



Farewell to the chief

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Toghcháin Údarás na Gaeltachta

D'eirigh go maith le Fianna Fáil sna toghcháin do vhoird Udaras na Gaeltachta le deanaí, ag coimeád tromlamh ar an mbord.

Bunaíodh Údarás na Gaeltachta i 1980 mar ghníomhaireacht fhorbartha réigiúnach don Ghaeltacht. Tá gníomhaíochtaí an Údaráis dírithe tríd is tríd ar leas phobal na Gaeltachta a fheabhsú, agus ar an gcaoi sin a chinntiú go gcaomhnófar an Ghaeltacht mar thobar fíoruisce na Gaeilge. Tá Údarás na Gaeltachta luaite le ról fhorbartha eacnamaíochta, sé sin, poist mharthanacha a chruthú agus infheistiúocht a mhealladh go dtí na réigiúin Ghaeltachta chomh maith le gníomhaíochtaí forbartha pobail, cultúrtha agus teanga, ag obair i bpáirtíocht le pobail agus eagraíochtaí áitiúla. Fiche comhalta atá ar Bhord Údarás na Gaeltachta - seacht nduine dhéag atá tofa ag pobal na Gaeltachta ar bhonn réigiúnach agus triúr, ar a n-áirítear an Cathaoirleach, atá ceaptha ag an Aire Gnóthaí Pobail Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta. Bíonn toghchán ann gach cúigiú bliain.

Údarás na Gaeltachta combines an economic development role with that of creating sustainable jobs and attracting investment to the Gaeltacht regions with community, cultural and language-development activities, working in partnership with local communities and organisations. The Board of Údarás na Gaeltachta comprises 20 members, seventeen of whom are directly elected by the electorate of the Gaeltacht, the other three, including the Chairman, being appointed by the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht affairs.

Is é Briain Ó Domhnaill as Tír Chonaill an ball is oige den bord nua, Tá sé ina bhall den Comhairle Contae freisin agus bhí sé gníomach l gconáil le cursaí Ógra Fianna Fáil i Tír Chonaill Thiarr Theas. Former Galway City Councillor and Chair of the Western Health Board, Val Hanly, made a come-back that surprised some when he polled very strongly in the Galway Constituency. Attributing his success to the high turnout in the city section of the Constituency, he stated that it was a clear message from the people of the urban Gaeltacht that they were committed to the Irish language and remaining part of the Gaeltacht area. Galway was most notable for its pro-government outcome. Fianna Fáil took four of the six seats. A member of the Progressive Democrats came home fifth and an independent was the sole opposition member elected.

No member of Fine Gael was elected to replace the seat won at the last election by the recently deceased infamous Pól 'Bainín' Ó Foighil. Members of Fianna Fáil joined representatives of all parties in lamenting the absence of the ever colourful Bainín from the ballot paper. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dílis.

In Meath, 20 year old Úna Ní Chonaire put her name forward as a candidate for the first time. Unfortunately, she failed to unseat independent incumbent Cathal Seoighe. Seoighe is employed as the full time manager of the Gibbstown Development Company. Úna made a very strong impression in the area and polled significantly ahead of the Sinn Féin candidate, Seán MacDonnchada. MacDonnchada had been extremely confident of taking the seat. The Green Party candidate polled just four votes.

In Mayo and Kerry, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael both took a seat each, maintaining the status quo, while Labour picked up their sole representative in the Ring constituency in Waterford.

Roibeárd Ó Ruanaidh

Ógra Fianna Fáil calls for automatic voter registration

Ógra Fianna Fáil has called on the Government to introduce a system of automatic voter registration for eighteen year olds, ahead of the Register of Electors for 2005 coming into force tomorrow. The youth wing of the senior Government party has said that the Department for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government should work with the Department for Social and Family Affairs in introducing such a system.

"Each year a new Register of Electors comes into force on February 15th, and each year the opportunity is missed to ensure all newly entitled young adults are added to the register," said Michael Shovlin, Leas Cathaoirleach Ógra Fianna Fáil.

