

Dóchas
The Irish Association of Non-Governmental Development Organisations

Dóchas Board 88 (2-22)
24/03/22

Dóchas Board

held via Zoom on
Thursday, 24 March 2022 at 10.00am

M i n u t e s

- Present:** Finola Finnan (Trócaire) Chairperson
Sarah O'Toole (CBM Ireland) Vice Chairperson
Paul O'Brien (Plan International Ireland) Treasurer
John Moffett (Misean Cara)
Bobby McCormack (Development Perspectives)
Lucia Ennis (Concern Worldwide)
Una Murray (Sightsavers)
Eamon Sharkey (GOAL)
Grace Milton (External Board Member)
Senan Turnbull (External Board Member)
Martina Fitzgerald (External Board Member)
- In attendance:** Jane-Ann McKenna (CEO of Dóchas)
Anna Farrell (Finance & Operations Manager, Dóchas)
- For Item 8 only:** Séamus O'Gorman (Head of Membership Engagement, Dóchas)
Ronan Doyle (Head of Communications and Public Engagement, Dóchas)
Morgane Clarke (Programme Support Officer, Dóchas)
Niamh Kingston (Project Manager, Dóchas Worldview Project)
- Apologies:** Peter McDevitt (Self Help Africa) Company Secretary

1. Meeting Opening

The Chairperson opened the meeting welcoming those present.

2. Apologies and Agenda

There was one apology, noted above. One member (John) joined and one member (Senan) had to leave at 11am.

3. Declaration of Conflicts of Interest

Senan confirmed that he had a conflict of interest in relation to the application for full membership from SeeBeyondBoarders Ireland (Agenda item 10.3) and so will not participate in the discussion on that item. All other members present confirmed that there were no conflicts of interest.

4. Minutes of Board Meeting

The Board approved the Minutes of the 87th Board meeting (27/01/22): Sarah O'Toole (Proposed), John Moffett (Seconded).

5. Notes on Irish Aid Exchange

The document on the Exchange (27/01/22) was noted.

6. Matters Arising and To-do List

Most of the items on the to-do list, with the exception of the following, have either been completed or will be addressed during this meeting:

- The **AGM and Conference** will be virtual again this year and will be our key priority over the coming weeks. Ruairí de Búrca has been invited to speak about the strategy at the AGM. The theme of the conference is Locally Led Development (LLD) and we have engaged with a group of members as well as with the Start Network and others in that regard. The event will feature a keynote speaker, facilitated breakout sessions and a plenary. We will be in touch with Board members, particularly around the AGM, over the coming days and will circulate the agenda for both events for comment and feedback as soon as practicable.
- The **strategy** has been edited, is currently being designed and will be launched at the AGM.
- On the issue of **diversifying our sources of funding**, the CEO is currently exploring what Dóchas has done previously in this regard, identifying what funding rounds are out there and looking at the opportunities that would realistically be open to Dóchas. We have engaged with the Wheel, who hold (until next year) the tender for a link to EU funding as well as with some foundations (e.g. Small, Gates, etc). We need more time to investigate the opportunities before we will be in a position to have a detailed conversation around this.
- Work around structural costs is ongoing with the FARC so we will come back on that over the coming weeks.
- We are working on a few outstanding issues in relation to our **2021 Compliance Record Form (CRF)**.
- It was noted that due to pressure of time we omitted to formally approve the 2022 budget at our last meeting.

Decisions:

- An advisory group (Grace, Martina, Una and Eamon) will be established to support Jane-Ann in the development of funding diversity strategy.
- The 2022 budget was approved. Paul O'Brien (Proposed), Finola Finnan (Seconded).

Actions:

- Jane-Ann to circulate agenda for AGM and Conference for comment and feedback.
- An informal meeting of the advisory group on funding diversity will be held in April (date TBA).

7. CEO Report

The **CEO Report** was circulated in advance, and Jane-Ann outlined the main highlights:

- The report on the **EU Funding research** project, commissioned by the Institutional Funding Group, has been finalised. It gives a clear insight into levels of funding Irish INGOs have been receiving through the EU, how other NGO platforms engage with the EU and possible options for Dóchas and its members in terms of a new strategy for EU engagement. There are potentially missed opportunities due to high turnover of staff within DFA as well as a potential lack of investment in appropriate structures for members to access funding streams for humanitarian and development work.
- The Dóchas team provided support to members around **accessing Irish Aid funding** and around the application process.
- The **Safeguarding Working Group** is very engaged and is currently reaching out to members in order to strengthen the implementation of safeguarding across the sector.
- Dóchas appeared before the **Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence (JCFAD)** to discuss Education (8 Feb.) and the humanitarian implications of the war in Ukraine (22 Mar.).
- We had planned to recommend to the Board that Dóchas join the **People's Vaccine Ireland** and support their campaign for vaccine equality. While we are already engaging with them and

agree in principle that Dóchas should join, we haven't yet defined what joining would entail for Dóchas and so we will come back to the Board when we have worked that through.

