

Board of the National Museum of Ireland

Minutes of Meeting of the Board

on Thursday 19th November 2020 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
Dr Linda King	Mr John Bowen
Mr Paolo Viscardi	Ms Judith McCarthy
Dr Susan Rogers	Mr Ambrose Loughlin
Dr Barra O'Donnabhain	Ms Mary Crotty

Apologies: None

In attendance:

Ms Lynn Scarff (Director, NMI)	Ms Maria Kearns (Head of HR, NMI)
Dr Audrey Whitty (Head of Collections & Learning)	Ms Jade Dillon (Secretary to the Board, NMI)
Ms Aoife Hurley (Head of Operations)	

1.0 Opening of meeting, apologies if any

The Chair of the Board opened the meeting and welcomed the NMI's new Board members, Dr Susan Rogers and Dr Barra O'Donnabhain to their first Board meeting. Prof James-Chakraborty will be joining the meeting at a later time. The Chair expressed her thanks to Ms Dillon for arranging training for the Board's new meeting platform and encouraged Board members to liaise with Ms Dillon if they had any feedback. The Chair welcomed feedback in relation to the volume of information circulated for Board meetings.

a) Dr Matthew Parkes, Assistant Keeper and Curator of the NMI – Natural History

On behalf of the Board, the Chair expressed her deepest condolences to the family, friends and colleagues of Dr Matthew Parkes, Assistant Keeper and curator of Natural History whose untimely death has shocked and deeply saddened many. The Chair described Dr Parkes as a kind and generous person and that the NMI has been very lucky to have had him on the team. The Chair expressed personal condolences to Mr Viscardi, Mr Monaghan and the NMI - Natural History team in particular.

b) NMI's New Board Members

The Chair welcomed Dr Rogers and Dr O'Donnabhain to introduce themselves to the Board and stressed the importance of Board continuity and diverse participation. Both Dr O'Donnabhain and Dr Rogers thanked the Chair for her introduction and gave brief backgrounds on their relevant experience and interests.

The Chair thanked both for their introductions and informed the Board that Dr Rogers will be



joining the Strategy & Engagement Committee and that Dr O'Donnabhain has joined GPAC and Strategy & Engagement Committee.

e) Corporate Governance Training

The Chair informed the Board that the Secretary will be scheduling Corporate Governance training sessions for Dr Rogers and Dr O'Donnabhain and encouraged those who wish to refresh their knowledge to please contact the Secretary.

f) Addition to Agenda

The Chair proposed that a closed session would take place under A.O.B to discuss the Director's upcoming annual progress check-in, scheduled to take place on 3rd December 2020. The agenda was proposed by Prof Hook and seconded by Mr Viscardi.

2.0 Minutes of Previous Meeting - 24th September 2020

The Board noted the minutes. The minutes were approved subject to minor amendments, and were proposed by Prof O'Dowd and seconded by Ms McCarthy. **The Secretary agreed to amend.**

3.0 Executive Report

The Board noted the Executive Report. Some minor amendments were noted by the Secretary.

3.1 Updates from the Chair

a) Board Recruitment feedback

The Chair explained the NMI Board's recruitment and handover strategy to Dr Rogers and Dr O'Donnabhain and informed the Board that the feedback from the Board recruitment survey was forwarded to the Minister for the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, Catherine Martin T.D, for her consideration. The Chair stressed that it is vital that Board members be recruited prior to the cessation of the current Board on 5th July 2021 in order to ensure a comprehensive handover.

b) NMI's Response to Arts & Culture Recovery Taskforce

The Board noted the letter that was submitted to the Arts & Culture Recovery Taskforce by the Chair of the Board and the Director on 15th October. The Chair noted that the importance of the museum as a place of wellbeing was highlighted in the letter and that a re-opening at Level 3 was advocated for.

c) Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sports and Media's Statement of Strategy

The Board noted that the Statement Strategy response was submitted to the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sports and Media by the Director on 10th November.

3.2. Updates from the Director

a) Dr Audrey Whitty, Chair of IMA

The Director warmly announced the appointment of Dr Audrey Whitty as Chair of the Irish Museums Association. The Chair and Board congratulated Dr Whitty on her successful appointment.



