disadvantaged area and to the growth in the provision of arts and cultural services in Armagh, Mid Ulster and in the border region. Remember there are no other Irish language, cultural centres in Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon. Nor indeed in neighbouring Co Tyrone.

Aonach Mhacha is also striving to be the home for other minority language communities in Armagh and we have developed relationships with the Bangladeshi, Bulgarian, Polish, Lithuanian, Latvian, Chinese and Ukrainian communities in the City. We seek to make Aonach Mhacha a home for all speakers of minority languages in the area.

In summary, we are keen to deliver on the benefits realisation plan that is outlined in detail within our original business case and in which the Department for Communities and other agencies so significantly invested.

We have many new partnerships to build, many new friends to meet, many new projects to launch and many new challenges to face. Tá súil agam go bhfuil na daoine ceart in áit againn leis na dúshláin a shárú le chéile.

## **CRÍOCH**

**Gearóid Ó Machail**

**Bainisteoir Forbartha Ghnó**

**15-12-2023**

Tuairisc An Chathaoirligh 15.12. 2023

Ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a ghabháil le gach duine atá ag cinntiú go bhfuil Aonach Mhacha ag freastal ar an phobal go háirithe le Gearóid, Mary agus a foireann, le Ciarán atá ag imeacht, le Liam Ó Loingsigh, le Casey atá nua - agus lenár dtionóintí agus leis an Bhord - Buíochas fosta lenár dteaghlaigh, lenár gcairde uilig a thug tacaíocht iomlán agus buíochas fosta lenár maoinitheoirí ar fad a sheas linn go dtí seo.

We have now completed the capital phase with only some isolated but notable issues yet to resolve. Aonach Mhacha continues to bring like-minded people together to promote our language in creative and innovative ways. An Ghaeilge agus a hoidhreacht a láidriú agus a leathnú i gCathair Ard Mhacha agus sna ceantair máguaird an sprioc atá againn.

The Irish language continues to grow as we collectively strive to restore and strengthen it and give expression to all its rich heritage here in Aonach Mhacha – But we need proper resourcing, and some progress has been made in this regard since last year's CCB but clearly more needs to be done. Our newly formed Finance Sub-Committee will be required to redouble their efforts if we are to be able to fund a fulltime manager.

Ba mhaith liom buaicphoinne nó dhó a lua. We have had many high points; Ranganna agus An Dioplóma a thosaigh i mbliana, Ceolchoirm Gaza agus gigeanna eile, Campa Mhacha, na Féilte éagsúla (AE Russell mar shampla). Ní raibh Camino Mhacha ann i mbliana ach is bealach an-mhaith é le maoiniú a thiomsú ach an cur chuige ceart a bheith ann. Beidh mé

féin ar ais in Celtic Junction Arts Center, Minnesota, i Mí Aibreáin 2024. Beidh Féile AE Russell ar ais anseo i Mí Aibreáin 2024, tá súil agam.

Ba mhaith linn lá tiomsaithe airgid a eagrú le linn Seachtain na Gaeilge 2024 – beidh an t-airgead de dhíth gan dabht.

Mar fhocal scoir ba mhaith liom focal buíochais a ghabháil le Gearóid, le Mary agus leis na hoibrithe go léir, buíochas le mo chomhstiúrthóirí le 15 bl. anuas, leis na tionóintí, leis na múinteoirí, le húsáideoirí Aonach Mhacha agus lenár lucht tacaíochta go léir. Tá neart dúshlán romhainn ach mar deir an seanfhocal – ní neart go cur lé chéile - agus le chéile ní féidir linn gach rud a dhéanamh ach níl aon rud nach féidir linn a dhéanamh ag an am céanna.

Guím gach rath ar an Bhord nua don bhliain 2024.

Réamonn Ó Ciaráin, Mí na Nollag, 2023

## **Aonach Mhacha's 2023-26 Strategic Plan**

### **Foreword from the Chairperson**

Dear friends of Aonach Mhacha,

It is my pleasure to present our three-year strategic plan. As the Chairperson of the Board of Directors, I am delighted with the ongoing progress that Aonach Mhacha has made over the years in promoting the Irish language and culture in Armagh City and the surrounding district. Commitment to our vision, mission, guiding principles and objectives has helped us to achieve a fine reputation as a hub for the Irish language, music, dance, history and traditional arts.

In this strategic plan, we aim to build on our success and take our operations to the next level. We will continue to provide a wide range of services and facilities to our supporters and customers, while expanding our reach and impact within our community at local, national and international levels.

