

ISSSD AGM 29-02-20
The Lir Theatre

Introductions around the room

Liam Doona **LD**
Joan O’Cleary **JOC**
Sinead Lawlor **SL**
Louise Dunne **Louise D**
Noelia Ruiz **Noelia R**
Peter Power **PP**
Lian Bell **LB**
Niall Rea **NR**
Robert Ryan **RR**
Deirdre Dwyer **DD**
Blue Hanley **BH**
Eoin Winning **EW**
Bill Woodland **BW**
Lisa Krugel **LK**
Sarah Foley **SF**
Katie Davenport **KD**
Ciaran O’Melia **COM**
Kata Rozvadska **KR** (skype)
Sarah Jane Shiels **SJS** (skype)
Catherine Fay **CF**
Michael Scott **MS**
Alan Farquharson **AF**
Conleth White **CW**

DD: This AGM should have taken place in 2019, but didn’t, so nobody has paid membership so far but that’s ok if you’re feeling insecure, don’t worry about that and we can sort it out at the end. We are really glad you have come, you may or may not want to be part of the committee after this, but we hope you will be, and Sarah Jane will issue invoices so you can pay digitally or through the internet, or else I can take cash off you today if you have it, and if you don’t we can sort that out after, but no body is not welcome because of that. Feel relieved and welcome!

LD: Welcome everyone. My name is Liam. What I’m going to do, I’m just going to describe some of the business that we need to do this afternoon. First of all it’s great to see everybody here, thank you all for rocking up. As Deirdre says we deferred the AGM as we were still in the midst of varying bits of tying off, bits of Prague and the National Exhibition and so on, so thank you for your patience in terms of waiting until today. Essentially what we need to do this afternoon, there are 3 reports that we need to receive under formal business of the committee. There’s a financial report, membership report and chair’s report. What those three reports will try and do is summarise the current health of the society, where we are in terms of members, where we are in terms of finance. And what

the chair's report will try and do is a review of the last period of the society, and set up some things to be thinking about in terms of the next phase of its actions. The other very important bit of business we have to do this afternoon is there are a number of committee positions, which are coming up for renewal. It's the chair myself (Liam Doona), deputy chair Alan (Farquharson), the treasurer SJ (correction Deirdre Dwyer), membership and secretary SJ (Sarah Jane Shiels), and Niall (Rea) Education (Correction Niall Rea is happy to stay on.), and Peter (Power) Outreach Officer.

DD: Members of the committee who are staying on could change positions if they want to.

LD: The process of that will be a nomination and a vote, so we'll come to those by turn a little bit later. The other thing we would like to do this afternoon is give over some time to general discussion, about the society, hopefully members will have ideas and issues to raise, so we'll leave that to the last part of the meeting. Is that ok for everybody?

Group consensus.

LD: So can I suggest on that basis that we take the three reports first, so that will set the tone for things? Membership, finance and chair's report.

Membership Report – *Please see appendix a*

Financial Report - *Please see appendix b*

LB: Ask with the amount of membership numbers why there is only 20 paid up members estimated?

DD: Because we reckon that in PQ years when there is incentive to be part of it, and National Exhibition years, the numbers will swell, we've taken that information from the British Society of Stage Designers.

NR: Is that new members not existing members?

DD: No, just as we all know occasionally membership lapses, I've got the numbers and can show where people paid the first year and didn't pay the second year, so the prediction is just a guess. Living the dream we would be having a much higher number, but I don't know. I feel unless we earn that we won't get more than that (20 estimated), because I don't think our membership has been feeling the value of our organisation fully. We hope to up that.

LD: 20 give us an operational minimum if you like.

DD: Yes. And maybe I was vastly underestimating; we weren't sure how many people would come today, so. Maybe I'm heartened and we'll have a bit more money in the bank.

LD: Thanks. What we'll do with all these reports, we'll put them on the newsletter.

DD: I think we upload them to the website is what we've done previously. All of the minutes of our meetings are there, to be read on the website, if anybody's really interested.

LD: And all the figures will be up there. Thanks guys, very much. I want to spend a couple of minutes on the chair's report, hopefully this will be helpful to people cause I'm going to try and review things that have happened over the last year, particularly with the society. But I'm going to go a little bit further back as well. Hopefully this will set a context for discussions this afternoon and might tee people off if they are interested in standing for some of the seats on the committee.

Chair's Report – *Please see appendix c*

DD: My gut is that we should leave the nominations and the elections to the end.

LD: So what I was going to suggest was we might open the floor up to any comments about any of the reports that you've heard, or anything you'd like to table. Either to be discussed now or simply you would like to see more visible on the committee agenda.

LB: I'd like to hear a little bit more about the (discussions with the Abbey), because I haven't been paying as much attention to it as I think I should. You were saying the conversation with the Abbey is still on going, it would be lovely to hear a little bit of where that is.