The Director gave an overview of the Executive Report, and highlighted the following:

- a) NMI's new Documentation Officer, Dr Kevin Forkan joins the NMI with a wealth of experience from his previous roles with the M+ museum in Hong Kong, as well as the National Archives of Ireland and Irish Higher Education Authority.
- b) Project Engage/Workforce planning: A new facilitator has been appointed and a number of 1:1 meetings have taken place between some staff members (new starters/long-term employees). A Project Engage Steering Group workshop will take place on 13th November.
- c) Dr Whitty and Ms Alex Ward judged the 49 plus Covid-19 NMI/DCCI Commission applications on 15th October.
- d) The NMI is in the process of developing an online shop. The online shop will focus on 50 products that are either unique to the NMI or known to be strong sellers.
- e) Records Management Project Phase 2: the NMI's Head of Digital & Information Systems, Mr Derek Williams is leading on an all-site project that will result in an overarching Digital Strategy for the NMI. This will be a large-scale infrastructure project that will involve most NMI Departments.
- f) NMI's *Down to Earth* exhibition has been pushed into 2021.
- g) *InForm* will be launched on 27th January, Covid-19 restrictions permitting.
- h) The NMI has purchased the Alison Lowry collection with a view to possibly including particular works in the *20th Century History of Ireland Galleries*, and for touring the collection, both nationally and internationally.
- i) iCAN was awarded the best network archive under the UK and Ireland Community Archive and Heritage Group Annual Award in 2020. The virtual awards ceremony took place on Monday 26th October 2020.
- j) An impressive number of events and interviews were organised by the NMI's Keeper of Irish Folklife Division, Ms Clodagh Doyle to celebrate Samhain and Halloween. The Board passed on their congratulations to Ms Doyle and it was suggested that Christmas would be another good opportunity for the NMI to arrange a similar level of coverage, but with a focus on Christmas traditions.

The Director agreed to pass the Board's comments on to Ms Doyle.

- k) The Director informed the Board that the NMI has not yet received any formal confirmation of funding for the *20th Century History of Ireland Galleries*.
- l) The Chair noted the report on activities and events delivered by the Museum in collaboration with the Traveller community. It was noted that this was an important report that demonstrated the breadth and success of the Museum's work with these communities and we should ensure it is disseminated to a wider audience.

b) Note on NMI Acquisitions

Clarity was provided to the Board in relation to the NMI Board's role in NMI's acquisitions. The Chair explained that acquisitions are under the remit of the Executive and that no Board ratification is required. The Board agreed that it is more prudent for acquisitions to sit with the Executive as waiting for Board approval could potentially lead to missed opportunities for the NMI.

4.0 Special Discussion Topic: NMI's Community Engagement

The Chair welcomed the NMI's Head of Education, Ms Lorraine Comer to the meeting and thanked her for taking the time to present to the Board. The Chair welcomed Ms Comer to present on the NMI's community engagement, outreach and education programmes.

a) NMI's Community Engagement Strategy Working Group

Ms Comer gave an overview of the NMI's Community Engagement Strategy Working Group. Ms Comer informed the Board that the establishment of the Working Group and the information documented from the meetings will play a crucial role in developing and shaping the NMI's Community Engagement Strategy that is due to be finalised during the first quarter of 2021.

The Group consists of NMI staff who have participated in community engagement practice in the past, and are tasked to reflect on these experiences and assist in the development of the Community Engagement Strategy.

b) Working Groups Discussion Points

Virtual workshops have been taking place since June 2020 and a themed approach has been taken to ensure that discussions are focused and do not overlap. Themes include: reaching a common understanding of language used in describing various communities in a museum context, sharing and examining NMI practice, building capacity, integrating the voice of the community in decision-making process, importance of building relationships and trust, how to evaluate, research and document community engagement practice at the NMI.

c) Importance of Sharing Acquired Knowledge with other Cultural Institutions

Ms Comer stressed the importance of developing a process for evaluating, researching and documenting community practice at the NMI to ensure that the NMI can share and disseminate the acquired knowledge with other cultural institutions and key community organisations in Ireland.

d) Working 'With' Not 'For'

Ms Comer explained the NMI's approach to community engagement as a symbiotic practice that is centered on working 'with' communities and not just 'for'. Ms Comer stressed the importance of providing communities the opportunity to tell their own stories. This, Ms Comer explained, is key to fostering a sense of ownership i.e. *my* museum.

e) Examples of the NMI's Key Community Projects

Ms Comer gave brief overviews of a few key community engagement projects that for facilitated by the NMI:

Ms Comer informed the Board that information on these projects can be found on the NMI's website.

Ms Comer informed the Board that the NMI will be presenting the draft Strategy to the Board during the first quarter of 2021 and thanked the Board for their time.



f) Feedback

On behalf of the Board, the Chair warmly thanked Ms Comer for her exciting presentation and congratulated Ms Comer on iCAN's award for the best network archive. The Chair expressed her support for the NMI's community engagement endeavors. The Chair put forward that co-curation and empowering communities are crucial components in creating an inclusive museum.

