

Minutes of Meeting of Aosdána Toscaireacht

12 – 2pm, Friday 9 August 2024

Present in person

Cecily Brennan, Amanda Coogan, Grainne Mulvey, Evelyn Conlon, Jimmy Murphy, Mick O'Dea, John McLachlan, Peter Sirr

Present online

John Scott

Apologies

Eithne Jordan

Welcome of new Toscaireacht and election of Chair

Karen Hennessy (Registrar) welcomed the new Toscaireacht. Aidan White, Aosdána Assistant was also present to welcome the new Toscaireacht.

The Registrar opened the meeting with the first item on the Agenda, to discuss and elect a new Chair. Eithne Jordan had provided a proxy vote in her absence which was included in the pack of documents for each member. Mick O'Dea proposed Cecily Brennan as Chair and Amanda Coogan seconded this proposal. Cecily Brennan accepted and was elected Chair and assumed the role of Chair for the meeting. There was inconclusive discussion as to the validity of a proxy vote and in fact the Chair was elected by acclamation.

Cecily spoke to the meeting about her aspirations as Chair and that she wanted to focus on transparency, communicating more openly with the membership, constructing well-reasoned arguments for increase in numbers, based on facts, clarity, and pride in our affiliation, a more effective relationship with the Arts Council and creating a warm, respectful and friendly environment for the members when we meet, allowing free expression of differences of opinion.

Meeting with last Toscaireacht

The final report from the previous Toscaireacht had suggested that it would be beneficial if they met the new Toscaireacht and it was felt that an opportunity to meet would be very useful. Discussion ensued on the best way to do this. The Registrar will invite all of the previous Toscairi to a meeting on the same day as the next Toscaireacht meeting. Holding both meetings on the same day is more beneficial for those who have to travel to Dublin.

The Registrar had provided many documents to the new Toscaireacht. It was asked if these could be grouped into virtual folders each containing all material relating to each item on the agenda.

It was also asked if minutes from the Aosdána/Arts Council Working Group meetings could be shared. The Registrar will share these minutes as well as the background to setting up this Working Group.

It was asked if The Aosdána/Arts Council working group could be an item on the next Agenda. The Registrar will include it on the next Agenda and explained that the Arts Council proposes that it continues to operate in the format of 2 – 3 Toscaireacht members meeting with the Registrar and the Director.

EDI Work Group Report

Cecily outlined the background to the EDI Work Group and gave details on the two meetings to date. All members of Aosdána were invited to each meeting and approximately 12 members attended both meetings. The work group had met for discussion on Zoom on 2 occasions, out of which a draft EDI Policy Document is being prepared. Cecily will look to bring this document to the Toscaireacht for its consideration once it is finalised.

Equality Questionnaire

Despite the low response rate of approximately 25% it was thought justified to those who had responded to continue with collation and analysis. Heather Maitland, External Researcher, appointed by the Arts Council is preparing a report. Heather met with the EDI Work Group. It was thought useful to have Heather present her report to the Toscaireacht. The Registrar will check if Heather can do a 10 minute presentation with 5 minute Q&A at the next Toscaireacht meeting.

Aosdána Handbook

As per the Motion put by Cecily Brennan at the previous General Assembly the Aosdána Handbook is to be prepared for distribution to the members for discussion prior to the next General Assembly in 2025.

It was asked who is the Handbook for? Is it for members only or a wider public? If it is for a wider public it is important to use Plain English so that it is accessible. Also if it is for public consumption it should be more approachable by including a preamble mentioning making art in various disciplines or such.

The current draft will require input from the new Toscaireacht as well as consultation with members at large. In order to do this it was thought that firstly the new Toscaireacht should discuss the function of the Handbook at their next meeting and then we would work together on the document.

Saoi Nomination

The process for electing a new Saoi was outlined by the Registrar as there is a candidate being put forward. As it requires 50% plus one of the entire membership to vote in favour of the new Saoi it was thought best to wait until Sep to issue the ballot sheets for voting. The Registrar will communicate with the nominator and the candidate that this is the proposed time frame. It was outlined that there currently 4 vacancies so even with one vacancy filled there will still remain 3 vacancies. Members should be informed of this when the ballot sheet is issued.

New Members meeting

It was welcomed that Toscaireacht members attended the second new members meeting held in the Arts Council. It was recognised that this is an important opportunity for new members to get to know each other as well as the Arts Council and the Toscaireacht and as such it is best if all can attend.

Cnuas threshold

The Toscaireacht asked to see the KPMG report which had been presented to Council prior to the increase in the Cnuas from 17,180 to 20,180. The Registrar will ask internally for this.

Members Contact Details

The Registrar outlined that she will follow on from the Motion, see below, passed at the General Assembly March 2024 for members contact details to be passed on to the Toscaireacht.

“We request that the registrar contact all members of Aosdána to give their permission for their name, emails and addresses to be given as a list for the Toscaireacht, that this list be maintained by the Toscaireacht for the sole purpose of communicating with the members of Aosdána taking all due proper legal safeguards to protect the information.”

It was outlined that it needs to be taken into consideration that in this instance it would be the Toscaireacht who is the data controller and as such will have to follow all GDPR requirements and “all due proper legal safeguards to protect the information.”

It was also outlined that it is highly likely that not all members will want to share details in which case the Toscaireacht need to consider that they would only be communicating with part of the membership and that this excludes others.

The Registrar pointed out also that all communication by members of the Toscaireacht in their role as Toscairi is subject to Freedom of Information. It does not need to include communication with the Arts Council but can be communication external to the Arts Council and includes communication from any email and any device. The Registrar can ask the Arts Council’s FOI /GDPR Officer to speak to the Toscaireacht at the next meeting

Aosdána Statement of Values

It was outlined that as a result of the motion passed at the previous General Assembly the Statement of Values now contains the reference to inherited ‘discriminations’. This is an important consideration in relation to drafting the Aosdána Handbook which includes the Statement of Values.

Aosdána status

It was recognised that Aosdána is an affiliation and not an organisation.

Writers in the Irish Language

It was decided that this needed further discussion and as such should go to a future agenda.

AOB

A letter to the Toscaireacht from a member in relation to the Cnuas and the Arts Council Bursary was thought best to include on a future Agenda as it requires some discussion

Dates for the Open Forum and the General Assembly should also be on the next Agenda.

It was decided that the Registrar should issue a doodle poll for the next Toscaireacht meeting to be in approximately 6 weeks time.