I would like to thank our general manager, executive officers, staff, volunteers and supporters for their dedication and hard work. Only by working together will we achieve our goals outlined in this strategic plan and make Aonach Mhacha a centre of excellence for the Irish language and culture which is open to one and all.

Please contact us at Aonach Mhacha if you have any suggestions to improve our services and/or if you wish to offer assistance. Ní neart go cur le chéile.

### **Introduction**

The growth of the Irish language in Armagh City and the surrounding district reflects a wider trend across Ireland. According to the 22 census, there were 1.9 million people in the Republic of Ireland who could speak Irish, with over 623,961 speaking it daily. In the north of Ireland, the 2021 census reported that around 12.4% of the population could speak Irish to some degree.

Within Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Council area, the number of Irish speakers has increased, particularly among the younger generations. According to the 2011 census, there were 10.3% of the population in Armagh who had a knowledge of Irish. This increased to 12.2% in 2021 i.e. 25,644 of the population with a knowledge of Irish. From 2001 to 2021 census figures show that the numbers of Irish speakers in Armagh experienced a growth of 68%.

Since Irish-medium education became an option for children, the number of people who have chosen this option has grown dramatically. Irish-medium childcare services and playgroups have been established and the number of Irish-medium schools has grown significantly. In 2023, there are now five Irish-medium primary schools located in Armagh City and its surrounding towns and one Irish-medium secondary school in Armagh City which offers Irish-medium education as an post-primary option for pupils of these 5 schools.

Aonach Mhacha has played a key role in promoting the Irish language and culture in Armagh since it was established. We have provided a space for people to learn, practice and celebrate their Irish heritage. Our services and facilities have attracted a diverse range of customers, including Irish speakers, learners, enthusiasts, and visitors from all over the world.

### **Vision**

To create a vibrant Irish language and cultural centre that fosters cultural exchange and engagement, offering opportunities for learning, socialising, and entertainment for people of all ages and backgrounds.

### **Mission Statement**

Our mission is to be the premier destination for Irish language and cultural activities and events, fostering community engagement, promoting language, raising heritage awareness, encouraging arts participation, providing support, training, and employment opportunities, while maintaining a cultural centre for all.

### **Company Structure**

Aonach Mhacha is a company limited by guarantee with a board of directors. The board is responsible for overseeing the management and direction of the company, setting policies, and ensuring compliance with legal and regulatory requirements. The board comprises the following members: Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer, and three ordinary members. Gael-linn, SEACHT, Pat Finucane Centre, Aonach Mhacha are the nominating bodies. The General manager, supported by three executive officers and a receptionist, is responsible for the day-to-day management of the centre.

### **Our Guiding Principles**

- a) To develop an awareness of and encourage appreciation of Irish culture through the promotion of the Irish language, music, drama, poetry, literature, visual arts, sport, and history.

- b) To raise awareness, educate, and encourage participation in the study and celebration of local heritage, oral history, customs, and pastimes of Armagh and the surrounding areas.
- c) To encourage participation in traditional arts and Irish cultural activities through the provision of workshops, classes, entertainment, and other participatory activities.
- d) To provide facilities and support to traditional arts, cultural, and community groups and organisations.
- e) To promote training and employment opportunities, particularly in the arts and in Irish cultural organisations.
- f) To maintain and manage a cultural centre for activities promoted by the charity in furtherance of the following objectives:

### **Objectives and Strategies**

**Objective 1:** To develop increased awareness, appreciation, and understanding of Irish language and culture in Armagh City and surrounding district.

#### **Strategy 1:**

- a) Create a promotional campaign to raise awareness about the centre's activities and services among the local community and beyond, including through social media and traditional advertising methods.
- b) Organise regular Irish language classes/interest classes through Irish for all levels of proficiency to promote and enhance Irish language learning.
- c) Organise cultural events such as traditional music concerts, poetry readings, and storytelling sessions to raise awareness of Irish culture.
- d) Collaborate with local schools and colleges to encourage the teaching of Irish language and culture in the curriculum.
- e) Establish and serve the needs of an Irish-medium parent and toddler group, an Irish-medium teenager chat group, an Irish-medium senior citizen social group and Irish-medium professional networking coffee mornings.

**By the end of year 1,** Establish and increase attendance at the centre's events/groups by 20%, with a particular focus on attracting new visitors from outside the local area.

**By the end of year 2,** establish partnerships with at least two cultural organisations/companies to broaden the centre's reach and increase awareness of Irish language and culture.

