



The Irish
Countrywomen's
Association

Annual Report
2018/19

Company information: Irish Countrywomen's Trust Ltd/Irish Countrywomen's Association

Auditors	N Carrick Auditors Ltd, Athy, Co Kildare CDM Accountants, Athy, Co Kildare
Bankers	Bank OF Ireland, College Green Dublin 2 AIB Drogheda Co Louth
Solicitors	O'Rourke Reid, Mount St Crescent, Dublin 2
Business address	58 Merrion Rd, Dublin 4, Ireland
Registered Number:	16219
Charity Number:	CHY4947
Charity Registration:	20006730

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Josephine Helly

National President & Cathaoirleach

Dear friends

I am delighted to introduce the first annual report of the National Executive Board 2018/21.

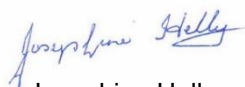
We look forward to serving the members of this great organisation, building on the legacy of thousands of women whose leadership has sustained the ICA and made it a source of learning, friendship and support for women, their families and communities,

We lead in a time of great challenges. Internally we have come through an immensely difficult year – unprecedented in ICA history – where contention and dispute marked an election year and attempts to address the difficulties were followed by a costly and divisive court case. We can choose to pick over what happened, or we can take the lessons learned, and ensure that our Association never again faces such difficulties. Most importantly we must return our focus to the membership, your interests and well-being, and through meeting our charitable purposes, to the contribution of the ICA to life in Ireland. This Report provides a valuable reminder that while we were dealing with conflict at national level, you the members were doing what you do best – making a difference to women and to communities.

The NEB is responsible for leadership and governance means dealing with the realities - managing our resources, rebuilding reserves, and meeting demanding standards of compliance and regulation. In all of this, the members and their interests are at the centre of our thoughts, priorities, deliberations and actions and the decision we take together with your activities will determine whether other women wish to join us. Taking office in a difficult period, I am encouraged by the support that I and NEB members have received from ICA members across the country, and from the National Advisory Committee, whose wise counsel we will draw on.

The NEB is committed to serving you the members and delivering the charitable aims of the Association. We are building a strong and united Board, and I thank my fellow Board members for their shared determination to meet the confidence that members placed in us on election. We will not let you down.

In fellowship and friendship


Josephine Helly

THE ICA

The ICA is a national organisation of women founded in 1910. Today more than 8,000 members in Guilds across the country come together in friendship and fellowship, enhancing their wellbeing and developing new skills. A hallmark of the ICA's work for over a century has been its contribution to community life, in leading the advancement of women's role, their rights and opportunities, and improving the quality of family life.

Our charitable objectives

Our objectives are to advance education and benefit the community through:

- a. Bringing women together in fellowship and friendship and developing and improving the well-being, knowledge and skills of women, and improving the general quality of life in Ireland through co-operative effort
- b. Supporting and promoting Irish language and culture
- c. Promoting the development of women in Ireland, nationally and internationally.

Our organisation

ICA members are to be found in communities across Ireland. In 2018 there were 479 Guilds organised in 27 county Federations. Members meet regularly and plan a programme of events for the year, which generally runs from September to June. Across all Guilds are common features – meetings, social events, campaigning activity, cooperative work in communities, fund-raising, and participation in Federation and across Federations national ICA activity. Each Guild is different and responds to the interests of its members. In Federations, Guilds come together and work in their county and on national campaigns, led by the National Executive Board.

ICA Central Office provides support to the whole organisation, organising events, competitions, training and conferences, and managing the national resources of the Association. An Grianán, our College in Co Louth, provides education and training for members individually, and to Guild and Federation groups, and through specialist programmes. It also welcomes other guests.

Our Policy Priorities

ICA national policy is determined by the members who bring issues through Guilds to Federation and on to the AGM for debate. This ground up and participative approach is at the centre of the Association's and determine our national policy priorities, which centre on the rights and advancement of women and the quality of life of the overall community:

- Health issues, health services and carers
- Violence against women
- Children's rights, including those of migrant children, and their vulnerability to being lost in the system. Supporting the Amber Alert system for any missing child
- Trafficking of women (and children)
- Women in Decision-making

These issues are reflected through national advocacy and with local issues, underpin community and fund-raising activities by Guilds and Federations.

How we are governed

The ICA is governed by its Constitution and led by the National Executive Board, elected triennially and accountable to the membership. The Finance Committee is a standing committee of the NEB.

The NEB is supported and advised by the National Advisory Committee of 27 Federation Presidents. Policy is determined by the members who bring issues through Guilds to Federation and on to the AGM for debate. This ground up and participative approach is at the centre of the Association's purpose. The NEB exercises its leadership on this basis.

Governance Structures

National Executive Board – 2015/18 and 2018/21

BOARD MEMBERS	To AGM 2018	2018/21	2018/21 (from Nov 3 rd)
National President	Marie O'Toole	* See note	Josephine Helly
National Secretary	Shirley Power	Anne Payne (Interim) (from June 6 th – Nov 3 rd)	Concepta McGettrick (to February 10 th) Eleanor Calnan (from March 2 nd by co-option)
National Treasurer	Mary MacNamara	Eleanor Calnan (Interim) (June 6 th – Nov 3 rd)	Helen Rutter
Chairman NAC	Susan Potts	Michelle Earley	
Regional Presidents	Esther Cahill Dee Devereux Barbara Meer Helen Rutter		May Campbell Margot Hennessy Ena Howell Sharon Kelly
Board members	Margot Hennessy Anna Rose McCormack Joanne Allen Liz O'Leary Chris Kelly Marty Carthy Deirdre Connery Alice Rowley Anne Devitt	Eleanor Calnan* Nellie Dillon Forde Carmel Garrett Kitty Harrington Annette Long	Eilish McDonnell Maureen McLaughlin Geraldine McNally Anne Payne
Outgoing National President	N/A	Marie O'Toole	

*Ms O'Toole was requested by the 2018 AGM to act as Caretaker National President pending fresh elections, but this was deemed by the High Court as not Constitutionally possible. The NEB asked that she act as Cathaoirleach until the elections were completed. **Ms Calnan was co-opted by the NEB as National Secretary.

NEB meetings: 9 in 2018; 3 in Q1 2019.

