

AN RÓD SEO ROMHAINN

**Development
Programme
for the
Irish
Traditional Arts**



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The Comhaltas vision for the traditional arts

“The traditional arts should be an enriching part of the lives of Irish people everywhere, particularly our young people; they should be a living, highly visible and vibrant part of society; they should be easily accessible to all; and their unique social, cultural and economic benefits should be fully realised by communities and individuals throughout the country and in Irish communities abroad”.

Introduction

Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann was founded in 1951 with the objective of ***keeping our unique arts traditions in all forms alive and returning them to a prominent position in Irish life.*** This was at a time when the future of the traditional arts was under threat after many years of neglect. Our unique arts were often dismissed by people within influential sectors in society as minority irrelevancies, celebrated only by the hopelessly old fashioned. As a result of the pioneering work of Comhaltas, public interest in our ancient arts was rekindled and that torch, once lit, has burned with increasing intensity over the last 5 decades.

Fifty years on the standing of the traditional arts at home and abroad is radically different. The art forms themselves have been immeasurably strengthened through the creativity and proficiency of individual artists. The number of people participating as artists and as audience members has grown exponentially. The impact of this growth has been overwhelmingly positive, but new and significant challenges to the traditions have to be addressed.

A major concern of Comhaltas today is that, despite undeniable progress in restoring the traditional arts to a prominent position in the life of the nation, the goal of reaching everyone on the island and Irish communities abroad has yet to be genuinely realised. As a consequence, local communities and society at large have not reaped the social, cultural and economic benefits that should flow from the traditions. Even in those areas where the arts are strong, changes in lifestyles mean that we have to plan new ways of ensuring a central place for our traditions in the future and of securing the means to pass them on to generations to come.

Our music, song and dance forms are internationally recognised and admired as part of what is distinctively Irish, and our heritage and culture, based on ancient origins, are cornerstones of our distinctive national identity. These are worth cherishing and developing in the face of increasing globalisation, homogeneity and threats to the rich heritage that distinguishes nations.

5 Year Development Programme

Since its foundation Comhaltas established strong roots within the community through a branch structure based, in many cases, on the local parish. Today, with 36,000 members and 400 branches spread throughout the world, Comhaltas and the traditions are very much alive.

As part of its 50th anniversary celebrations in 2001, Comhaltas launched a process of renewal, “**Athnuachan**”, to take it forward into the next 50 years and meet the challenges of fostering and developing the traditional arts in the community in a changing world.

This Development Programme sets out how the Comhaltas vision for the traditional arts can be realised, not by it acting in isolation but by working in the community with a variety of partners. The ground-up, broad-based partnership

approach is one of the particular strengths of Comhaltas and the importance of building on this so that success can be embedded in the community for long-term benefit is recognised.

Over the 5 year period, Comhaltas will focus on 4 key areas for action that together will give people genuine access to the traditional arts. Comhaltas will:

- Engage the whole community through the “Meitheal” initiative and the formation of new strategic partnerships;
- Support the teaching of the traditional arts in education at all levels;
- Expand the branch network and support services; and
- Establish new regional support teams and resource centres.

The process of developing this Programme has involved dialogue at all levels of the organisation, including with representatives of Comhaltas in Britain and in North America. Under the “Meitheal” initiative some 10 separate working groups considered various aspects of the developmental and promotional needs of the traditions. The Programme also incorporates the views of interests such as teachers of the traditional arts, schoolteachers, Irish language interests, local and national public representatives, as well as individual members of Comhaltas working in branches throughout the country and abroad.

Bringing the various initiatives in this Development Programme to fruition will require a very significant commitment and contribution from Comhaltas members everywhere. It will also need the support of Government, public bodies and agencies and other organisations and individuals to work with Comhaltas on the actions identified for our common heritage.

The by-line “*The Living Tradition*” adopted by Comhaltas over many years is a practical expression of the unique position of our traditional arts in the modern

world. The world looks to Ireland as a place where the traditions of past generations still flourish, but with the pressures of modern living these traditions are under threat as never before. We must not repeat past mistakes but rather treasure what we have and plan for the future.

Section 1: Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann

1.1 *50 years of success*

Comhaltas can rightly celebrate over 50 years of success. This success is the result of many thousands of individuals acting locally for the collective good. A shared vision of restoring the traditional arts to prominence in Irish life provided a common purpose, and the multitude of individual creative actions has woven a rich tapestry that is the heritage and strength of the movement today.

Comhaltas is very much an international organisation, providing opportunities for young people in particular to enjoy and participate in the traditions that have been passed down through the generations. Through its extensive branch network in America, Britain and elsewhere, Comhaltas makes a vital contribution to fostering strong links with the Irish diaspora and to promoting a positive image of Ireland on the international stage.

1.2 *A rich heritage in which “community” is the essence*

The challenge taken on by Comhaltas in 1951 of reversing the fortunes of the traditional arts was, by any yardstick, truly ambitious. From the outset Comhaltas recognised the fundamental link between these arts and the community and the importance of providing a comprehensive response to the needs of the traditions. The traditional arts belong to the community as they express the personality and identity of that community over time. The focus is much less on the individual artist.

Our traditional arts are a unique heritage of great sophistication and antiquity. They are a heritage grounded in stability rather than in frenetic, market-driven changes of fashion, and they encompass key concepts like community, participation, apprenticeship, responsibility and the development of identity. Such a heritage draws us closer to former generations but its future depends on

the constant forging of links between old and young, a constant bridging of generations through an unbroken thread from ancient times. That heritage is a proud resource that belongs to Irish people everywhere, young and old alike.