**By the end of year 3,** establish an annual Irish language and culture festival in collaboration with local organisations, which will attract visitors from across the country and internationally.

**Objective 2:** To raise awareness, educate and encourage participation in the study and celebration of local heritage, oral history, customs, and pastimes of Armagh and the surrounding areas.

**Strategy 2:**

- a) Develop and deliver a programme of workshops, classes, and activities focused on local heritage, oral history, customs, and pastimes.
- b) Support Armagh's local history society to promote and celebrate the rich history of Armagh and the surrounding areas.
- c) Establish an oral history project to collect and preserve stories and memories from local people.
- d) Undertake a feasibility study to investigate the possibility running guided tours of local heritage sites and landmarks.

**By the end of year 1,** Increase the local history society's membership by at least 50 members, and organise a series of local history talks and workshops.

**By the end of year 2,** establish a rotating theme exhibition space to showcase local history and culture, and develop a virtual tour of the exhibition to allow remote access.

**By the end of year 3,** (a) Based on the findings of a feasibility study establish a tour guide service or facilitate other ways for tourists to visit local heritage sites and landmarks (b) publish a bilingual book on the history of Armagh and the surrounding areas, in collaboration with local historians and writers.

**Objective 3:** To encourage participation in traditional arts and Irish cultural activities through the provision of workshops, classes, entertainment, and other participatory activities.

**Strategy 3:**

- a) Develop and deliver a programme of workshops, classes, and activities focused on traditional arts such as music, dance, and crafts.
- b) Establish a youth club to engage young people in traditional arts and culture.
- c) Organise regular traditional music and dance sessions to provide opportunities for participation and enjoyment.
- d) Establish a performance troupe to showcase traditional arts at local and national events.

**By the end of year 1,** establish a youth club with at least 20 members and organise the first series of workshops and activities.

**By the end of year 2,** establish a traditional music and dance festival, which will attract visitors from across the country and internationally.

**By the end of year 3,** establish a performance troupe and organise at least two public performances at local events.

**Objective 4:** To provide facilities and support to traditional arts, cultural and community groups and organisations.

**Strategy 4:**

- a) Needs Assessment: Conduct a comprehensive needs assessment survey to identify the specific needs and requirements of traditional arts, cultural, and community groups and organisations in the area.
- b) Facility Provision: Based on the needs assessment, develop and implement a plan to provide facilities at Aonach Mhacha that are tailored to meet the identified needs of traditional arts, cultural, and community groups and organisations.
- c) Partnership Development: Establish strategic partnerships with relevant organisations and local businesses to create a supportive ecosystem for traditional arts and cultural groups.
- d) Capacity Building: Develop and implement capacity-building programmes for traditional arts, cultural, and community groups and organisations.
- e) Financial Support: Secure grant funding and other financial resources to support traditional arts, cultural, and community groups and organisations in hosting events, projects, and initiatives that promote Irish culture and heritage.
- f) Annual Cultural Festival: Host an annual cultural festival at Aonach Mhacha to showcase the work of traditional arts, cultural, and community groups and organisations.
- g) Expansion and Collaboration: Develop partnerships with other cultural organisations and venues in the community to expand the reach and impact of traditional arts and cultural groups.

**By the end of year 1:**

- Conduct a survey to identify the traditional arts, cultural and community groups and organisations in the area and their needs for facilities and support.
- Provide facilities to these groups at Aonach Mhacha, such as providing storage, equipment and resources.
- Establish partnerships with relevant organisations and local businesses to support the development of traditional arts and cultural groups.

**By the end of year 2:**

- Expand the provision of support services to traditional arts, cultural and community groups and organisations, including marketing and promotion, fundraising, and governance.
- Organise workshops and training sessions on fundraising, marketing, and governance for traditional arts, cultural and community groups and organisations.
- Develop a mentorship programme to connect experienced traditional arts and cultural practitioners with emerging artists in the community.

**By the end of year 3:**

- Through grant funding, secure financial support to traditional arts, cultural and community groups and organisations for events, projects and initiatives that promote Irish culture and heritage.
- Host an annual cultural festival at Aonach Mhacha to showcase the work of traditional arts, cultural and community groups and organisations, and provide opportunities for networking and collaboration.
- Develop partnerships with other cultural organisations and venues to expand the reach and impact of traditional arts and cultural groups and organisations in the community.

**Objective 5:** To promote training and employment opportunities, particularly in the arts and in Irish cultural organisations.