Finance Committee of the NEB - 2015/18 and 2018/21

Finance	To AGM 2018	June to Nov 3 rd 2018	From Nov 3 rd 2018
Chairman – National Treasurer	Mary MacNamara	Eleanor Calnan (Interim)	Helen Rutter
Members	Marie O'Toole Shirley Power Susan Potts Dee Devereux Esther Cahill Helen Rutter	Nellie Dillon Forde Carmel Garrett	Eleanor Calnan May Campbell Nellie Dillon-Forde Margot Hennessy

Finance Committee meetings: 7 in 2018; 3 in Q1 2019.

National Advisory Committee - 2015/18 and 2018/21

Federation	President 2015/18	Federation President 2018/21
Carlow	Margot Hennessy	Annette Reddy
Cavan	Anna Rose McCormack	Mary Duffy
Clare	Joanne Dunphy Allen	Mary O'Halloran
Cork	Deirdre Hickey	Eleanor Calnan
Donegal	Maureen Milligan	Maureen McLaughlin
Dublin	Mary Melia	Joan Canning
Galway	Sharon Kelly	Carmel Garrett
Kerry	Liz O'Leary	Collette Dalton
Kildare	Mary Smith	Nellie Dillon Forde
Kilkenny	Marie Landy	Ann Kelly
Laois	Anne Cass	Anne Payne
Leitrim	Chris Kelly	Michelle Earley - Chairman NAC
Limerick	Mary Moloney	Annette Long
Longford	Mary Carthy	Olive Quinn
Louth	Susan Potts (Chairman NAC)	Susan Reynolds
Mayo	Alice Rowley	Kay Devine
Meath	Olive Carolan	Geraldine McNally
Monaghan	Lorna Soden	Susan Clarke
Offaly	Maura Allen	Maura Allen
Roscommon	Monica Beegan	Kitty Harrington
Sligo	Kay Cunnane	Mary Fergus
Tipperary North	Ann Clarke	Kathleen Corcoran
Tipperary South	Anne Devitt	June O'Dwyer
Waterford	Noeline Power	Noeline Power
Westmeath	Gill Stanley	Eilish McDonnell
Wexford	Deirdre Connery	Mary Darcy
Wicklow	Madge Kenny	Hilda Roche

NAC meetings: 6 in 2018: 2 in Q1 2019

Staff

At year-end 2018, the ICA employed two full time staff at Central Office, and 2 full-time and 20 part-time staff at An Grianán.

ICA MAKING A DIFFERENCE - ACTIONS AND IMPACT

Wherever ICA members gather we come together in fellowship and friendship and to make a difference through educational, cooperative, national and international work. ICA activities are at the centre of communities, making a huge contribution to community life, supporting volunteer activity, and raising funds for many local charities.

Through friendship and fellowship, members' work demonstrates the creativity, cooperative work, and continuing commitment of ICA members everywhere to the quality of life, well-being and rights of women, girls and families, here and elsewhere.

Across these ICA objectives thousands of ICA members come together and volunteer their time to make a difference as the examples over the next few pages of this report show.

- **Enhancing women's well-being, knowledge and skills**
- **Improving quality of life through co-operative effort**
- **Supporting and promoting Irish language and culture**
- **Promoting the development of women in Ireland and internationally**

At national level the organisation works to enhance this activity and to provide a national platform and voice, managing an organisation approaching its twelfth decade.

The national organisation - bringing it all together

Big or small, ICA Guilds and Federations are the life blood of the Association and the focus for members. Social events are very important but at the centre of ICA life since its foundation has been the promotion of skills, and opportunities for collective action nationally. A voluntary structure leads the activities and Central Office provides back up support, as well as information, advice and coordinating training. The ICA Strategic Plan 2018/20 provides the framework against which the national work is organised and overseen.

The Strategy sets three priorities for the NEB

1. Support the Membership organisation	2. Sustain and develop An Grianán as a centre for learning and leisure	3. Deliver good governance
Support/nurture current ICA membership Promote ICA to potential members through a targeted approach Influence through Advocacy	Sustain and develop ICA usage Develop the external business Develop the facility Support business development	Achieve and maintain excellence in Governance compliance Manage assets effectively Ensure decision-making is effective Plan and develop staff

ICA - Enhancing women's well-being, knowledge and skills

<p>Annual Craft Day</p> <p>Kildare Federation</p> <p>Demonstrating 11 crafts and attracting 110 participants to share and develop skills and meet the ICA.</p>	<p>Race Week Ladies Day</p> <p>Galway Federation: Gort Guild</p> <p>An event with women residents in Rosemount Nursing Home enjoying an afternoon specially for them in this important week in Galway life.</p>	<p>The Trip from Tipp</p> <p>North Tipperary Federation</p> <p>The Annual Federation 'trip from Tipp' was to Kenmare in 2018, a chance to widen friendships, travel, and learn more about Ireland – visitors in our own land.</p>
<p>"Mind your Health" Night</p> <p>Laois Federation: Spink Guild</p> <p>Raising awareness of physical, dietary and mental for members and guests from the wider community health.</p> <p>Spink and Castletown Guilds</p> <p><i>Knitting clubs</i> - ICA members and women from the local community knitting, learning new skills and making friends. A spin off provided hats and scarves, plus toiletries and sweets, to PATH - Portlaoise Action to the Homeless at Christmas.</p>	<p>Annual ICA Programme</p> <p>Sligo Federation: Ballisodare Guild</p> <p>The programme is designed for members and to reach other women, promoting social contact and skills. In 2018/19 it included painting, cookery and flower arranging, with a small charge for some classes and welcome support from local businesses.</p>	<p>Taste of Cavan Festival</p> <p>Cavan Federation</p> <p>ICA members demonstrating crafts and promoting ICA to women as thousands visit the Festival. Funds raised go to the ICA College at An Grianán.</p>
<p>Celebrating 70 years</p> <p>Galway Federation - Gort Guild 2018</p> <p>Enriching the lives of women in the community, and the development of the Guild premises as a modern-day facility for the community.</p> <p>Clifden Guild - Jewellery making and remodelling - Demonstrating making, remodelling and recycling skills.</p>		
<p>Guild of the Year Competition</p> <p>Wicklow Federation</p> <p>Amidst a strong focus on the work ICA members do with their communities, this Competition recognises that the Guilds themselves provide Guilds and members with an opportunity to display their talent, promote arts and crafts, and sustain excellence in Guild programmes and activities. In 2018, Guilds competed on a '60s theme over six sections – Craft, Art, Baking, Entertainment, Written work and a display table.</p>		
<p>Singing together – celebrating together</p> <p>Kilkenny Federation</p> <p>Marking 50 years membership of some members the Federation celebrated, and started a choir as a new string to their bow.</p>	<p>Offaly Annual Arts and Craft Day</p> <p>Offaly Federation, Clonbullogue Guild</p> <p>An annual event maintaining the ethos of ICA, demonstrating, educating and promoting crafts to the community.</p> <p>Community Clean Up</p> <p>Carlow Federation, Ballyconnell Guild</p> <p>Supported by Carlow Co Council to identify and clean up dumping black spots and to encourage a litter free environment in the village,</p>	

1. Support the membership organisation

Membership 2018

In 2018 the emphasis was on general encouragement to Guilds and Federations to work to recruit new members. Despite much hard work, and 434 new members who are warmly welcomed, there was an overall net membership loss of 5%. The downward trend has been evident over the past decade with ICA membership now some 36% lower than in 2008.

