



IMMA'S HALF DOZEN

ARTS MINISTER Patrick O'Donovan is seeking applications from worthies looking to fill no less than six upcoming vacancies on the **Ali Curran**-chaired board of Imma.

At the end of last year two vacancies were filled, with UCC architectural design academic **John McLaughlin** and consumer affairs expert **Rhoda Lane-O'Kelly** appointed for five-year stints.

The latter is the head of the Consumer Goods Forum and boasts an address in Paris. Describing herself as "a seasoned executive", Lane-O'Kelly added an executive master's in cultural

leadership to her CV in 2024, so presumably she has plenty to offer at board meetings.

When the two vacancies were advertised last year, it was noted that the estimated time requirement was a chunky 75 (unpaid) hours per annum. The good news is that this time around the successful candidates will only have to commit a paltry 32 unpaid hours a year.

The previous advert highlighted two areas where essential experience was being sought – "strategic communications/brand building" and "physical infrastructure development/capital programme management".

The minister is now looking to fill six vacancies, although by the end of this year only five terms will have concluded. Next month will see both business suit **John Cunningham** and risk management expert **Margot Lyons** complete seven years on the Imma board, while in December fundraiser **Mary Apied**

and former Convention Centre chairman **Dermod Dwyer** complete a decade each in situ. Writer **Eva Kenny's** first term will also conclude then.

It seems that a sixth vacancy is being advertised now because artist **Gerard Byrne** will complete his decade as an Imma director next February. Clearly, O'Donovan is planning rather further ahead than his predecessor as minister, **Catherine Martin**.

For the upcoming vacancies, seven areas have been highlighted where experience is being sought –

"corporate governance/financial expertise; finance and accounting; professional artist with international experience; strategic fundraising and philanthropy; climate and sustainable transition; legal; and public relations/strategic comms".



Rhoda Lane-O'Kelly

WHILE THE Arts Council has been getting both barrels recently for rather obvious rea-

sons (clue: €7m IT debacle), it is rarely criticised by its clients for equally obvious reasons. Certainly, the smart move is to only question the modus operandi on Merriem Square after you have been cut loose.

Last week, one-time Abbey Theatre artistic director Ben Barnes fired a salvo at the funding agency, ostensibly regarding its disproportionately Dublin-focused spending record but actually to highlight the fact that his Four Rivers theatre group in Wexford had seen its approx €200,000-a-year grant "inexplicably" slashed to zero this year.

This was apparently on the grounds that other applications were "more compelling", which must have hurt the hapless Ben, who presumably knows a compelling argument for funding when he sees it.

It turns out too that Barnes also wrote recently to both the Arts Council director and chairwoman – Maureen Kennelly and Maura McGrath – to give the Merriem Square mafia some tips on funding projects outside the Pale. The gals, however, may have had other things on their minds.



MAGNIER'S NEW WORLD

DISCONTENT WITH Coolmore's near stranglehold on Irish racing had been a talking point at bloodstock sales in recent seasons but that has all changed. But the result is a significant hike in prices for top-quality horseflesh.

Tattersalls and Goffs sales have seen records tumble, with Sheik **Mohammed al Maktoum's** Godolphin, **Kia Joorabchian** and **John Stewart's** Resolute Racing among those pushing sales prices to new heights.

At this year's Tattersalls Ireland Breeze-Up Sales, prices increased by 21%, with a new record for the top-priced lot – a son of *Night of Thunder*, who

realised €580,000. The two-year-old was consigned by **Gay O'Callaghan's** Yeomanstown Stud and was purchased by **Anthony Stroud** of Stroud Coleman Bloodstock, one of 10 lots he acquired at the sales.

Stroud is well-known as Godolphin's 'talent spotter' and was responsible for the purchase of al Maktoum's recent Newmarket 2,000 Guineas winner, *Ruling Court*, who is by Coolmore USA sire *Justify*. Stroud, on behalf of the sheikh, outbid Coolmore for the €2.3m colt at the Arqana Breeze-Up sale. (The soft going last weekend ruled *Ruling Court* out of the Epsom Derby, for which he had been a favourite.)

Al Maktoum had ceased buying progeny of Coolmore sires back in 2005 but, following the departure of his last bloodstock advisor, **John Ferguson**,

Stroud issued the directive to find "nice horses without restrictions on their sires". It is a policy that's certainly now paying dividends for the boys in blue.

It is not only on the racecourse that Magnier and his entourage are meeting stiff re-

sistance, as the current high-profile (ie super expensive) Barne Estate schmozzle in the Four Goldmines is showing. The developer and moneybags owner of Newtown Anner Stud, **Maurice Regan**, looks to have summed things up rather nicely with his recent quip: "John Magnier will have to get used to not getting things his own way."

CURRAGH'S HEAVY GOING

CURRAGH RACECOURSE head honcho **Brian Kavanagh** struggled to find some good going wherever he could among the attendance figures after the recent underwhelming Tattersalls Guineas Weekend Festival.

Overall numbers for the three-day event were down again but poor weather got the bulk of the blame. **Anthony Kamin-skas** of AK Bets, however, was once again critical of the facility, with rails colleague **Brian Graham** also proving pretty vocal.

Graham, who has two rails pitches at the Curragh, voted with his feet by choosing to attend the Downpatrick races instead of the opening night of the Curragh's Guineas triple-header. It looks to have been a wise decision.

Certainly, AK Bets, which recently took over the on-course betting office at Listowel racecourse, had plenty of time to share videos of the sparsely populated Curragh stands. One video – captioned: "This is what no consequences to failure looks like" – got a big thumbs-up.

Despite all the criticism, an upbeat Kavanagh continues to put the Co Kildare venue's best face forward, which is not surprising given that the Curragh redevelopment programme ran more than 25% over budget and cost €81m, of which the Irish taxpayer contributed €36m. This figure is in addition to the annual government subsidy (€79m in 2025).

There was some good news for the public in south Co Dublin – 800 new social and 'affordable' homes are to be built on part of Leopardstown racecourse's very large car park – space that is not required as attendances there have also fallen.

Last year, Leopardstown – a Horse Racing Ireland (HRI) racecourse – also received a kicking from Graham and his colleagues. Change is in the air as chief executive Tim Husbands has since exited to be replaced by interim boss **Vicki Donlon**, commercial manager of all four HRI racecourses since 2021.



John Magnier