

## History and Context

**THE FOUNDING** constitution of Na Píobairí Uilleann (NPU) set out a main object of the organisation:

“the promotion generally of Irish music and the music of the uilleann pipes in particular.”

Under this main object four areas of activity were identified. One of the areas of activity outlined was to:

“(iv) Spread a knowledge of reedmaking and promote the making of pipes.”

Over the first 25 years of the organisation’s work, NPU made great progress in relation to many of its objectives: establishing a headquarters at Henrietta Street, organising regular piping tuition in Henrietta Street, regular production of our membership publication *An Píobaire*, establishing regular events including the annual *Tionól* and the *Ace & Deuce of Piping Concert* and organisation of the piping element of *Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy*.

While NPU made some advances in relation to reed making and pipe making, the organisation’s achievements in other areas outpaced

progress in relation to this objective.

The period from the late 1990s and the early 2000s saw increasing international interest in uilleann piping. The popularity of Riverdance brought the uilleann pipes to worldwide audiences and a range of exciting artistic projects such as the collaboration between piper Liam O’Flynn and Nobel Laureate poet Seamus Heaney attracted new listeners to the pipes. The growth of the internet meant that increased access to information about the pipes was available worldwide. This information revolution saw Na Píobairí Uilleann launch its first website in 1997.

Uilleann pipe making sadly suffered two sudden, unexpected losses when pipe makers Dave Williams and Alain Froment passed away in 2005 and 2008 respectively. Both of these pipe makers were masters of their craft and had built up a lifetime of knowledge and skills that they brought to their instruments.

In 2008 and 2009, thanks to funding from The Arts Council, Na Píobairí Uilleann filmed the working methods of four master pipe makers, Cillian Ó Briain, David Quinn, Andreas Rogge and Geoff Wooff. An



*Student notebook with chanter at a PipeCraft course in August 2021*

indepth project of this magnitude with pipe makers was unprecedented. The result was many hours of footage covering various aspects of making the instrument. The material was edited and uploaded to the NPU website, where it is freely available to all.

Communications with pipe makers confirmed that they were not in a position to take on apprentices. There are many reasons for this: many pipe makers work in small workshops where health and safety considerations for employees would be onerous and impractical, insurance premiums and other costs associated with employing an apprentice and the time required to oversee work, impart knowledge and skills are all factors that have discouraged this model of knowledge transmission.

## NPU – Uilleann Pipe-Making Report

Between December 2006 and May 2008, five surveys were conducted on behalf of Na Píobairí Uilleann:

- An online survey of uilleann pipers in December 2006 to ascertain the prevailing market conditions for uilleann pipers
- A survey of 420 pipers in 2007
- An online survey of people in the EU interested in a career in pipe making in March 2008 to gauge the interest in pipe making tuition
- a phone survey of potential pipe making students willing to commit 20 hours a week to a pipe making course in April 2008
- A phone survey of pipe makers

worldwide in May 2008

*The Uilleann Pipe-Making Report* that resulted from the research conducted found that “...the burgeoning demand for quality instruments has led to a major logjam, an impasse which can only be overcome with immediate up-front investment in pipe-making tuition and research”.

The research also found that there were pipers in 43 countries, with an estimated 4,000 pipers worldwide (in 2008). The estimated value of back orders at this time was €7,000,000 with 70% of pipers purchasing new pipes (as opposed to second-hand) from a maker.

The survey results found that the waiting lists with the top ten pipe makers by sales turnover in the world at the time ranged from 2 to 25 years. The NPU *Uilleann Pipe-Making Report* proposed to:

- ‘[Provide] structured and sustained pipe making courses with tuition from the best available master craftsmen’
- ‘create a learning environment where an expanding community of pipe makers can aspire to attain and exceed the standard set by the classic pipe makers’
- Run an initial 20-week pipe making course
- Hold week-long pipe making courses each quarter on a continuous basis... [to] benefit both full-time and part-time makers and those who want to develop essential reed making and instrument maintenance skills.

Support for the proposal was given in the Report by Liam O’Flynn and Paddy Moloney.



*Aerial view of the PipeCraft workshop at Clonshaugh*



*(left to right) Gay McKeon, Emmett Gill, Ronan Browne, Cormac Cannon & Bill Haneman at the assessment of instruments for the three-year full-time course in December 2014*

## What is PipeCraft?

PipeCraft is Na Píobairí Uilleann's instrument making training centre. It is situated in Clonsaugh Industrial Estate, Dublin 17 and has easy road connections, just off M1 and M50 motorways and is a short drive from Henrietta Street. The workshop is fitted out with all of the equipment required for tuition in pipe making.

## Funding for PipeCraft

The establishment of PipeCraft in 2011 was made possible by the receipt of capital grants totalling €177,201 to purchase machinery and equipment and to fit out the premises

The financial details of the PipeCraft facility and the courses delivered over the past 12 years are summarised below.