CF: I was the representative on that. So the last meeting was with the Arts Council on February 7th I think, and it was really to present the findings of the Panel at that point. Maureen McGlynn and Cliona Dukes are heading that, so they did a lot of statistical work of how many actors over the last three years (had been employed by the Abbey). They had a graph between the Gate and Rough Magic and The Abbey; The Abbey really wasn't performing very well on those actor figures. But they don't have designer figures in particular. Everybody wants to finish it (discussions with the Abbey); really, we're done with it. The point of the meeting in the Arts Council, was to present the information to date, and to ask them are they supportive in this new model The Abbey has created, because the balance does seem to way in the co-production side of things, and we were really hoping after the series of meetings last year, that the new programme in 2020 would have a bigger opportunity for new work, and for writers, directors, designers, and it hasn't. So that was really what that meeting was about, and then we asked if we could have a meeting with the board also, well

we've asked several times for a meeting with the board, but they since sent a letter saying they don't want to meet with us, they believe it's resolved, and it is where it is. So our last letter to the board, which, when they all come through, I'll make them available and then we'll try to update them, but that takes a bit of time, but they will be available to the membership. So the last letter to the board was to thank them for their correspondence, and to say it was disappointing they wouldn't meet with us. So I don't know if there will be another meeting after this, my feeling is there may be one more with the Arts Council, but I don't expect that to happen.

LD: And just to say the 'us' there is the expanded group

DD: The signatories

CF: The signatories 427 and then there's representatives on the panel of directors, writers, actors, producers, designers, technicians.

Member: And the board you're referring to is the board of the Abbey.

CF: Yes. It was Francis Ruane who sent that letter.

DD: We didn't sign (the letter) as a membership, it blindsided us, so some of the membership had signed it and some of us hadn't. We as a society had already engaged in correspondence with the Abbey, when we weren't on that list we didn't feel bereft of a chance to speak because we've already engaged on our own communication which Liam can take up on, got so far and then halted. So prior to that letter being published we had already engaged in some correspondence with them about our concerns.

PP: 6 months (prior to the letter)

LD: Just so people know we had started that conversation very early on with the Abbey at the request of a couple of members in particular, and both the Abbey and the Arts Council were extraordinarily slow to respond, but finally did respond. It quickly remained apparent that the board were rock solid behind the artistic directorship, there was absolutely no cracking them. The Arts Council seemed to be pretty rock solid behind them to, despite that moment of pause in funding. I met with them once or twice, it was pretty clear that they weren't for moving. There was some interesting possible developments which were mooted, including staff designs, kind of a system, so there was some sense of people getting an opportunity to get their feet under the table, and actually they did announce finally, just a couple of weeks ago, or a month ago, they put up some short term positions to assist other designers. But my personal sense of it was, meeting the guys at the Abbey and talking to others, they're pretty convinced on their position, and I think they're pretty convinced of the values of the outcomes

MS: I think it's very simple, when you make political appointments, from more or less the business sector with no real reference to the arts, that's what you get.

And until that changes, nothing's going to happen with the Abbey, and you may as well knock your heads on the wall, I'm doing this an awfully long time, seeing this, when you appointed people who, the bottom line is their concern, can they go to the party, can they look good and meet famous people? That's what it's about. They aren't going to disturb the status quo, because that's actually not losing money on haemorrhaging the problem. And that may seem extraordinary bleak way of looking at it, that's actually the truth of it. And it's not just the Abbey, it's through all of the artistic institutions for people who are fighting for art, or struggling against impossible people on the board, business people, and they play golf.

MS: Can I just say something about communication? It's my first meeting, the first time I've been here. I wanted to join about 4 years ago, and I received an email a few weeks ago saying, 'Hi we forgot about you.' So I do think, digitally, everything is kind of f****d, and I do think there needs to be a number of things. One is a regular newsletter, if only a Mail Chimp thing that goes out and says, the following people are doing something, a bit like agents. I think people can find a way of self-contributing to that. I also think it's fantastic that the organisation exists as a forum, when we started the Theatre Forum, it started because Patrick (...) started it in the Abbey, and everybody came, kind of going, oh we better go because we have to be in that, and then it became a thing of itself, and has become what is the Theatre Forum. And I think there is the possibility of that happening here. But the best bits of it wasn't the formal meetings that now happen because I stopped going to that that was irrelevant to me, what was important was the discussions between all the people who were practitioners, and that's what made things happen, and if you actually want things to really start to happen, then it's actually about the practitioners talking with each other, as a group of people. People hear that's happening, then they start to pay attention, as opposed to anonymous logos to appear with letter headings. Again speaking from experience.

LD: That's very useful, I think we learned some hard lessons about communication actually, and one of the things, by no way of excuse, we were kind of learning and inventing as we went along

MS: I'm not moaning, I'm busy, so if I don't get, if something happens I just to (...). I get 100 and something emails a day, some of them come into little boxes and I go whatever, if I don't have to deal with it, if it's not making me money, I'm not worried about it generally, because I'm not funded so I need to make sure that I can live like everybody else too. But the possibilities you have with an organisation like this are really exciting, and I think it wouldn't be a bad thing to have a conversation day, to set out those things. Because otherwise they kind of have to develop over time, but it would be more interesting to have to say; this is what we want to do. And you can't do them all together. But actually setting goals wouldn't be a bad thing. And actually just talking about these things, because talking is actually the most powerful thing that people have. And we actually as people who physically visit buildings and (...) we know how on the ground it actually works. And we're all not bankers and business people and we

don't necessarily play golf to keep in with people. So we're on the ground, but when people hear people talking, they actually pay attention. Really pay attention.

LD: I think the concept of a conversation day is a really good one. A very interesting idea.

