

Opening Statement by CLRG representatives
Chair of the Dáil Committee
Committee on Media, Tourism, Arts, Culture, Sport and the Gaeltacht
Wednesday November 25th 2020

A Airí is a Theachtaí Dhála

Ár mbuíochas libh as ucht an deis a thabhairt dúinn labhairt libh ar son na múinteoirí in Éirinn atá cláraithe le CLRG. Mar is eol daoibh táimid in an droch staid faoi láthair de bharr na bacanna atá i bhfeidhm mar thoradh ar aicíd COVID19 atá ag goiliúnt orainn.

Irish dance is an Art Form which demands dedication of mind and body. CLRG have in excess of 2300 teachers registered worldwide, with teachers across all the continents and 518 teachers registered on the island of Ireland. In the current climate, the very future of Irish dance is in a precarious situation as our pupils, teachers and dance families face the challenges posed by COVID restrictions. I am here to advocate for our members and express our concerns.

Following on from the issues that arose during responses to the question raised on our behalf by Deputy Mc Grath on November 19th, we would like to draw attention to the following points:

1. Firstly, we want to highlight the numerous formal educational benefits of Irish Dance:
 - Dance is an integral part of the Physical Education Curriculum at primary and secondary level and is often taken as a choice subject for Leaving Cert Applied, and for awards such the Gaisce Awards.
 - There is also Bachelor of Arts in Irish Dance at the University of Limerick as well as multiple MA programmes and the possibility to conduct doctoral studies in Irish dance. Without access to dance lessons and regular training, current students of senior cycle throughout the country are being disadvantaged as they cannot prepare adequately for auditions/entry requirements for these courses. Consequently, many students will not be in a position to pursue Third Level studies of (Irish) dance.
 - Additionally, organisations such as CLRG provide educational training to future teachers, examiners and adjudicators of Irish Dance. This is done through a system of grade exams (similar to the familiar grades in Music, Speech and Drama, Elocution) and in order to become fully qualified, dancers must firstly complete their 12 grades. Once again, it should be noted here that because they cannot train for or sit these exams under levels 3 and 4, students – and critically future teachers/adjudicators – of Irish Dance are being deprived of the opportunity to prepare for and avail of the education and training necessary to their chosen career path.
2. Secondly, we wish to highlight the various contributions made by the Irish Dance industry to Irish society, tourism, and the economy more broadly.
 - Competitions throughout the country provide essential business for industries such as hospitality, catering, retail and tourism. For example, the World Championships brings an average net contribution of between 13 and 14 million euro to the host city. [further details and figures available if required]
 - Shows such as **Riverdance**, **Lord of the Dance** and others have greatly increased our cultural capital and catapulted Irish Dancing onto a world stage while also attracting many tourist to the country. These shows were – and continue to be – possible because there is a long-standing system of transmission in place wherein aspiring future elite Irish dancers can gain access to expertise and appropriate dance education and training. In denying this critical access to dance

knowledge, we run the risk of losing future cultural ambassadors and performers. Similarly, the long-term impact of dancers not being able to train in Ireland will lead to a considerable loss of cultural ownership, influence and impact globally.

3. Thirdly, Irish dance is vital for children's physical health and wellbeing.
 - It offers children and young people opportunities to build transversal skills that can serve them in many areas of their lives. These include, but are not limited to, team building, discipline, resilience, determination, commitment, fitness, creativity and making friends.
 - In the current climate, children are having to engage on internet platforms- increasing their screen time. Many inequalities have arisen as a result of this due to poor connectivity and lack of resources and space in family homes.
 - By running classes, Irish dance teachers can help combat these issues and instead promote healthy lifestyle choices in our young people in a safe, socially distanced and structured environment. Irish Step dance is an individual non-contact activity. We have prepared very thorough risk assessments and return to class protocols and are committed to ensuring a safe environment for the children in our care. (will have further details of this as required) After all, as teachers, that is what we do best.

4. Finally, I would like to reiterate once again the seriously damaging impact that currently restrictions are having on the Irish Dance Industry.
 - We have not been able to hold classes in person dance classes since we entered level 5. A return to level three still precludes us from teaching indoors.
 - We wish to seek guidance from your committee as to the reason dance has been excluded from activities allowed indoors at Level Three, particularly when other comparable activities have been permitted to continue indoors during this time (gymnastics etc. can provide further details and examples if required). It takes up to ten years to build a dance school in a community and many schools have been decimated during this pandemic.

To conclude, under the terms of the 2003 UNESCO convention for the safeguarding of ICH, it is the right of Irish citizens to expect that the State provide for and facilitate the preservation, through practice and transmission, of traditional Irish Step Dance. Within this context, we would respectfully request that due consideration be given to adverse effect of ongoing restrictions on our national cultural heritage.

Le gach dea-ghuí

Orfhlaith Ní Bhriain (Vice Chairperson of CLRG)