He continued saying, "The ability and information necessary to have an automatic system of registration is already in place through the Department of Social and Family Affairs. That Department, based on the registration of children for child

benefit, is charged with issuing sixteen year olds with their PPS numbers, and this information and capability should be extended to afford eighteen year olds the right to vote."

Ógra Fianna Fáil are concerned that the procedure necessary to have a name added to the register following its publication each year, including having the application witnessed at a Garda Síochana station, is considered to be a hassle by many young people and that this results in most newly-turned eighteen year olds being disenfranchised at polling time.

"In the year ahead we are likely to have not only by-elections, but also a referendum on the European Constitution. It is vital that young people are given every opportunity to participate in our democracy and have their say. The introduction of automatic voter registration for eighteen years olds would be a simple pragmatic step to take in achieving this goal," Mr. Shovlin concluded.



An tAire Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta, Éamon Ó Cuív TD, ag tacú le iarthóir Fhianna Fáil Úna Ní Chonaire i dtoghcháin Údaráis na Gaeltachta i gContae na Mí

Michael Shovlin, Ógra Leas Cathaoirleach

As regular readers of Grassroots will probably have noticed, usually in this spot we would have a piece by Michael Moynihan T.D. However, following on from the youth conference and from his promotion to chair of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Science, Michael has brought his time as Ógra Cathaoirleach to a close. Unfortunately Ógra must soldier on without Michael's leadership, but not without first paying tribute to the immense hard work and enthusiasm he has invested in our organisation over the last seven years.

Having had the honour of being a member of the National Youth Committee for a few years now, I have had the opportunity to see Michael in action up close and he has been a truly effective Cathaoirleach who has brought about a significant amount of change and has been effective in promoting the Ógra agenda throughout all levels of the party. An official event has been organised to formally thank Michael for all his efforts (see details below) and I would urge any members who are available to come along for what is sure to be another night to remember.

Of course since Michael's announcement that he was stepping down speculation has been rife as to who will replace him. Whoever is chosen in the coming months by An Taoiseach Bertie Ahern T.D. to take over from Michael will find an Ógra organisation that is in a strong position to face the challenges of the next number of years.

Our main challenge in this "Year of Organisation" for Fianna Fáil must be recruitment and the active participation of members on the ground in each and every constituency and at each and every level of the party. Ógra must also start to consider where it fits into a modern Fianna Fáil. We must look at our strengths and our weaknesses and examine how these can be best utilised for the good of the party as a whole.

Recently Fianna Fáil General Secretary Sean Dorgan (who features in an informative interview on pages 6&7 of this issue) set the National Youth Committee the task of outlining its role and how we see that developing in the months and years to come. While the new Cathaoirleach and the Committee as a whole will obviously have an input into any such future vision, the general membership of Ógra also needs to start asking themselves that question. Where do you, as a member of Ógra think we should be going as an organisation? What can we do differently? How do we become more relevant to our local communities?



Michael Shovlin

Our challenge over the coming months is to answer those questions, not just with words, but with actions as well. It is vital that all the Ógra organisations throughout the country put some real thought into this issue and that they meet to debate this matter and how it affects them at a local level. With no elections on the horizon for a while we now have the ideal opportunity to take stock of ourselves and the direction we are heading. However this can only have a workable effect if there is real input from everyone. Please take this opportunity and do not be afraid to voice your opinions. That afterall, is what Ógra was set up to provide in the first place.

Is mise le meas, **Michael Shovlin**,
Ógra Leas Cathaoirleach.

