



## **AOSDÁNA HANDBOOK**

### **1 What is Aosdána?**

Aosdána is an autonomous affiliation of artists established by the Government in 1981 to honour artists whose work has made an outstanding contribution to the creative arts in Ireland—and to assist members, where necessary, to devote their energies full-time to the practice of their art.

Aosdána is funded by the state through the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon, which is charged with the handling of all of Aosdána's administrative and financial arrangements and accounts for its operation in its annual report to the Oireachtas.

The governing body of Aosdána is the General Assembly which takes place annually (see below at 7).

### **2 Criteria for membership and process for electing members**

By peer nomination and election, Aosdána honours and supports artists of the disciplines of visual arts, literature, music, architecture and choreography whose distinguished body of work has made an outstanding contribution to the creative arts in Ireland and who have demonstrated a sustained dedication to their art practice.

1. Artists can be born on the island of Ireland (hereinafter Ireland) or be a resident in Ireland for at least 5 consecutive years prior to being elected.

2. Artists born in Ireland but resident outside of Ireland are eligible for membership.

In all cases (1 and 2 above) an artists' work must be considered to make an outstanding contribution to the creative arts in Ireland.

These are the only criteria which must be met by candidates, the only criteria to be employed when nominating candidates for membership.

The process of nomination and election is as follows:

#### ***Stage 1***

##### ***Nomination Process***

Any member may nominate an artist for membership of Aosdána. Another member must second this proposal. Unsolicited applications for

membership are not accepted. There is no limit to the number of artists that any member may nominate or second for membership.

Nominations must be accompanied by a strong recommendation written by the two nominating artists, indicating their personal conviction that their nominee is a worthy candidate for membership, and offering a personal critical response to the work of the nominated artist.

Nominators are required to provide a full CV and a short biography for the nominated artist. A written agreement from the nominee that they are prepared to be nominated is also required along with a description or list of where and/or how the work of the artist can be viewed or accessed.

Nominators should note that the submission of lists of works and curriculae vitae are not sufficient in themselves.

It is the responsibility of the nominator to provide to the Registrar a postal address and telephone number at which the nominee can be contacted after the nomination has been approved. This is to ensure the nominee's acceptance has been secured. Failure to secure this acceptance shall cause the nomination to fail.

Third party quotations and appraisals will not be accepted on any of the nominating papers.

Short quotations from the person being nominated are permitted in letters of nomination from the proposer and seconder, which may include quotations from the nominee's writings, extracts from artist's statements and such like.

Any form of canvassing by candidates is unacceptable and will invalidate the nomination.

The Toscaireacht of Aosdána (see below at 8) will read and note all nominations received and satisfy themselves that the terms of the nomination process have been properly complied with before it enters the next stage.

## ***Stage 2***

### ***The Discipline Ballot***

Once the nomination stage is complete, the lists of candidates (together with relevant information about their work) are forwarded for ballot to the members under their respective artistic disciplines.

Stage 2 is conducted through postal and email ballots. A blank returned ballot sheet counts as a 'no' vote.

Ballot papers for all disciplines must be returned, properly completed, by

a specified closing date. A discipline must have 6 or more members to conduct its own discipline ballot vote. In the case whereby the discipline has 5 or less members the discipline is voted upon by all 250 members.

The Registrar shall undertake the counting of ballots in the second stage; the Toscaireacht shall nominate a member of the Toscaireacht to assist in this process. The quota necessary to go forward to the General Assembly is 50% plus 1 of ballots received in each discipline by the specified date as "Yes" votes.

Following the completion of this stage, the Registrar shall communicate with the nominators and their candidates, advising them of the outcome. The names of candidates who achieve the discipline ballot quota will then be forwarded to the General Assembly

### ***Stage 3***

#### ***The General Assembly vote***

In advance of the General Assembly, all members shall receive adequate information about every candidate for election in all disciplines; that is to say, relevant information regarding all candidates who have been successful in the discipline ballot.