1.3 *Comhaltas provides a national response*

Comhaltas' response to the challenge of keeping the traditions alive was of necessity both multifaceted and holistic. It had to reflect the intimate relationship between community and the traditions; to foster links between the generations; to establish local teaching structures that could reach into every parish; and promote excellence, innovation and creativity in all art forms. Its success today comes from:

- **A branch network**, often based on the parish, which provides the focal point for community action. The branches are more than simply local music schools. Comhaltas provides the “nursery” setting in which young students spend most of their formative years learning and perfecting their art forms, while developing an attachment and commitment to our rich cultural heritage that will stay with them throughout their lives.

Pupils learning instrumental music are introduced to other art forms such as singing and dancing. The branch *Seisiún* brings people together in an enjoyable setting and provides an invaluable opportunity for players to perfect their art. The branch also acts as an important meeting point, where the coming together of young and old ensures the passing on of the traditions, and where the use of Irish is encouraged in an everyday setting.

- **County, provincial and national committee structures** which reinforce the work of the branches and provide the support infrastructure necessary for a national response.

- **A corps of teachers**, immersed in the traditions, which provides expert instruction in all traditional instruments to the many thousands of pupils attending classes each year.
- **A Traditional Music Teaching Diploma**, *Teastas i dTeagasc Ceolta Tíre (TTCT)* which promotes high teaching standards.
- **A competition framework** at county and provincial levels leading to All Ireland Champions at Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, which serves to promote excellence and invaluable shared learning experiences.
- **A 12-level graded examination framework** for traditional music, *Scrudú Ceol Tíre (SCT)*, based on best international practice, which provides a structured learning framework for students.
- **Collecting, recording, archiving and publishing** folklore material associated with the traditions which contribute to the cumulative knowledge and permanency of the tradition at local and national levels.
- **Keeping the traditions visible** in the community through activities such as performances, organised tours, fleadhanna and local seisiúin, which promote the arts as an integral part of our culture and contribute to consolidating a sense of community on the ground.
- **Extending the services provided by Comhaltas throughout the Irish diaspora** in North America, Britain, Australia and other parts of the world in recognition of its long-standing and powerful historical and cultural links to Ireland.

1.4 *An enviable track record*

The record of achievement by Comhaltas is an enviable one. Details of some of the activities outlined above give an indication of the strength and track record of Comhaltas today:

- Cultúrlann na hÉireann (The Irish Cultural Institute) at Belgrave Square, Monkstown, Co Dublin.

- Over 1,000 music classes are organised each week in every county in Ireland for children and adults. These provide instruction in all instruments within the tradition.

- Hundreds of music classes are also organised throughout Canada, the United States and Britain every week. Classes are also organised in other countries as part of our effort to encourage an international interest and participation in the traditions.

- Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, which, in addition to many organised cultural events, involves up to 7,000 qualifiers who have emerged from over 25,000 competitors at County and Provincial level. It is one of the largest annual folk music events in the world and is organised in conjunction with voluntary organisations in the host town, attracting 250,000 visitors and worth up to € 25 million to the local economy.

- Fleadh Nua is held every year in Ennis, County Clare. This has grown into a 9-day event attracting over 50,000 visitors.

- 45 separate Fleadhanna Cheoil are organised each year in Ireland, Britain, United States and Canada. For the first time a Fleadh Cheoil was held in Australia in 2003. In North America over the past few years

two qualifying fleadhanna cater for over 400 competitors in each event and the numbers are increasing.

- Fleadh Amhrán agus Rince is held in Ulster every year.
- Scoil Éigse, an annual weeklong summer school of master classes and recitals, is attended by almost 800 students from all over the world, most of whom have achieved scholarship standard.
- The Teastas i dTeagasc Ceolta Tíre (TTCT) was developed by Comhaltas to provide a structured Diploma course in traditional music teaching. Over 20 years, some 550 traditional music teachers have qualified on this course.
- The Scrúdú Ceol Tíre (SCT) is a graded examination framework (12 levels) in traditional music, developed initially with the support of the Royal Irish Academy of Music. Today some 3,000 examinations take place annually and the number is growing. The SCT programme, including a comprehensive adjudication workshop support programme, is now being introduced to Britain and arrangements are in hands to extend the programme to North America.
- Publication of tutors, tapes and other Irish Music related material.
- “Treoir”, a quarterly magazine published by Comhaltas for over 30 years, contains information on the traditions in general, artists and performers, historical material, local folklore as well as music and songs. It is also an invaluable link to the Irish diaspora.

- A FETAC accredited course for the Production and Performance of Traditional Irish Arts has been running successfully for 4 years.
- “Seisiún”, a colourful show of music, song, dance and storytelling, is produced and presented by Comhaltas branches in the summer months in most counties. These attract a significant local audience and also give visitors to the area an opportunity to sample and participate in our rich and unique cultural heritage.
- High profile authentic traditional shows are staged in Brú Ború, Cashel and in Cultúrlann na hÉireann, Monkstown. These shows further indicate the immense artistic potential of the Traditional Arts and are important contributors to national tourism.
- 12 regional Comhaltas cultural centres that have grown generically in the four provinces.
- Archives of traditional music held in Cultúrlann na hÉireann, Monkstown and in local tithe cheoil reflect over 50 years of collecting invaluable material relating to the traditions. A new music archive initiative has been established in the North American Province, involving a partnership with the Boston College Library, provides an important repository for recordings and other archive materials related to the history of traditional Irish music in the United States and Canada.
- Annual Comhaltas tours to the United States, Britain and Canada encourage second and third generation Irish people to maintain strong links with the traditions. Regular tours also take place to Australia and European countries, and further a field such as China, South Korea, The

Gulf State of Oman and Tasmania. The demand from foreign Governments for these ambassadorial visits always outstrips supply.

