

Board of the National Museum of Ireland

Minutes of Meeting of the Board on Thursday 30th September 2021, at
10am
Via video-conference

Present: Ms Catherine Heaney (Chair) Mr Ambrose Loughlin
Ms Helen Shenton Mr Declan Nelson
Dr Linda King Dr Andrew Power
Mr Paolo Viscardi Prof Geraldine Sheridan
Dr Susan Rogers Prof Cathal O'Donoghue
Dr Barra O'Donnabhain Dr Claudia Kinmonth

Apologies: Mr John Bowen

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

1. Opening of meeting, apologies if any and adoption of the agenda

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed the Board members and the Executive to their first meeting of the new Board (term 2021-2025). Apologies were conveyed for Mr Bowen and Dr Kinmonth conveyed her apologies in advance as she would need to leave the meeting at 11am.

a) *Introductions and announcements*

- All Board members, Executives and the Secretary to the Board introduced themselves.
- A note of sympathy was recorded for Mr Viscardi on the recent loss of his father.
- A note of congratulations was recorded for the daughter of Mr Bowen who recently got married.
- The new Board members have not yet been officially announced by the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media but hopefully this will be released in the coming weeks.

b) *Acting Deputy Director role*

On behalf of the Board, the Chair congratulated Dr Whitty on being successful in her interview for the position of Deputy Director of the National Museum of Ireland. The Director informed the Board that this is an Acting role and that Dr Whitty will continue as NMI's Head of Collections & Learning as well taking on additional duties in the absence of the Director.

c) *Adoption of the agenda*

The agenda was proposed by Mr Viscardi and seconded by Dr King.

2. Minutes of 30th June 2021, matters arising

The minutes of 30th June were proposed by Mr Loughlin and seconded by Mr Nelson.

a) Matters arising

The Chair covered off a few outstanding matters from the previous Board meeting in June:

- A mid-year check-in with the Director was completed over the summer by the Chair and Dr King.
- A Board handover letter outlining Board priorities was forwarded to the Minister on 8th July 2021, including a note on the challenges in relation to the Collections Resource Centre.
- Online induction training on general governance will be made available to all Board and External Board members between now and Q1 2022. This will be followed by onsite governance training in Q1 or Q2 of 2022 which will focus specifically on the legislations and Codes that are of relevance to the NMI.

3. Executive Report

The Board noted the Executive Report and it was taken as read. The Chair, the Director and Dr Whitty expanded on the below key items:

a) Oireachtas Hearing of 29th September 2021

- The Chair notified the Board that she and the Director attended Oireachtas hearing on 29th September 2021 on the topic of challenges facing the museum sector and cultural institutions as a result of COVID-19. Dr Whitty also participated in the hearing in her capacity as Chair of the Irish Museums Association (IMA).
- The participants and members of the Joint Oireachtas Committee discussed Ireland's night-time economy and resource issues within the cultural sectors. It was noted that the engagement was positive and considered.
- The Chair and Director also spoke to NMI's challenges surrounding the nation's Collections Resource Centre and proposed that a review of the National Cultural Institutions Act 1997 be conducted.

b) Museum Standards of Ireland Programme (MSPI) Interim Accreditation Submissions

The Director and Dr Whitty notified the Board that the MSPI Interim Accreditation Submissions for NMI – Country Life, NMI – Decorative Arts & History and NMI – Collections Resource Centre were submitted to the MSPI Coordinator on 29th September. On behalf of the Board, the Chair congratulated all those involved in the drafting, reviewing and collating of the documents over the past three years, including previous Board members, Prof Kathleen James-Chakraborty, Ms Judith Finlay, Prof Ingrid Hook, Prof Mary O'Dowd, Ms Denise Moroney and Ms Mary Crotty.

c) Down to Earth exhibition launch

Minister Eamon Ryan launched the *Down to Earth* exhibition in Collins Barracks on 27th September 2021, an exhibition in partnership with Geological Survey Ireland. The exhibition has been dedicated to Dr Matthew Parkes who died suddenly last October during the making of the exhibition.

d) Acquisitions

A note of thanks was recorded for the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media for their financial assistance in helping secure a number of acquisitions of significant Irish importance, including a number of objects from Howth Castle, items from the Patrick Pearse collection and 'A Meeting' by Harry Clarke which was on long-term loan to the NMI.

4. Special Discussion Topic: Board Work plan 2021/2022

The Board noted the proposed Board Work Plan for 2021-2022.

- The Chair gave an overview of the proposed work plan which was based on the internal handover document collated by the Secretary to the Board for 30th June 2021 meeting. Work Plans for each of the Subcommittees were also noted by the Board.
- The Chair notified the Board that a temporary Legislation Committee will be established in Q1 of 2022 and that this would be chaired by Ms Shenton.

The Board approved the Work Plan for 2021-2022.

5a) Capital & Estates Committee

The Board noted the Capital & Estates Committee report and it was taken as read. The Board discussed the issues surrounding the Collections Resource Centre and it was noted that although the lease lasts until the end of this decade, it will take years to decant and move the Collection to a new permanent home and that it is likely that delaying this any further will lead to a crisis management scenario.

5b) General Public Advisory Committee

The Chair informed the Board that Dr O'Donnabhain was appointed as Chair Designate for GPAC for their first meeting on 9th September and was formally nominated by GPAC as Chair. **The Board formally appointed Dr O'Donnabhain as the new Chair of the General Public Advisory Committee.**

The Board noted the GPAC report and it was taken as read. Dr O'Donnabhain updated the Board on key areas:

- a) It was highlighted that a significant amount of fieldwork has taken place nationwide over the summer months and that the Irish Antiquities Division and the Conservation Department in particular have found the increase in fieldwork challenging due to additional commitments associated with NMI's capital projects that have had a knock-on effect on the workloads of NMI staff.
- b) The Board noted the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the NMI and the National Museum of Northern Ireland which was approved by GPAC on 9th September. **The Board approved the MoU with exception to minor changes in wording.**

5c) Audit & Risk Committee

The Board noted the following documents and these were taken as read:

- Audit & Risk Committee report
- Financial pack for August 2021
- Risk Register
- Management Response letter
- Letter of Compliance for 2020.

The above documents were formally approved by the Board.

- Dr Power updated the Board on some key areas within the financial pack on behalf of the Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee who was unable to attend the last ARC meeting.
- **It was agreed that a presentation to the NMI's funding streams would be given to the Board.**
- **It was agreed that online shop sales figures would be added into the ARC financial pack in future.**

5d) Strategy & Engagement Committee

The Board noted the Strategy & Engagement Committee report and it was taken as read. Dr King updated the Board on key updates:

- NMI's artist in residence, Anthony Haughey presented to the Strategy & Engagement Committee on his project plans for the coming year.

- It had been agreed at the Committee meeting that the Director would present on NMI's levels of engagement on social media and the challenges and lessons learned by the NMI.

6. A.O.B

There was no other business.

7. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Board will take place on 2nd December 2021.

End of meeting.

F E M I N A L