



Board of the National Museum of Ireland

21st November 2019, Palatine Room, Collins Barracks

Including end of year overview of NMI's *Strategic Plan 2019-2022* Progress Report

- Present:** Ms Catherine Heaney (Chair)
Prof Ingrid Hook
Prof Mary O'Dowd
Ms Denise Moroney
Mr Paolo Viscardi
Mr Ambrose Loughlin
Mr John Bowen
Mr Declan Nelson
Dr Linda King
Dr Andrew Power
- Apologies:** Ms Mary Crotty
Prof Kathleen James-Chakraborty
Ms Helen Shenton
Ms Judith McCarthy
- In attendance:** Ms Lynn Scarff (Director, NMI)
Mr Mark Sherry (Head of Finance
& Procurement (Item 6b))
Ms Jade Dillon (Secretary to the
Board, NMI)
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1. Opening of the meeting, apologies if any, adoption of the agenda

The Chair opened the meeting and conveyed apologies for Prof James-Chakraborty, Ms Shenton, Ms Crotty, Ms McCarthy and Ms Kearns. The Chair informed the Board that Mr Bowen would be joining the meeting at a later time and that Mr Viscardi would be leaving the meeting early.

2. Minutes of the meeting of 12th September 2019 and matters arising

The minutes were approved with the exception of a minor error in the attendee list. Ms Dillon agreed to amend accordingly.

Matter arising:

The Director informed the Board that NMI had received a letter from Minister Madigan outlining NMI's allocation from the DCHG for 2020, which was proposed Dr Power and seconded by Ms Moroney.



3. Executive Report by the Chair and the Director

The Director gave the Board an overview of the Executive Report that was circulated to Board members prior to the meeting.

Recruitment:

The Director informed the Board that NMI's new Head of Operations, Ms Aoife Hurley would be commencing employment at NMI on the 25th November 2019.

It was agreed that the Head of Ops to be invited to the January 2020 meeting.

The Director further reported that a new Head of I.T had been selected and will take up position in January 2020.

Retail Team:

The Director informed the Board that the Retail team had recorded a significant increase in profit for 2019 and the Board commended Ms Terri McInerney and Mr Shane Sterio for their hard work through the year.

Visit to NMNI:

The Director reported that she and the Head of Collections & Learning, Dr Audrey Whitty visited the National Museum Northern Ireland to discuss joint programming and the development of a Memorandum of Understanding between the two museums. The Chair informed the Board that she visited NMNI separately to further discuss the MoU.

Deputy Martin's Visit to NMI:

The Chair informed the Board that she and the Director hosted a visit and tour of NMI – Archaeology for Deputy Micheál Martin. Main topics of discussion included cultural institutions and capital developments. The Chair reported that Deputy Martin conveyed genuine interest in the NMI collection and the *Strategic Plan 2019-2022*.

Ireland in Focus: Photographing the 1950s launch by President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins

The Board agreed that the launch of the Ireland in Focus: Photographing the 1950s exhibition was a great success and agreed that the level of attendance was exceptional. The Board agreed that the President, Michael D. Higgins' speech was eloquent, authentic and complimentary to the current ambitions of the NMI; particularly in relation to making accessible spaces available to the public for culture to thrive. The Director thanked the Board members who graciously volunteered to meet and greet the Ambassadors who were present on the evening.

The Director informed the Board that the launch was covered extensively by the media and that the response from the public has been very positive.

Visitor Figures

The Director informed the Board that visitor figures for the NMI are up 11% for 2019 compared to last year. The Director further reported that there was a very slight decrease in footfall in NMI – Country Life. Some discussions followed in relation to NMI's outreach strategies and ways to communicating with the public.

Mr Bowen joined the meeting.



4. Special Discussion Topic and Discussion: Review of 2019 and Priorities for 2020

The Chair informed the Board that the Director would be presenting on what NMI has achieved in 2019 in terms of NMI's *Strategic Plan 2019-2022*. The Chair encouraged the Board members to participate and ask questions throughout the Director's presentation.

2019 Overview of NMI's *Strategic Plan 2019-2022* Progress Report:

Pillar 1: Capacity 1. NMI Team

Objective: *to deliver a programme for change that develops and strengthens the team's ethos and spirit*

Progress Report: The Director gave an overview of NMI's phase 1 of Project Engage; NMI's strategic approach to improving staff wellbeing and interdepartmental communications.

The Director reported that 17 departmental workshops took place, 128 staff members, initial site meetings, Final report and implementation plan due to be received during the week of 25th November.