The Board discussed co-production and the importance of seeking feedback from communities, i.e. audience research.

The Board discussed the benefits of involving NMI staff (particularly curatorial staff) from other NMI Departments in community engagement projects. The Chair put forward that the Board, in terms of public duty, should also promote and be actively involved in driving forward the NMI's community engagement practice.

g) Museum in the Classroom

The Chair emphasised the NMI's relevance to communities and schools, particularly during a time when classrooms may be closed during the winter months. The Director agreed and noted that the Education team were exploring engagement with local schools and the experience of having their class for a day at the Museum with the aspiration this would occur in early 2021, COVID 19 allowing. She also noted that the online Museum in the Classroom has proven to be an excellent resource for teachers, students and anyone who wishes to learn more about Ireland's history and heritage through the NMI's Collections. Ms Comer informed the Board that the content is relevant to the school curriculum and that the site includes teacher's notes, study notes, virtual tours, and interviews with curators.

h) Resources for community engagement

Dr O'Donnabhain emphasised that in terms of projects that arise from the community engagement strategy, it would be important for the Board to advocate for the resources required for these projects. **The Board and Director agreed that supporting the NMI in securing funding for these projects is an important step in the strategic direction of the overall project.**

The Board thanked Ms Comer again for her insightful presentation and commended the Education team for all their hard work.

Ms Comer left the meeting.

a) General Public Advisory Committee

The Board noted the GPAC report. Prof James-Chakraborty gave a brief overview of items discussed at the last GPAC meeting, which took place on 5th November:

i) GPAC External Members

Prof James-Chakraborty informed the Board that external members for GPAC were suggested at the meeting and that the profiles of two potential candidates for the Committee's consideration were circulated. Remote working has given the Board a great opportunity to accrue international experience for subcommittee work.

The Board approved Prof James-Chakraborty and Dr King's recommendations.

The Secretary agreed to circulate the profiles to the Board after the meeting today.

ii) Approval of two projects

Prof James-Chakraborty informed the Board that GPAC had expressed support for the following upcoming projects at the NMI:

1) The implementation phase of the NMI's Records Management Plan.

2) The execution of the Irish Folklife Division's Acquisitions Policy and Procedures for MSPI. Prof James-Chakraborty reported that the Keeper of Irish Folklife Division, Ms Doyle is eager to cultivate a collection that includes intangible heritage and objects from everywhere in Ireland.

iii) Upcoming exhibitions

Prof James-Chakraborty informed the Board that Dr Whitty gave the Committee an update on two recently approved exhibition proposals:

Manuscripts of St Gallen's exhibition

It is envisioned that the exhibition will be launched in late 2022 and will run for four months. On behalf of the NMI, Dr Whitty expressed her sincere thanks to external member of GPAC, Prof Dáibhí Ó Cróinín for his guidance.

Covid-19 Lockdown: Stoneybatter Youth Service Response

This exhibition will mark the first anniversary of the first lockdown in Ireland (March 2020) and will showcase artworks inspired by young people's experiences during this time.

b) Audit & Risk Committee

The Board noted the Audit & Risk report, and the report and financial summary were formally adopted by the Board. Mr Loughlin gave a brief overview of items discussed at the last Audit & Risk Committee meeting, which took place on 2nd November:

i) Financial Statements 2019

The Board noted the final version of the Financial Statements for 2019. Mr Loughlin informed the Board that the signed version of the Financial Statements for 2019 was approved by the Comptroller & Auditor General on 29th October 2019.

ii) the NMI's Recruitment Policy

Mr Loughlin reported that the Audit & Risk Committee approved the NMI's Recruitment Policy, with exception to amendments. The Board approved the final version of the NMI's Recruitment Policy.

iii) Managing Staff Wellbeing – Biggest Risk

Mr Loughlin informed the Board that the health and wellbeing of NMI staff was discussed as a priority for the NMI at the current time. As such there will continue to be a focus on health and well-being of staff, particularly during the winter months.



iv) Own Resources

Mr Loughlin highlighted that the NMI's own resources will need to be considered in greater detail at the next Audit & Risk Committee meeting, scheduled to take place on the 1st December.

b1) Discussion on Risk: Three Board meetings left before cessation of the current Board

Mr Loughlin informed the Board that all the NMI departments are currently developing their business plans for 2021. Mr Loughlin stressed that the continuity of the Board and its subcommittees in terms of input into the NMI's business planning, is a significant risk and will need to be discussed in more detail at the coming meetings.

