



Irish Forest School Association

Minutes of IFSA AGM.

Monday 6th September 2021 7pm - 8pm, online via zoom

Registered: 44 members

Agenda

1. **Welcome/Gratitude**
2. **Minutes of 2020 AGM for approval**
3. **Chairperson's report 1 May 2020 - 30 April 2021**
4. **Financial report 1 May 2020 - 30 April 2021**
5. **Membership Report 1 May 2020 - 30 April 2021**
6. **Social Media/communications Report**
7. **Ratification of ACORN for 2021 - 2022.** The following members of the existing ACORN are seeking reelection. As the number does not exceed the places available, all are deemed elected: Joan Whelan (Chair), Mirjam Bloem (Membership) ; Caroline Percival (Treasurer); Orla Gallagher; Kerry Walker; Shane Furlong; Lucy Bell; Ciara Hinksman; Lucy O Hagan.
8. **Autumn Gathering 2021- Saturday 9th October 2021 (Regionally) 11-4pm
Back in the Woods**
9. **Member's news**
10. **Close**

Chairperson's report

Welcome to our 5th AGM. This report covers the period 1 May 2020 to 30 April 2021. We will be back to a post Covid timeframe in 2022 and we will host the next AGM in May 2022.

Following the AGM in August 2020, we welcomed Lucy O Hagan and Kerry Walker onto the ACORN.

The new ACORN met, online, in September, Oct, Dec, Jan, Feb and Apr.

Special thanks to Nichola Salmon who has been part of the ACORN for the past four years and has taken on the social media duties over the past year and really enhanced our website and our presence on social media at a really important time for us. Thank you Nichola for your commitment to IFSA over the past four years. We wish Nichola and her husband all the very best for the arrival of their first baby in the Autumn!

I would like to thank all the members of the ACORN for all the effort they put in to make our meetings so energising and positive. We try to ensure that the spirit of FS is part of the way we do our business on your behalf and that is working very successfully. There is a huge voluntary commitment put in to make the organisation successful and, on your behalf, I want to thank each and every one of them for that commitment.

EVENTS

In this past year, we particularly focussed on providing support for members as practice resumed in the woods. And we did that in novel ways, using technology, and it was very successful. One positive is being able to reach more people. So we had our virtual campfire in June 2020 with over 100 people in attendance. Special thanks to Shane who led on the night. Then we were back in the woods for Autumn Gathering, regionally, under the heading Nurturing Connections in New Directions. The regional format meant that more people were able to participate and we reduced our carbon footprint at the same time. This is a format we are using again this year; it depends on volunteers from the regions being willing to share their practise and build local communities of FS people. Important way to build connections locally, accessing volunteers and supporting new trainees. Thanks to Ruairi and Ross in Dublin; Grainne and Veronica in Co Clare; Tricia in Sligo; Niamh in Cork and Amy Dixon in Belfast. We also sent out Xmas News and thanks to two members, Leah Duffy in St Johns School and Caroline in RMDS who supplied blogs of their practice, which are available on the website

Spring Webinar series. Over 100 registered for each one . Highly successful and we hope this will become an annual event. Thanks to Sean, Lucy and Carol – the webinars on online on our website if you want to view them again.

QQI Level Six Training – with Brigits Garden. IFSA completed a survey of FSLs in Ireland. Over 70 people responded and gives us a good picture of the views of FS practitioners about their training experience which is helping to frame our work. This is a really exciting development and we are very grateful to Brigit’s Garden and their commitment, both financial and philosophical to this project. Lucy B, Kerry, Carol B and Ciara, all members are involved in that project.

Spreading our wings – we have been making links with likeminded organisations. Niamh Ní Dhuill form LEAF / An Choill Beag gave a presentation about her organisation to the Acorn.

Those involved in the emerging FS movements in Turkey, in Portugal and Spain have also made links with us. We continue our close links with NIFSA and sent our condolences to NIFSA on the passing of Lady Dufferin in Oct 2020. She was a stalwart patron of conservation and the environment and of FS in NI.

We were delighted to see positive reports on FS in the media and we encourage you to send into us any publications for the website and I’m sure there are others, so please share with us. Thanks to Niamh Geoghegan who represented us on Cork FM and in the Examiner newspaper. I know a number of others featured in local media.

GOVERNANCE – as you we have started work on a quality framework. The first policy as part of this process is a code of Conduct for members, which we hope to present at the next AGM.

We made our annual Charities return

We sent a submission to the NCCA on the ongoing redevelopment of the primary school curriculum

General for members

We continue to provide Garda vetting for FS trainees and leaders who have no access to training through other channels, through the Volunteer Centre Network. I want to highlight again the importance of full compliance with the law in terms of Garda vetting and child protection for us all.

We remain members of Leave No Trace.

Insurance remains an ongoing concern, not just for FS but for many businesses and voluntary settings.

We respond as well as we can to queries from both members and non-members

Our map of FS practitioners is on the website. And I would encourage any of you who are practicing and who are not yet on the map to complete the forms -we will send the link again following this meeting

We agreed our next tasks going forward are to:

Internal: We will return to a May date for the AGM. We expect changes on the ACORN, are keen to encourage members to step forward! We feel that is important for the growth of the IFSA in the coming years.