Dates for the Diary

- Ógra Summer Forum, Media Training and Policy Workshop, Cork , Saturday June 18th Cork
- Ógra Summer Bar-Be-Que and Presentation to Michael Moynihan TD, The Franciscan Well, Cork, Saturday June 18th 9pm
- Fianna Fáil Galway Races, Tuesday 26th - Friday 29th July
- National DeValera Commemoration, Ennis Co. Clare, Saturday September 3rd
- Fianna Fáil Exhibition Tent, National Ploughing Championships, Mogeely, Middleton Co. Cork, 27th -29th September
- Annual 3rd Level Recruitment Campaign September - October 2005
- Fianna Fáil Ard Fheis, Glen Eagle Hotel, Killarney Co. Kerry, Saturday October 22nd

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As usual if you have any suggestions for stories please drop an email to communications@ogra.ie. Grassroots is always looking for photographs from Ógra events so if you do have any Ógra related pictures please do send them to us. The Ógra website can also be used for articles, notices or photos so feel free to in send any material that you would like added. Don't forget to keep an eye on www.ogra.ie for further information or send an email to ogra@fiannafail.ie if you would like to receive our regular Ógra E-Zine.

Jimmy Healy, Grassroots Editor

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Gone . . but not forgotten

At last November's National Youth Conference, Michael Moynihan T.D. informed the delegates of his decision to stand down as Ógra Cathaoirleach. During his 7 years in the position, Deputy Moynihan presided over a period of great change and development in Ógra Fianna Fáil. Here Fianna Fáil Membership & Youth Officer and former member of the National Youth Committee, Aidan O'Gorman, talks us through some of events of Michael's time as the Ógra head honcho.



Michael addressing the faithful

In 1998 two new sheriffs came to town bringing with them a distinctly Rebel air and a passion for promoting young people in politics that was to have a lasting impact on Ógra and indeed throughout Fianna Fáil. In February of that year a young T.D. from Cork, Michael Moynihan was appointed to the position of Ógra Chairperson. He followed a line which began with a Dub called Bertie in 1980 and includes Ministers Frank Fahy, Tom Kitt, Michael Martin and Deputy Seán Haughey.

Upon his appointment Michael announced his intention out his to see "Ógra develop into a vigorous and vibrant young political organisation for the new millennium."

Around this time Michael's close friend and fellow Cork North West woman Gobnait O Connell (RIP) was also appointed the party's Membership Development and Youth Officer. Together they set about revamping Ógra.

They worked on the introduction of a new "National Youth Scheme" for the party. This saw increased resources being invested in Ógra and increased responsibilities for the National Youth Committee. Ógra was also given extra representation on the party's Ard Chomhairle at this time. The first National Youth Conference under Michael's stewardship took place in Killarney in October 1998. This was the first of five enormously successful conferences during his tenure. In Killarney a special force was unleashed on Ógra when Michael unveiled his secret weapon for spicing up conferences - a little known Band called Erin's Fury stole the show at the conference and were set to become an

Ógra institution. In the 1999 local elections Gobnait and Michael were vocal and successful champions of young candidates and saw a successful campaign for Fianna Fáil. Ógra launched its first webpage and a new Ógra newsletter was published. That year's conference held in Longford has entered legend as a fantastic weekend of socialising and politics.

Gobnait O'Connell left HQ in early 2000 to take up a role as advisor to the new Minister for Health Micheal Martin. Her passing in a tragic car accident in September 2000 was a deep shock to all in Ógra. Gobnait was well loved and respected throughout Fianna Fáil and her loss is greatly felt by all in the party. The Gobnait O'Connell memorial award for Ógra of the year was dedicated to her memory and presented for the first time at the 2001 Youth Conference in Kinsale.

In January 2000 Sinead Ní Mhaille began her hugely influential period as Youth Officer. She developed a close working relationship with Michael. During this period there were conferences in

"Michael unveiled his secret weapon for conferences - Erin's Fury"



Unveiling the plaque to commemorate the role of Jack Lynch in founding Ógra during our 25th anniversary celebrations

Westport, Kinsale and Portlaoise. At these conferences Michael could usually be found late on Saturday Night in the middle of a sing song with an energetic if somewhat inharmonious choir. The legend of these conferences has spread far and wide. Chairman Moynihan was usually to be found in the midst of the maddest revelry and loudest singsongs.