Recruitment initiatives at national level – at major events such as the Ploughing Championships and the RDS Knitting and Stitching Show – have not been effective, with few enquiries translating into membership. However, while the numbers are small, in 2018 every Federation recorded new members, largely attracted through their local and Guild activity.

The number of small Guilds is also increasing, and 54% of all Guilds have 15 or fewer members. Just 17% recorded over 30 members in 2018. Small numbers can be very effective as the source of friendship and fellowship, but it places pressures on Guilds to fill Committees and Officer roles, and to develop new programmes. In some Federations, for example in Galway, there is a practice of bringing smaller Guilds together for social activities and to share their experiences and skills, helping to sustain the local activity.

The requirements under the Constitution for officers and committees, will be considered in the review of the Constitution and legal structures, with the aim of taking the pressure off small Guilds.

National support for ICA activities

ICA National activities are intended to bring that activity together and are driven by the work of four National Committees – Arts, Handcrafts and Produce - and a Competitions Committee.

Through these Committees the ICA oversees standards, encourages skills development/sharing and participation, and arranges Competitions where members display their talents.

Handcrafts: The Handcrafts Committee works to attract interest from members interested in trying new skills and developing existing ones. Four Taster Classes in 2018 attracted almost 70 members members trying out crafts as diverse as tatting, embroidery, shadow quilting and Christmas crafts.

The Royal School of Needlework partnership with ICA continued, with Central Office hosting a three day programme in July for ICA members and guests.

The culmination of the Committees work is the National Handcrafts Week at An Grianán, a regularly oversubscribed event.

ICA National Competition Programme included drama, art, craft, produce, the national table quiz, and, in baking, the Aldi National Brown Bread Competition and Gempack baking. The competitions work through the Federations and national finals usually take place at An Grianán.

The ICA at the National Ploughing Championships. The traditional presence of ICA at 'the Ploughing' brings the Association to a larger stage to promote the best of ICA. In 2018 Offaly Federation organised the ICA tent, ably assisted by the local Guilds, providing crafts demonstrators and refreshments. Despite extraordinary weather which meant the event had to close on one day, the ICA made its presence felt and welcomed many members, dignitaries and guests.

ICA National Yarnbombing event: Launched in 2017, Yarnbombing events continued into 2018 by Guilds and Federations, highlighting ICA skills, and opportunities for women to get involved in handcrafts.

***Baby Hats for Premature Baby Unit –
Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital***

Louth Federation: Marshes Guild

Supporting the Federation charity by knitting 72 baby hats for premature babies including the granddaughter of one ICA member, and passing on knitting skills to each other.

Recycling Workshop and Parish Spring Clean

Monaghan Federation: Aghabog Guild

Working with the Environmental Officer from Monaghan Co Council a workshop on recycling and sustainable waste management, a litter pickup of each road in the parish, highlighting the problems, good practice and contributing to the global effort on the use of dumping of plastic.

Christmas Jumper Day

Waterford Federation, Minaun Guild

Replacing Kris Kindle, the Guild members wore their Christmas jumpers to the December meeting and made donations to the Simon Community to help homeless people in the area.

The Leitrim Observer - Talking Newspaper

Roscommon Federation, Drumboylan Guild

Since the 1990s, the newspaper is produced for local people who are blind, circulated on memory sticks free of charge by An Post, supported by the NCBI and Sligo Talking Newspaper.

ICA - Improving quality of life through co-operative effort

Community Social Night

Monaghan Federation

Ardaghey Guild

An annual evening of friendship, food, and entertainment for the community, with a raffle to cover costs and food provided by the Guild. Pure fun!

Supporting older people

Clare Federation: Labasheeda, Ballynacally Feakle Guilds

Working with the Clare Fire Service to identify older people whose safety would be enhanced by having home smoke alarms, and installing c. 150 across the Guild areas.

Joining the Food Cloud

Leitrim Federation: Aughavas Guild

As a community with few facilities, the Guild joined the Food Cloud Programme, distributing €2000 worth of food in January and responding to a vital need in the locality.

Support for Women's Aid

Carlow Federation

Leighlinbridge Guild

'Hats n Handbags' Sale raising €1700 and ongoing collections of toiletries and other items at Federation meetings for ongoing support to women leaving situations of domestic violence.

A living memorial

Kerry Federation

Annascaul Guild

In memory of founding Guild member Maeve Dineen, 300 spring bulbs were planted in the internal garden of Dingle Community Hospital to be enjoyed by patients and visitors alike.

Senior Citizens Christmas Party

Kildare Federation: Clane Guild

Welcoming 130 local people, the Guild fund raised during the year for an event with music and a visit from Santa Claus.

Christmas Fair & Annual Walk, Trim

Meath Federation

Showing ICA member talents and raised funds for St Vincent de Paul in Enfield, Co Meath. The proceeds from the Walk went to Breast Cancer Research.

Practical support – VAW

Dublin Federation, Botanic Glasnevin Guild

Supporting Aoibhneas Women's Refuge through practical support, collecting toiletries and clothes and fund-raising.

Supporting sub-aqua

Kilkenny Federation, Cranagh Guild

Fund-raising for equipment for the local sub-aqua club.

Fitness – mind and body

Keeping fit - 'Go for Life': Guilds are actively involved in the Go for Life Programme with many benefitting from small grants for local activity. In January 2018 PAL training took place at An Grianán ICA PALs. National Treasurer, Helen Rutter attended the launch of the Go for Life grants in November 2018, and has advocated the importance of fitness and activity for older people in rural areas, who may not have access to gyms or other facilities.