- The Comhaltas Folk Orchestra provides a unique opportunity for young proficient performers to broaden their playing experience.
- The “Cúlra” programme and its sister initiative “Cúlra na nÓg” have been promoted by Comhaltas in Britain for over 20 years. Under these programmes thousands of people, particularly young people, of Irish extraction have participated in a structured programme of active experiential learning in Irish culture and history. The programme includes seminars, residential summer schools and participation on a study week in Ireland. The Cúlra na nÓg programme caters for young people between the ages of 11 and 16 years.
- The annual North American Provincial Convention, which is the premier traditional Irish music event in North America, brings together people from all corners of the United States and Canada for three full days of music, song and dance workshops, céilithe, lectures, seminars, exhibitions and other activities.

At Comhaltas branch level there is also an impressive array of activities promoted throughout the year in addition to the provision of music classes referred to above:

- Hundreds of regular branch sessions are held in every corner of the country and in selected cities and towns abroad.
- A wide range of local féilte and weekend festivals with an emphasis on the participation of young people is promoted and supported, and

incorporate sessions, recitals, céilithe, workshops, and master classes. These involve an enormous local voluntary effort.

- Comhaltas members host regular traditional programmes on local radio stations throughout Ireland and abroad. These programmes broadcast music, advertise up-coming events, and hold interviews and discussions on topics of interest to the traditional arts supporter as well as showcasing local artistic talent.
- Youth exchange programmes with groups both within Ireland and abroad are important activities for sharing and reinforcing the traditions, and serve as valuable life experiences for young people.
- Many branches undertake regular tours to festivals in Europe, North America and further a field. The Cluain Tarbh branch in Dublin, for example, often attends 2 festivals in Europe each year. These activities are funded exclusively through voluntary effort without state support.
- Branches work with local national schools to provide teachers to tutor pupils in traditional music, singing and dancing. These classes are organised both during and after school hours.
- Performances in local nursing and retirement homes, particularly by young players, are an important branch activity, as the traditions belong to all members of society.
- Comhaltas branches play an important role with other community and voluntary groups in organising and performing at local, regional and national events and fundraising for a myriad of deserving charities.

- Comhaltas is helping to foster improved North South and cross community relations. For example, Comhaltas was pleased to welcome prominent Loyalist leaders to Cultúrlann na hÉireann recently. Music knows no religious or sectarian boundaries and all Irish communities should be able to enjoy the traditions. Comhaltas has received a number of awards in Northern Ireland and Britain for its cross-community activities.

- A number of branches have developed tithes as venues for teaching and performing the traditional arts, holding Irish language classes and other community-based activities.

- Branches provide an important setting in which people can converse in Irish. Young members are encouraged to develop a grá for the language. Many branches, including in Britain and North America, organise Irish language classes.

Section 2: Facing new challenges

2.1 *The traditional arts are for everyone*

Despite the great progress in promoting the traditional arts, there are many Irish people today who have little interaction with the traditional arts during their lives. As a consequence local communities and society generally have not reaped the social, cultural and economic benefits that should flow from the traditions. At one end of the spectrum many people will not have an opportunity to experience the traditions, while at the other end the contribution that our arts can make to community cohesion and identity and the formation of social capital is inevitably restricted. The development of the art forms too is impoverished by this situation.

2.2 *Genuine access remains a significant barrier*

There will always be those who have little interest in the traditions. However, for many Irish people genuine access to the traditions presents a real difficulty. In some of our larger urban areas the traditional arts have a very low visibility, and the same applies to many towns and rural areas. The infrastructure and personnel to support the promotion of the traditions on the ground are very often not in place. There are notable exceptions, especially where a Gaelscoil has been successfully established, and in many areas Irish dancing also enjoys widespread support. Comhaltas believes that significantly wider access to the traditions has to be addressed as a priority, including in larger urban areas, and this is a fundamental objective of this Action Plan.

2.3 *Traditional arts in schools are weak*

Despite the international appreciation of our cultural heritage and its role in defining Irishness, it is regrettable that in Ireland today there is relatively little teaching of the traditional arts in schools, nor are the necessary supports provided to teachers. In effect, opportunities for a wide audience to access the

arts are lost and there is little counter balance to the threats to Irish culture and identity from increasingly globalised culture and other media influences.

2.4 *Harnessing voluntary effort in support of our arts*

The development of the traditional arts has depended to a very significant extent on the contribution of volunteers. As a highly successful voluntary community network throughout the island of Ireland and abroad, Comhaltas is an outstanding example of how community support and engagement can be harnessed. But life style changes are having an effect on the level and nature of volunteering in the community in general, and in Comhaltas. For example, engagement in higher socio-economic groups remains higher than in other groups. The level of volunteering in areas suffering most from social exclusion is low, and this in turn will have an important impact on the degree of engagement with the traditional arts in those communities. The same pattern emerges for many isolated rural communities.

The critical point is that an active programme of developing and supporting the voluntary effort and fostering community networking is essential in taking the traditional arts to all communities. This will entail providing the necessary capacity on the ground, including a stronger, full-time regional support framework, and establishing new branches in targeted areas to develop local community effort and to foster vital links with education, local government, and other state services.