NR: I've just hosted Francis O'Connor in Sligo, and he talked about almost the very same thing, that one of the most important things in the British Stage Design calendar are the days when they just get together to meet, and usually its in a hotel foyer so they have a drink or whatever but younger members begin to talk with older members. Just to see the lie of the land, and that happens 4 times a year. I'm not saying we do that 4 times a year that would be up to the new committee. But it's interesting you saying that because I've just literally heard it yesterday from Francis.

Member: Its something for me, I graduate in October as a set designer and you come out into the world and where do you start? Now I do have an advantage in the sense that I am going to be working with the Abbey for a couple of months, so I get to learn there, but where do you go? I've background in construction, so I do theatre construction too. I try and meet and greet there, but you're talking at that stage on amateur musicals on that level. To get into a more serious position, in bigger venues, you just don't know where to start. Now I think networking is a great thing, but where do you start networking? Looking at the ISSSD, what I'd like to do is, as a new member and a new person in the industry, is learn from more experienced members, where to start, what to do, where to be, who to meet, how do you meet them?

MS: Could I suggest one of the ways of doing that is on the website. About two years ago I was asked to do a show in the Gaiety, and we had it sorted. And the person who was doing the design and lighting left the Gaiety very suddenly, and with about two and a half weeks to go in rehearsals, the scenery was ready to go to the shop, I had to go and find a new designer, a set designer ideally and a lighting designer. I ended up looking through this website, and having to ring people individually, which was quite difficult, as there really wasn't any information, or another place to go, I ended up, with 10 days notice, having to do it all myself, which I hated, but there were two jobs there, I just couldn't find a way to contact people, there wasn't even a network where I could put an email in saying, "Hi the followings happening, this is an emergency, there's a budget, there's money how about doing it, it's the Gaiety" It was actually really difficult, to actually locate anybody.

LB: I think there are a few different things there and I think they're all equally important, that is really important. I think the face to face just getting to chat to people, and us getting to chat to each other is really important, and then what Francis (O'Connor) was talking about in the UK what they do is actually director and designer cups of tea or pints, so it's a chance for you to meet your peers but also to meet the kind of people that you want to get to work with in the future.

On a related note, a couple of years ago I got a bursary from the Arts Council to do a few different things that were sort of nourishing to me. And one of them was, I found that I don't get to meet other designers, other than when I'm working alongside say a costume designer, a lighting designer. I never actually ever get to talk to other set designers, and I never get to have the bigger conversations other than lets get the work done kind of conversations, so I did as part of that series of very informal interviews/conversations with people like Francis and bigger directors who work in visual ways around Europe, where I literally sat down, they either came to my house or I went to their house and we sat down and had a cup of tea and I just asked them what do you do, tell me about how you got here and how do you think, how do you even start designing. And those kinds of conversations were amazing, and I never had them before I hadn't had them since college. So it's something that I'm interested in trying to foster in some ways is informal conversation in smaller groups rather than just sitting and listening to somebody speak. So with that in mind I went to Willie White in the Theatre Festival, in the first instance asking are there, knowing that the answer was probably no, are there ever any designers that come in with shows, that could be sequestered away for a couple of hours and have cup of tea in my house with a group of people and just have a chat. He said well no not really cause designers don't tend to travel in that way, but he would be interested potentially if I were to propose one or two, one person, that he might be able to bring somebody in for a more public kind of talk but then to do something a bit more informal that would be a bit of a chat, where it would be a group of us and somebody interesting, and a chance for us to talk to each other as well as that person. So I'm kind of thinking about that obviously just a thought at the moment. So if anybody has any ideas of people that they would just love to meet, who are set designers, or directors who work in visual theatre, send me an email and send me their names cause I might just make a list to forward to Willie to say please pick one of these and bring them over.

DD: It might dilute what you're trying to do so piggybacking on it might not be the best idea, but certainly our conference, when that happened, we invited Donatella Barbeiri, if we were able to get our budget together for another conference, maybe these smaller conversations could be part of that.

LB: They could happen at the same time. DTF (Dublin Theatre Festival) is a crux of a time for a lot of us, so if that were to happen I would suggest that happen towards the end of the festival, where people actually have a bit more time. I'm interested in the informal, I'm interested in the human level, but Willie does need to get a public event at some level. But if anyone wants to suggest people my name is Lian Bell

MS: Why don't we ask Bob Wilson to come and do something?

LB: Well there's one name to go on the list, but it's not we here, I'll be speaking to DTF.

MS: Bob is doing lectures at the moment in universities, that's why I think he's worth talking to, he's actually in the process of doing that. He actually has worked here, twice, and he actually made a piece here, which was an unbelievable nightmare, because he changes his mind every 5 minutes, but we got it on. But we also brought, from the gallery of New York, the drawings for Einstein (on the Beach), and had an exhibition and video stuff at the time, and we had a conference about how you could make art with lots of people. Other people who would be interesting to have over, because they would interact, I brought them to work with the students of Trinity, when they were starting the Drama course with Peter Schuman, those are the people who are seminal to the people who are now inspirational to other work, and obviously Eva van Hogan his partner would be another extraordinary person. I think you start up there, and fail, but if you don't start there, there isn't a chance of doing anything, because I think the arts council would fund something like that as well Willie, because those sort of manes are attractive, and they're identifiable, if that makes sense, and I think one should start big. We all have friends, but I think those are the sort of names we should be reaching for, the ones who are making international theatre, and funded both commercially and at such a scale, because, everybody is asking the government to multiply the funding. We are the least funded country in the EU.

