

Deeside Cello Project

Trustees' Annual Report

January to December 2025



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Deeside Cello Project (DCP) Trustees

1. Dr Hugh Gibson
2. Dr Jane Morris
3. Dr David Southwood
4. Ms Islay Harper
5. Mrs Myrtle Watt
6. Ms Helen Foster



Objectives and activities

The Deeside Cello Project is the name for the charity arising from the Aboyne Cello Festival, which has flourished as a summer school for two decades, and now is working to consolidate, formalise and expand its work of bringing all things cello to the North East of Scotland. We promote the arts, bring the benefits of creativity and social interaction to people of all ages but especially young people, with a focus on ensuring that underprivileged people are assertively included. Running concurrently with the summer school, and an integral part of the annual festival, is a series of professional public concerts across beautiful Deeside, bringing fantastic live music to communities and increasing tourism as well as inspiring the summer school participants.

The Deeside Cello Project has a constitution [on the website](#). Our Trustees meet in person and online on a regular basis to coordinate and plan the summer school and concerts and also discuss other areas of development and future plans.

Overview of Outputs, Outcomes and Impacts:

Outputs

Each year the Trustees consider a budget for the annual festival activities, including the public performances. Expenses include tutor fees, transport, accommodation, food, publicity material and concert venue hire. Based on the expenditure budget and anticipated funding from concert takings, donations and other sundry sources, student fees are set, taking account of likely enrolment numbers. The ability of the Charity to proceed with the festival is dependent on the actual enrolments received (starting in the first calendar quarter) and the available reserves. The policy on reserves is discussed further below. Since 2015 this model for funding the summer school and related activities has been successful, with festivals occurring each year, including the COVID years when many aspects of the festival were held online. In 2025, this same model was applied, assisted greatly

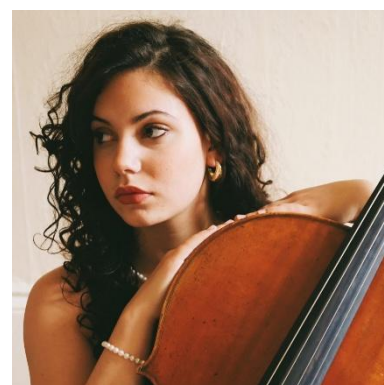


by some significant assistance from the MacRobert Trust (this is detailed further below). The trustees were able to direct some of the donations received specifically to reducing students' fees, and a highly successful festival, together with all five public concerts, went ahead.

Impacts

The Deeside Cello Project organises a vibrant live music festival experienced directly by over 600 people in Central Eastern Scotland, with its effects reaching many more. 2025 was the year that saw:

- 17 residential students developing their skills, and confidence and forging links in the professional music arena, providing potential opportunities for their career development
- 3 non residential students (2 staying locally with parents and 1 cello teacher joining for CPD)
- 1 Young Artist, Shakira Segalla – Humbert, giving a stunning recital with pianist Dina Duisen
- 1 Associate Artist, Finn Mannion (Young Artist 2022)
- 8 adult learners developing their skills and enjoying playing alongside up-and-coming young musicians
- 3 younger/less advanced learners taking part and many others watching performances
- 4 top professional cellists and educators as tutors
- 2 additional professional performers
- 537 audience members enjoying world class classical music concerts at an affordable price.
- Local community involvement in the festival - the community hall in Tarland and artist's studio in Aboyne is the hub of activity with local accommodation, private hosts and local businesses benefitting



together with many volunteers, including drivers of the Deeside community minibus.

- Alumni of the Cello Festival include many dozens of cellists who are now professionals in the UK and abroad. They keep in touch with the festival and one another and recommend their peers and their students to attend the summer school.

2025 Summer School

The 2025 Aboyne Cello Festival Summer School was another happy one with fantastic feedback from the student group about the quality of the coaching, supportive atmosphere, value for money and inspirational concerts.

Activities

The Summer School began with a day of Cello Orchestra when the participants had a chance to meet one another, the artistic Director of the festival and the adult amateur cellists who joined the orchestra. The adult cellists were both visitors to and residents of Deeside. After this, the participants, the core group of which were conservatoire students and teenagers aiming to attend conservatoires, were kept busy with classes in which they had lessons in a masterclass format. We hired the Deeside Community Minibus, further strengthening our ties with the local community, to meet and transport people to and from the train station at both ends of the summer school and for travel to the concert venues on the first, second, fourth and seventh evenings where the participants were treated to inspiring performances from world class musicians and young talent. In addition to the core student group and the adults, there were lessons for some less advanced young people, again in a masterclass format, and they had a chance to discover the joy of playing chamber music and performed in the internal student concert on the Friday.



Wellbeing

The summer school has always been known for its extremely supportive, non-competitive and friendly attitude of all involved. We are aware that safeguarding is of the utmost importance. and we have a Designated Safeguarding Lead, and best practice processes encompassed within a safeguarding policy. We identified the need, last year, to improve our provisions for neurodivergent participants and to this end our DSL had meetings and training resulting in our processes developing for 2025, starting with some new questions on the application form including offers to discuss specific needs, give more advance information about accommodation details and create more safe spaces for time out during the summer school.

We also start the week with a fun session for all students from a kinesiologist, looking at how we use our bodies, exercises to help coordination and combat tension, and opening up the discussion about physical and mental wellbeing including handling performance nerves.