There will be an emphasis in 2019 on promoting 'Go for Life' and other opportunities to develop fitness among members through Guild and Federation initiatives, so important for general well-being and to maintain independent living. The potential for continuing to offer PAL training will also be explored.

Digital fitness = Agri Digital Skills: Monica Beegan, Roscommon Federation continues to promote the training provided under this initiative which has already been availed of by 11,550 people with training for a further 5,000 planned. For more information members can contact Roscommon Leader Partnership.

Volunteer activity and the leadership by National Committees are central to promoting skills and developing and organising events and activities. The ICA appreciates the incredible level of voluntary time that goes into this work and the benefits for members and, in many instances, the wider community.

We value our volunteers and will develop tools so that Committees can demonstrate the benefits of this work to the members and our communities.

Keeping Guilds and members informed

Communication information to members, from the NEB and Central Office, is through Federations and directly to Guilds and via the website. The quality and timeliness of communication has been a bone of contention for some time. Communication arises in a number of ways:

NEB decisions; Quick and accurate communication is vital if members are to know what is happening at national level and the decisions being taken on their behalf. The NEB has begun to issuing briefings within a few days of Board meetings, which go to the NAC and on to Guilds,

However, it is intended that the members portal of the website will carry all information to members.

NAC meetings: NAC meetings are an important source of two-way communications and will also be scheduled to facilitate consultation by the NEB on issues.

Newsletter: Five newsletters were issued in 2018.

Website: The review of the website was completed and work on development got underway with the aim of relaunch of a more member focussed and up to-date site in 2019.

There has been a long running demand for much more consistent communication, so that members hear about issues at the same time, and this is a priority for the NEB.

Advice and guidance: Central Office continues to receive regular requests for information from members and Guilds, and in the main the queries are on grants, insurance, national competitions, reporting and events.

Wicklow Federation Drama Festival

Wicklow Federation

The 64th Drama Festival is open to ICA and local drama groups and is entirely organised by ICA members on a voluntary basis. 6 one act and 8 short plays/sketches were entered in 2018. An important local event, the Festival encourages self-confidence, skills and team work, and results in a high standard of live drama. A conscious effort to use Gaeilge involves signage in Irish, the use of Irish in the Festival welcome and also during the raffle that takes place to support the organisation of the event. Simple steps to promote day to day use of Irish in Wicklow Federation.

Oiche Gaeilge/Come Dine with Me

Longford Federation

A Come Dine with Me Federation Competition combined with Oiche Gaeilge as part of Seachtain na Gaeilge when the winners of the competition were announced. Promoting local produce and supporting local farmers, members showed their cooking skills and the evening encouraged members and guests to use Irish, through reading, songs and poetry. The events raised funds for Mullingar Hospital.

ICA - Supporting and promoting Irish language and culture

Cúpla focail eile?

Donegal Federation

An Timire Ann Mc Kinley a retired national school teacher has hit on a novel way of getting members in Donegal Federation who have little or no exposure to spoken or written Irish engaged with the language. Each meeting Ann prepares a 'cúpla focal' sheet for all participants - days of the week, weather and seasonal descriptions - and takes the members through it to get the words and pronunciation right.

"Buail Suas Amhrán"

Cork Federation

A bilingual book which includes the ICA prayers in Gaeilge, English and phonics, songs and poems, sean fhocal, everyday phrases and words and essays as Gaeilge. Promoting Irish with members and with new Irish, all Federation and Guild meeting in Cork begin with the ICA prayer in both languages. The Book is also being sold through other Federations and profits used to provide scholarships to An Grianán.

Seachtain na Gaeilge

Westmeath Federation, Mullingar Guild

A long standing commitment to the use of Gaeilge as part of their meetings, the Guilds also participates in Irish language quizzes, contributes to local publications and for Seachtain na Gaeilge, produced Irish language greeting cards.

ICA - Supporting the work of Foras Eireann

Representative: Marion Lyon Cavan Federation

Foras Eireann is a permanent conference of voluntary organisations working together to assist and promote social, cultural and economic development in Ireland by distribution of funds arising from the Charlotte Francis Shaw Trust. It has assisted ICA Guilds to fulfil their remit to promote Irish Culture within their Guilds Four meetings took place. €1960 was distributed to ICA Guilds in the period May 2017 to April 2018. The 70th anniversary of Foras Eireann is occurring in 2019 year.

Ms Lyons has made suggestions to widen the base for grant aid to promote the objectives of the Trust, to avoid a fee increase to encourage continued interest, and to seek funding from the Dept of Culture as a replacement for a Grant from the Dept of Education which ended some time ago.

1. Promoting ICA through building better membership support

The Regional and Federation Presidents now lead the way in supporting Federations who will in turn be enabled to support Guilds. In March 2019 work began on a plan for support and development with the Regional Presidents identifying two priorities.

- **support and development of the skills of all office holders** at Federation level, and encouragement to Federations to pass on these skills to Guild Committees.
- **promoting ICA membership** with the development of a pack of **materials and ideas to generate membership interest**, for use by Guilds and Federations to reach women who might join and to identify areas where interest warrants a new Guild,

Following consultation with the NAC at its meeting on March 23rd 2019, the Regional Presidents will announce a programme of support and development events for Federation Officers, PROs, Information Officers and Specialists, to get underway from June.

Further consultation with Federation Presidents will focus on recruitment initiatives by Federations and Guilds, and whether new Guilds might be the best approach where there is local interest.

Work on the guidelines and materials supporting recruitment will be developed over the year and will be available on the website. The first step will be to prepare standard membership and information leaflets, that can be customised by Federations and Guilds with local information. A consistent and nationwide approach to promoting the ICA has to combine a Guild up approach as well as using national and regional events and opportunities.

The Regional Presidents will also lead the discussion with Federation Presidents and Committees to identify the best way to support smaller Guilds, so that they are able to enjoy varied programmes.

CELEBRATING INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

ICA Federations and Guilds mark this important day for women worldwide, with events and activities that honour women and their achievements, and bring women together to celebrate, as these examples show.

Clare Federation: International presentations by Guilds - profiles of significant women who made a difference in their country, on the traditional costume, biscuit baking and music.

Limerick Federation: With a focus on the environment IWD in Limerick combined a talk from Limerick Co Council with a collection for Adapt House for victims of domestic violence. The Federation's eye on international needs is also marked by knitting jumpers and hats for babies in Tanzania and Kenya.

