

Meeting of Toscaireacht, via Zoom.

11am – 1pm, 23 November 2020 via Zoom

Present

Anne Haverty (Chair), Enda Wyley, Geraldine O'Reilly, Michael Holohan, Gerard Smyth, Grainne Mulvey, Mary O'Donnell, Theo Dorgan, Eamon Colman, Deirdre Kinahan

Zoom Host

Karen Hennessy (Registrar Aosdána)

Minutes and Matters arising

Gerard Smyth proposed the minutes of 27 July meeting and Theo Dorgan seconded. No matters arising.

Postal Elections 2020

The success of the postal election process was discussed. With an 83% return in ballots it was very successful. It was stated that a postal ballot is always feasible for members if unable to attend a General Assembly due to ill health or unavoidably outside of Ireland and that members should be reminded of this each year.

Call for Nominations 2021

It was thought that given the Christmas period that the timeframe of 6 weeks, whilst being the usual timeframe, was too tight and that it would be better to extend it. It was decided to extend it by 2 weeks until 18 January 2021. Given that any possible vaccine would not be rolled out until Spring 2021 that the earliest the Assembly could take place is June 2021. Ideally early June if restrictions allow. Having a June date allows the Registrar to extend the call for nominations closing date by 2 weeks and complete the discipline ballot process before the Assembly date. The Registrar can communicate to members that the earliest date will be June 2021. It was mentioned that zoom could be considered for members 'nomination speeches' should the necessity occur.

Membership Composition

The letter issued with the 'call for nomination's by the Registrar and Chair had resulted in positive feedback overall however a letter in response to it was negative and submitted by the member to the Toscaireacht to be an item on the Agenda. The letter issued by the Registrar had outlined the following composition after the recent elections.

DISCIPLINE	Discipline as % of Membership	No. of MEMBERS	No. Male	% Male within Discipline	No. Female	% Female within Discipline
Architecture	3%	8	4	50%	4	50%
Choreography	2%	5	2	40%	3	60%
Literature	38%	94	62	66%	32	34%
Music	13%	32	25	78%	7	22%
Visual Art	44%	110	63	57%	47	45%
TOTAL Members		249	156		93	
% per gender			63%		37%	

Anne Haverty said that she considers the letter an important tool in awareness raising and building consciousness. There was overall support for this. It was emphasised that it has no intention to influence nominations and that all candidates who are nominated should in the first instance be held in high esteem and have created a significant body of work and made an outstanding contribution to their art-form and to the creative arts in Ireland. The Registrar will feed this back to the member.

Theo Dorgan outlined that he is drafting a memo to all members in relation to composition which he considers to be an important issue. He outlined that it is currently an item for discussion by the Arts Council/Aosdána working group. Theo would like to issue a letter to members in advance of the next working group meeting. It is not known when the date is for the next meeting. The Registrar will check with the Chair of the working group. It is likely to be mid Dec at the earliest but could be in January 2021.

Theo invites all members of the Toscaireacht to contribute to the memo to members and to send on comments and contributions within the next 7 – 14 days. The memo will issue to the membership via the Registrar and will invite all members to consider the composition of Aosdána and to reflect on salient features which include: the gender imbalance; the imbalance in art-form representation; how genres within art-forms are represented. It will also outline the difficulty in being aware of all artists producing great work and of the growing diversity within the population of Ireland. The question of how to reflect this growing population and diversity in Aosdána was discussed. The memo will reflect also on how all members have a right and a duty to nominate.

It was mentioned that not all members nominate and that new members may not feel empowered to nominate. The Registrar was requested to look at the past 5 – 7 years and look at the proportion of male and female nominators and if the candidates they nominate are male or female. Statistics were requested in relation to the recent election. A total of 7 male candidates and 6 female candidates were elected. Of these 13 candidates 7 of the nominators were male and and 6 female.

The guidelines for nominators issued by the Registrar had been drawn up to encourage members who do not usually nominate to feel confident to nominate.

Discussion ensued on the merits or otherwise of increasing the number of members with viewpoints on how this could and if it would correct imbalances. It was suggested that a proposal could be made to the Arts Council to increase the membership by 50 new members across 3 years. The Chair outlined that the Arts Council has proposed to increase the membership by 10 new members and that this deserves consideration. Theo Dorgan outlined that the memo to members is a proactive step to encourage members to consider questions of fairness, justice and imbalance and that this action enables the Toscaireacht to communicate directly with the membership.

The Registrar outlined that she had received queries around membership composition from different sources including 'Lets Talk About Dance' – Dance Sector; ISACS Director and an independent music practitioner. Their queries had to do with under-representation of their art-form and genres within art-forms within the membership of Aosdána. The Registrar outlined that these enquirers were heartened to hear that these issues were being discussed and that statistics were being looked at.

Theo outlined that a focus on art-forms and genres is needed and that this should be part of a future Agenda of the Toscaireacht and also of the Arts Council/Aosdána working group. This needs further discussion.