Key Projects: Workforce Plan, Organisational Structures, Systems and Processes, Initiatives addressing Institutional Culture.

Objective: *Develop a workforce plan and recruitment policies aligned with our values, and based on an analysis of the skills and diversity of the team*

Progress Report: The Director reported that there has been great progress in relation to recruitment of senior positions within NMI, including a Head of Operations, Head of Collections and Learning, Head of Finance and Head of I.T.

Key HR policies have also been drafted and reviewed by NMI's Audit and Risk Committee and will be discussed later in the Board meeting.

2. Buildings

Objective: *Design, develop and initiate the redevelopment and refurbishment project for the NMI – Natural History*

Progress Report: The Director informed the Board that the Preliminary appraisal for NMI - Natural History has been finalised and signed by Minister Madigan. A steering group will now be established between the Department, OPW and NMI. The Director re-iterated to the Board that the new Head of Operations, Ms Aoife Hurley will have a crucial role in driving the Natural History Project forward.

Objective: *Prepare a detailed development and control plan for the CRC to address all risks documented in 2018*

Progress Report: The Director summarised the recent developments in relation to the Collections Resource Centre and informed the Board that NMI are planning for a sustainable



solution that is mapped onto a preliminary business appraisal with a detailed brief. This document will be then sent to the Department of Culture, Heritage & the Gaeltacht for review.

3. Systems

Objective: *Stress-test our compliance ensuring all policies are up to date, and make changes where compliance fails or falls short*

Progress Report: The Director gave a summary of the steps that have been taken in 2019 to mitigate risk including the finalising of NMI's Risk Policy and Risk Register, risk training with management and NMI staff.

Pillar 2 – Collections

Achieving Excellence:

Objective: *Create the resources and expertise needed in exhibitions development and project management, to deliver on audience needs through the latest theory and practice in interpretation*

Progress Report: The Director reported that an Audience Research Group was initiated in 2019 and a tender for audience research is to go out in January 2020. The Director reported that new exhibitions policies have been developed by Dr Whitty and Mr Monaghan and have been initially been reviewed by GPAC. An Exhibition Working Group had also been established in early 2019.

Board Discussion: discussions followed the Director's overview of the progress on audience research at NMI. The Director informed the Board that a variation of methodologies are to be instigated and will be a crucial tool in setting campaigns and outreach programming over the following years.

Dr Power emphasised the importance of investing in new strategies in terms of communicating with the public about events and exhibition launches at NMI.

Objective: *Work to achieve MSPI accreditation within the timeframe of this strategic plan collection care*

Progress Report: The Director reported to the Board that MSPI policies have been developed by Dr Whitty and Mr Monaghan.

Board Discussion: Prof O'Dowd emphasised the importance of the role of research in terms of NMI's goal in 'achieving excellence'.

Pillar 3: Engagement Programming



Objective: *Develop and implement a process-led approach to exhibition planning and development, including major exhibitions and themed displays*

Progress Report: The Director gave an overview of the actions taken over the last year to establish a new planning approach for temporary exhibitions and that six temporary exhibitions developed and opened in 2019.

Objective: *Complete the design for the History of Ireland series of galleries within the Decade of Centenaries (by 2023), opening an exhibition on the Foundation of the State for 2022*

Progress Report: The Director recapped on the initial planning of the *History of Ireland* series of galleries and re-iterated to the Board that progress is underway.

Branding and Identity

Objective: *Develop an identity for NMI that addresses improved wayfinding on site and assisting audience engagement*

Progress Report: The Director reported that an updated dual language signage project is currently in development.

Board Discussion: some discussions followed in relation to NMI's engagement with academic institutions and cultural institutions. The Director informed the Board that NMI is collaborating with a number of notable cultural bodies, including the establishment of a Memorandum of Understanding with the National Museum of Wales.

The Director gave an overview of NMI's 2020 priorities, including the implementation of Phase 2 of Project Engage, developments for Natural History and the Collections Resource Centre and event/exhibition programming.

The Chair thanked the Director for her comprehensive reported on objectives achieved in 2019.

6. Committee Reports

a) HR Committee (overview of policies)

The Chair invited members of the Board to provide comments on the HR policy drafts that had been circulated with November Board papers. The Board considered the drafts and approved the drafts with the exception of a few minor amendments.