- a) Partnerships with Educational Institutions: Develop strategic partnerships with local schools, institutes of further and higher education, and training organisations to promote training and employment opportunities through the Irish language.
- b) Internship Programme: Establish an internship programme at Aonach Mhacha for students and recent graduates to gain practical experience in arts and cultural management.
- c) Training and Professional Development: Develop a comprehensive training and professional development programme for Aonach Mhacha staff to enhance their skills and knowledge in arts and cultural management.
- d) Apprenticeship Programme: Develop an apprenticeship programme in traditional arts and cultural management for members of the local community, with a focus on providing opportunities for people from underrepresented backgrounds.
- e) International Internship Programme: Expand the internship programme to provide opportunities for international students and graduates to gain experience in working through the Irish language and with Irish cultural organisations.
- f) Mentorship Programme: Develop a mentorship programme to connect emerging artists and cultural managers with experienced professionals in the community.
- g) Formal Training and Certification Programme: Establish a formal training and certification programme in traditional arts and cultural management in partnership with local training organisations and institutes of further and higher education.
- h) Diversity and Inclusion: Expand the apprenticeship programme to provide training and employment opportunities for people from underrepresented backgrounds in traditional arts and cultural management.
- i) Partnerships with Cultural Organisations and Venues: Develop partnerships with other cultural organisations and venues in the community to promote training and employment opportunities in the arts and cultural sector.

**By the end of year 1:**

- Develop partnerships with local schools, institutes of further and higher education and training organisations to promote training and employment opportunities through Irish.
- Establish an internship programme for students and recent graduates to gain practical experience in arts and cultural management at Aonach Mhacha.
- Develop a training and professional development programme for Aonach Mhacha staff to enhance their skills and knowledge in arts and cultural management.

**By the end of year 2:**

- Develop an apprenticeship programme in traditional arts and cultural management for members of the local community, with a focus on providing opportunities for people from underrepresented backgrounds.
- Expand the internship programme to provide opportunities for international students and graduates to gain experience in working through Irish and with Irish cultural organisations.
- Develop a mentorship programme to connect emerging artists and cultural managers with experienced professionals in the community.

**By the end of year 3:**

- Establish a formal training and certification programme in traditional arts and cultural management in partnership with local training organisations and universities.
- Expand the apprenticeship programme to provide training and employment opportunities for people from underrepresented backgrounds in traditional arts and cultural management.
- Develop partnerships with cultural organisations and venues to promote training and employment opportunities in the arts and cultural sector in the community.

**Objective 6:** To maintain and manage Aonach Mhacha and the services it provides.

**Strategy 6:** Develop and implement a long-term maintenance and sustainability plan for the Aonach Mhacha to ensure it is well-maintained, well-resourced and suitable for its intended use.

**By the end of year 1:** (a) Secure funding to employ a full time Chief Executive Officer to strategically manage, maintain and develop Aonach Mhacha. (b) Secure the long-term future of Aonach Mhacha's restaurant and catering services.

**By the end of year 2:** Secure funding to employ 5 full time executive officers to assist Aonach Mhacha's Chief Executive Officer in delivering Aonach Mhacha's 3 year strategic plans.

**By the end of year 3:** Conduct a thorough assessment of the building and its current maintenance needs. Develop a comprehensive maintenance plan that includes regular upkeep, repairs, and upgrades as needed. Identify and prioritise major capital projects that need to be completed over the next several years.

### **Staff Development and Retention**

Aonach Mhacha's staff are a crucial element in achieving the centre's vision and objectives. The staff are the frontline representatives of the centre. They interact with visitors/customers, provide information about the centre's services and products, and ensure that visitors/customers have a positive experience. Aonach Mhacha requires a skilled and dedicated workforce who can provide high-quality services to visitors and customers and a workforce who are highly knowledgeable about their various roles and responsibilities which may evolve over the time span of this strategic plan.

Outlined below is how Aonach Mhacha will invest over the course of this strategic plan in its staff's development and management. This is to ensure that staff are motivated, skilled, and equipped to provide quality services on behalf of Aonach Mhacha.