### Revenue Income, Costs and Grants for the 12 years 2010 to 2021

Tuition Fee Income	€668,113
Running Costs	€796,978
Net Cost	€128,865
Revenue Grants Received	€105,186
Cost net of grants	€23,679



In summary, PipeCraft and the instrument making training courses delivered have not been a financial burden on the organisation. The achievement of the financial outcome outlined above is not insignificant and is a clear indication of NPU’s ability to establish, grow and develop initiatives and projects whilst applying prudent financial controls.

Na Píobairí Uilleann develops an annual operational plan and associated budget for all activities based on our published organisational strategy and reports to the relevant agencies on a regular basis in relation activities.

The Board of NPU continues to have oversight of operations at PipeCraft along with detailed day-to-day management by the staff of course delivery and operations at the facility.

NPU is subject to statutory financial regulations, like all registered companies and charities. NPU also complies with exacting detailed conditions for grant monies it receives and has always been an early adopter of best practices in regard to financial and regulatory reporting. The annual financial statements are prepared in accordance with the Companies Act 2014, FRS102 “The Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland” and Accounting and Reporting by Charities

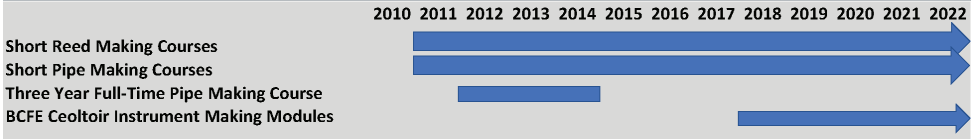


*Probe Making Course in May 2021*

Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their financial statements in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS102).

The Annual Report of the organisation includes the audited accounts of the organisation. All NPU Annual Reports from 2008 to 2020 are currently available on the NPU website: <https://pipers.ie/about/reports/>

## Courses at PipeCraft 2010 to date





*Chanter making course in August 2021*

## Establishment of Tuition at PipeCraft

A series of short courses were established in early 2011, the first courses held were reamer making with Bill Haneman and bellows making with Jim Wenham. Regular summer reed making and pipes maintenance workshops were also established in 2011 and continue to date.

In November 2011, 12 students participated in a six-week “Introduction to Pipe Making” course taught by Bill Haneman and Cillian Ó Briain.

A full programme of short courses were held in 2012 and have been a core element of PipeCraft

programming since then.

Tutors in 2012 included:

Mick O’Brien (Advanced Reed making, Tuning and Maintenance)  
 Paddy O’Hare (Bag & Bellows-making)  
 Eamonn Curran (Pipe making Practical Repair Skills for Pipers)  
 Jim Wenham (Bellows Making)  
 Mick Dooley (Reamer Making)  
 Dave Hegarty (Reed Making)  
 Donnacha Dwyer (Reed Making)  
 Donncha Keegan (Reed Making)

Additionally in 2012, 10 participants commenced a full-time, three-year pipe making course. The

students were individually funded in their studies through local LEADER programmes and the course was supervised by full-time PipeCraft coordinator, Ray O'Toole.

Over the three-year period, the ten candidates on the course completed a three-quarter set of concert pitch pipes and a B chanter. The instruments completed by the students were assessed by a panel of experienced pipers (Cormac Cannon, Ronan Browne and Emmett Gill) in December 2014. The individual written qualitative assessments were shared with the students.

## BCFE Ceoltoir Modules 2018 to date

In 2018, NPU successfully piloted modular courses in instrument making in partnership with Ballyfermot College of Further Education (BCFE). Ceoltoir is a third-level college course offered by BCFE in traditional music performance and instrument making. As part of this course students can elect to undertake a module in instrument making, choosing from flute making, whistle making, harp making, mandolin making as well as pipe making. Students who undertake the pipe making module complete a practice set in their first year of studies, whilst second year pipe making students complete a mainstock and drones to add to their practice set. The instrument making strand of the Ceoltóir course provides an introduction to instrument making for students. Many of the students on the pipe making



*Students observing tutor Bill Haneman demonstrating at a chanter making course in August 2021*

module also choose to attend some of the short courses which are offered on a stand-alone basis by NPU. Ceoltoir offers a wide demographic of students with an introduction into instrument making. Students on the Ceoltóir course have one day per week in their timetable dedicated to their instrument making module, and attend PipeCraft, throughout the academic year, with the facility in use throughout the week. Student performance is assessed by PipeCraft tutors and BCFE's course coordinator, as well as by external examiners. All instrument making tuition is provided by NPU.

## NPU Short Courses

Over 140 students have





*BCFE Ceoltóir course harp making students at work in PipeCraft in December 2020*

participated in courses at PipeCraft since 2011. Many students have participated in multiple courses, developing a knowledge of the many aspects of instrument making.