All members present at the General Assembly shall be eligible to vote. Members who cannot attend the General Assembly because of infirmity or unavoidable absence from the country may apply to the Registrar in advance for a postal vote. All votes cast in the election whether by those present or by those submitting a postal vote will be and will remain anonymous.

Time is provided at the General Assembly for nominators to propose the election of their candidate(s). Only one such address is heard in relation to each candidate. In the absence of the proposer, the seconder shall speak to the nomination.

In the event that neither proposer nor seconder are present, the nomination (having already been approved by the discipline) shall be deferred until the next General Assembly, when the candidacy shall be proposed by the same nominator and seconder, by the original nominator or seconder together with one other member, or by a new nominator and seconder, with the written agreement of the candidate forwarded to the Registrar.

At the General Assembly, a ballot paper is circulated to each member, listing the names of candidates for election. The candidate with the greatest number of votes will be deemed to be elected to the first available place, the candidate with the next greatest number of votes will be deemed to be elected to the second available place and so on for the remaining available places.

In the event of a tie between two or more candidates for the last available place, a postal ballot will be arranged as soon as possible to decide the matter. In this instance

the unsuccessful candidate or candidates will, with their consent in writing, be automatically put forward for election at the following General Assembly.

The names of successful candidates are announced before the end of the General Assembly, and the Registrar advises these candidates as soon as possible of the outcome. The Registrar shall also communicate with the nominators and seconders of those candidates who have not secured election, informing them that a process exists to carry the nomination forward to Stage Three at two further General Assemblies.

Because the number of candidates for membership frequently exceeds the number of available vacancies and to avoid the requirement for re-nomination, candidates for election who have satisfactorily completed stages one and two but are unsuccessful at the following General Assembly are automatically re-nominated to stage three for the subsequent General Assembly. Should a candidate fail to be elected at this second General Assembly, their candidacy is automatically carried forward one more time.

This process requires the written agreement of the nominee and their nominator and seconder (or failing one or both of their original nominator and seconder, the nominee may be proposed and/or seconded by one or two other members).

A candidate failing to be elected at three consecutive General Assemblies may be nominated again but must be put forward through the three-stage process as a fresh nomination.

Once elected, an artist remains a member of Aosdána for life unless they submit their resignation in writing to the Toscaireacht.

Membership of Aosdána is a signal honour. All members across the disciplines are expected to include mention of their membership in the biographical details they provide for publications.

### **3 Number of members**

At present, in 2025, membership is limited to 250 artists. The limit on numbers is set by The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon.

### **4 Aosdána's Statement of Values**

'WHEREAS Aosdána is an independent affiliation of artists that, when places become available, elects to its membership, by peer selection, artists who have by the quality of their work made a significant contribution to their art form

AND WHEREAS Members nominating and seconding candidates for election to the honour of membership do so free from constraint and in accordance with their own independent best judgement

WE STATE AND CONFIRM That members have made, make and will continue to make every effort to inform themselves fully when identifying suitably qualified artists deserving of the honour.

WE FURTHER STATE Our unswerving commitment to undertaking that duty in a spirit of principled commitment to demonstrable equity, informed by a lively and inquiring sense of new and emerging art forms, an awareness of inherited historical discriminations in the representation of women artists and embracing the obligation to keep actively in mind how questions of class, gender, ability/disability, and ethnicity, can act to obscure significant achievements by individual artist.'

## **5 Saoithe**

A number of members are recognised for particularly outstanding achievement and distinction by election to the honour and title of Saoi. At any one time, there may not be more than seven Saoithe. The honour is symbolised and represented by the conferring of a gold torc, which is presented by the President of Ireland.

To elect a Saoi, fifteen members must nominate a candidate of merit and distinction. The Toscaireacht shall ensure that the nomination has been made according to this rule.

Election occurs by postal ballot of all the members. A successful outcome will consist of 50% plus 1 YES votes of the entire membership, voting by postal ballot. An election shall take place as soon as may be practicable, following satisfactory nomination. Only one nomination for Saoi per vacancy may be accepted at a time. In the case of multiple vacancies among the Saoithe, only one nomination at a time may be processed.

