

Board of the National Museum of Ireland

Minutes of Meeting of the Board

on Thursday 29th April 2021 via video-conference

Present: Ms Catherine Heaney (Chair) Ms Denise Moroney
Ms Helen Shenton Mr Declan Nelson
Professor Ingrid Hook Professor Mary O'Dowd
Professor Kathleen James-Chakraborty Dr Andrew Power
Mr John Bowen
Dr Linda King Ms Mary Crotty
Mr Paolo Viscardi Mr Ambrose Loughlin
Dr Susan Rogers Ms Judith McCarthy
Dr Barra O'Donnabhain

Apologies: Ms Helen Shenton

In attendance: Ms Lynn Scarff (Director, NMI)
Dr Audrey Whitty (Head of Collections & Learning, NMI)
Ms Jade Dillon (Secretary to the Board, NMI)

1.0 Opening of meeting, apologies if any

The Chair opened the meeting and apologies were conveyed for Ms Shenton. Mr Bowen announced that he would need to leave the meeting before the end of the meeting.

1.1 Congratulations

On behalf of the board, the Chair congratulated Mr Viscardi for his promotion to AKI Natural History. On behalf of the board, the Chair also congratulated Prof James-Chakraborty for being awarded a major European Research Council (ERC) research grant.

1.2 Protocol document for virtual meetings

The Board noted the draft protocols for virtual meetings document.

The document was formally adopted by the Board.

2.0 Previous minutes, adoption of agenda, matters arising if any

The Chair proposed to bring the Capital & Estates committee report agenda item forward to accommodate Mr Bowen's early departure from the meeting. The change to the agenda was proposed by Dr King and seconded by Prof Hook.

The minutes of 25th February were proposed by Dr Power and seconded by Dr O'Donnabhain, with the exception of a minor amendment.

2.1 Matters arising

a) Re-opening

Today, the government announced the planned date for the re-opening of museums and galleries in Ireland. The Chair requested an update from the Director on plans for engaging with communities now that the

museum will be re-opening on 10th May. The Director informed the Board that NMI will continue to take a blended approach to engagement with the public i.e. via online and onsite, until the roll-out of Covid-19 vaccines has been completed. The Director informed the Board that local schools and DEIS schools will be prioritised for onsite visits.

b) Project Engage

The Chair referred to the Director's update on the Project Engage workforce plan from the February meeting, and proposed that the plan be included as a potential risk in NMI's Risk Register. **It was agreed that any updates on the Plan in relation to risk should be brought to the attention of the Board via the Audit & Risk committee.** The Director informed the Board that staff buy-in so far has been satisfactory with particular areas in need of some more attention.

c) Director's annual appraisal

The Chair confirmed to the Board that the Director's annual appraisal is now complete and that all relevant documentation has been submitted. The Chair thanked Dr King for making herself available for the appraisal.

3.0 Executive report

The Board noted the executive report and the two appendices. The Director gave an overview of the key updates, including the following:

- **Decade of Centenaries programme launch:** An Taoiseach, An Tánaiste and Minister for the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (DTCAGSM) officially announced the Decade of Centenaries Programme for 2021 at Collins Barracks on 27th April.
- **Project Engage workforce plan:** A meeting has been scheduled with DTCAGSM on 30th April to outline the proposed sanctions for 2021/2022 that have been agreed as essential roles by NMI.
- **Collections storage:** The Director reported that Curatorial, Conservation and Registration teams are under increasing pressure to make spaces suitable for the storage of collections from NMI - Natural History and NMI - Archaeology.
- **Artist-in-Residence:** Anthony Haughey was selected as the winner for NMI's Artist-in-Residence programme.
- **Cist burial finds:** The Board noted two Irish Antiquities Division reports on the Knockavroegen Bronze Age Cist Burial, Co. Kerry and Kilderry Bronze Age Cist Burials, Co. Kilkenny.
- **Benin material:** The Board noted a recent press statement from the National Museum of Ireland on its holdings of material from Benin. The Director informed the Board that NMI is currently working on a document with regards to repatriation and restitution and that Irish Antiquities Division, Curator, Dr Bernard Gilhooly is NMI's liaison with the Digital Benin project.
- **Earth Day seminar:** There has been impressive uptake for primary school online seminars and workshops; most notably for the Earth Day seminar that is due to take place on 22nd April which has over 27,000 students enrolled for the talk.
- **The NMI's website homepage** is currently being re-vamped. **It was agreed that the final draft would be provided to the Strategy & Engagement committee for review.**
- **Researcher access:** NMI has written to universities to provide them with an update on when researchers will be in a position to visit NMI premises.