DD: Speaking of funding in that way then it might be interesting to update you in how we got our funds thus far, and what we're planning and whether or not we think we'll be likely to ... and having looked at the examples of the AIST and how their relationship with the arts council went, and in terms of our stake holders we did have a home in ITI (Irish Theatre Institute), which is now less tenable as they are no longer able to facilitate us our of hours in the way that they have, so we were able to hold our meetings there. So they were our first stakeholders and we went to them as a home because they have been representative of Ireland in PQ 2007, so they were the people who made the first iteration there. And so we're trying to figure out how we progress. Sarah Jane (Shiels) was successful really she led up the application for us to get the €30,000 in the arts grant strand, which is coming up now the deadline. We're not sure if that's the home for ISSSD. We haven't had clarification from the arts council although we have had meetings with the Arts Council regarding how we secure, if there is a possibility, they're not interested in funding further support organisations, which we knew when we founded. Theatre forum and ITI already exist, and they have changed their relationship with AIST (Association of Irish Stage Technicians), that's right Conleth isn't it? So they said to us outright...

CW: It's for technical reasons...

DD: And they've said to us in meetings that they are not interested in funding us as an organisation, but we can apply for project funding. So we have not got ourselves together for the Arts Grant, which is going in at the end of the month, because of the change in circumstances. But theoretically we could be going forward in 2021 with a view to getting two year funding to fund, but very specifically they cannot fund PQ, so they can only fund national things, which is

why we held the National Exhibition, which actually is as important for the people on the ground, it seems to us, that the National Exhibition, theoretically that's another avenue to go to fund that. But we have met with David Parnell who has now changed position, so we are in the process of trying to arrange a meeting with Rachel West, to say how do we get this special funding pot that the Venice Biennale has. I don't think we're going to get it now but at least how do we begin that conversation, because that's a three way organisational fund, from the department of the Arts Culture and Heritage, the Arts Council and Culture Ireland fund the whole thing. That would be something we're interested in conversing about, we're pursuing that, but haven't had loads of joy. We're trying to figure out how to make it a regular thing that we can continue as a society, apart from just our membership fees, although that is always amazing that we get membership fees. We were unsuccessful this year in applying to Dublin City Council for conference fund, so that's where we're at so if we do want to put on a conference in the coming year we'll have to fund it somehow. So that's where the funding path is, and if you have questions about that please feel free to ask. So things like a conference are essential, and could possibly be done for cheaper than we did the last one because the Abbey was a very expensive place to host it, and we know that there are other places who would be cheaper to host it, which we now know after that experience. But it felt like a National touch stone for us to have that and we'd love to have another one but haven't figured out quite how to manage it yet.

LD: Any other thoughts?

BW: Jumping off the communication point and a lot of what's been said about outreaching, getting a chance for a group of us to sit down and actually see each other. I think that would be really important, not just for the fresh out of college or what have you, but for those four or five years time as well. Like myself, I know, obviously you don't get a chance to have these kinds of discussions if you're not doing a show or having a pint. There's always a certain level of complaining that goes on, that's the just nature, what do you do. Amongst the people, a lot of designers I know are four or five years out of Lir MFA or SEEDS or some kind of design internship. It's going to sound melodramatic when I say it but really the only word I can come up with is there is a level of despair, amongst that group of people, because people just aren't able to get a foothold. I remember when I got out of the masters programme here, four or five years ago now, there was sense in that year, first coming out you have a certain amount of scraping about. You're doing bits of steady workflow, designing for not very much money, but it felt like you were getting somewhere, and the general feeling amongst people anecdotally who I'm around is that's really stopped. A lot of people I know have just walked away from the arts completely, because they just completely feel that if they're not, no one's in this to get rich, but not even being able to pay even half their bills

JOC: This isn't unique to students, or unique to five year out students, it's across the board, people who are working in the business a long time

MS: I think part of the problem is that the arts council has ceased to fund companies in the way it did, so the work opportunities simply aren't there, the tours aren't happening.

Member: The issue we are having with the Abbey and the new model it has reduced the number of available jobs for freelance designers. Similarly the Gate have cut their numbers of productions that they are producing in the year, it's a crisis in terms of making a living in the city of Dublin, and I guess Nationwide.

DD: Particularly in Dublin with its rent, it's overheads.

LD: Peter do you have any thoughts on that? You did a lot of work around that a few months ago