Where two or more artists are proposed at the same time, only the first proposal received shall be forwarded for election to the membership. The second and any subsequent ones shall be held in abeyance until the result of the election is known, and there is a further vacancy.

The Registrar will be the teller for the ballot. All voting papers cast shall be available for scrutiny. Ballot papers will be held for six calendar years from the closing date of the election.

The President, will be invited to confer the honour of Saoi on the newly elected Saoi in the presence of The Chair of the Toscaireacht, The Chair of The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon and The Director of The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon.

## **6 The Cnuas**

In establishing Aosdána, the government also established the Cnuas, a payment designed to make it possible for members to devote their energies fulltime to their art practice.

All members are entitled to receive the Cnuas, provided they meet certain conditions. Cnuas guidelines and an application form are available from the Registrar.

Receipt of the Cnuas is subject to a non-Cnuas income threshold. The threshold is treated on a three-year averaging basis; a Cnuas recipient may earn over the threshold in a given year, under the threshold in a preceding or subsequent year, it is the average that counts.

A recipient may suspend the Cnuas for a specific number of payments. If the suspension period goes over 12 months the member must reapply.

The Revenue Commissioners have designated the Cnuas as non-taxable for persons designated as having Artist's Tax Exemption. The Cnuas is subject to USC (the Universal Social Charge) and PRSI (Pay Related Social Insurance).

It is granted through The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon to allow eligible Aosdána members a minimum standard of living and working conditions, and to help them to concentrate their time and energy on the full-time pursuit of their art.

The Cnuas is granted for a five-year term and may be renewed upon completion of the five-year term. In this instance, members must re-apply using the Cnuas application form. Members wishing to renew their Cnuas must demonstrate that they have completed work of merit during the preceding five years.

Cnuas recipients receive payments quarterly in advance, made automatically for three-quarters of the year, that is, January 1<sup>st</sup>, July 1<sup>st</sup> and October 1<sup>st</sup>. The April payment will only be paid when the recipient member completes and submits an Annual Artistic Activity Report to the Registrar outlining the nature of the creative activity in which he/she has been engaged and confirming compliance with the eligibility criteria for receiving the Cnuas.

The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon publishes the names of Cnuas recipients on its website, in its Annual Report and in other publications.

## **7 The General Assembly**

Each year, the entire membership of Aosdána meets in General Assembly, to elect new members, to agree matters of policy and procedure, and to undertake an analysis and review of the various activities of Aosdána, and to discuss issues relevant to the arts and artists in society.

In advance of the General Assembly members may submit motions of relevance to Aosdána itself or bearing on the arts and artists in Ireland. Emergency motions on the day of the Assembly, and not on the agenda, are taken on the written proposal of a member and seconded by no fewer than nine other members.

The Chair of the meeting, and the Toscaireacht present, must approve an emergency motion before it goes forward. The conduct of the General Assembly is outlined in the Standing Orders below. The standing orders for the General Assembly *must* be agreed by the General Assembly and cannot be amended by any other means than a General Assembly meeting.

Standing orders for the General Assembly will govern the conduct of all meetings of the General Assembly of Aosdána. **See below**