2.5 *No national policies for the promotion of the Traditional Arts*

The traditional arts sector has also suffered from a lack of a coherent national policy to promote the traditional arts for the benefit of all. This has resulted, for example, in less than 3% of public arts funding going to support the traditional

arts, and only a very small part of this going to the voluntary arts. The need for a national policy, which encompasses significantly increased public funding support to the traditions, was a central conclusion of the Government's recent review of the arts. Comhaltas welcomed this conclusion as a watershed statement for the traditional arts in the future.

The consequence of not having an overarching national policy for the traditional arts over the years is more than financial. Among other things, it means that:

- These arts do not get the recognition and support they deserve in the education system;
- There is no strategy to develop the arts in communities where they are weak and have little visibility;
- The necessary support infrastructure and capacity on the ground is not in place;
- Stakeholders are not given due recognition, encouragement and support to maximise their contributions;
- There are no national guidelines establishing priorities for the disbursement of public funds in support of the traditional arts; and
- The significant benefits that should accrue from the traditions are not being realised.

Section 3: 5 Year Development Programme

3.1 *Underlying principles of Programme*

The Introduction Section above sets out the circumstances that led to the preparation of this Development Programme, in particular the link to the 50th anniversary celebrations in 2001 and the process of renewal, “**Athnuachan**”, to take Comhaltas forward for the next 50 years. It also set out the Comhaltas **vision** for the traditional arts in the future:

The traditional arts should be an enriching part of the lives of Irish people everywhere, particularly our young people; they should be a living, highly visible and vibrant part of society; they should be easily accessible to all; and their unique social, cultural and economic benefits should be fully realised by communities and individuals throughout the country and in Irish communities abroad.

This **vision** encompasses a number of key principles that are incorporated in this Development Programme:

- The genuine accessibility of the traditional arts to all our citizens, both young and old, as an enriching social and cultural experience;
- The pursuit of excellence in all art forms;
- The value of the traditions to social cohesion within communities;
- The importance of our arts in underpinning a distinctive Irish identity; and
- The organic process of passing a living tradition from one generation to the next.

3.2 *Strategic approach adopted*

Bringing the traditional arts to a wider public, including the larger urban areas is a substantial challenge. The strategic approach underpinning the Development

Programme entails focussing on 4 key areas for action in the short and longer term that together will create the circumstances to achieve the overall objective.

Comhaltas will:

- Engage the wider community through the “Meitheal” initiative and the formation of strategic partnerships.
- Support the teaching of the traditional arts in education at all levels.
- Expand the branch network and support services.
- Establish new development teams and resource centres on a regional basis throughout the island of Ireland.

The specific actions to be pursued in respect of these 4 Action Areas are set out in the following sections.

Section 4: Engaging the whole community

4.1 “Meitheal” initiative

In 2002 Comhaltas launched “**Meitheal**”. This is a unique and imaginative programme aimed at individuals and groups across the country and in Irish communities abroad, which encourages and supports personal and community based actions for the development and enjoyment of the traditional arts. The core concept of Meitheal is that it reaches beyond the Comhaltas movement to link the community, Comhaltas and the living tradition in a mutually enriching way. The interests, talents and energies of a wide array of individuals and groups will be engaged through new connections, partnership and local co-operation, to work together for the benefit of all. **Comhaltas will promote strongly the Meitheal initiative in Ireland and abroad during the period of the Programme.**

Flexibility, partnership, informality, mutual support, and networking are cornerstones of the Meitheal process. Under Meitheal, individuals and groups can participate in projects of particular interest to themselves on a flexible basis without having to work through a particular institutional structure. A very wide range of projects can be promoted, from linking older players in informal musical settings to Internet projects utilising cutting edge technology. The initiative enables links to be formed more easily with business interests and groups.

Meitheal is already bearing fruit. Individual projects underway include a traditional music programme on the Internet, the establishment of a new residential summer school in music and the compilation of directories of present and past local artists by school children.

4.2 *Strategic Partnerships*

As part of the Meitheal initiative, Comhaltas will forge new strategic partnerships and alliances for joint action with organisations and groups who share our vision for heritage and the community. Partnerships will be pursued with a wide spectrum of organisations in sports, arts, culture and heritage activities, an Ghaeilge, community development and education as well as local authorities and other state bodies. Partnership will also be encouraged with suitable business interests where clear community benefits are evident.

Partnership arrangements will not be confined to organisations at national level. The proposed new regional development teams (see section 7) will promote and facilitate the forging of partnership arrangements with local groups and businesses, and Comhaltas County Boards and branches will also play a part (see section 6).

4.3 *Implementing “Meitheal”*

Comhaltas will promote and support a wide range of Meitheal projects throughout the period of the Programme. To facilitate the initiative, county Meitheal Support Groups will be established on a phased basis during the period of the Programme with the objective of taking responsibility for co-ordinating and driving Meitheal in their respective areas. The Support Groups will be composed of people from Comhaltas and other stakeholder groups within the traditional arts. The target in this Programme is to launch 6 Meitheal Support Groups in the first year, 12 in the second and the remainder in the third year.

Comhaltas will appoint a national Meitheal Facilitator to help establish and work with Meitheal Support Groups and on individual projects. He/she will provide advice and assistance as appropriate, including resource procurement

where necessary. The Facilitator will network with relevant groups outside Comhaltas, helping to build confidence and the bridges necessary for joint action and wide community participation.