PP: I ended up accidentally in Leinster house giving a speech about this in April of last year. Just to echo what you're saying, there seems to be cavernous, there's a void in the capacity to maintain a career. There is a lot of focus on this emerging level support of educational practice or restaged development, and a lot of the responses of the institutions we were engaging with, including the Abbey and I think its' across the board. There seems to be an attitude of using this early stage career development to deflect from the fact that there's not actually mid career stability. So it's this sort of neo liberal generative of a thing without really worrying about the long-term nature of it. So this work precarity was coming up and the concept of the precariate, as a name for people who live in a zero hour contract psychology, and I think that was feeding in quite heavily into the co-production model, not to equally be melodramatic about the language, but it is a virus in that it has taken over the method of making in this country. And in a lot of countries, because it's minimum input maximum output. The institutions put as little in as they need, as they can and get what looks like an incredible amount out. Where really as you start to look into the statistics of that, what's actually happening is they're squeezing the sponge tighter. Now to be fair what was being discussed amongst our peers at the time, the Abbey became a fulcrum for what is actually a much larger problem, which is not really their fault. What's being encouraged is a top down model that even the Arts Council itself has been pushed and pressured to exist under, which is this sort of overly wrought statistical analysis of success versus investment. So there's a very terrifying relationship between each euro that goes in to what they expect to get out of it. And the government is putting the Arts Council under that much pressure, as makers I'm not sure if everyone here has, but those of us who have been successful in getting funding for productions, can tell you the level of administrative workload absolutely exploded in the last 5 or 10 years, and a lot of that has to do again with the fact that the Arts Council, you can tell there's a sort of anxiety in that organisation about what they have to prove what they're doing with the money they're disseminating. They are under attack from Creative Ireland, which is not an arms out organisation, Culture Ireland who technically is not an arms out organisation. The general level of that came to me standing with 5 very high level makers, ANU productions, Brokentalkers, myself, Aideen Barry, Liv O'Donoghue. We ended up in a vortex of despair, with a lot of very skilful

peers of mine, people that I would have perceived myself to be looking up at, rather than in line with in my career, particularly being not based in Dublin and that has its whole other problem. And what became really frightening was that I had assumptions about the success rate of those individuals, only to sit a talk to them and hear horror stories, legitimate horror stories. I don't think its giving away any personal information, these speeches were given in public, Louise Lowe telling a story of living at home with her mother and not being able to take this huge opportunity in Melbourne or with Punch Drunk because she couldn't afford to leave Ireland, to physically leave. That stuff really terrified me and obviously terrifies all my peers. I'm in my mid thirties, I would have thought at some point I would have stabilised my career. I'm sure like everyone I get to August and I think every ones forgotten I'm a designer, and then it sort of pops up. So I don't mean to be despairing about it, what I felt the purpose of this organisation would help with, was for us to share the story of that, because I think there is a sort of a shame associated with it, there's a sort of a hidden nature, that conversation about being precarious, this idea that we're afraid to talk about our rates, where there's a conversation that we've tried to bring into the organisation about contracts understanding, because a slightly better contract versus a slightly worse contract means you have incrementally better pay and three or four hundred euro extra per contract five contracts a year is the difference being paying your rent or not. And that's very much understanding licences, all the things that there isn't a general dialogue about, if you have an agent or not, if you have someone willing to tell you, so all of that fed into this conversation last year about precariousness, where as I said I ended up in front of politicians talking about. And happy to do a very uncomfortable thing with is talk about my own financial situation in front of a nation of people, strangers, that's very difficult, and actually I didn't realise how difficult it would be until afterwards I realised I felt very violated by the whole process. So yeah, I think the anxiety is very real, I hope the organisation is, I would like to think we are super aware of that, and a large part of the conversation is, is not about trying to fire brand, or assault individual organisations, it's more about trying to find a narrative that is cohesive enough to make a clear rally cry for the ecology of our arts organisations. I think with the technical groups in Ireland AIST, they were better at articulating, and I think we took quite a lot of inspiration from their capacity to articulate, you know worth per hour, this idea of valuing yourself. My hope would be who every comes in next would be very much up for trying to take control of that narrative and really try and run with a dialogue of the actually truth of how we're living with this job

MS: But I think one of the reasons that the AIST are very successful and articulate, is that a lot of the people who are involved has actually jobs in venues, they kind of actually at the end of the week each week get paid. I've been producing professionally on my own for 40 years, and some times I can go to TK max and the next day I'm moving the furniture to find money to buy milk. I'm doing it 40 years. I do shows in the Gaiety; I do shows in places I can't pronounce the name of. That's the way the arts are in Ireland, and they haven't changed in 40 years. And that comes down to funding and understanding why you fund the arts. And so there's two problems, one is the government and the people who

appoint people to boards who are business people, but the government itself doesn't understand why we have arts.

PP: I don't want to hold court any longer, but one of the major conversations that came out of that process, I was asked then to go on and do an engagement with the Arts Council around "Making Art Great Again", and what we were trying to discuss was, how can we speak in a language that people who are not artists can understand, because another part of that responsibility is not to presume those that gate keep for us at administrative level or indeed venue level or board level, understand anything about what we do, and they're not really required to understand it in the way that we do. One of the things that came out is trying to find a communal language, that would translate the value of what we do to a language that would speak to them, and I thought the National Campaign for the Arts, did quite a wonderful job, at least the beginnings of a wonderful job, in articulating language that spoke very directly to tourism boards, very directly to ministers, very directly to investment. It is very difficult to talk about the nebulous nature and value of art and society it's an on-going argument through the ages, it's very easy to say for every euro you put in two euro comes back. And so that attempt to translate is another thing we need to take responsibility for together, we're never going to win the battle of explaining why arts is important for itself, it seems there are people who choose to do it, and people who choose not to. But I think there is a central conversation, a communal narrative a communal language that I think began with NCFEA and I'd like us to continue that too.