## **Section 1: Notice and Preparation for Meetings**

- 1.1 The minutes of the previous General Assembly shall be available for inspection or consultation by members of Aosdána. A report shall be given as regards action taken to implement or advance motion adopted by the previous General Assembly.
- 1.2 The normal practice shall be to record only decisions in the minutes with due regard to a record of members' contributions to debate.
- 1.3 Notice of a member's request to have any item included in the agenda for a meeting shall reach the Registrar not less than twenty days before a meeting.
- 1.4 Notice of a member's request to have any motion included in the agenda for a meeting shall include the name of the member and a seconder and shall reach the Registrar not less than twenty days before a meeting.
- 1.5 A copy of the agenda including proposed motions shall be circulated to each member of Aosdána not less than nine days before a meeting.
- 1.6 Copies of the previous Minutes will be circulated to each member.
- 1.7 Having regard to 1.3 and 1.4 above the agenda for a General Assembly shall be decided by the Toscaireacht.
- 1.8 The role of Aosdána in General Assembly shall be to elect new members, to decide matters of policy and procedures, and to undertake any analysis and review of the various activities of Aosdána and to discuss issues relevant to the arts and artists in society.
- 1.9 In view of the size of the Assembly, confidentiality of discussions cannot be guaranteed.
- 1.10 An Aosdána member shall declare interest in any matter with which they have connections of a kind that might lead to easy misrepresentation of the fairness of Aosdána's procedure and, having had an opportunity to make a statement to Aosdána on the matter and to answer queries put (in order that Aosdána should not be deprived of the benefit of the member's particular knowledge), shall withdraw from the discussions at a signal from the Chair.
- 1.11 A quorum for a General Assembly shall be not less than 20% of the membership.
- 1.12 The Toscaireacht shall make a report of its proceedings to every General Assembly.

1.13 The report from the Toscaireacht shall include action taken to implement or advance motions adopted by the previous General Assembly.

1.14 Order of business from the agenda for a General Assembly shall be decided by a majority vote.

## **Section 2: Role and Conduct of the General Assembly**

2.1 The Chair of the Toscaireacht shall chair the General Assembly. If unavailable, an Acting Chair shall be elected by those present at the start of the meeting. The Chair shall have a casting vote.

2.2 The Registrar oversees the planning, organisation and running of the General Assembly. On the day of the Assembly itself the Registrar is available to support the Toscaireacht Chair as required and shall collect and keep safe any additional documentation that arises on the day. The Registrar will be seated near the Toscaireacht table to accommodate this.

2.3 The General Assembly proceedings are minuted by a professional minute taker and a recording is made of the day's proceedings for accurate checking if required.

2.4 The Registrar shall have authority to respond to queries on behalf of Aosdána in emergency situations, when the Toscaireacht is unavailable, subject to Aosdána being informed at its next meeting and the Toscaireacht as soon as possible.

## **Section 3: Participation, Quorum, and Voting**

3.1 Emergency motions not on the agenda will be taken at a General Assembly on the written proposal of a member seconded in writing by no fewer than nine members. Emergency motions must relate only to urgent and unforeseen matters which could not have been presented as an ordinary Motion to the General Assembly.

3.2 The Chair shall determine whether a proposed emergency motion meets the criteria of urgency and unforeseen nature, subject to challenge by vote of the members present.

3.3 A motion to suspend Standing Orders must be in writing and signed by five members present and voting. Such a motion shall be deemed carried if 60% of members present are in favour. Standing Orders relating to quorum and voting procedures may not be suspended.

3.4 The Chair, may with the consent of a majority of members present, adjourn the meeting or declare a recess for a specified period.

3.5 A motion to amend Standing Orders shall be put in writing and seconded by two members and shall be received by the Registrar at least twenty days before the meeting at which the proposal is considered.

## **Section 4: Conduct and Reporting**

4.1 To ensure freedom of expression and the rights of all members to contribute, members are requested to conduct themselves respectfully towards each other and refrain from dominating or interrupting discussion.

4.2 Any member may raise a point of order if the rules appear to have been broken, which will be ruled on by the Chair. A challenge to the Chair's ruling shall be decided by a majority vote of those present.

4.3 Individual members of Aosdána having been cautioned may be suspended from a General Assembly by being named by the Chair and their ruling supported by a majority of those present. The period of suspension expires at the end of the meeting. Before a vote to suspend is taken, the member shall be given an opportunity to respond to the Chair's concern.

4.4 The Registrar, a member or members may be requested by the General Assembly to make public statements on Aosdána affairs or matters in which Aosdána has a special interest.

4.5 Voting on motions and elections shall normally be by show of hands unless a secret ballot is requested by at least ten members present. Both methods are valid and this flexibility does not constitute a need to suspend standing orders.