4.0 Special discussion item: GPAC topics

The Board noted the presentation slides on NMI's proposed strategies for staying relevant, and an outline of NMI's research strategy.

a) Staying relevant

The Director gave an outline of strategic areas of focus that NMI are working towards that will ensure that NMI continues to stay relevant as a cultural institution:

- 1) Ensuring that formative evaluation, public consultation and expert advice is embedded in NMI's systems and processes.
- 2) Increasing capacity for the establishment and implementation of these systems and processes through workforce planning.
- 3) Acting on the results of public consultations and effectively communicating changes.

b) Research strategy outline

The Director explained to the Board that the research survey was undertaken by NMI's Collections & Learning division. The Board thanked the Executive for carrying out this survey and a note of appreciation was recorded to the participants of the survey. The Director informed the Board that this is a key area of focus for the CNCI at present. The Director informed the committee that the NMI intends to work with Board and engage with the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science to explore the process of recognition for cultural institutions as research bodies.

4.1 Feedback.

a) Communication plan is critical

The Board discussed the proposed approach and agreed that NMI should not only ensure that NMI programming, research and exhibitions is reflective of today's communities, politics and societies but that an effective communication plan is critical to ensuring that NMI's work is recognised.

b) National Cultural Institutions Act 1997

The Board discussed the National Cultural Institutions Act in the context of staying relevant as a cultural institution. The Board agreed that the current Act does not sufficiently reflect the evolution of the NMI; particularly in terms of NMI as a research and education institution.

It was agreed that the current Act would be discussed under matters arising at the next Board meeting scheduled to take place on 10th June.

(Meeting adjourned until 11:10).

5.0 Subcommittee reports

5.1 Capital & Estates committee report

The Board noted the report.

a) Financial allocation for investigative works for NMI – Natural History

The funding allocation for investigative works was formally confirmed in April and this document was formally noted by the Board.

b) Collections Resource Centre

The Director informed the Board that NMICRC premises is currently undergoing a rent review. The Director agreed to keep Capital & Estates committee informed as it evolves.

Mr Bowen proposed that a long-term collections storage solution for the NMI should continue to be a key feature of Board agendas through the Capital & Estates Committee as it is a particularly serious issue.

It was agreed that the Executive would circulate a briefing note on the CRC for Dr O'Donnabhain and Dr Rogers.

c) Governance and operational agreements for NMI – Natural History

Mr Bowen told the Board that NMI has sought expert advice on the particulars outlined in the recently received draft agreement between the DTCAGSM, the OPW and the NMI, and a report is due to be finalised in the coming days. The advice will be shared with NMI's Audit & Risk committee once it is received.

It was agreed that a meeting would be convened between Mr Bowen, Mr Loughlin, the Director and

Ms Hurley upon receipt of the report. It was agreed that a draft version of the NMI and OPW Memorandum of Understanding would also be discussed at this meeting.

d) External membership for Capital & Estates committee

The Board noted the two external member profiles. **The Board agreed that both candidates would be excellent contributors to the Capital & Estates committee and approved the five-year appointments.**

The Capital & Estates committee report was approved by the Board.

5.2 GPAC Report

The Board noted the report. Ms McCarthy updated the Board on key discussion points from the last GPAC meeting:

a) Irish Folklife Acquisitions Strategy

The Board noted the Irish Folklife Division Acquisitions Strategy and formally adopted the document for MSPI interim accreditation. A note of thanks to Dr King and Dr Rogers for their assistance in the refinement of the strategy.

b) 20th Century History of Ireland Galleries Business Case and the Visual Report

GPAC discussed the business case and the visual report for the *20th Century History of Ireland Galleries* that was submitted and approved by the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media. The executive emphasised that expert advice, along with public consultation, will heavily influence the final listing of themes for the Galleries.

c) 'Restitution' and 'repatriation'

The Director informed the committee that the NMI is liaising with its counterparts and peers towards a national approach on repatriation that will be supported by the DTCAGSM. Dr Audrey Whitty re-iterated that the main challenge for the NMI in this context is that the NMI does not have a permanent full-time Ethnographer assigned to the 15k objects within the collection. The Director assured the Board that the NMI are working on prioritising sanction for this position.

d) Guidelines in relation to the use of NMI grounds for installations and permanent monuments

Prof James-Chakraborty informed the Board that draft guidelines were circulated to GPAC for discussion. It had been agreed by the committee that permanent installations within the museum landscape would not be appropriate but that temporary installations and programmes would be very much welcome.