During Michael's chairmanship Ógra enjoyed record years of recruitment in all colleges. New Ógra units were founded throughout the country and the organisation grew to unprecedented strengths. The National Youth Committee also met in Northern Ireland for the first time during this period when the group went to Belfast and engaged in meetings with representatives of all the main political parties.

Ógra had a very valuable input into the 2002 general election campaign where Michael himself topped the poll in Cork North West. His running mate Donal Moynihan gained the 2nd seat for Fianna Fáil in this 3 seat constituency. In 2002 a new webpage was launched which included the online Ógra discussions forum and the opportunity for young people to join Ógra online.

In 2003 Aidan O'Gorman was appointed youth officer and Michael continued his hard work as a champion of Ógra overseeing the launch of Grassroots, the Ógra Newsletter. The 2004 Local elections were the most successful ever for young Fianna Fáil candidates with 40 councillors under 30 elected. Record recruitment levels were maintained and Michael continued to work tirelessly for Ógra.

At last November's Youth Conference Michael announced his retirement as Ógra Chairman. He has been appointed chairman of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Science.



Top: Never far from the spotlight and above: Unveiling the new Ógra logo at Conference '98

Throughout Michael's chairmanship he always put Ógra to the fore and, leading by example, invested a huge amount of his own time and energy to ensure Ógra's continued success. Having honed his skills chairing Youth Committee meetings, he has become a recognised master at refereeing a good scrap and dealing with petty arguments.

His skills in reconciling the personality clashes, internal rivalries and inflated egos associated with youth politics will ensure his new role dealing with the likes of Deputies Olwyn Enright, Sean Crowe, Paul Gogarty and Jan O'Sullivan will be a piece of cake. His legacy to Ógra is a vibrant organisation with a sense of purpose and increased influence within Fianna Fáil. He is responsible for a great youth organisation and has single-handedly put the village of Kiskeam Co. Cork on the map.

It's fitting that Michael's last act as chairman of Ógra was to be seen standing on a table conducting a raucous crowd of Ógra delegates through a medley of rebel songs at 4am on Sunday morning of the Cavan conference.

Michael stills regularly checks up on the progress of Ógra and continues to be remarkably well informed on the plotting and planning within the organisation. I am sure that as he progresses to well-deserved higher office in Fianna Fáil and national politics that he will always maintain a special affinity with Ógra and the younger members of our party.



With Tipp North Ógra, Gobnait O'Connell award winners 2004

Sean Dorgan Q&A

Having recently celebrated his second anniversary in the role of Fianna Fáil General Secretary, Seán Dorgan was invited by Grassroots to answer questions from the Ógra membership. Originally from Castlegregory, Co. Kerry, Seán has been at the forefront of revamping the party organisation, a role he knows all about having previously worked for the Irish Management Institute and QA Ireland. He has also headed up the marketing development programme in the Smurfit Business School, UCD. Unfortunately Grassroots received too many questions to print here, but the full text of the interview will be published on www.ogra.ie

Q. What do you see as the role of Ógra Fianna Fáil in the organisation? - Brian Jordan, Waterford

A: Ógra Fianna Fáil was established nearly 30 years ago. In that time, it has played an invaluable and central role within Fianna Fáil. It has served as a vehicle through which young people have got involved in political life. Thirty years on, it's timely to reflect on Ógra's position within the party. Certainly, it is as important now as it ever was. In fact, one could argue that it is more important now to have an active, vibrant Ógra. I recently encouraged your National Youth Committee to reflect on Ógra's role and current relevance. I asked them to stimulate a debate within Ógra and indeed the Party on how it is positioned and how best to enhance and improve its positioning. I would welcome a vigorous debate at this year's Árd Fheis on Ógra's role and on how it might be enhanced. To make a difference, Ógra must be different. It must be relevant. It must challenge and must be campaigning. It must be more than a college/university organisation. It must be connected and truly representative of Irish young people's concerns, values and priorities and must campaign for change, both within the Party and in national politics.