- **Performance management:** Aonach Mhacha will each year implement a performance management system to monitor staff performance and provide regular feedback. The company will establish clear performance expectations and provide staff with the necessary resources and support to meet those expectations. Performance evaluations will be conducted regularly and provide constructive feedback to staff on their performance and opportunities for improvement.
- **Career development:** Aonach Mhacha, where possible, will provide staff with career development opportunities that align with their interests and career goals. This may include opportunities for advancement within the company, mentorship programmes, and leadership development training.
- **Communication:** By the end of every year Aonach Mhacha will have reviewed how it communicates internally with its staff and will have implemented effective communication channels between management and staff to ensure that staff are aware of organisational goals, priorities, and expectations.
- **Succession planning:** By the end of year one Aonach Mhacha will have agreed a succession plan to ensure that key positions within the company are adequately staffed in the event of a vacancy.
- **Staff retention:** By the end of year one, Aonach Mhacha will have implemented strategies to retain staff.

### **Finance Reporting**

Overall, strategic planning for financial reporting is essential for the long-term success of Aonach Mhacha. By implementing a robust financial reporting system and setting clear financial goals, the company can ensure financial stability and sustainability, while also advancing its mission and vision for Aonach Mhacha.

To strategically plan for the financial reporting aspect of Aonach Mhacha over the next three years, Aonach Mhacha will:

**By the end of year one:**

- **Review:** Carry out an internal review of its policies and procedures relating to financial reporting.
- **Reporting System:** Agree a financial reporting system that will track and report on all financial activities within the company.
- **Financial indicators:** Identify key financial indicators that will be used to track progress towards the company's financial goals.
- **Financial goals:** Based on the objectives and vision of Aonach Mhacha, SMART financial goals will be established that align with the overall strategy.
- **Allocate resources:** Allocate resources will be allocated towards financial reporting and management.
- **Regular Financial reporting:** Aonach Mhacha will regularly report on its financial performance to the board of directors and stakeholders, where appropriate.
- **Monitor and adjust:** Regular monitoring of financial performance will be conducted to ensure that the company is on track to meet its financial goals.
- **Audit and Risk:** Establish a mechanism which can appropriately assess risk and internally audit the management and governance of Aonach Mhacha.

**By the end of year two and continuing through year three:**

Aonach Mhacha will continue, through its internal structures, policies and procedures, to report on all financial matters in accordance with good practice.

### **Ethics and Transparency**

Aonach Mhacha has a responsibility to act ethically and transparently. Here is how Aonach Mhacha will deliver on this responsibility in 2023-26:

- **Selflessness:** Aonach Mhacha will always act in the best interests of the company and the community it serves. It will prioritise its objectives and vision over the personal interests of its staff, volunteers or directors.
- **Integrity:** Aonach Mhacha will act honestly, ethically and in a trustworthy manner in all of its dealings. It will avoid conflicts of interest, and any such conflict will be disclosed to the relevant parties.
- **Objectivity:** Aonach Mhacha will make decisions based on evidence and fact, and will not be influenced by personal biases, political affiliations or outside pressures. The company will ensure that all staff and volunteers receive equal treatment regardless of their background or affiliation.
- **Accountability:** Aonach Mhacha will take responsibility for its actions, decisions, and policies. It will be open and transparent with its stakeholders and will provide regular reports on its activities, finances and governance.

- Openness: Aonach Mhacha will be transparent and honest in all of its communications, decision-making processes and dealings with stakeholders. It will be open to feedback and constructive criticism, and will seek to improve its performance based on such feedback.
- Honesty: Aonach Mhacha will communicate honestly and accurately with all of its stakeholders, including staff, volunteers, donors and the wider community. It will not knowingly provide false or misleading information.

### **Conclusion**

Aonach Mhacha has become a hub for all things Irish language, music, dance, history, heritage and tradition related. With our vision of being a vibrant Irish language and cultural centre and our guiding principles, we aim to increase awareness and appreciation of the Irish language, Irish culture, Irish heritage and promote participation in traditional arts and Irish cultural activities. Our objectives and their goals are the tangibles upon which an assessment can be made on Aonach Mhacha's ability to deliver on its vision.

We also aim to promote training and employment opportunities to assist in the running of a cultural centre that is well-maintained and suitable for its intended use. Through this 3 year strategic plan we will be able to develop specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound strategies to deliver on each objective over the next three years. By the end of year three, we aim to have made significant progress in achieving our objectives, including expanding our educational offerings, increasing participation in cultural events and activities, and enhancing the experience of our visitors.

Finally but perhaps most importantly, as a centre that offers all services through Irish and English, we are a language friendly centre and welcome speakers of all languages. We are also very proud to have not only a local customer base but also a global customer base, and we look forward to continuing to provide both physical and virtual experiences and services to a wider audience.