## **Section 5: Template and Guidance for Submitting Motions to the General Assembly**

5.1 Members wishing to submit a motion for inclusion on the agenda of a General Assembly are encouraged to follow the guidance below to ensure their proposal is in keeping with the Standing Orders.

5.2 Basic Requirements (per Standing Orders)

1. Motions must be submitted in writing to the Registrar at least twenty days before the date of the General Assembly (Standing Order 1.4).
2. Each motion must include the name of a seconder who supports the proposal.
3. Members will be reminded of this deadline in the official notice issued at least thirty days before the meeting.

5.3 If possible, please follow this template, ensuring that the motion is well-drafted and clear.

**Title of Motion:**

*(e.g. "Proposal to Establish ...").*

**Proposedby: [Your Name]**

**Seconded by: [Seconding Member's Name]**

**Text of Motion:**

*(e.g. That the General Assembly of Aosdána instructs the Toscaireacht to...)*

*[If proposing a change to existing policy or Standing Orders, please specify the clause or policy concerned.]*

**Please include a short rationale (optional but encouraged):**

*(e.g. This motion is proposed in order to...)*

## **8 The Toscaireacht**

Aosdána is self-regulated through the Toscaireacht, a committee of ten members, Toscairí, who are elected by the membership for a two-year term. The Toscaireacht meets a number of times per year to oversee the administration of Aosdána, to liaise with external bodies on its behalf, and to set the agenda for the annual General Assembly, taking into account members' requests to have items included.

Every member of Aosdána is eligible to serve as a member on this committee. Nominations for the Toscaireacht must be made in writing by three members, and are then subject to two counts: the first to select the two highest polling representatives from the three largest disciplines (Literature, Music, Visual Arts), the second for the remaining four places, from any or every discipline. Nominees not elected in the first count will automatically qualify for the second.

The proceedings of meetings of the Toscaireacht are covered by Standing Orders and the minutes of its meetings are published regularly on the website. The Toscaireacht makes a report of its proceedings to every General Assembly.

From time to time, the Toscaireacht shall nominate one of its members as its Chair, or to have a particular role, for example to act as the contact person for Aosdána between meetings of the Toscairí. Should the number of Toscairí fall below ten members between elections, the Toscaireacht shall have the power to co-opt a member or members in order to fill any vacancy that may occur.

### **Standing orders for Toscaireacht meetings are as follows:**

Standing orders are the rules that say how an organisation organises its business. The standing orders for the Toscaireacht should be agreed by the Toscaireacht only allowing the Toscaireacht to amend them as they see fit.

These standings orders are for guidance to each newly elected Toscaireacht who may amend them as they wish.

#### **1. Role and Membership of the Toscaireacht**

1.1 The Toscaireacht is the elected committee responsible for the oversight and guidance of Aosdána between General Assemblies.

1.2 The Toscaireacht will elect a Chair from among the Toscairi at the first meeting.

1.3. If more than one Toscaire wishes to be Chair and an election is required, the candidates will inform the Registrar of their wish to stand. The Registrar will inform the Toscairi at least 7 days in advance of the meeting and a vote will be taken at the first meeting.

1.4 The Chair shall preside over all meetings of the Toscaireacht, ensure the orderly conduct of business, and have a casting vote in the event of a tie. In the absence of the Chair, the Toscairí present shall elect an Acting Chair for the meeting.

1.5 The Toscaireacht may establish working groups as necessary, defining their remit and duration in writing.

1.6 In the event of the resignation or death of a member of the Toscaireacht between General Assemblies, the remaining members may co-opt another eligible member of Aosdána.

1.7 Co-options shall be made on the basis of the member who achieved the next highest vote in the Toscaireacht election.

1.8 Co-option shall be by majority decision of the Toscaireacht and shall be reported at the next General Assembly.

## **2. Meetings**

2.1 It shall be normal practice to record only decisions in the minutes with due regard to a record of Toscairi contribution to debate.

2.2 The minutes shall be drafted by the Registrar and approved by the Chair and circulated prior to each meeting to all Toscairí.

