

# Dóchas

## The Irish Association of Non-Governmental Development Organisations

Dóchas Board 76 (1-20)  
30/11/20

### Dóchas Board

held in the Dóchas office on  
Thursday, 30 January 2020 at 10am

### M i n u t e s

**Present:** Finola Finnan (Trócaire) Chairperson  
Siobhán McGee (ActionAid Ireland) Vice Chairperson  
Paul O'Brien (Plan International Ireland)  
Sarah O'Toole (CBM Ireland)  
Louise Supple (Concern Worldwide)  
Gerry Egan (External Board Member)  
Peter McDevitt (Self Help Africa) Treasurer  
Grace Milton (External Board Member)

**In attendance:** Suzanne Keatinge (CEO of Dóchas)

**Apologies:** Charlie Lamson (Sightsavers)  
Niamh Carty (Oxfam Ireland)

#### 1. Apologies and Agenda

Apologies (see above) were noted. There were no changes to the Agenda as circulated.

#### 2. Declaration of Conflicts of Interest

All members present confirmed that there were no conflicts of interest.

#### 3. Minutes of Board Meeting

The Minutes of the 75<sup>th</sup> Board meeting (21/11/19) were approved: Paul (proposed), Sarah (seconded).

#### 4. Matters Arising and To-do List

Most of the items on the to-do list have either been completed or will be addressed during the course of this meeting.

Board members were asked to complete Conflict of Interest Disclosure forms by the end of the meeting.

#### 5. Strategic Priorities 2020

*[Members of the Dóchas team were asked to join this part of the meeting: Seamus O'Gorman, Ronan Doyle and Gillian Ivory]*

A wide ranging discussion was held to help shape Dóchas priorities for 2020. It included a presentation from Suzanne, where she summarised the outcomes from a team planning day. Directors were invited to share their perspectives on three issues: what's changing in the overall context that Dóchas needs to respond to; what went well and less well in Dóchas in 2019; what should our new priorities be for 2020, bearing in mind also that we need to do a strategic planning exercise this year.

**Critical 'global' context issues** that were raised, included the expectation of more and intense conflict, which, combined with the possibility of Ireland being voted on to the Security Council, may offer a new opportunity for Dóchas to convene members on this issue.

The squeeze on funding was considered one of the most pressing concerns for the sector, and the funding landscape in general was said to be significantly shifting. It therefore demands more attention, including in relation to how the sector is portrayed to the public, and the media. It also warrants ongoing discussion with Irish Aid in relation to supporting strategic long-term funding for NGOs, which is timely, given that we are in an evaluation/re-design cycle for Programme Grant recipients and the Civil Society Fund. Recruitment of staff, particularly in relation to fundraising, is also adding to the pressure on members.

Public engagement will need to remain a key priority for Dóchas in response to the funding environment, but also to engage with the changing political context. We hope to get some useful recommendations on how to shape our political engagement work, following the lunchtime session, [to follow this meeting] with political commentators.

The sector needs to be able to find new approaches to link and adapt to digital and social movements, as well as resist the possibility of a backlash from far-right movements that are gaining air-time.

Key issues highlighted by way of **what went well in 2019**, included the resilience shown by the team in managing the staffing gaps, particularly in the last quarter. It was noted that the Board responded quickly, effectively and supportively to support and manage the transition. The transition of the chair, was also a significant moment last year.

Peer learning and knowledge remains "the heart beat" of the organisation and needs to remain so. We continue to have a stable and strong budget, and it was a step change to secure an increase in core funding and the public engagement project from Irish Aid. However, reserves have now been utilised to allow us to reach a full staff compliment, so we will need to proceed cautiously. It is also essential that we deliver on Irish Aid's public engagement project.

Our policy work in relation to the DAC peer review showed the relevance of this work to the sector, and initiating the Safeguarding Code with and by CEOs was also an important moment that showed the value of collective action. We also delivered our flagship events to a high standard.

**Things that went less well** included the ongoing difficulty in getting CEOs to participate actively in the network, as well as low levels of participation in some Working Groups. We also need to seek new ways of strengthening the quality of the engagement with Irish Aid, particularly as Board sessions, to make the most of the time.

With **respect to priorities for 2020**, it was noted that developing a new strategy will remain a key focus, as well as taking the time to build the new team. Improving automation and our website need to be prioritised to encourage more membership engagement, but we now have some internal expertise to deliver on these. We will also focus more on strengthening collaboration and policy work on gender equality; making the most of the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary since the Beijing Declaration.