Governance: Quality Framework – continued

External Lobbying stakeholders: who makes decisions that affect us (e.g. Coillte, Heritage Council, DCYA, DES)

Supporting members:

Regional groups Use of regional meetings to provide discussion/network/sharing forums for member practitioners,

Further exploration of an approach to fundraising to support IFSA that does not compromise members seeking funding for their activities.

Thank you all for your continued support.

Joan Whelan

Proposed by Orla/seconded by Caroline

Financial Report May 2020 – April 2021

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|---|------------------|
| Balance forward I May 2020 | €1561.62 |
| Total Income for the period 1 st May 2020– 30 th April 2021 | €7527.17 |
| Total Expense for the period 1 st May 2020– 30 th April 2021 | €2755.16 |
| Closing Balance as of 30 th April 2021 | €6,333.63 |

Expenditure

| | |
|---------------|---------|
| WEBSITE | €118.07 |
| GARDA VETTING | €20 |
| BANK CHARGES | €41.60 |

| | |
|---------------------|-----------------|
| INSURANCE | €335 |
| EVENTS | €1437.50 |
| ACORN MEETINGS | €0 |
| MERCHANDISE | €0 |
| TRAINING | €0 |
| PRINTING/STATIONARY | €0 |
| LEAVE NO TRACE | €100 |
| PHONE (Bank Error) | 702.99 |
| TOTAL | €2755.16 |

Income: - May 2020- April 2021 - €7,527.17

| | |
|---------------------------|-----------|
| MEMBERSHIP | €6,624.18 |
| TRAINING | €200 |
| PHONE REFUND (Bank Error) | 702.99 |

The accounts were proposed by Miriam and seconded by Orla

Membership

Maintaining our current membership and growing the membership of the Irish Forest School Association is core to our aims. In doing so we can offer you benefits such as:

- Supporting the growth and development of the Forest School movement in Ireland
- Discounts in attending our annual conference
- Discounts in attending our Autumn Gathering CPD
- Access to Garda Vetting*
- Discounts with affiliate organisations e.g., training/professional development workshops with Earth Force Education.

We are currently working hard on resources for members, and hope to be able to offer further benefits to members as our growth facilitates.

To this end, we have seen a good growth in members this past year, with 200 members on our current mailing list. We notice an increase each time there is training in Ireland. Our events this year online also drew in new members. We had over 100 members registered for the Spring seminars and 90, 66 and 63 attendees on the three nights respectively. Membership will remain at €35 and current membership is extended to April 2022.

<https://irishforestschoollassociation.ie/contact/>

Communication/social media

Website:

- Average Monthly views: 2891

- Average daily views: 96

Most popular page is the Map of FS where we have 38 FS and practitioners listed - 6500 views in the reporting year.

Recording from the [Spring Webinar Series](#) also available to view on website:

Importance of Blog posts and content evident in the views these case studies receive. For example:

- St John's FS Blog post - 650 views
- Kerkus FS Blog - 415 views
- RMDS FS Blog - 285 views
- Sligo Woodland School - 489 views

If any members have relevant FS content, please consider putting together a short blog post accompanied with images/video.

Facebook:

- Reach 19,484 (-10% on last year, possibly due to no Annual Conference and related content)
- Likes 3,700
- Demographics: 86% Female, 14% Male
- Geographic breakdown: 79% Ireland, 9% UK, 3% USA
- IFSA Facebook Forum - Members only: 129 members.

Most popular and interacted with posts were related to the IFSA Spring Webinar Series in February 2021 and the Virtual Campfire in June 2020.

Call for member content, please send by email to irishforestschoollassociation@gmail.com or by message to the social media page.

Instagram:

- Reach 1,358 (+174%)
- Followers 1,300
- Demographics: 83% Female, 17% Male
- Geographic breakdown: 31% Ireland, 11% UK, 4% USA

Share relevant tagged content to Stories, set up 'FS in Action' highlight button showcasing FS activity from members.

Call for members to follow us and tag us in your relevant FS posts and stories, IFSA Instagram handle is @irishforestschoollassociation

Use hashtags #IFSA #IrishForestSchoolAssociation

Twitter:

- Followers: 402
- Posts: 73 (generated 58 Retweets, 203 Likes)
- Post Impressions: 112,700 (average 1500/post)

Call for members to follow us and tag us in your relevant FS posts and stories, IFSA Twitter handle is @IFSForestSch

Use hashtags #IFSA #IrishForestSchoolAssociation

Elections The ACORN for 2021=2022 was ratified. There is one vacant space and those present were invited to contact us by email if they were interested in being co-opted onto the ACORN. Joan reminded those present that we anticipate changes in the ACORN next year as many of those serving have been involved since IFSA was founded.

Autumn Gathering ‘Back in the woods’ was announced.

Members shared their news and the meeting closed at 8.15pm with gratitude and an energising activity led by Shane.

Joan Whelan