The Meitheal process is very much focussed on voluntary actions within communities, and this will remain a fundamental principle of the process. However, Comhaltas will seek public funding to establish the Facilitator position on a full-time basis to provide the vital drive and support the programme will require particularly in the early stages. Funding support for assistance to the Facilitator will also be sought in view of the large number of projects and array of individuals and groups likely to be involved.

Comhaltas will also seek funding to support the establishment of individual Meitheal projects. The objective is to establish a “Meitheal Fund” to provide seed funding in appropriate projects to leverage additional funding from the community and other sources. Seed money will not be used to grant aid individual projects in full.

Meitheal will also be rolled out in Britain, America and elsewhere through the Comhaltas network in these countries. The priority will be Britain and North America during the period of the programme, but in the final phase of the plan other countries will be considered.

[A summary of targets and anticipated costs associated with the implementation of Meitheal during the period of the Programme is at Appendix A.](#)

Section 5: Traditional arts in Education

5.1 Every child has a right to the traditional arts

“Comhaltas believes that every child should be given the opportunity in school to experience the traditional arts and should have the choice to pursue them as part of their normal education. It is a right that should not be denied to any child”.

Although recognised within the school curriculum, the teaching of the traditions and music in particular, is far from satisfactory. The location of schools and the personal interests of teachers will determine to a very large extent whether or not they will feature on the timetable. At secondary level, for example, the majority of music teachers come from a classical music background with limited experience in traditional music. In the absence of alternative arrangements to support the teaching of traditional music in schools, the creation of greater exposure to and opportunities for participation in traditional music will not be possible.

Comhaltas has already achieved a lot in the area of traditional music in the education system. Many branches and individual members operate local arrangements whereby traditional music teachers visit schools to teach children. Co-operation between Comhaltas branches and Vocational Education Committees in the provision of music classes on school premises remains very important.

To address the objective of bringing the traditional arts to all schools, Comhaltas will expand the existing corps of specialist traditional music teachers available to schools, and will create new opportunities for primary school teachers to develop their knowledge of the traditions. Comhaltas will also develop appropriate support arrangements and tools to enable existing music teachers in

secondary schools to adequately teach traditional music as part of the national examination curriculum.

5.2 *Opportunities for adults are also limited*

Opportunities for adults to access and learn the traditional arts are also very limited. Aside from the inevitable loss to an individual, the opportunity to tap into goodwill and support for the traditions is being missed. Comhaltas will seek opportunities to enable adults to pursue both formal and informal learning in the traditions.

5.3 *Specific Actions under the Development Programme*

Comhaltas will:

- Introduce a new **In-Service course for primary teachers** to facilitate teaching the traditional arts. The approval of the Department of Education and Science has been obtained for these courses. Six pilot courses will be held in the first year and the number will be extended the following years, based on experience and assessment.

- Provide additional places on the **Comhaltas Teastas i dTeagasc Ceolta Tíre (TTCT)** traditional music teachers certificate (see section 6.3) for primary and post primary schoolteachers, and for trainee schoolteachers (in particular music teachers) who are accomplished traditional musicians. The Programme target will be 10 teachers per year in the first 2 years and 20 per year thereafter.

- Provide an **introductory pack for traditional music, song, and dance** for use in primary schools. This will have a 12–lesson format and includes

lesson plans, teaching instructions, work sheets and an accompanying Video/DVD. The preparation of the pack is well advanced and pilot projects to test the pack will take during the school year 2004 – 2005.

- Introduce a new textbook, “**First Steps in Music**”, aimed at students who attend regular music lessons in school. The textbook will include song lyrics and music for traditional tunes graded according to standards. A CD and instructions for teachers will accompany the textbook. A pilot project has been established to test the pack and the results to date are very encouraging. The objective is to distribute the pack to all national schools at an estimated cost of €50,000, and funding support for this action will be sought.
- Promote Comhaltas **SCT Traditional Music Examinations** (see section 6.3) in schools to complement and augment the teaching of traditional music to Junior and Leaving Certificate levels.
- Develop a programme to support existing music teachers in schools in providing traditional music at Junior and Senior cycles as part of the examination structure.
- Support the introduction of a structured Transition Year course in traditional music and song.
- Develop new traditional arts outreach arrangements to schools by the proposed new regional resource teams (see section 7).
- Develop, in conjunction with Vocational Education Committees and other education bodies, short duration foundation and other courses in traditional music and song for adults.

- Undertake a review of instrumental courses currently available to adult learners in Comhaltas branches with the objective of increasing the opportunities available.

- Rejuvenate existing, and forge new, links with music and folklore Departments in third level institutions both at home and abroad.

Comhaltas has a number of development teams, comprised mainly of members of the teaching profession, working on various elements of the promotion of the traditional arts in schools. As part of this Development Programme Comhaltas will seek funding for the engagement of a full-time Education Officer to coordinate and support the initiatives set out above. He / she will play a lead role in preparing education packs, delivering the In-Service courses and programmes for Junior and Senior cycles and Transition Years, supporting teachers and networking with other stakeholders in the education sector. The person appointed will have experience in the field of education and will be supported by an administrative assistant.

A summary of the estimated costs associated with the actions set out above is at Appendix B.

Section 6: Strengthening Comhaltas services

6.1 *Expanding the branch network*

The Comhaltas network of over 300 branches throughout Ireland and 100 abroad has been central to our success over the years. The branches have developed organically in every county at parish level as part of the effort of local communities to protect and develop the traditional arts in their area. In this, Comhaltas is a uniquely “bottom-up” structure.