MS: If you go back historically to why the Arts council are doing what they're doing, it comes back to price wars, back in the 90s, when (...) was there and they decided to start to digitise, and have measurable things, they have their versions of the same thing now. But it was all about if we spend a penny, what's the visible value and can we define the value of art. And that's now run away, completely, it's like a virus, almost like a hacker got into it, and that happened and you can never explain to these people, but it is about thinking in a different way about how you're talking to people. My father coined a term a very long time ago about designing, which was lighting design was 5% aesthetics, and 95% of it was actually mathematics, and that was absolutely the truth, because when he started working, Hilton used to do things like "Oh we'll move it over there dear boy" and he learnt to tilt the bar and didn't move the light, Hilton was like "Great". And he went to the Abbey and he was the techie there. And then one day they decided they would get somebody in to light borstal boy who brought lighting plans, and drew them up, and suddenly everybody had to have lighting plans, but until that person drew up that lighting plan for borstal boy there was not a single lighting plan in the country, except at the back of a cigarette packet. And so now we have digital plans, and we have magic sheets, and they make us real, because we can send a plan to a venue. And if you write it in the right way, all the techies get used to it and the can rig the thing in advance, and it's kind of in the place you want it. So it is about creating a language from our end of things to other people.

DD: I'd just like to go back to Bill's (Woodland) point and also bring in the costume collective as an example, I'm trying to tie those things together, yes it is one of the things we could provide space for people to talk, I don't know if we can provide hope really but we maybe can by having conversation and communication and solace and I think that's really interesting and that brought me onto thinking about how do we create language that will represent for ourselves in a better way, and also to bring in the costume collective, cause I went to that meeting that you had in Trinity and how we can combine forces rather than maybe be separate in such a way. I'm not suggesting that we were splinter groups in the same way we just had different concerns, but how we could interact better with that and access/provide a place for all of those people to come together to talk, and perhaps find a way to represent for ourselves in a better way. Which I think, maybe we need an officer in the way Catherine you ended up being the Abby Officer in our committee, I didn't know we needed that, but maybe we need a NCFA officer within our committee. The agenda and the roles that we have thus far maybe are not sufficient, this is a space for us to figure out what we need to do to change the organisation going forward and make it more relevant if it was feeling irrelevant, which is about engaging more. I think the conversation days are a brilliant idea because we have set out an agenda around PQ and around the National Exhibition, but maybe that's not what people are interested in, maybe that's not what designers are interested in, so we are open to passing all of that on. So would you speak a little bit about the costume collective and where are you now?

JOC: The costume collective has sadly been suspended, we reached a certain point and that was that.

CF: Well I think the point was then I joined the ISSSD when we went a presented that time

DD: Because it was really inspiring to see there was may 60/70 people in that room, costume makers and costume designers and workers and to seen the swell of those numbers was really like "Wow this is our community", which we haven't yet, as ISSSD managed to capture the imagination yet, I'm thrilled with this number here, but if we consider all the people who aren't here as well, I'm interested in that.

JOC: One of the things that we tried to achieve was to work out in our business the structure of all the different jobs and titles, in order to present that to producers or whoever is the front line in paying us, in order for them to fully understand what it is we do, and what they're paying for, so we got so far with it and it seemed to be like...

CF: It was supposed to go into a document, and then we talked about maybe doing one for set and for lighting for all the disciplines

JOC: Other disciplines were interested in our format of doing it, but we just hadn't acted on it in a while.

DD: And as Peter said talking about money, we're interested in talking about money in a non vulnerable way, so that we can talk about money but you don't have to say actually I'm down to my last .20p and I'm searching the sofa for money for milk, we want our artists to feel protected but also that we don't have the bench mark standard so designers don't know what they can ask for when they're really being taken the piss of

JOC: It's a very delicate thing, and we always had the nervousness of having a survey that was done 20 years ago is still being referred to as standard for what the fees are. I cleared out my studio and I was looking at contracts that were 10/12/15 years old and the fees are the same, nothing has changed and the conditions are worse

LD: I think there have been some revisions to the British equity.

DD: And what can we do about that and how can this organisation and how can these people who are here today, thank you for coming, how can you all be part of what can we do or, it's not a question of what people can do for us but what position we can do

Member: Are there other organisations that look after directors and writers?

DD: There was a newly founded one in response to the Abbey, and organisation of directors came together. I don't know how much further they've gotten, but I certainly know, they were trying to, and I think actually they were inspired by us, going oh this is a voice

Member: I know from IT Sligo, they started up a new course, a writing literature course, and we're trying to collaborate with them in parts that we're doing up there. I sat and talked to a few writers, and they'd write something, and as they explain their writing, you're designing in your head, and then when you start talking to them, they start changing the way they see it as well, and maybe their writing will change from what's coming out of your head. But a writer, to get something made has to meet a director and a producer, and then they need a set designer. But I need to meet a director for them to hire me to build a set.

DD: They started an organisation, there was a number of them, I only know that anecdotally but certainly they were talking about it.

Member: It could resemble conversation days, but having a conversation day with other designers is good in a sense, you get inspiration for things that have been done, but I can't ever see them throwing you work

PP: But just to be clear, this organisation is not set up to generate work, that's not the purpose of it, although, I'm with you and I also need work, and also need to network, we're not really here to facilitate, at least I don't think we are.

DD: And we haven't been thus far.

LD: The thing for me, is, it comes back to this thing on continuity, mutualising things and having the feeling on continuity. The more consistent you can be, the more you start to build a calendar, the more you have the idea that things come round on a fairly regular basis, there are conferences, there are meetings, there are events, that energy begins to build around that, the challenge is to keep that wheel turning. Deirdre is absolutely right, the last couple of years have been a great moment for building societies, because groups of people have wanted to come together to talk about the Abbey, the big challenge is sustaining that, and building the energy round it. For me a lot of that comes down to at its simplest level, a calendar of interesting events.