Tutors who have generously delivered tuition at PipeCraft and to whom great thanks is due include:

Alan Burton, Eamonn Curran, Mick Dooley, Donnacha Dwyer, Hammy Hamilton, Dave Hegarty, Bill Haneman, Michael Hubbert, Paddy Hyland, Donncha Keegan, Niall Kelleher, Benedict Koehler, Sam Lawrence, Ultan Mac Gabhann, Jan Muylaert, Cillian Ó Briain, Mick O'Brien, Aaron O'Hagan, Michael

O Srutháin, Paddy O'Hare, Padraig 'Kynch' O'Kane, Ray O'Toole, Robert O'Connor, Andreas Rogge, Conor Roche-Lancaster, Joe Walsh, Jim Wenham.

## Ethos at PipeCraft

PipeCraft is an inclusive space to provide opportunities to experience pipe making and reed making, acquire skills and share and transmit experience and knowledge. The collective knowledge held within the piping and pipe making communities are of immense value and PipeCraft aims to provide an educational environment to share and develop these resources.



The facility has provided opportunities for students to learn, tutors to develop their teaching skills and for NPU to learn how best to serve the needs of the piping and pipe making communities long into the future.

Na Píobairí Uilleann understands the years of dedication and labour that are required for an individual to acquire the many skills and become a master instrument maker. PipeCraft has never been intended as a 'quick fix' or easy solution. The workshop is a space that is available to the piping and pipe making community to share and develop together. It has offered an increasingly diverse cohort of students with an introduction into the fundamentals of instruments making. The facility has been made available to the wider traditional arts community by facilitating the provision of training modules in harp, flute, whistle and mandolin making as part of the BCFE Ceoltóir course.

## Health & Safety

Health & Safety at PipeCraft has always been of paramount importance and is always a major focus of the tuition offered. Monthly Health & Safety audits are undertaken by staff and annually by independent Health & Safety Auditors who carry out inspections of the facility and equipment. These best practices add to the learning for all involved at PipeCraft.

## Results

A number of participants in PipeCraft courses have developed businesses, making instruments on a commercial basis. Professional and semi-professional instrument makers have also taken the opportunity to upskill on PipeCraft courses and now employ skills gained in PipeCraft as part of their regular work.

Many course attendees now play instruments or elements of instruments that they made in



*Students at work on a key making course with Aaron O'Hagan in PipeCraft in July 2021*



*Demonstration of pin-mounted regulators by Andreas Rogge at PipeCraft in May 2014*

PipeCraft. Course participants have also developed a greater understanding of their instruments and gained insight, many students are now able to make reeds and effectively maintain their instruments.

A number of past participants in PipeCraft courses have subsequently taught courses in PipeCraft, in probe-making and instrument measurement, bellows making and chanter making, sharing the practical skills and knowledge that they have learned and developed in the first instance at PipeCraft.

## Feedback and Oversight

**ALL COURSE** participants are asked for both formal written and informal feedback on completion of all courses at PipeCraft. Feedback from PipeCraft course participants, along with NPU membership surveys has continued to inform the services offered in relation to pipe making and reed making.

The model for delivery of services has continually developed over the 12 years since PipeCraft opened, adjusting and adapting to user requirements, feedback and qualitative assessment by NPU staff and tutors. Staff provide regular formal reports to the NPU Board about PipeCraft.

Full-time and part-time pipe makers are in regular contact with NPU staff, providing information regarding their experiences and their needs.

## The Future

In the past 10 years NPU has expanded weekly piping tuition from 1 to 29 locations throughout Ireland. We are certain that the student numbers will continue to grow. Currently NPU provides weekly tuition in uilleann piping to 160 students and if you consider that many more students avail of private tuition it is reasonable to estimate that there are at least 200 people taking lessons each week in Ireland. With many students going on to purchase half and full sets of pipes along with the requirement for reeds and ongoing maintenance of instruments, it is easy to understand that it will be a challenge to meet the emerging demand. In the first quarter of



*Lathe in use by a student at PipeCraft*

2022 NPU held ‘Try the Pipes’ events in seven locations in Ireland and it is evident that many more students will avail of the opportunities presented to experience and enjoy playing the pipes. To cater for this ever-increasing demand, NPU has conducted teacher development training with 55 people and have made many more instructional tuition videos available online on our website over the last three years. Through the focus on International Uilleann Piping Day there are now uilleann piping groups reaching critical mass in many other countries which will continue to drive the demand for new instruments.

Prior to 2008 there were very few resources available to cater for the transmission of pipe making skills. As a result of the generosity and support

of the pipe making community and our members, NPU has undertaken many research projects and has made videos of skilled pipe makers and reed makers freely available to all. Most importantly we have provided training and opportunity to many people and developed a prevailing ethos committed to sharing and transmitting knowledge.

Without the actions, commitment and support of the traditional arts community and partnership organisations over the past 12 years the craft of pipe making would certainly be in a much poorer state.

Gay McKeon