It takes many years of learning and immersion in the traditions to become accomplished musicians. The long-term commitment required to providing quality tuition depends on having a strong local branch structure in place to foster and support the emerging talent. The branches are also focal points for a range of activities associated with the heritage.

Being locally created and promoted is the branches’ greatest strength. However, there are areas of the country where branches have not been established, particularly in new urban areas, and some existing branches are not as strong or active as they might be due to lack of resources and changing personnel over time.

Comhaltas will expand its branch network throughout Ireland and abroad and weaker branches will be strengthened. Branches will be encouraged to extend their activities and interactions with local communities through increasing membership, expanding activities and services, and creating new opportunities for enjoyment of the traditions through social activities.

One of the highest priorities for Comhaltas is passing on the traditions to children through its extensive teaching programmes. A renewed emphasis will be placed on the participation of families in branch activities. Stronger links

between local authority arts officers and other community fora and arts groups will be fostered, and a renewed emphasis will be placed on an Ghaeilge and on singing in Irish and in English.

6.2 *Actions by Branches and County Boards*

The following actions will be pursued under the Programme at Branch and County Board levels:

- **Establish new branches:** Under An Comhaltas Bunreacht, County Boards are responsible for the establishment of branches. County Boards will be encouraged to establish three new branches in their area during the period of the Programme. In counties with larger urban populations County Boards will be encouraged to establish a branch in these larger communities. Achievement of this action will involve drawing on the support of existing branch members and galvanising other local interests.

- **Focus on families:** County Boards and branches will promote the participation of families in the activities of the branches, including by developing new family orientated interests and activities. This will include more opportunities for performance by children and young adults in local community activities and events. A renewed emphasis will be placed on young people participating and enjoying the traditions in settings where alcohol is not readily available.

- **Twinning branches** and youth exchange programmes to promote a shared understanding and enjoyment of the traditions and to reinforce the learning process will be developed. Larger branches in particular will be encouraged to twin with weaker branches. Twinning of branches will also be promoted as a means of building bridges between geographically distant communities both in Ireland and abroad.

- A new **“Try Trad”** initiative will be introduced aimed at musical students from other traditions and genres on the island. The twinning programme will be relevant here, including in relation to cross border exchanges.
- **“Seisiún”** will be promoted widely to encourage more people in the local community, in addition to tourists, to enjoy the traditions.
- **Meitheal:** Branches will play a key role in promoting the **“Meitheal”** initiative (see section 4 of this Plan) in their local areas. They are ideally placed to forge the necessary community links and develop attractive creative projects.
- **Traditional Arts Information Programmes:** Branches and County Boards will be assisted to develop and implement new local and countywide information programmes based on a PR booklet recently prepared by Comhaltas. The focus will be on promoting enjoyment, understanding and wider participation in the traditions.
- **Local traditional arts plans:** Comhaltas will promote the preparation and implementation of local traditional arts plans by branches and County Boards, in association with other local arts groups and local authorities’ arts officers, with whom strong links already exist. Support from local businesses will also be sought for these plans.
- **An Ghaeilge:** A new programme to promote every day use of the Irish language in branches will be introduced, with the objectives of encouraging more members to use the language as part of their daily life.

- **Singing in both Irish and English:** Branches will be encouraged to introduce singing in both Irish and English into their teaching programmes aimed at children and adults. Comhaltas will prepare a booklet of popular songs to support and facilitate this initiative.

6.3 *Developing other Comhaltas services*

To facilitate the achievement of the actions in this Programme and to strengthen the overall capacity of Comhaltas to promote the aims of the movement more effectively, the services provided at central level will be progressively enhanced and expanded. A programme to improve systems and processes across the organisation will be also pursued, including the utilisation of new communications technologies. Other important functions, in particular funding (including opportunities for fundraising, commercial development, sponsorship and public funding) and publicity will be reviewed and developed.

Comhaltas, during the period of the Programme, will undertake the following actions as part of its continued commitment to supporting the traditions:

- **Comhaltas SCT (Scrúdú Ceol Tíre) Traditional Music Examinations:** The new SCT Traditional Music Examination programme will be targeted in particular at young players in Comhaltas branches, at students of independent traditional music teachers in the community (both Comhaltas and non-Comhaltas members) and at schools. A syllabus and Video/DVD tutor has been prepared to accompany the new SCT system. In 2003 some 3,000 candidates presented for examination and during the period of the plan a three fold increase in the number of candidates applying to undertake the examinations is targeted.

Comhaltas also proposes to make the Video/DVD tutor and supporting documentation available to all music teachers at post primary and head teachers in primary schools throughout Ireland. The cost of delivering the pack to schools is estimated to cost €75,000, and sponsorship will be sought for this.

- **Teastas i dTeagasc Ceolta Tíre (TTCT) - Traditional Music Certificate for Teachers:** Comhaltas will expand the number of places on the TTCT Traditional Music Teachers course to strengthen the teaching of traditional music in branches and in the community. During the period of the Plan 2 courses per year will be held, bring an additional 320 qualified traditional music teachers on stream.
- The Comhaltas FETAC accredited course for the **Production and Performance of Traditional Irish Arts** will be extended to provide additional places to encourage more young people to follow and develop careers in the traditions.
- The recording and production of **CDs of talented non-commercial players**, old and young, reflecting regional styles will be encouraged and supported.
- The recording and production of **CDs of talented young players** in solo and group format will also be encouraged and supported.
- Membership of **the Association of Irish Traditional Musicians**, a trade union affiliated to ICTU for 35 years, will be promoted to support the standing of commercial and non-commercial traditional musicians within the music industry.