- Sally Hayden (journalist with The Irish Times) will speak at our session on the **findings of the Worldview survey** (5 Apr.).

8. Emerging Issues

The CEO said that the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine has taken up a lot of our time over the last three weeks. Our work in this regard fits under pillar three of our strategy which sets out how we would like to influence differently and we have put this into practice in our response to the situation in Ukraine. We have issued regular press releases and messages around key issues affecting Ukraine and our members – in particular who is working on the response, and how people can donate. Our messaging has evolved to reflect the changing context – from respect of international humanitarian law to safeguarding. It is important to engage the public and politicians at this time, to highlight the role of the sector, when there is a large interest in the humanitarian situation. One challenge is identifying what the key messages for us as a sector are, as often this is not forthcoming from members. We have received enquiries from a number of sources (e.g. Pobal, the Department of Children, the Department of Rural and Community Development, HSE, etc) asking if members need their help or can support them. We have engaged with members on this.

During a general discussion it was noted that:

- ✓ Over the last few weeks people not normally involved in our area of work have shown a willingness to get involved. There is a risk that people will move away from the established organisations if we cannot engage with them. We need to consider how we can engage more with the public on these issues, and draw links with what is happening in Ireland regarding refugees etc.
- ✓ The Dóchas team did some excellent work over the last few weeks and Dóchas delivered rational messages on the importance of donating money rather than goods, which isn't an easy message for individual agencies to deliver. In the medium term the narrative around the outpouring of positive generosity can change. We can play a role in shaping that narrative.
- ✓ We have an opportunity to talk about aid and need in a way we haven't done before.
- ✓ We need to be mindful of those members not involved in responding to the crisis. They may be missing what Dóchas is doing in this regard and so we need to manage that communication to members.

The CEO said that our approach is outlined in our strategy – proactively engaging with the media and political parties. We need to focus on political engagement, on the communications piece and on how we can ensure the voice of the sector is represented in the narrative around Ukraine.

The Chairperson said that there is an appetite among Board members to discuss these issues further should the need arise. The CEO encouraged members to get in touch if there are areas on which we could be more proactive.

9. Strategic Topic: Ethical Communications and Dóchas Code of Conduct on Images and Messages

Séamus, Ronan, Morgane and Niamh joined for the discussion on this item only.

An Executive Summary of Dr Eilish Dillon's report together with a proposal to review and invigorate the Code was circulated in advance. The CEO presented the proposal explaining that the plan is to update the Code so that it is reflective of the evolution of communications and the aid sector since it was introduced (2007). We would then implement the Code through learning, which would involve an annual one-day training to support the Code as well as an annual ethical communications workshop/event to highlight challenges, best practice and external perspectives to encourage peer learning and the sharing of knowledge.

During a general discussion the following comments were made:

- ✓ Dóchas conducted research (2014) on finding Irish frames which was quite critical of the membership in terms of its values and frames as those we were flagging were very much against our proposed mission.
- ✓ A complaints system is essential and a peer review process that enables members to talk to one another is crucial.
- ✓ Our membership is made up of many types of organisations with varying modalities. Our focus should be on good rather than best practice.
- ✓ All imagery has an element of framing but maybe the frame needs to be more disciplined.
- ✓ Change needs to come from the top down – getting CEOs and senior management teams on board is key.
- ✓ Setting standards is key – the challenge is to agree on and meet those standards.
- ✓ The process is vital.

The CEO said that we are proposing an ongoing process of dialogue and consultation with members. We want to change the way members communicate. There are a lot of diverse opinions around Dr Dillon's report, and the implementation of the code, so we need to bring it all together and make space for ongoing collaborative discussion and build standards higher without setting a bar that members can't meet.

Decision:

- The proposal was agreed.

10. Board Sub-Committee on Finance, Audit and Risk

The minutes of the last meeting (10/03/22) together with Risk Register were circulated to members in advance.

10.1. Report from Committee (including Risk Register)

The 2021 audit process and the review of the Reserves Policy were the key focus of the last meeting. The committee unanimously approved the Reserves Policy without alteration.

10.2. Directors Report and Financial Statements for 2021

Copies of the Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2021 together with the auditor's (Crowe) letter of representation, letter of Engagement and management letter were circulated to members in advance of this meeting.

The CEO said that the audit went very smoothly. The management letter is clean and the auditor's (Crowe) report is unqualified. The financial statements and management letter were presented to the FARC (10 March) by Ms O'Hanlon (Crowe). The sub-committee agreed unanimously that the financial statements would be forwarded to the Board for approval and signature. The Board is also required to approve and sign the letter of representation and the letter of engagement.