Leitrim Federation: A Yarnbombing event in Market Yard Carrick on Shannon, showcased member talent in crochet and knitting and received a warm welcome from the townspeople and visitors. Well prepared the members had contact cards so that anyone interested in joining the ICA could do so. As well as the yarn based craft, paintings and card making were also on show.

South Tipperary Federation: An open evening for ICA members and their guests in a wide range of national costumes – bringing women together for an evening of enjoyment, celebration and friendship.

Kerry Federation: Castlegregory Guild coffee morning for ICA members and women in the community on March 8th; Federation wide 'Yarnbombing' event in Lisowel.

Exchange visits - the Women's Institute NI

Galway Federation, Clifden Guild

A long-standing tradition of friendship between ICA and the WI in N Ireland continues. For Clifden Guild, this means building on a thirty-year partnership with Ballievey and Banbridge WIs, marked by visits, often at An Grianán, where crafts, arts and cookery are at the centre of activity, and by coming together on trips to enjoy the sights and culture of the island of Ireland.

Small steps to dignity- Sanitary kits for Ethiopia.

Leitrim Federation: Leitrim Village Guild

An initiative by Guild member Elaine Higgins - kit bags, with a reusable sanitary towel and washing items, quickly grew into a Federation wide activity. The Kits delivered by Elaine to Ethiopia, help to ensure that girls do not miss school each month, giving them an extra nine weeks schooling each year. With period poverty in the news as a topic of concern, this initiative shows ICA at the forefront of action on the rights of women and girls.

PROMOTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN IN IRELAND AND INTERNATIONALLY

"Women looking after one another and especially themselves"

Mayo Federation Strategic Plan 2018 – 2021

The headline sets the tone and direction of the Mayo Federation Strategy to change the perception of ICA members and what we do through an ambitious programme of activities, public relations, an annual Guild open month in February, demonstrations, fund-raising and competitions, and an active Facebook page with small videos to showcase talent and courses.

Supporting migrant women

Westmeath Federation: Horseleap/Streamstown Guild

Reaching out to migrant women the Guild invited 6 women to join and covered the cost of their fees.

International Cultural Night

Meath Federation

A night with the Filipino Community in the surrounding counties, to hear about their culture, heritage and traditions through song and dance. Supported by the attendance of Minister of State Helen McEntee TD, Cathaoirleach Tom Kelly, Meath Co Council and the Honorary Consul in Ireland Mark C Congdon. Donations to the Columban Fathers Charity projects.

2. Advocacy and influence

The ICA has more than a century of achievement in advocating for women, families and communities and the Strategic Plan recognises this legacy and that the ICA voice must be relevant to members now.

The work of advocacy, at one time involving the ICA as almost a lone voice for campaigning for equality, women and families, is now shared with many other organisations and campaigns. Where that is so, we will join with others who share our concerns and demands, to get a strong message to those who can make change. Work on pensions rights provides an example, which saw the ICA joining with the Active Ageing Partnership to protest and demand change.

Sometimes, though, we may be a lone voice – and if that is the case and it is in our members' best interests, we will have the conviction to lead the way.

Right around the country Federations and Guilds keep a close eye on issues and political developments that have an impact on members, and on women and families generally. Local action can have considerable impact as action by **Roscommon Federation** campaigning against Government 2018 Budget proposals to add 23% VAT to vitamins/food supplements.

In 2018, national advocacy activity was limited as the organisation dealt with the demands of an election year and legal proceedings. In early 2019, the National President appointed Carmel Dawson as ICA PRO, to restore the ICA voice in the media, and develop opportunities to influence policy and policy-makers, nationally and in the EU.

Prebudget submission 2018 – this covered home care/Fair Deal: Pensions - allowance and parity for women; Waste charges.

Meetings

2018	25 th January	State Pensions Event, Wexford
	6 th March	National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (Oversight Group) in Department of Foreign Affairs
	15 th May	Safe Ireland
	Aug 13 th	Irish Cancer Society
2019	March 15 th	EU Commissioner Phil Hogan

Working in partnership

NWCI

As a founding organisation, we continue to be a member of the **National Women's Council of Ireland**, working with the other 140 plus members to advance women's rights.

Representative: Marie O'Toole, National President 2015/18

Main themes 2018: A wide agenda including violence against women; health; childcare; women in decision-making; human rights; the Repeal campaign; and gender budgeting.

Meetings attended: AGM

Opportunities for ICA as a partner: Over the years the ICA has played very active roles in the NWCI including membership on the Board and holding officer positions. The only inhibition to this participation is the availability of NEB or NAC members, or ICA members generally to get involved in NWCI activities, campaigns and initiatives.

Representative 2019: In March 2019 the NEB appointed Nellie Dillon-Forde as the ICA voting delegate for the NWCI AGM, and Helen Rutter as substitute.

COFACE

The ICA has a long involvement as a member of COFACE, the European Network of Families, promoting the well-being, health and security of families and their members in a changing society. It serves as a trusted entity for family mainstreaming and for the voice/needs of families in the EU and beyond. This vision works in parallel with the work of ICA for the benefit of women generally.

Representative 2018: Shirley Power (and a member of the COFACE Administrative Council).

Main themes 2018: #Iwantworklifebalance, EU Work-Life balance Directive, European Pillar of Social Rights, Family Carers, Toys & Diversity, Persons with disabilities, Digital Families & Safer Internet Day, Social Rights, International Women's Day, Gender Equality, GDPR & Building sustainable and future-proof education systems.

Meetings attended

Feb 2018	Expert Meeting & Training – Theme: Analog Families in a digital world, Sofia
April 2018	Expert Meeting - Theme: Work-Life Balance, Paris
May 2018	Administrative Council Meeting, General Assembly and 60th Anniversary Celebrations, Brussels
Oct 2018	Conference - Building sustainable and future proof education systems.

Opportunities for the ICA as a partner: With a proper plan, ICA could engage with COFACE, use information, and further progress issues at European level; in Ireland liaise and work with government departments and agencies to promote improvement in Ireland for ICA members and society generally. This could impact on the Association being the organisation of choice for new members. Board interest is important so that staff resources to support it are available.

Representative 2019: In March the NEB appointed Anne Payne, NEB member and Laois Federation President as the COFACE representative.

ACWW

Representative: Marie O'Toole National President

Main themes: Agri and horticulture projects in developing countries; Clean water for all

Meetings: 18th June – European Area Conference:

Opportunities: Supporting international projects and participating in the debates which lead to ACWW positions at the UN.