- The **publication of written works** on all aspects of the traditions will continue to be supported. Particular emphasis will be placed on new authors, including promoting this element within the “Meitheal” process.
- **Concerts, master classes and local performances** will be promoted on a joint basis with local authorities and other arts interests.
- A **network of “famous past pupils”** will be established under a “giving back” programme to support the learning process of new players. Comhaltas taught a very significant number of today’s most successful professional artists in the traditional idiom.
- The **Comhaltas Archives** will be upgraded using modern technologies and adding to the extensive existing collection. The “Meitheal” initiative will be utilised to the fullest in identifying partners for this work.

6.4 *Comhaltas in North America, Britain and elsewhere*

The Comhaltas network of 100 branches abroad is an integral part of the Comhaltas movement and they play a vital role in promoting the traditional arts to a wider international audience. Comhaltas is strongest in North America and Britain, and branches are constantly being opened in other countries where Irish communities have settled. The Provincial Councils of North America and Britain are keen to maintain close integration within the overall Comhaltas community. However, while many of the challenges facing the development of Comhaltas abroad are similar to Ireland, there are a number of significant differences, and these need to be addressed in an appropriate manner.

A concern for Comhaltas in Britain is attracting increased numbers of second and third generation Irish to the traditions. Addressing this issue is complex,

and links in with developing a sense of Irishness and cultural heritage. The Cúlra project is therefore a very important initiative in this regard, and building strategic links to other Irish associated groups is also essential. The substantial geographic distances between branches in North America presents a major challenge in promoting the traditions.

There is a need in both Britain and America to strengthen the funding and administrative support bases. The development of an indigenous corps of teachers is also a priority.

While the actions identified in this Plan will apply as appropriate to North America and Britain, including those relating to strengthening the branch network and the promotion of “Meitheal”, special emphasis during the period of the Programme will be placed on:

In the case of Britain:

- Developing Cúlra and Cúlra na nÓg
- Seeking national and local public funding and exploring new commercial funding opportunities
- Heightening the awareness of local authorities and state arts bodies of the value of the traditions to Irish communities in Britain and of Comhaltas itself
- Providing full-time administrative support to the organisation
- Developing an indigenous corps of teachers to serve all branches in Britain

In the case of North America:

- Creating strategic links with other Irish bodies and arts bodies
- Providing full-time administrative support to the organisation

- Developing new commercial funding opportunities to strengthen the financial base of the province.
- Developing an indigenous corps of teachers to serve all branches in North America
- Promoting the use of new technologies to enhance communication opportunities between remote branches.

The Provincial Councils for North America and Britain will prepare *Development Plans* to address the priority issues identified above. These Plans will reflect fully the objectives of this Development Programme.

In relation to branches in countries other than North America and Britain, the priorities during the period of this Programme will continue to be (1) the establishment of new branches, (2) supporting teaching and education programmes, and (3) organising master classes and exchange arrangements.

Larger branches in Ireland will be encouraged to formally twin with branches in Britain and North America and elsewhere to foster direct personal links and develop mutual support and exchange programmes.

Section 7: Regional development teams and Resource centres

7.1 *Regional Development Teams*

New regional development teams will be established to promote, support and facilitate the development of the traditional arts on the ground. These teams will be composed of full-time personnel and will complement the existing provincial, county and branch structures.

Maintaining the voluntary structure remains vital to the continued work of Comhaltas. However, lifestyle changes in society generally are having an impact on the pattern of volunteering today. There are also many tasks that need full-time personnel. Areas of the country where the traditional arts are weakest often correspond to those communities where volunteering is lowest such as in socially deprived areas, or where there has been very little contact with the traditional arts over long periods. In such communities, reliance on voluntary personnel alone will not be sufficient to achieve the objective of bringing the traditional arts to all. Dedicated full-time teams are required.

The new teams will lead programmes and projects to develop an interest in the traditional arts throughout their regions, including establishing outreach programmes into schools and community groups, traditional arts networks and other extension arrangements. The teams will support the development of Meitheal and will enable a more significant programme of community and public performances and local and overseas tours to be arranged. The teams will work closely with Comhaltas committees, local authority arts officers, schools authorities and other relevant stakeholders in the development of local plans for the promotion of the traditional arts. Links to other arts groups in the region will be fostered.

The teams will address the development of traditions in the larger urban areas, working with all existing interests to create and facilitate opportunities for engagement by these communities in the traditions.

7.2 *Eight teams across the island*

The teams should be located in and operate from regional resource centres (see below) where the necessary physical infrastructure, facilities and support services will be available. The regional teams should be established without delay to begin the development process with the community while the proposed regional resource centres are being developed on a phased basis. This can be done initially utilising existing Comhaltas centres to the greatest degree possible.

A total of 8 teams will be established to serve the island of Ireland, 6 in the South and 2 in the North, in respect of the following regions:

- Dublin
- South East
- South West
- West
- North West
- North Midlands and North East
- Belfast and surrounding areas
- Remainder of Northern Ireland

The composition of the teams will depend on the needs of each particular region and will include a team leader, music / arts officer, a schools support officer and back up staff. The cost for each team on this basis has been estimated at €185,000 per annum. A summary of the estimated costs for the operation of the teams is at Appendix C to this Programme.