Overall, it was stressed that we needed to be measured in our approach, and not stretch ourselves too thin. Do fewer things, very well, and be willing to say 'NO'.

One unresolved issue was how to take forward the need to encourage innovation in the sector, by, for example, providing that space and challenge on future trends. At present, there are no visible actions to deliver on that goal, but we are linked to a regular conversation taking place among other national platforms on the 'future of INGOs'. We do need to explore the issue further through the strategy process.

It was noted that the issues raised by Directors aligned with many of the key priorities and activities that were identified by the Dóchas team. It was helpful to have these validated by the Board, and we will refine and update our operational plan and budget further. By way of summarising the high-level objective for this year, it was defined as:

**"Incentivising collaboration" by...**

- ✓ Making it easier to collaborate (eg investing in digital, and communications to members)
- ✓ Showing the **value** of connection & learning among members (eg thr' strategy development, our conference, and the Working Groups)

- ✓ Showing the value of collective action (eg thr' our public engagement project, and policy work)

**Action:**

- Suzanne to circulate presentation to the Board

## 6. Update on public engagement project

A short summary of the public engagement project and timeline was circulated in advance. **Ronan Doyle joined the meeting** to provide a short briefing on the progress and importance of this project since he joined Dóchas in November. It was noted that an initial meeting among members will take place on 4 February, and with Irish Aid on 3 February.

The principle objective of the project is to build support for overseas aid by mobilising specific audiences who are able to influence the political environment; it is not about a broad public campaign at this time. It will include identifying key 'segments' of the public who are most likely to influence change within their political constituencies, as well as testing and finding a relevant narrative/s and tools.

Key to the project's success will be a strong steering group drawn from the membership, and comprising a wide-range of competencies. Directors were urged to encourage their organisation to engage with this process. It was also suggested that we consider some outside expertise on the steering group, and it was important to include Irish Aid where possible. In that regard, we have been liaising closely with the Gates Foundation who have funded similar projects in the UK, Germany and France.

It was stressed that the Board (and steering group) need to be fully on-board with the specific purpose: To Build Support for Overseas Aid. In that regard, it may warrant a further discussion at the next Board meeting to test that focus.

Key milestones this year include the setting up of the Steering Group; the need to conduct a baseline survey, and establish strong audience segmentation; that in turn will allow one 'deeper dive' piece of research. We also hope to do some testing on relevant and effective messaging. It was noted that it will be challenging to complete all three activities. In that regard, we hope to link and use the learning from the UK as they have had an Aid Tracker in place for 5 years now. We also need to involve Irish Aid every step of the way.

It will also be important to manage the tension between finding an authentic narrative and voice for the sector, but in a way that is relevant and fresh to the public. To do the latter may require taking risks, and being innovative in order to break out of the NGO bubble.

**Actions**

- Directors to check within their own organisations about engagement with this project, and encourage high-level engagement.
- Bring back to the Board at the next meeting, the issue around project focus following the meetings planned among members in the coming weeks. At that time, share details of the purpose, competencies, and members of the Steering group for input.

## 7. Report by the CEO

Copies of the CEO Report were circulated to members in advance of this meeting. Suzanne gave a few short updates including:

- Dóchas was successful in our submission to Bank of Ireland's Community Challenge. It will involve a minimum of 3 face-to-face meetings with marketing experts from BoI, between February and March.
- In reaction to the general election, we have written letters to most Party leaders and Foreign Affairs spokespeople, as well as to the chair of the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, to call for ensuring that their party's commitment on ODA is in the new Programme for Government.
- We will be asking members to come to our occasional 'long' team meetings so that we can get to know their work in more depth.
- Dóchas will submit a short submission by 31 January, on the Government's proposed National Volunteering strategy, to reinforce the messaging from Comhlámh and Volunteer Ireland, and ensure there is a stronger international dimension.

**Decision:**

- The Board was happy to endorse the proposal to move the annual conference to 9 September and re-direct the focus to "Generation Equality" in light of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Beijing Declaration.

**8. Report from Sub-Committee on Remuneration and Human Resources**

No meeting of this sub-committee took place since the last Board, however, the chair asked that the Board endorse their revised Terms of Reference which was recently updated (13 Nov.). She noted that it now includes reference to the sub-committee's role in discussing trends around exit interviews and performance reviews. Under the 'scope' of the Committee, it was agreed to change the wording to ensure that it's clear that it's the Board, not the Committee that makes the final decision on remuneration.

**Decision:**

- Pending this change the ToR was approved: Finola Finnan (Proposed), Siobhan McGee (Seconded).