TEAGASC - Education & Training Forum

Linked to the historical association through the Hort College, ICA was invited in 2016 to join the Teagasc Education & Training Forum, which advises and guides Teagasc on direction, development and delivery of programmes, bringing a coherent approach to promoting careers in farming and related sectors.

ICA Representative 2018: Shirley Power.

Main themes 2018: Current course content and course structures - continuous development to maintain/improve experience for students; to attract a greater interest from applicants

Meetings attended: February and December 2018

Opportunities for ICA as a partner: There are opportunities for the ICA to take a more active role in encouraging young farming women into areas of strong development within the sector and using the relationship through the Forum to develop some aspects of farming and horticultural courses, with associated accreditation, at An Grianán. Shorter courses could also offer personal development opportunities for members. This would build on strong links to the advancement of women's education in this sector; accreditation attracting non-members and other groups to An Grianán; a major selling point for attracting younger members. ICA falls short in not maintaining/developing our college and in the decline of attendance over time. Teagasc Colleges offer examples of how this can be done.

Rural Electrification and Electric Ireland Homes: The ICA is participating in an Advisory Board supporting Dr Sorcha O'Brien and her research on rural electrification. This link to an influential point in ICA history acknowledges an important legacy - the extraordinary work of ICA demonstrators and the leadership thinking of the ICA in promoting electrification to rural Ireland and giving practical guidance to extend its reach.

Helen Rutter has been the ICA representative and reports that this work will lead to an exhibition at the Museum of Country Life in Strokestown, Co Roscommon, which she recommends to all Guilds and Federations to include in their 2019 programme.

AN GRIANÁN

At An Grianán in Co Louth the ICA advances education by bringing women together in fellowship and friendship, improving well-being, knowledge and skills, and supporting and promoting Irish language and culture. We do this through our cooperative effort with our committed staff team, and An Grianán welcomes national and international visitors – men and women - as well as ICA members. The College is both important to us and, in its work, well aligned with our charitable objectives.

2018 results

Manager, Niamh Donegan reports that in 2018/19 An Grianán welcomed 3,770 guests, 60% of whom were ICA members, 4% our friends from the Women's Institute, Northern Ireland, and the remaining 36% from a wide variety of organisations who chose An Grianán for their conferences, masterclasses or other events.

Courses in 2018

Our most popular skills courses in 2018 were Ribbon Embroidery, Cookery, Painting on Silk, Goldwork, Rushwork, and Macrame. Parchment craft saw a big increase in numbers again last year, and mosaics and beaded jewellery were popular too. We also introduced new courses such as felt needlework, very popular with ICA members, and stump work and gold work were also sought after, with bookings very strong for these courses.

Major Events

Handcraft Week. The efforts and organisation of Josephine Helly and her 2018 Handcraft Committee (Pat O'Looney, Margaret Cline and Elsie Moxham) ensured that this fixture in the calendar continued to go from strength to strength, with classes full to capacity, and 85 members in attendance. Handcraft week is now so popular that before it concluded in 2018, there was a waiting list for 2019.

The **Annual Garden Party** in June saw one of the highest attended in recent years. It was a beautiful sunny day in June, and we enjoyed music from a Joe Dolan tribute act and danced into the small hours. It was the first year we made a Weekend of the Garden Party for those guests who wished to stay, many of whom also enjoyed a trip to Newry and Belfast as part of the weekend. The Garden Party 2019 will also offer the choice of day or weekend stays and with another fantastic trip planned.

External Conferences and events

Among the larger events that we managed in 2018 was the EAMI – the European Association of Music and Imagery – and we welcomed delegates from all over Europe in September. A great success for An Grianán, but also a huge boost for the local area through the additional accommodation needed and transportation. It was a truly international affair, with delegates leaving with very fond memories of Ireland. Dublin Chamber of Music returned in 2018 for their two weekends and return dates are booked for 2019 and 2020. The Harp Society, regular visitors, were with us in 2018 and will return in 2019, and we also look forward to welcoming the Recorder and Viola Conference in August.

Ancillary business

The Garden Centre remains a draw and was popular in 2018, so we encourage visitors to drop by when visiting An Grianán. New tenants for the **Gate Restaurant** will see it reopen in May/June 2019, and we wish the new team a very successful and happy time with us. The local community also make use of the Tennis Court and a Boxing Club uses a small part of the Hort College for its activities.

Planning the future

Since 1954, An Grianán has welcomed thousands of visitors and has been an important part of life for many ICA members. As a sanctuary, a place to recharge batteries, for learning and personal development, ICA members can recount thousands of stories of how their visits make a positive impact on their lives. However, the visitor numbers have been reducing, and for sustainability An Grianán must attract many more ICA and other visitors.

Defining a vision for the future is a big challenge – An Grianán cannot rest on the laurels of past times.

The ICA Strategic Plan reflects the challenges we face in sustaining An Grianán for the future.

- Reducing numbers of ICA members using An Grianán and ICA as a proportion of users
- The external (non-ICA) market as vital for the future
- Targeting ICA members to return and retain the current repeat visitors
- Attracting new ICA users who will come for particular purposes
- Attracting external clients involves ensuring that we meet their needs
- AG has particular challenges in terms of ongoing maintenance and any development, and financing of both
- Ensuring that developments proposed have proper business plans, financial proposals and capacity to finance

The current Strategic Plan could be described as a holding plan where An Grianán is concerned, tackling the immediate priorities and paving the way for a longer term plan. However, the extent of the challenge cannot be underestimated. Little or no productive investment has been made in An Grianán for some time. Attracting increased business from ICA members has been difficult.

Sustaining and developing ICA usage. ICA members account for 60% of An Grianán business but the actual number of ICA members who visit is very small at c.15% of all members. Not surprisingly we are keen to encourage repeat visits and to develop programmes which encourage people who have enjoyed a stay with us to return. We hope that this will continue but we will also be looking to members who may not have visited for some years. If you are that member your feedback will help us to offer you the kind of visit that you will enjoy.

Developing the external business: The trends show an increasing reliance on external business with an increase over 10 years from 27% to 36% of the total. We work hard to bring business to An Grianán but the feedback is also very clear – investment in the facilities is a priority to sustain and grow business against serious competition. As 2018 and anticipated business for 2019 indicate, we have grown a niche market in recent years, and we must listen and respond to customers to gain more repeat, as well as new, business. For 2019 improving our customer feedback systems will be vital, for both ICA and external visitors.