Financial Review DCP 2025

DCP Reserves Policy

The trustees consider there is a need to maintain amounts in reserve. The DCP's financial year runs from 1 January to 31 December, with most operating income falling in the period April to August and most operating expenditure falling in the period February to August (mainly at the end of this period: July and August). While the cash flow resulting from this profile of income and expenditure is positive, reserves are required because:

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- a) A change of accommodation from the present donated accommodation to paid accommodation from 2026 will mean a substantial deposit will be required to reserve accommodation well before any monies are received from participants in the spring.
- b) Ongoing expenses such as website hosting, design and printing publicity materials can occur at any time of the year.
- c) Depending on demand for festival places and numerous other factors – including the availability or otherwise of grant funding – it may be that the DCP in a particular year might make a financial loss. The trustees are mindful of this and keen to ensure each annual festival can be planned with confidence.
- d) Some specific items of charitable work – particularly future scholarship funding for emerging talents – is unknown in a financial year. Accordingly, the Trustees wish to set aside funds in a specific 'Young Artists' reserve.

At the end of the 2024 Financial year, the reserves of the DCP were £5,101, comprising £750 set aside to assist a future emerging artist/s (the 'Young Artists' reserve) and a general reserve of £4,351. At the end of 2025, the reserves have risen to **£8,390** mainly thanks to grant funding from the MacRobert Trust of £2900.



As the expected difference between the present cost of accommodation and the future cost in a new venue is at least £7000, maintaining reserves of at least £8000 will ensure that the first year in a new venue is viable even if grant funding is not adequate.

Funding

We are extremely grateful to have been able to access the second year of our two-year grant from the MacRobert Trust. We have also been successful in gaining funding from the Eilidh Trust, although late in the year, so this will be put towards the bursaries for 2026 summer school. We have used money from the David and June Gordon Memorial Trust grant to finance the Young Artist award position in which, by audition, a cellist on the brink of their career is supported with a full bursary to the summer school and a public recital with an international pianist. We used an anonymous donation to provide five bursaries to reduce the cost of the course to participants who applied through our bursary scheme application process, which is necessarily becoming more rigorous every year as the demand increases. We have been working hard to make financial forecasts and build on the success of the summer school and the concurrent concert series which helps to keep the summer school fees low.



*The David and
June Gordon
Memorial Trust*



Finances

The Charity has a financial year running from 1 January to 31 December with the principal activity, the festival itself, taking place in late July, and with all operating income and expenditure in a financial year relating to the festival activities of that year. To date, there has been no capital expenditure. Within each financial year, there is a strongly positive cash flow, with registrants paying course fees in advance of the festival and most significant operating payments being made in arrears. With these conditions expected to continue throughout the forecast period, the income and expenditure forecast and the cash flow forecast are synonymous, with the one exception being the receipt of specific tied grant funds (e.g. for bursaries) and the provisioning for and use of funds for the Young Artist.

Donated goods and services

It is a largely impossible task to enumerate the hours provided gratis by many willing volunteers who believe in the power of music to transform lives, but it must run into many thousands of hours per year!

Administration:

All administration involved in the Deeside Cello Project is provided by volunteers. This includes:

- Summer School administration: Publicity, booking tutors, applications, transport organisation, bursary applications, catering for the residential group, social media advertising.
- Publicity distribution across Aberdeen and the whole Deeside area.
- We benefit from the volunteer drivers of the Mid Deeside Community Minibus which we hire for student transport.
- Concert series administration: Booking and liaising with venues and artistes for the concert series, putting together publicity material, generating advertising from local businesses.



- DCP Budgeting, preparation of annual accounts and all financial reporting and modelling, as well as oversight by independent accountant.
- All the Trustees are unpaid and work to fulfill their roles, including applying for grants.

Venues:

- Newton Dee Village provided their excellent Hall and piano for one of the public concerts in return for free entry to the concert for their Camp Hill residents, 39 of whom attended the concert this year.
- Some venues for masterclasses in Tarland and Aboyne have been donated for free.
- The main residential accommodation is at present donated for a small charge to cover expenses.



The Deeside Cello Project in 2026 and beyond

The DCP is pleased to report that the donated accommodation in Tarland, which has been the home of our summer school for the past 20 years, will now be available for one final year. Efforts are continuing to find a new home for the summer school from summer 2027. There has been financial forecast modelling done which shows that an increase in the cost of accommodation will in part be sustainable with an increase in students taking part, and to that end, we are upscaling our publicity, revamping the website, planning increased use of social media and starting our publicity further in advance so as to hope to increase numbers of participants from 2026 onwards.

Friends of the DCP

The Trustees will be investigating the possibility of starting a ‘friends’ association and increasing the involvement of interested parties in the administration and fundraising efforts to help secure the future of the summer school and concert series.

Instrument Loan Scheme

It is hoped to start an instrument loan scheme – initially to help participants on the summer school have a good cello to play on, and eventually it is hoped to acquire a number of cellos (student/professional level) which can be loaned to Scottish cellists who need a better instrument but cannot afford one.



Declaration

Signed on behalf of the charity trustees:

Helen Foster

Print name Helen Foster

Designation Trustee

Date 22.09.2026