The Board formally adopted this approach subject to amendments the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, and/or the OPW.

It was agreed that GPAC would discuss the general principles of restitution and repatriation at its next meeting on 27th May.

The GPAC report was approved by the Board.

5.3 Audit & Risk Committee report

The Board noted the report.

a) Internal audit report

The draft internal audit report, which has no High Level findings in relation to Internal Financial Control, and just one ongoing High Level finding on IT, was approved by the Audit & Risk committee, subject to some suggested additions by the Committee to the Executive Summary relating to the impact of Covid-19.

The Board formally confirmed that it was satisfied with the internal audit report on the basis of the

review of the NMI's compliance with Provision 1.8 of the 2016 Code in respect of ensuring effective systems of financial control.

b) Risk register

The Board noted the Risk Register. Mr Loughlin informed the Board of two new additions to the risk register. Mr Loughlin notified the Board that Mr Derek Williams, NMI's Head of Digital and Information Systems, is in the process of procuring a new phone system for the NMI and envisages that a new system will be activated in Q2 2021.

c) Financial report

The Board noted the financial report.

d) Draft financial statements 2020

The Board reviewed the draft financial statements for 2020. **The Board approved the draft financial statements for the external audit with exception to some minor edits.**

e) Procurement

Mr Loughlin informed the Board that the NMI's 2021 Procurement Plan was approved by the Audit & Risk Committee.

f) Security policy

The Security Policy was formally adopted by the Board and approved for inclusion for MSPI accreditation submission.

The Audit & Risk committee report and relevant papers circulated were approved by the Board.

5.4 Strategy & Engagement committee report

The Board noted the report.

a) Branding and identity

The committee had discussed the urgent need for the NMI to prioritise and re-assess its branding and communications, particularly now during this extended period of closure. NMI's branding and identity work packages had been circulated to the committee for discussion.

b) Communications plan

The need for an effective communications plan was agreed by the committee.

c) Commercial

Ms Terri McInerney, NMI's Commercial Manager, presented to the Strategy & Engagement committee on commercial goals for 2021 and 2022, including the retendering of the NMI's café spaces, the development of a robust sponsorship and donations programme and development of exciting outdoor visitor experiences, such as outdoor concerts and food markets.

The Strategy & Engagement committee report was approved by the Board.

5.5 Transition committee report

The Chair gave an update on Board appointments, re-appointments and RDS and RIA nominations.

a) Handover letter

The Chair of the Board and the Chairs of the Board committees met on 26th April to discuss content for the Board handover letter. **It was agreed that the handover letter would be discussed on 10th June Board and would be finalised on 29th June at the last meeting of the current Board.**

b) Board remuneration

The Chair of the Board and Chairs of the committee discussed Board remuneration. **It was agreed that a note on remuneration would be circulated for 10th June meeting.**

6.0 A.O.B

a) A note of gratitude to NMI staff during closure due to Covid-19

The Board reflected on the work undertaken by NMI during the closure of cultural institution during the pandemic and there was agreement that NMI staff have made significant efforts in raising the profile of the Museum via social media platforms, online galleries and programming.

It was agreed that a note of gratitude would be drafted by the Chair and circulated to all NMI staff on behalf of the Board.

b) Ms Maria Kearns

The Director informed the Board that the contract of Ms Maria Kearns, NMI's Head of Human Resources had come to the end of its term. The Board conveyed their deep appreciation for Ms Kearns for her work as the Head of Human Resources from 2016 to 2021, particularly in relation to policy development. **It was agreed that a note of gratitude would be sent to Ms Kearns from the Director's Office on behalf of the NMI Board.**

8.0 Date of next meeting

10th June 2021 at 10am.

End of meeting.

APPROVED