The workplan for 2019 will also see the development of essential linkages which can help us in our day to day work, but most importantly as we plan for the future.

Developing the facility: There has been no annual or multi-year planning to address maintenance and refurbishment, with a tendency to become reactive, dealing with issues as things go wrong rather than on a preventative schedule. A budget for 2019, the first for many years, has begun this planning process, and the resources must be found or generated to carry out the work.

The immediate priorities are essential maintenance and normal refurbishments in the Main House and The Sanctuary.

Supporting development: The ICA must have a vision for An Grianán in the 21st century and not rely on the past. A demonstrably feasible plan is essential - sentiment simply does not deliver a sustainable business. The Strategic Plan includes a proposal to set up a small advisory group, of experts in hospitality, education and business, to advise the Manager and the NEB. Our thinking needs to be challenged and with the complexity of running any business, we require support on an ongoing basis.

In March 2019 the NEB initiated a review to identify how the use of the facilities might be maximised.. Over the past 20 years there have been at least five reports which attempted to guide development, but none was seen through to completion. Successive Boards have struggled to translate the campus potential into practical business plans and growth of usage and income. Piecemeal action has not worked.

The NEB is prioritising the development of a long-term vision and the necessary business and resource planning which will establish just what the future holds for An Grianán.

ICA GOVERNANCE & FINANCE

2018 – Election Year: Election process and the related legal proceedings

The triennial cycle for elections of the National Executive Board - ICA National and Regional Officers and NEB members, and National Advisory Committee - began again in 2018, with the balloting process starting in January to be completed in April. The process ran into some difficulties between January and March, with errors in the distribution of ballot papers and in the attempts to resolve matters. This led to the calling of an EGM at the request of Guilds, the subsequent abandonment of the elections for 3 national and 4 regional officer positions, and a decision by the 2018 AGM to have completely new elections. This in turn led to a High Court challenge in early June - on the proposed disposal of the ballot papers already returned, on the decisions and procedures at the EGM and the AGM, on the authority to act of those new Board Members elected and in office from the AGM 2018, and seeking the declaration of the elections as already balloted. The Plaintiff, an ICA member, was joined later in the proceedings by five other members.

Nine of the 17 NEB members are Federation Presidents elected before the 2018 AGM, and the tenth, the Chairman of the National Advisory Committee was elected in July by the NAC. At the request of the AGM the outgoing National President (2015/18) had agreed to remain as a 'caretaker' National President while new elections were being arranged. This was also challenged. The High Court found that the Board as constituted, could carry out the necessary functions to maintain ICA operations, but that it was not possible under the Constitution for the members to decide that an outgoing National President remain as a caretaker. At the request of the NEB the Outgoing National President, a non-executive and non-voting member, chaired the NEB until elections were completed.

All ICA members were kept informed of the legal proceedings and the various decisions, through a number of briefings by mail and to the NAC, then at the Winter Conference in Donegal, and subsequently through a further communication in February 2019.

The High Court case ran from early June to July 31st 2018. Proposals in mediation during the proceedings by the ICA were rejected by the Plaintiffs and so the case could not be settled. It was extremely costly.

On July 31st the High Court ruled that the ICA elections take place without delay and be completed by September 30th. This was done and the newly elected office holders were introduced on November 3rd at the ICA Winter Conference, taking office at its conclusion. From November 3rd the full NEB complement was in place, led by National President, Josephine Helly.

The problems that arose and the legal challenge, identified some governance weaknesses which must be addressed. ICA members must be able to exercise decision-making and direct the Association, generally but also where serious issues arise. Election processes must be overseen such that the process from start to finish is fair, transparent, respected, and has the absolute confidence of the membership.

The NEB in 2017 had already identified that a review of the legal structures would be beneficial and included it as an action in the 2018/20 ICA Strategy. The NEB elected in 2018 will progress this matter as a priority.

Electoral Procedures - Review

In May 2018, in light of the errors in the election process, the Procedures Committee undertook a Review and identified improvements required. These recommendations were taken up post the 2018 AGM by the Procedures Committee, and they informed the elections process in August/September 2018. For example, the process of printing, checking, distributing and posting the ballot papers was carried out by the members of the Committee. The election was completed without any problems and the results announced and reported to the High Court.

The recommendations will be applied further to prepare for the elections in 2021.

Governance Priorities

The Strategic Plan sets out four objectives under Governance priorities and the NEB works with staff to implement actions.

5. Achieving and maintaining excellence in Governance
6. Effective asset management
7. Effective decision-making
8. Staff planning and development

1. Achieving and maintaining excellence in Governance

As an ICA Election year 2018 was expected to see the election of members to the new NEB and NAC by the AGM, but events resulted in a two-stage election, with the NEB fully in place from November 3rd.

Governance Training: It is ICA practice to provide governance training to newly elected NEB/NACs and in 2018/19 this continued. A Webinar on Good Governance by The Wheel was available to the members of the NEB 2015/18; in June and July 2018 the elected members of the NEB and for the NAC 2018/21 took place. In November and again in February 2019 there was further training and briefings for the NEB. A programme of continuous training is being prepared so that all office holders are fully and continuously briefed on responsibilities and can develop their skills.

NEB and NAC Changes: The unusual electoral year resulted in the NEB being elected in two stages (May and November). The NEB shares the hopes of members, that this extraordinary situation and the events leading to it, will never occur again.

There were changes with the resignation of the National Secretary Concepta McGettrick in February 2019; the co-option by the NEB of her replacement Eleanor Calnan in March 2019. The filling of Eleanor's vacancy, by co-option by the NEB from the NAC, is due to be completed.

Despite this unusually disruptive year the NEB is functioning as a collective body on behalf of the members.

Structures: The legal case in 2018 identified some issues which require attention to copper fasten membership authority and to make provision for the handling of unanticipated events, and breaches of regulations and codes of conduct. Some queries on the Constitution and the Memorandum and Articles of Association of the Company Limited by Guarantee, The Irish Countrywomen's Trust, were also raised and advice is being sought.

The Strategic Plan developed by the previous NEB/NAC had already identified the need for assessments of the ICA legal structures against both company law and charity regulation, and all additional matters will be addressed then.