Ógra must drive recruitment of new members to the party. It is important we prepare for the future, promote new young candidates for the party and continue to expand its membership base. Ógra is the platform young people should use to challenge the status quo and be a radical campaigning force for change. Ógra will be more successful if its members continue to be innovative and motivated with fresh ideas and opinions. I would encourage all Ógra members to get involved, assess your current voice within the party and campaign for change where such change is required.

**Q. What is the latest regarding establishing the party on an all Ireland basis as proposed a few years ago?
Regards Eamon Browne, Tralee Kerry North Ógra**

Fianna Fáil recently changed its rules to allow for individual membership. The party is proceeding to invite all supporters across Ireland, North and South, to become individual members of the party. Individual membership of Fianna Fáil will entitle such members to attend all party functions, like the Árd Fheis. The issue of organising in the North of Ireland is a complex question and one deserving of much reflection.

**Q. How do you see Ógra being able to balance the seriousness of the older generation and the under 26 age group of Ógra? Can they not be invited along to the meetings of the Senior Comhairle Ceantair?
Would this not be a two way process?**



Seán Dorgan

**Patrick and John Higgins, Enniscorthy /Bunclody
Comhairle Ceantair Ógra.**

A. I see Ógra being well able to find this balance. Members of Ógra, whatever age, are all more than capable of coping with the 'seriousness of the older generation'. 2005 is the year of the organisation. Fianna Fáil units are directed to hold as many public meetings as possible. Ógra members should attend Comhairle Ceantair meetings to contribute to the senior Party as well as organising Ógra activities. I'm aware that some constituencies have no Ógra representation – this must change. However, we must avoid pigeon-holing young people. I am much more supportive of mainstreaming young people's involvement within our organisation. Clearly, we need more young members, young candidates at election time and officers at all levels within our units. Young members should not be overly worried about the perceived "seriousness". Meetings should be fun! Politics should be enjoyable for everyone.

**Q. How did you get involved in Fianna Fáil?
Sarah Ryan, Sec, Dub SE Ógra**

A. I was born into a Fianna Fáil family. I started going to cumann meetings with Dad in Castlegregory when I was 15. I was chairman locally and attended the CDC meetings over the following few years. I'd say they gave me the post to keep me quiet! I loved the cut and thrust of South Kerry politics at the time. John O'Leary was our TD when I first became involved. I remember working at a local level on John O'Donoghue's first campaign. There was a great sense of Fianna Fáil as the one party that meant so much to people.

**Q. What do you do in your spare time?
Aoife Murphy, Sec, DIT Ógra**

A. There isn't a whole lot of spare time I'm afraid! I try and keep in regular contact with my mates - and talk about anything but politics. I try to hit the gym, but find it hard to keep that schedule going – I'm working on that. I keep an active eye on Kerry foot-

ball, try and get back to Kerry often, but only manage it every two months. I like to read, but unfortunately, I don't really get to read fiction anymore, the lack of which can make Jack a sometimes dull fellow!

Q. Do you think that the cumann structure and ordinary membership should have more input into party policy?
Mairead Conroy, Mayo Ógra

A. The party welcomes policy for all quarters. Liam Cullen is our newly appointed head of research. He is keen that any members who have innovative ideas on matters of policy should write them down and submit them to their local representatives and the Fianna Fáil Research Office in Leinster House, Dublin 2. In addition, I am looking at how we enhance our October Árd Fheis to make it much more delegate centred; I'd welcome any thoughts you might have on this.

Q. Why have we set up the "Forum for Opportunity"?
Darragh McShea, Chairperson, NUI Galway

A. Firstly, this matter has been widely misrepresented and misrepresented. The reaction has been over-the-top and misplaced. Let me highlight some important points in relation to how the Party operates.