It was noted that due to an increase in cyber fraud, the auditor recommends that we carry out a fraud risk assessment to identify any steps that can be taken to mitigate against potential risks. We have adjusted Risks 9 and 10 (which relate to fraud, financial corruption and theft) placing greater emphasis on cyber risk and the need to carry out a risk assessment in that regard.

Decision:

- The accounts were approved: Lucia Ennis (Proposed), Sarah O'Toole (Seconded).

Actions:

- The letter of representation, letter of engagement and financial statements will be digitally signed by Finola and Peter in their capacity as Directors of Dóchas.

- Copies of the signed letter of representation, letter of engagement and the financial statements will be returned to the Auditor by email, copying the signatories so that they are aware that their digital signatures have been assigned to those documents.
- FARC to follow up on recommendation around fraud risk assessment.

The Chairperson thanked those involved in the audit process. The level of activity and output outlined in the Directors' Report is very impressive.

10.3 Review of Risk Register

The CEO said that Risk 12 (health and safety of staff) has been moved to green following the lifting of restrictions around COVID. The following risks remain amber:

- Risk 4 (poor governance of members): is an external risk over which we have no control.
- Risk 7 (income declines): we have yet to receive confirmation of our funding from Irish Aid for 2022.
- Risk 11 (staffing gaps and turnover): with the uncertain staffing environment post Covid.

In relation to Risk 7, we haven't yet received confirmation in relation to the level of funding we will receive for 2022 although funding is expected shortly. We will work on developing the 2023-2024 proposal later this year, which will give us a greater level of security going into 2023.

11. Governance and AGM

11.1 Report from Sub-Committee on Governance

The minutes of the last meeting (18/02/22) were circulated to members in advance. The constitutional review process and a draft of our Complaints Policy and Procedure were the key focus of the last meeting. The latter has since been completed and the document will come before the Board in June. The review of the Constitution will be the primary focus over the next number of months. Work will not be completed in time for the AGM and so it is likely that it will be brought to the Board and then to an EGM later in the year. The CEO successfully secured pro-bono support from Matheson to assist with this work. The Committee will also look at the CRF for 2021 in advance of it's being brought to the Board for final sign-off. Senan added that he expects that Dóchas will be in full compliance by the reporting deadline (31 Oct.).

11.2 Board Nominees

We have three Member Director vacancies on the incoming Board and have received three nominations: Sarah O'Toole (CBM Ireland), Karol Balfe (ActionAid Ireland) and Siobhán Cassidy (Trócaire).

It was noted that each full member has one vote at the AGM and that candidates will need to receive at least half (50%) of all votes cast in order to be elected.

11.3 Applications for Full Membership

We have received applications for full membership from two organisations: SADAKA – The Ireland Palestine Alliance and SeeBeyondBorders Ireland. Due diligence was carried out and a briefing document on each application was circulated in the Board pack in advance of this meeting.

During a general discussion it was noted that Dóchas rules require applicants to provide annual reports and signed financial statements for their two most recent financial years. SeeBeyondBorders Ireland haven't been in existence long enough to provide reports and

accounts for a full two-year period. However, they provided a trustee report and financial statements covering a 16.5 month period together with management accounts covering the subsequent 6-months.

Decisions:

- The Board agreed to recommend the application from SADAKA – The Ireland Palestine Alliance to the membership at the AGM.
- The Board agreed that the application from SeeBeyondBoarders Ireland would not be forwarded to the AGM as they were unable to provide annual reports and signed financial statements for a full two years. However, they will be encouraged to re-apply next year and to participate in Dóchas meetings and events that are open to the wider international development sector.

12. Other Business

12.1 Thank you to Finola and Paul

Sarah noted that both Finola and Paul will be stepping down from the Board at the AGM and so this is the last Board meeting they will attend. Having worked with them both on the Board, with Finola as Vice Chairperson and with Paul on the sub-committee on Human Resources and Remuneration, she experienced at first hand the professionalism they brought to the Board and the very significant contribution they made to Dóchas during their tenures.

Those present paid tribute to Finola and Paul thanking them for their contribution and commitment, for the manner in which they made new Board members welcome, for setting the tone and for epitomising the values of Dóchas. Their contribution is hugely appreciated and they will be very much missed.

Finola thanked everyone for their kind words and added that it's been her absolute pleasure to serve on the Board for the last five years.

12.2 Membership of CONCORD Working Groups

Bobby said that he recently saw an email from the Dóchas Development Education Group which indicated that they are unhappy with the CONCORD strategy around Global Citizenship Education. He asked if there is an opportunity for Dóchas input in that regard.

Action:

- CEO to check with Louise and come back to Bobby on this.

13. Board Dates for 2022

The **next Board meeting** will take place on Thursday, 23 June 2022 at 10am.

Subsequent meetings will take place on: 22 September and 24 November. The AGM will take place on 12 May.

Chairperson:.....

Date:.....