LB: Which can be very low fi

LD: Absolutely

NR: Am I the only Northern Designer? Is there anyone from the North?

Member: Me

NR: It was different in my career, I don't really design anymore, but there was a bench mark set up by equity, certain companies were certain levels, certain theatres were certain levels, and you just went the equity website, to your local equity rep and they would tell you, that is the fee that the company should be giving you, and then that was in the arts council funding for that company, that they expected that person to be hired at that rate, including directors, including writers, including actors and including designers. When the arts council funded a certain number of productions, the budget had been agreed that this is the payment that everyone was due, should we look to setting up something like that?

LD: In fairness to the arts council they have recently started an initiative, which is about getting companies to be more transparent about those kinds of employment rates. I don't think the Arts Council is proposing to set the rate, but it is proposing that companies become much clearer and transparent about it. The set rates you're talking about, they do still exist, and they're the ones the British Equity have just revisited, they're set pretty low.

CW: You're missing the lack of equity down here

LB: I just have one questions and a point of interest, and one is who is a member of equity?

(Many have been, lapsed)

MS: Can I just say, in 2001 when I videoed the Matchmaker from the Gaiety, it was the very first time anyone had actually videoed a play live, and I was trying to

do a contract, for everybody, and I rang equity here and they didn't have a clue, and I ran British Equity, and they didn't know, because nobody had ever done it before.

LB: Well one of the reasons I think Equity in Ireland is so weak, is that people aren't members. I'm not a member; I've never been a member.

AF: There was a time when all theatre designers were members of equity, and it was no better

LD: Lets take this last point.

CW: The fees are set up with Equity agreements with different organisations, you go on any website and see TMA and West end, and we don't have that.

NR: Maybe we should campaign to have that?

LD: Genuinely last point.

BH: I just wanted to mention this one thing because I've been on this journey this last couple of weeks where I had a meeting with someone in here (The Lir), who told me about the new social welfare artists scheme thing. I went in and chatted to them, and originally they couldn't even tell me who I had to apply to. They said you have to prove you're a lighting designer; you need some proof from your national organisation. I asked what is my national organisation, and they said I don't know, I guess it's the arts council, of course the arts council wouldn't talk to me, I talked to my arts officer in Galway, they said they would write me a letter, I went to the office in Galway. Finally (social welfare) gave me a list saying you need to join either Equity or Siptu, which I had never heard of either, and then I found out it was actor's equity Ireland, and I'm not even an actor, so I'm in the process of trying to join that now but I also went to the meet the arts council meeting last week and was chatting to someone about this scheme and they were like, we don't know, if you're on that scheme how that's going to interact with you applying for arts council funding.

(Gasps from the room)

LD: Ok, thank you for that!

LB: Can I just say one tiny thing that's a position thing? For anyone who doesn't know about it I run a programme called Gap day, which is a day where you get paid to take time away from as a freelance multiple worker on multiply things, you can take time away from, wherever you are close to wherever you live. We try to support more regional artists. Mermaid Arts Centre website, it's open to designers, it's open to production managers, please pass it onto them

NoeliaR: Very quickly, do you all read the newsletter? I'm going to send you all a newsletter, I'm very grateful to be given the opportunity to be your

communications officer, and I'm going to try to do my best, and this has been very insightful for me. So I think I can draft a communications strategy for the society, raise all your points online, improve your presence, and see how we can be more beneficial. So I'm going to send a newsletter with those points, I just want to make sure everybody is going to read that news letter in the next few days.

MS: I think the society should set up a WhatsApp group. Because we are doing shows now and we actually do WhatsApp groups, and it extraordinary how suddenly you'd be stuck for something, and a message pops up going, we need something.

NoeliaR: I think you could use social Media for that. Because a WhatsApp group with 200 people is a little bit messy.

Member: Sinead O'Donnell Carey set up a Set and Costume page in Sligo, but it actually has worked because she needed an elephant for the Opera, and my local theatre had one, and I wrote back yes, there's one in Mullingar and she came and got it.

DD: We have two Facebook groups, we have the one you have to ask to join and we have the public facing one as well, so that's slightly complicated, I'm not sure what the best thing to do with that.

LD: Can I bring us all to the final bit of business for the day, which is the business of electing new members to the committee. I'm going to make a proposal about this, which is a slight simplification of matters, which is this. If we were to look and nominate a new secretary, a new treasurer, a new chair, plus two general committee members that would be five new members on the committee in total. Chair, secretary, treasurer and two lets call them ministers without portfolio, who might be co-opted into various roles as the committee saw fit over the next phase, that seems to me to a slight simplification of what we had before but might help in people getting their heads round the process.

DD: And to outline whose remaining on the committee, so there's 4 remaining on the committee, the new committee won't be just starting from nowhere. That's part of our constitution; we said we could only stay on for three years, which was in order to keep it fresh. Catherine is on for two years, Niall is on, Kata is staying on, and Katie Davenport. And we are trying to keep it gender balanced, so bear that in mind that we have three females staying on, and only one male staying on. Let that be a cry for the men!