7.3 Regional Resource Centres

Comhaltas will develop strategically located regional resource centres from which the new regional teams referred to above will operate.

The centres will provide facilities for teaching, rehearsal, archives, recording and performance and session playing. The centres will support the work of Comhaltas branches and will also be fully available to any person or group interested in the traditions. The centres will act as local traditional hubs networked to a wide array of interest, including Comhaltas branches, schools, tithe cheoil, local arts centres and groups, “Meitheal” project teams, music schools and individual music teachers.

Each centre will also develop high quality shows aimed at both the home and visitor audience. The strategy is to establish in each regional resource centre an “economic engine” to support the activities of the centre and the regional team. Links will be created to tourist promotion interests (this is already taking place in many areas between Comhaltas branches and local tourist initiatives). Revenue generated from the “economic engine” will be channelled back to community based traditional arts initiatives.

The objective is that regional resource centres will be strategically located. However, it is recognised that such a programme of development will require substantial capital funding and can only be undertaken on a phased basis. In view of the importance of establishing the regional teams immediately, it is proposed to utilise a number of existing Comhaltas facilities as a base from which the teams will operate until such time as the new regional centres are fully developed.

Among the first priorities Comhaltas will include the CLASAC project in Dublin, which will complement Cultúrlann na hÉireann. Dublin has nearly one third of the national population and the new centre is essential to ensure that support services to the traditional arts are enhanced significantly as soon as possible. A site has been acquired from Dublin Corporation for the development, full planning permission has recently been obtained and the Government has agreed to contribute funding of some €900,000 towards the project. It is estimated that the centre will cost some €4.8m in total to develop and a phased approach is being adopted.

The location of the other centres in each of the regions identified will be chosen having regard to strategic needs and the location and suitability of existing facilities already operated by Comhaltas and others.

It is estimated that the regional resource centres (excluding Dublin and Belfast where development costs are higher) will cost in the region of €3.5m each to develop. Under this Development Programme support will be sought from the Government for the development of the 6 centres. Support will also be sought from the Northern Ireland authorities for the proposed 2 regional centres there.

The estimated costs over the period of the Development Programme of establishing the resource centres are at Appendix D. While the objective is that each resource centre will generate revenue to contribute to the cost of the regional team, funding assistance will be required during the start up period until the centres are in place and have developed a revenue generating capability. It is anticipated that support funding will be required for each team for a period of 3 years after the centre is operational and thereafter on a decreasing basis, to a point where revenue generated by the centre will contribute to at least 75% of the ongoing cost of the teams.

Appendix A

Meitheal Projects - summary of targets and costs

Cost item	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Meitheal Facilitator	€38,000	€40,000	€42,000	€44,000
Support person to Facilitator	€25,000	€26,000	€28,000	€30,000
Promotion material	€10,000	€12,000	€12,000	€10,000
Overheads and travelling	€10,000	€10,000	€11,000	€11,000
Project support funding	€30,000	€40,000	€55,000	€60,000
Total annual cost	€113,000	€128,000	€148,000	€155,000
Target no. of projects	70	100	140	160
No. of large projects promoted	8	10	12	12
No. of Meitheal Support Groups established	6	12	14	

Appendix B

Education projects - summary of costs

Cost item	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total cost
In- Service programme for teachers	Self financing	Self financing	Self financing	Self financing	Self financing	Self financing
First Steps in Music Tutorial	€5,500	€20,000	€14,500	€10,000	-	€50,000
12- Lesson Introductory Pack	€2,000	€8,000	€8,000	€10,000	-	€28,000
SCT pack	€7,000	€7,000	€7,000	€7,000	€7,000	€35,000
TTCT courses	€8,000	€8,000	€12,000	€12,000	€12,000	€52,000
Projects Officer	€38,000	€40,000	€42,000	€44,000	€46,000	€210,000
Support person to PO	€25,000	€26,000	€28,000	€30,000	€32,000	€141,000
Overheads and travelling	€10,000	€10,000	€11,000	€11,000	€12,000	€54,000
Promotional material	€8,000	€2,000	€12,000	€5,000	€5,000	€32,000

Appendix C

Regional Development Teams - Estimated operating costs

Team Location	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5 All teams in place
Dublin	€90,000	€90,000	€185,000	€185,000	€185,000
South East	€90,000	€90,000	€185,000	€185,000	€185,000
South West		€90,000	€90,000	€185,000	€185,000
West			€90,000	€90,000	€185,000
North West		€90,000	€90,000	€185,000	€185,000
North Midlands and North East			€90,000	€90,000	€185,000
Belfast	€90,000	€90,000	€185,000	€185,000	€185,000
Remainder NI			€90,000	€90,000	€185,000
Total cost per year	€270,00	€450,000	€600,000	€1,195,000	€1,480,000

Appendix D

Regional Resource Centres - Estimated establishment costs

Centre Location	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5 and beyond	Total Cost
Dublin	€1.5m	€2.3m	€1.0m			€4.8m
South East*	€1.0m	€0.5m				€1.5m
South West*		€1.0m	€0.5m			€1.5m
West			€1.5m	€1.5m	€0.5m	€3.5m
North West*			€1.0m	€0.5m		€1.5m
North Midlands and North East					€3.5m	€3.5m
Belfast		€1.0m	€2.5m	€1.3m		€4.8m
Remainder NI*				€1.0m	€0.5m	€1.5m
Total cost per year	€2.5m	€4.8m	€6.5m	€4.3m	€4.5m	€22.6m

* Denotes conversion of an existing premises