Mr Loughlin strongly advised that all subcommittee members should consider risks that may arise if a full Board is not put in place by the final meeting of the current Board on 5th July 2021. Mr Loughlin pointed out that it will make be difficult for the NMI Executive to move forward with business planning and strategic plans if a full board/skills aren't put in place. Mr Loughlin advised that this should feature as an agenda item for the next few subcommittee meetings and that the agreed risks should be collated and brought to the attention of the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport & Media in early 2021.

The Board agreed that this would be a prudent approach take over the next few months and the chairs of the subcommittees agreed to table Risk as an agenda item for their upcoming meetings.

The Chair highlighted to the Board that there are only three full Board meetings left before the cessation of the current Board and advised that the June Board meeting be brought forward to the week before 5th July 2021.

The Secretary agreed to re-schedule the June Board meeting.

The Chair advised subcommittees to focus on prioritising risks and the approval of any key policies for the NMI to ensure that key developments and projects are not delayed.

The Board agreed to prioritise risks and the approval of any key policies for the NMI.

The Chairs agreed to convene a meeting with subcommittee chairs prior to the February Board meeting.

c) Strategy & Engagement Committee

The Board noted the Strategy & Engagement Committee report. Dr King gave the Board an overview on the Committee's key updates:

i) NMI's Social Media Policy

Dr King informed the Board that the Strategy & Engagement Committee approved the NMI's draft Social Media Policy and Guidelines with the exception of minor amendments. The amended versions will be re-circulated to the Management Committee and will be brought to the attention of the Board in due course.



ii) External Member for the Strategy & Engagement Committee

Dr King informed the Board that she had shared the names of two people whom she felt may be valuable contributors to the Strategy & Engagement Committee, one as an external member and the other as a once-off advisor for NMI's branding and identity project. The Committee had approved the recommendations for circulation to the Board.

The Board approved Dr King's recommendations.

The Secretary agreed to circulate the profiles to the Board after the meeting.

d) Capital & Estates Committee

The Committee noted the report. Mr Bowen took this opportunity to thank Dr Power who stepped in as Deputy Chair for the last Capital & Estates Committee meeting that took place on 9th November.

i) NMI – Natural History

Mr Bowen commended the NMI – Natural History team on the social media coverage on the NMI- Natural History project, and on recording the developments from the beginning of the project. Mr Bowen continued on to say that the recordings serve to emphasise the NMI as a fortunate custodian of some of Dublin's most beautiful historical buildings, and that having the developments visually documented will be an invaluable resource.

ii) Capital & Estates Terms of Reference

The Board noted the updated Terms of Reference for the Capital & Estates Committee. Mr Bowen notified the Board that the interface between the Capital & Estates Committee and the Audit & Risk Committee has been outlined within the updated Terms of Reference that has been attached for noting. **The Terms of Reference were approved by the Board.**

iii) External Members for Capital & Estates Committee

Mr Bowen informed the Board that he will be liaising with Ms Hurley regarding the appointment of external members onto the Capital & Estates Committee.

The Secretary agreed to arrange a call between Ms Hurley and Mr Bowen.

iv) Review of the National Development Plan

Mr Bowen informed the Board that he has been liaising with the Chair regarding the National Development Plan and queried whether the NMI should submit a response.

The Board agreed that it would be prudent to submit a response, particularly in terms of highlighting the NMI's significant capital project developments that are scheduled to take place over the next few years, and that it would be important to record from a public record perspective.

The Director agreed that she and Ms Hurley would draft correspondence and send to Mr Bowen for review prior to the submission deadline. The Secretary agreed to confirm the submission date.

v) Oireachtas Committee for the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media



The Chair informed the Board that she wrote to the recently appointed Chair of the Oireachtas Committee, Deputy Niamh Smyth on 7th October to firstly congratulate her on her new role. The Chair offered the NMI's assistance in providing relevant input and expertise pertaining to the NMI's role as a National Cultural Institution.

It was agreed that the NMI would assemble information packs for the Committee members that would outline the NMI's national role, NMI's Strategic Plan and Master Vision Statement and an overview of the NMI's current community engagement and education projects.

6.0 AOB and Items for Noting

a) Closure St Stephen's Day

The Director notified the Board that in line with other cultural institutions, the NMI will now close on St Stephen's Day going forward.

7.0 Closed Session

Dr King was nominated to participate in the annual progress meeting of the Director with the Chair of the Board. Upon request from the Secretary for Board feedback, the Board noted the Secretary's work and positive contribution.

End of meeting.