2.3 The agenda for meetings of the Toscaireacht shall be drawn up by the Registrar taking account of: matters brought to his/her attention by members of Aosdána; the minutes of General Assembly meetings; the minutes of the Toscaireacht; the wishes of individual Toscairí; any matters related to the affairs of Aosdána.

2.4 Notice of meetings including the agenda and the draft minutes of the previous meeting shall be given to all Toscairi at least seven days in advance, except in the case of emergencies.

2.5 Emergency meetings may be called by the Chair or at the request of at least three members of the Toscaireacht.

2.6 The Toscaireacht shall make a report of all its proceedings to every General Assembly including decisions made, matters considered, and any recommendations.

2.7 When confidentiality is enjoined on Toscairí by the Chair or by majority vote of the Toscairí it shall be observed.

2.8 The Registrar, a member or members may be requested by the Toscaireacht to issue public statements on Aosdána affairs or matters in which Aosdána has a special interest.

2.9 Unless decided by consensus, decisions will be by a majority vote. A Toscaire may have their dissent recorded on request.

2.10 A Toscaire shall declare interest in any matter with which they have connections of a kind that might lead to easy misrepresentation of the fairness of Aosdána's procedures and, having had an opportunity to make a statement to Aosdána on the matter and to answer questions put (in order that Aosdána should not be deprived of the benefit of the member's particular knowledge), shall withdraw from the discussion at a signal from the Chair.

2.11 In cases where a Toscaire is requested to render a professional service to Aosdána and where the provision of such a service will result in the loss of professional income to the Toscaire, the Registrar may make payment to the member of an amount equal to the fee which would be appropriate to a non-member of Aosdána in the same circumstances.

2.12 If circumstances warrant it, a Toscaire may be reimbursed for 'out-of-pocket' expenses incurred while they are on Aosdána business, such reimbursement to conform as far as possible to rates laid down in the various Department of Finance circulars relating to travelling and subsistence expenses.

2.13 The quorum for a meeting of the Toscairí shall be five, and voting will be undertaken only by those present.

2.14 Meetings may be held remotely via audio or video link at the proposal of the Chair or on the request of the majority of members. Toscairi may attend meetings remotely via audio or video link with prior agreement of the Chair. Remote attendees shall be deemed present for quorum and voting purposes.

2.15 The Toscaireacht may invite non-members to attend for specific agenda items, provided this is agreed in advance by majority decision.

2.16 The Standing Orders shall be reviewed every three years, or sooner if proposed by a Toscaire and agreed by two-thirds of those present.

2.17 A motion to amend these Standing Orders must be circulated in writing to all members of the Toscaireacht at least seven days prior to the meeting where it is to be considered.

2.18 Toscairi are reminded that all correspondence on matters related to the work of the Toscaireacht is subject to Freedom of Information legislation.

2.19 A copy of these standing orders shall be made available to any Toscaire on request and shall be available on the Aosdána website.

## **9 Administration of Aosdána**

Aosdána is funded by the Government through The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon, which is charged with handling all of its financial and administrative arrangements, and which accounts for its operation in its annual report to the Oireachtas.

A designated staff member of The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon is the Registrar of Aosdána. The Registrar oversees all of Aosdána's administrative and financial arrangements and acts as teller at elections, and, when he/she is unable to do so, a deputy is appointed by The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon.

The official address of Aosdána is the official address of The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon. At present, in 2025, this is 70 Merrion Square, Dublin 2. Eircode DO2 NY52

**For further information, please contact: [aosdána @artscouncil.ie](mailto:aosdána@artscouncil.ie)**

Information on all members is contained on the Aosdána website. It is the responsibility of each member to keep this information updated, should they so wish.

## **10 The History of Aosdána**

Newly elected members are advised to read *Aosdána Beginnings* by Mark Duncan in order to acquaint themselves with the history of Aosdána.

For more information about Aosdána and its members, consult [http://aosdána .artscouncil.ie/](http://aosdána.artscouncil.ie/)

Compiled by An Toscaireacht

Approved by the General Assembly 4.9.2025