Board Vacancies

The Chair informed the Board that the advertisement for the two Board vacancies are due to be advertised in Q1 2020. **The Chair informed the Board that she will be arranging individual meetings with Committee members in the next coming weeks to discuss Committee strategies for 2020.**



b) Audit and Risk Committee (overview of end of year financial reports)

Mr Loughlin formally welcomed Mr Sherry to the meeting as NMI's recently appointed Head of Finance and Procurement. Mr Loughlin updated the Board on the NMI's current finances. Mr Loughlin notified the Board that NMI's Financial Statements 2018 were signed and sent to the Office of the Comptroller & Auditor General on the 14th November 2019. The Board noted the time pressure from the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General that the financial statements be signed and accordingly ratified as finalised and their signature by the Chair and Mr Loughlin.

Mr Viscardi left the meeting.

Mr Loughlin updated the Board on NMI's Risk Policy and Risk Register and minor amendments that have been suggested by the Audit & Risk Committee. The Board approved both documents with the exception of a minor amendment.

Ms Dillon agreed to liaise with Ms McBride from NMI's HR/Corporate Affairs Unit in relation to the amendment.

It was agreed that the Risk Policy and Risk Register would be noted at NMI's Q4 meeting with the Department that is due to take place on the 3rd December 2019.

Update from Mr Sherry, NMI's Head of Finance and Procurement

Mr Sherry gave the Board an overview on the NMI's current financial processes and priorities for the Financial Department from 2020 onwards. Mr Sherry remarked that the Government's decision to migrate to accrual accounting will be beneficial to the NMI.

The Chair formally welcomed Mr Sherry to the Museum and reported that the Board is open to fully engaging with NMI in the budgetary process.

b) Development and Strategy Committee

Mr Bowen gave an update on the Development & Strategy Committee.

Collections Resource Centre

Mr Bowen informed the Committee that the CRC Steering Group had been re-established and The Director and Ms Finlay, NMI's Registrar and Collections Resource Centre Manager, will be utilising the NHM Preliminary Report as a template for drafting a preliminary report for the CRC.

Natural History

Mr Bowen informed the Board that NMI's new Head of Operations, Ms Aoife Hurley has been invited to the next Development & Strategy meeting to give a report on the remedial works required for NMI buildings.

Retail

Mr Bowen reported that Ms Terri McInerney and Mr Shane Sterio gave the Development & Strategy Committee a report on the commercial and operations retail figures at the last meeting. Mr Bowen informed the Board that significant forward progress has been made and that the figures reported were a testimony to the Retail team's commitment to the *NMI's Strategic Plan 2019-2022*.

The Chair thanked Mr Bowen for his update. **The Chair proposed that to extend the agenda for a further 20 minutes. Ms Dillon agreed to take note.**



c) GPAC Committee

Prof O'Dowd updated the Board in place of Prof James-Chakraborty.

MSPI Policies

Prof O'Dowd informed the Board that 6 draft copies of NMI's policies for Collections and Collections Strategies had been circulated to GPAC for sign-off i.e. 1) *NMI's Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Prevention Policy*, 2) *NMI's Acquisitions Policy*, 3) *NMI's Disposal Policy*, 4) *NMI's Human Remains Policy*, 5) *NMI's Natural History Division Acquisitions Strategy* and 6) *NMI's Irish Antiquities Division Acquisitions Strategy*. The Director invited the Board to offer feedback on the MSPI policies. **Prof O'Dowd, on behalf of the Chair of GPAC, Prof James-Chakraborty, recommended the adoption of the above-mentioned policies and the Board formally agreed.**

The Director commended Dr Whitty, NMI's Head of Collections & Learning, and Mr Monaghan, Keeper of Natural History for their considerable work on drafting the policies. The Director further commended GPAC for their interrogation of the policies.

e) Strategic Plan Committee (Project Engage Strategic Plan for 2020)

The Director gave the Board a detailed step-by-step report on the Project Engage Strategic Plan 2019 and goals for 2020. The Director informed the Board that a Steering Group had been established to assist in the implementation of the strategy.

Staff Newsletter

The Director informed the Board that the Staff Newsletter will be distributed every two months. The Board agreed that the staff newsletter is a useful means of acknowledging the work of staff.

7. AOB

The Chair reminded the Board that the Department of Culture, Heritage & the Gaeltacht's Corporate Governance Training session would take place in the Palatine Room, Collins Barracks on the 26th November 2019 and encouraged members to attend.

The Chair informed the Board that she and the Director had been kindly invited to Leinster House on the 13th November 2019 for dinner with Ceann Comhairle, Seán Ó Fearghaíl. Ceann Comhairle, Seán Ó Fearghaíl wished to thank the NMI for the use of the Ceramics Room.

End of meeting.