- ☐ Over 300 Councillors Firstly, running a political party is a very expensive business;
- ☐ Over 300 Councillors We receive state funding (like all other political parties). Fianna Fáil will receive €4,398,000 in 2005.
- ☐ Over 300 Councillors The vast majority of this goes on servicing the organisation and running the party. We employ 35 staff. We maintain a full time press office and research office, both based at Leinster House. We recently employed four regional organisers to run our Party much more efficiently. In addition, we maintain our Headquarters at Mount St.
- ☐ Over 300 Councillors We fund various organisational activities (including Árd Fheis, Ógra, membership recruitment campaign, Ploughing Championship, etc).

FF Headquarters supports:

- ☐ 55,000 members
- ☐ Over 300 Councillors
- ☐ Over 100 Parliamentary Party Members
- ☐ 3,000 branches

The important point missed in the recent debate is that election spending cannot be financed from any State provided income. The relevant election spending must be provided entirely from fundraising activities. So, we have to resource all election referendum campaigns from fundraising. The other alternative is not to contest elections – which is not an option. There is no Forum for Opportunity. The brochure featured in the newspaper articles was a draft. The fundraising product mentioned was nothing more than an attempt to invite Party supporters to contribute an amount per month, just like many of us contribute to a local GAA, soccer or rugby club. We make no apologies for people who support Fianna Fáil to help us to fight an election campaign.

Q. Is the Fianna Fáil leadership losing touch with the general membership?
Aimee Milne, Chair, DIT Ógra

A. It is up to everyone, at whatever level, to play a part in maintaining communication. Certainly, we at HQ need to do more to

improve communication with the party. Bertie Ahern, as Taoiseach, travels the country and meets with members on a continuous basis. Regular communication is the key to avoiding unwanted friction and we should never lose sight that we all have the same goal. I am glad to get the opportunity to speak to the Ógra membership by answering your questions and would encourage any future correspondence or issue you feel needs to be addressed. You can email me at seandorgan@fiannafail.ie.

Q. Do you think Ógra should be scrapped?
Francis Wall, CIT Ógra

A. No. The challenge for Ógra is to make sure its relevance is shown within the party. It needs to do this now. Ógra is an extremely positive force. It is the valuable medium for young Fianna Fáil supporters to (a) become informed and, (b) involved in politics.

Q. Why is the Ard Fhéis only being held every 18 months now?
Niall Kelleher, Kerry South Ógra

A. That is not the case. Last year alone, we held two over a period of six months. The reason they are not on more often than this is because they require a lot of resources and time to organise. The 2005 Árd Fheis will be held in Killarney on October 22nd. The Árd Fheis is the most important event in the Fianna Fáil calendar. It is essential that it is scheduled at times that are of maximum benefit to the party.

Q. Will future Ard Fhéis be held outside of Dublin?

A. At present, there is only one venue outside Dublin that is capable of holding an Árd Fheis. This is Killarney, Co. Kerry. The 2003 Árd Fheis in Killarney was a great success and we have decided to return there again this year. It will be a one day Árd Fheis and we will try and ensure it is a truly delegate-centred gathering.

Q. Do you think Fianna Fáil will contest elections in the North within the next ten years?
Siobhán Ó'hUadhaigh, Dub SE Ógra

A. It's premature to say at the moment. A motion was passed at the 1999 Fianna Fáil Árd Fheis calling on the party to organise and contest elections in the North. The motion was passed at the Árd Fheis but implementation of this motion is a matter for the National Executive. Under Fianna Fáil rules, a cumann, as currently constituted, is established in a Dáil constituency. In order to open the way to establishment of a presence in the North, the party would be obliged to change its rules.

The Northern Ireland Committee of the National Executive is currently addressing this issue and will report back to the National Executive in the near future. The National Executive will then debate the issue. There have been many expressions of interest from persons in the North of Ireland for Fianna Fáil to establish there. The party is encouraged by this level of interest and will evaluate the matter. At present, our primary focus is to maintain our seats in Dáil Éireann. The party has yet to take any decision vis-à-vis organising in the North - as such, it is purely speculative to talk about contesting elections.

National Youth Conference '04 in pictures



To join Ógra Fianna Fáil Ring 1850 40 40 45, Email ogra@fiannafail.ie or log onto www.ogra.ie