The chair of the sub-committee also asked for sign-off of Dóchas' new 'Code of Conduct' for employees, volunteers and consultants. The document had been discussed twice by the Committee, and feedback received also by the Dóchas team. It was noted that there had been some discussion on whether to have separate codes for each group [i.e. staff, volunteers and consultants}, but it was agreed that it was unnecessary given the size of the organisation. It was suggested to make it clear under the 'scope' of the code that it did not apply to the Dóchas Board as they already had a code of conduct.

**Decision**

- In relation to designated personnel at Board level on safeguarding, it was agreed that if the matter pertains to a specific safeguarding issue, then the contact should be the chair of Dóchas Human Resources Sub-committee. For all other complaints under this code, it should be directed to the chair of Dóchas.
- Pending the changes noted above, the 'Code' was approved by the Board: Gerry Egan (Proposed), Paul O'Brien (Seconded).

**Action**

- We will need to look at automating our complaints handling mechanism (ie how to direct complaints directly to the Board member involved).

**9. Report from Sub-Committee on Finance, Audit & Risk (FARC)**

The minutes of the last meeting (21 Jan) were given out to Board members present. The chair gave a short verbal report noting first that the audit is underway. A few minor accounting entries needed to be changed, but otherwise, we are in a healthy position. We expect to have a small surplus of approx. €26k in 2019.

The sub-committee was also happy to recommend the proposed 2020 budget, and noted that they expect a balanced budget. The extra reserves from previous years have mostly been utilised. It was also stated that the rate of spend on the public engagement project will be challenging, so it will need to be closely monitored.

**Decision**

- The 2020 budget was approved. Proposer: Sarah O'Toole; Seconder: Finola Finnan

**10. Report from Sub-Committee on Governance**

The chair gave a short verbal report on the last meeting (29 Jan), and minutes will be shared at the next meeting. The ToR has been revised, and will be shared for approval at the next meeting. It was agreed that for now, the chair of the sub-committee needed to be a Dóchas director to ensure continuity and good communications with the Board.

The Dóchas Membership Handbook has now been recommended by the Sub-Committee for sign off by the Board. A few last edits are being made, but it will be circulated shortly.

A second draft of the Dóchas Charter was discussed and agreed by the sub-committee. It will now be sent to the membership for consultation. We are therefore on track to get it approved ahead of the AGM in May.

The Board self-assessment needs to be completed by March, and it will be sent to each Director in February. The process will be managed by the chair of the sub-committee following last year's recommendation that it should not be the responsibility of the CEO.

Nominations for the Dóchas Board will need to be advertised in the coming months. There will be 'two' member vacancies, and 'two' external Director vacancies. Proposals for the latter will be discussed at a short virtual meeting by the sub-committee, following the drafting of ToRs.

Dóchas will complete the CRA template by the end of the year. Good progress has already been made, and any major concerns will be brought before the next sub-committee meeting.

**Actions:**

- Directors to receive, and complete Board Self assessments forms by end of February
- ToR to be circulated for Board approval
- Handbook to be circulated for Board approval.

**11. Review of the Risk Register**

It was noted that copies of the Risk Register, which was reviewed by the FARC (21 Jan.), were circulated to members in advance of this meeting.

Risks that remained 'amber' (there are no red ones) were briefly discussed:

- Risk 4 – 'poor governance of a member leads to the sectors reputational damage' - remains amber, although no new issue or media coverage has emerged.
- Risk 6 – 'members leave the network' – we are fairly comfortable that this will not be the case in the foreseeable future, but as the invoicing for the new fee structure won't take place until September, we have to continue to watch this closely.

Risks that have moved from 'amber' to green include:

- Risk 1 – 'reputation is damaged' – has moved back to green because the staffing situation has stabilised, and there was no reputational damage.
- Risk 12 – 'staffing gaps lead to failure to implement strategy' – most gaps have now been filled.
- It was also agreed that it was not necessary to move Risk 7 – income declines - to amber. While the need for new income streams remains important, we are doing as much as we can to make that happen, and it does not pose a huge risk to the organisation given its current budget outlook.

**12. Other Business**

Suzanne mentioned the importance of getting CEOs to represent the sector's key policy positions at an upcoming event we are hosting with Irish MEPs on 24 February.

**13. Dates of future meetings**

The next Dóchas Board will be on 26 March. The 2020 AGM will take place on 7 May 2020. The 2020 Conference and Awards will be held on 9 September.

Chairperson:.....

Date:.....