LD: So with that I'm hoping there are some people in the room who would be interested in nominating themselves for one of those five roles.

DD: Or do any of the current members of the committee want to go into those roles?

CHAIR

AF: Niall would you do chair?

NR: I understand, it's just cause I live in Sligo and Belfast I really do think the chair should be a Dublin based person.

DD: And it might be better that you stay in the education role.

NR: And I would like to stay in the education role

CF: Ciaran?

DD: Ciaran was on the committee already and had the role of vice chair. Would you be willing?

LD: Nominate Ciaran.

AF: Seconded

Passed

TREASURER

DD: I'm willing to stay on for a handover to the new treasurer. And I'm willing to be a PQ advisor, and talking to the arts council and keeping up those relationships to see how we can get PQ2023 up if everybody is ok with that

CF: Nominate Bill Woodland

PP: Seconded

Passed

SECRETARY

NR: Catherine? Katie?

NR: We did propose the committee refresh itself the year after PQ so there is stability until the visit to Prague

SJ will do a three-month handover

LD: Nominate Sarah Foley

NR: Seconded

Passed

MINISTERS WITHOUT PORTFOLIO

LD: It's important that we have a full group on the committee to assist with the various tasks; sometimes those people may take on particular roles. If you are interested in taking an active part in the society, there are two roles there.

Member: Conleth?

DD: Seconded

Passed

CF: Lisa Krugel

CW: Seconded

Passed

LD: We have a new board.

NR: Could we set the next meeting of the new board?

DD: It's usually the first Thursday of the month.

CF: It was also every month, but there was something about it being every second month.

DD: It had started it was every other month but in the ramp up to PQ

LD: Can I make a suggestion? I think the earliest you could have it would be the April date, so could I suggest that the first meeting is made April 2nd?

NR: Could the outgoing committee come to it as well? And a venue?

CF: In general we've ended up here for the last few so I think I could probably organise another room

LD: So the next meeting will be the Thursday April 2nd, at the Lir, 6pm

PP: I'll be in Uzbekistan, but I'll feed in with you before.

MS: Can I suggest another place to meet would be Rua Red; it's right at the end of the LUAS line

Appendix a
Financial Report:

**ISSSD Treasurer's Actions re Financial Matters 2019/2020
AGM**

Dec 2018 – We had a starting bank balance of €5,373.32.

Dec 2019 – Over the year we took in €2027.50 in Membership fees.

**Income Raised and Expended for PQ 2019 from PQ producer
Triona Ní Dhuibhir's accounts.**

INCOME

Arts Council	30,000	Activity
Design and Crafts Council of Ireland	2,000	Activity
		Received
Culture Ireland	40,000	
Dublin City Council	0	n/a
National Embassy of Ireland	0	n/a
Cork City Council	4,000	Activity
Sligo County Council	2,000	Activity
Membership Fees 2018 & 2019	2,078	Core
Income In Kind - ITI Meetings	787	In Kind
Venues In Kind - Project	6,600	In Kind
	87464.9	

We have a current bank balance of €1823.67 on Feb 29th 2020.

Expenses 2020

The known expenses that will go through the bank account in the coming year:

€900 for the remainder of the year of fees for Noelle Ruiz.

DCCI membership

Bank Charges

Web hosting costs

AGM in Feb Costs, approx €80

Income 2020

We expect income €950 from DCCI for exhibiting the PQ Exhibit in Dublin, Belfast and Sligo.

We can expect approximately €1000 in membership fees, that is approx 20 paid up members.

Appendix b

Irish Society of Stage and Screen Designers Membership breakdown

February 2020, 134 Members

Gender Balance:

Male/Female 58/76

Place of work:

Screen 5

Stage 68

Stage and Screen 54

Category status:

Student 20

Graduate 27

Professional 87

Associate 1

Area of interest:

AV 1

AV, Virtual and Augmented Reality 1

Costume 19

Design Education 1

Lighting 15

Lighting AV 2

Lighting Other 1 (visual arts based -scenographic performance practice)

Lighting Set Sound 1

Lighting Sound Composition 1

Lighting Sound Photography 1

Other 1

Production 1

Prop maker, Maker, Scenic artist 1

Set 25

Set AV Live event 1

Set and Costume 18

Set Costume Model Making 1

Set Costume Other 4 (Sculpture, Art Department Assistant, Graphic Design and Illustration)

Set Costume Production Design 1

Set Costume Production Photography 1

Set Costume Props Puppets Scenic Painting 1

Set Costume Puppetry 1

Set Design and Construction 1

Set Lighting 8

Set Lighting AV 2

Set Lighting AV Installations 1

Set Lighting AV Photography 1

Set Lighting Costume 3

Set Lighting Costume Art Department Other 1

Set Lighting Costume AV 1
Set Masks and Puppets 1
Set Props 1
Sound 3
Sound AV 2
Sound Composition 2
Sound Design Composition 1
Sound Design Composer 2

Breakdown by application category:

Set 74
Costume 52
Lighting 39
AV 12
Sound 13
Composition 7
Other
Photography 3
Production 2
Prop maker 2
Design Education 1
Scenic Artist 2
Live Event 1
Scenography Performance Practice 1
Visual Arts Based Scenographic Performance Practice 1
Sculptor 1
Art Department Assistant 1
Graphic Design 1
Illustration 1
Virtual and Augmented reality 1