Grainne Mulvey item “RTÉ NSO and the Concert Orchestra to please consider programming more contemporary Irish composers’ works in their future schedules. In light of the pandemic, it has been difficult for composers to secure performances with larger ensembles. It is imperative to ensure the continued high level of ensemble and orchestral composition writing in this country. “

It was considered to be a very important request and it was suggested that Grainne draft a public letter to the Irish Times with signatories. It was thought that this would have more effect than a letter from all members. The signatories could sign stating that they are a member of Aosdána.

Eithne Shortall Irish Times piece

The piece by Eithne Shortall listing candidates up for election via postal vote in lieu of the General Assembly was discussed. This detail on candidates may have come from a member as it did not come from the Registrar. It is insensitive to print this detail as it reflects negatively on an artist if they are not successful at the election. It is confidential information and should not be leaked to the press. It was requested that the Registrar insert a line into the Discipline Ballot paper and the General Assembly Ballot paper stating that all information on candidates is **confidential** and that it should on no circumstances be shared externally. The Registrar will look to do this once the time comes to draft these ballot papers.

Aosdána/Arts Council Working Group Update

The Artistic Attainment Advisory Guideline as edited and approved by the Toscaireacht at their 27 July meeting was noted by the Council at the 18 November plenary.

The proposed 40th anniversary publication was approved at the 18 November plenary. The Toscaireacht agreed to Theo Dorgan's proposal of Gerard Smyth to the panel to select the writer/historian for the publication. The Registrar will feed this back to the Arts Council/Aosdána working group and inform of the next steps.

In relation to the Cnuas the Registrar gave an update that the Council is currently evaluating its budgetary approach for 2021 including, an examination of the value of awards and bursaries across the sector. The Cnuas is part of this. A Cnuas review/or Cnuas Appraisal which has been discussed at the last two working group meetings will involve examining components of the Cnuas: namely the value of the Cnuas; the threshold options and the question in relation to the State pension. A scoping out of this will go to the next Council plenary 3 Dec. Once approved the work on the appraisal can begin. It is intended to make this as short as possible, thereby having the recommendations early Spring 2021.

Arts Council ICT Business Transformation Project Update

The Registrar informed that the Arts Council ICT transformation project is on-going (this involves updating the Arts Council online services and improving the process for all users of liaising with the Arts Council online). The first step in the process of bringing Aosdána online is to involve representatives of the Toscaireacht on the working group for user testing. Enda Wyley and Deirdre Kinahan had previously volunteered to be part of this group and had not yet participated due to the summer holiday break. This user testing will begin again in April/May and the Registrar will keep Enda and Deirdre informed. Theo outlined that there would need to be a mechanism for those members who were unable to operate online not to be left behind. The Registrar outlined that only 18 members are not online and that currently they receive assistance from the Arts Council as well as from colleagues when needed and that this could continue in those situations where it was necessary.

Letter from member in relation to honouring deceased members

The letter was discussed and thought to be very appropriate. There is a time constraint however in honouring each deceased member at a General Assembly with a 10 minute eulogy. This would have resulted in 2hours 20 minutes if it had occurred at what would have been the most recent Assembly. An alternative version could be to show an image of the member and have a one line statement read by a representative member. Further discussion on this will take place at the next meeting. The Registrar will get back to the member on this.

Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was set at 25 January 2021 with the purpose of reviewing nominations. The deadline for nominations is 18 January 2021.

AOB

It was stated that requests to circulate items to the membership should be run past the Toscaireacht by the Registrar. It was also stated that political items should not be sent to the membership unless thoroughly checked. It was suggested that in the current instance that the Registrar contact the member and recommend he ask fellow members that he knows personally.

Action Items

- Registrar to reissue the 'Call for Nominations' with revised deadline of 18 Jan 2021.
- The Registrar will respond to the member who had queried the 'Call for Nominations' letter.
- The Registrar to check with the Chair of the Arts Council/Aosdána working group on the date of the next meeting.
- Members of the Toscaireacht to respond to Theo's memo on membership composition and contribute to this memo to members within the next 7 – 14 days.
- The Registrar was requested to look over the past 5 – 7 years at the proportion of male and female nominators and if the candidates they nominate are male or female.
- Registrar to include a focus on art-forms and genres on future Agenda of the Toscaireacht and also of the Arts Council/Aosdána working group.
- Grainne Mulvey will draft and issue a letter to the Irish Times and ask fellow members to be signatories.
- The Registrar will insert a line into the Discipline Ballot paper and the General Assembly Ballot paper stating that all information on candidates is confidential and under no circumstances should it be shared externally.
- The Registrar will inform the Arts Council/Aosdána working group that Gerard Smyth will be part of the panel for the 40th anniversary publication and will come back with the next steps.
- The Registrar will keep Enda and Deirdre informed of user testing in relation to the ICT transformation project.
- Further discussion on how to commemorate deceased members will take place at the next meeting. The Registrar will include it on the Agenda and get back to the member who raised it.