Compliance: The NEB is aware that the requirements around standards must be fulfilled, and we have a duty to ensure that everything is done correctly. During 2018 work on relevant policy areas progressed including on GDPR and Child Protection. The NEB decided that a coherent and streamlined approach to policy required a single organisation approach and this has informed the work. For example, two separate employment policies will be replaced by a single policy. Additionally, it became evident in 2018 that while policies are a first step, much compliance requires protocols and procedures, staff and volunteer training, and continuous reviews to maintain compliance.

Data Protection policies and guidelines were reviewed in 2018 and updated for advice to Guilds and Federations. Michelle Earley, Chairwoman of the NAC, undertook further work to develop policy suited to the needs of the ICA. This will lead to a redesign of the membership application form, making consent to use personal details for membership purposes explicit. The practice developed in other organisations is providing a great help to achieve compliance but keep the process as simple and streamlined as possible.

The question of Child Protection had arisen in 2017 and was debated at the 2018 AGM where there was a strong emphasis on ensuring that the ICA retain the potential for membership by girls from age

16 and work within communities that is intergenerational. This led to a presentation to the NAC in July 2018 by Olive Ring, an expert in the area. A working group was set up, chaired by Geraldine McNally, NEB, and with the assistance of Ms Ring carried out an assessment of ICA needs in relation to this complex area. A progress report was made to the Winter Conference and a further report will come to the 2019 AGM.

Risk assessment, including a full Health and Safety audit at An Grianán and Central Office, will be priorities in 2019.

2. Effective asset management

Finance: The audited accounts 2018 were prepared and circulated to members for discussion at the AGM where a detailed presentation will be made to members and will form the last part of the Annual Report. In summary the financial outcomes are as follows:

1. The overall fixed assets of the Irish Countrywomen's Trust Ltd stand at €8,5612,10
2. Current assets of ICT are €735,121
3. Central Office returned a deficit of €260,648.
4. An Grianán returned a surplus of €28.819
5. Legal fees in connection with proceedings in 2018 – amounted to €262,811. These costs were paid from ICA reserves, and the NEB decided that there would be no fee increase arising from these costs.
6. Sponsors during 2018 were Aldi (Brown Bread Competition) Gempack Foods Ltd (Baking Competition); and Manor Farm Chickens
7. Grant aid: two grants were received – from Solus for An Grianán €21,000; and from Dept of Agriculture and the Marine €9000 as a contribution to participation at the National Ploughing Championships.

Financial compliance: In mid-2018, on foot of matters raised at the EGM in April, Grant Thornton carried out a review of the regime in relation to the National President's expenses. This was reported to the Winter Conference by the Interim National Treasurer who advised that the systems improvements required were being addressed, but that no wrong-doing or inappropriate activity had been found. A review is underway of the Revenue approval of the National Presidents honorarium, traditionally paid to the incumbent to cover the expenses associated with the role. Advised by the ICA accountants, CDM, this work continues.

The Interim National Treasurer also reported on improvements introduced in some of financial controls related to expenses, authorisations of payments, preparation of annual budgets and financial reporting to the NEB to enable well informed decision-making

In March 2019 the Finance Committee received a preliminary report from Anna Sinnott of an assessment of the financial controls in place, based on the Charities Regulator's guidance in this matter. Helen Rutter, National Treasurer will take the lead on behalf of the NEB, working with the Finance Committee and the Finance Officer, in ensuring that all planned changes are implemented.

Principles / standards re Fundraising: The ICA policy will be reviewed in 2019 with reference to guidelines and oversight against Charities Regulator standards and consider what is required for national and Federation/Guild guidance.

Property management: Members will be all too aware of the extent of responsibilities involved in the oversight and management of Central Office in Dublin and An Grianán in Co Louth. There is an onus on us to make assets work effectively to achieve our charitable aims.

Problems with the building at 58 Merrion Rd identified in 2016 are being dealt with under the property insurance, and the NEB acknowledges the support of Steven McQuaid of 2HQ Consulting Engineers. Hopefully the work required will be completed as quickly as possible and a medium-term plan for the building can be considered.

The NEB has prioritised attention to the medium/long term future of An Grianán, and members will be consulted. A full assessment of the potential of the facility for external users is being initiated, to utilise its location on the M1 north/south corridor. This work will inform a medium-term plan, providing the basis for budget planning and identifying resources required.

In 2018 just 15% of all ICA members were guests at An Grianán, and it is vital that members make use of the College if it is to continue.

The property register at Central Office continues to be updated and as always Guilds are reminded to ensure they

Maintenance, refurbishment and improvements: Both Central Office and An Grianán present ongoing challenges in terms of maintenance and upkeep. Actual use of Central Office is poor, with just two offices used every day, and the main meeting room on average two or three times each month. This includes use by Dublin Federation for their meetings. The other rooms – 6 rooms – are either used occasionally or are largely for storage. The bitty layout, particularly of the upstairs offices, and access issues because of steps and stairs and the location of bathrooms, inhibit use or, for example, renting the rooms to third party organisations.

At An Grianán the staff carry out a mammoth task in keeping the facilities functioning and welcoming to guests. However there has been no planned maintenance or refurbishment programmes for many years, and the absence of thorough budget planning has resulted in reliance on a crisis response if systems such as heating require attention.

The **2019 budget planning** process has taken account of this, but presents a challenge to us to increase revenue significantly if the funds are to be available for essential work and to begin to build a surplus for further development.

3. Effective decision-making

The NEB is committed to developing its skills as a body and equipping all members to carry out their role as part of the collective body. Training has taken place on election, and a programme of continuous development will be available throughout the term of office.

Effective decision-making processes have been reviewed and a number of systems tightened up. The delegated powers policy which has been in place is implemented through the Finance Office and the Finance Committee, and the NEB oversees proper decision making on this basis. Written proposals come to the NEB on anything with a financial, contractual, or legal implication, and are presented in advance of Finance Committee and NEB meetings. The proposals must set out clear objectives for any decisions, and once made the NEB monitors implementation through operational reports and tracking expenditure against budgets.

Systems for assessing value for money and for how activity is to be measured as implemented, will be developed in the coming months to ensure that member's funds are spent effectively. The Financial Controls assessment is providing the basis of further work which will contribute to good decision-making.

4. Staff planning and development

In June 2018 the NEB requested Mr Tom Murray to carry out a review of the ICA management requirements. The initiative came from a report made to the previous NEB, advising that good practice would suggest such an assessment to inform any planned management appointments. Mr Murray reported in early March 2019 and the detailed recommendations are with the NEB.

A staff training plan will be prepared in 2019 and incorporated into work plans and budgets.

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