

**DRESSAGE IRELAND COMPANY LIMITED BY GUARANTEE**

**Company Number: 258826**

**(the “Company”)**

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting

held at The Green Isle Hotel, Dublin

on 8<sup>th</sup> November 2023 at 19:30

**PRESENT:**                   **Marguerite Kavanagh IN THE CHAIR**

**IN ATTENDANCE:** 46 members registered attendance as recorded by Claire Ewing (DI Admin).

Guests In Attendance: Richard Twomey (Richard Ensor Accountants), Nicholas Metcalfe (Mason Hayes & Curran).

**APOLOGIES:** Alison Mastin Moore, Rosie Gomes, Mary Cox, Fiona Dunne, Jean Mitchell, Faith Ponsonby, Sally Andrews, Marion Greene, Damien McCormack, Lucy Adams, Donie McNamara, Lene Aksoy, Bernie Foley, Ana Maria Hughes, Maire Quinlan Pluck, Sinead Donellan.

**CHAIRPERSON IT WAS RESOLVED** to appoint Marguerite Kavanagh as chairperson of the meeting (the “**Chairperson**”).

### **1. Chairperson’s Address**

Marguerite opened the AGM and welcomed everyone and then introduced the Directors, Nicholas Metcalfe from Mason Hayes and Curran legal firm and Richard Twomey of Richard Ensor Auditors as well as Claire Ewing our Office Administrator.

The list of Apologies was displayed to the membership.

Last year’s AGM minutes were emailed out to the membership and Marguerite asked for a proposer and seconder. The minutes were proposed by Lisa O’Brien and seconded by Jane Averill.

2022 saw a full return to sport post covid. In January the board undertook to commence updating policy documents and the rule book. Due to the increasing volume of office work, we agreed to increase the office admin hours.

Early in the year Sarah Mellor and Claire Sedgeman stepped off the board, subsequently Ronan Murphy and Miriam Walsh were Co-opted on, again their specialised skill set was much appreciated. Mid-year we began assessing our constitution and later commenced on updating it.

Regional training clinics continued throughout the country and, for advanced riders Dressage Ireland ran training clinics with Richard White international coach.

The Winter Finals were held in Castle Irvine early April, and we were delighted to have sponsorship from Omagh and Fermanagh District council and many other local sponsors.

The Wild Atlantic Dressage Festival ran over the May bank holiday weekend in Sligo, Leinster ran the Botanica three-day festival in the National Sports Arena over the June bank holiday weekend, while The Northern region ran a two-day festival in Castle Irvine and the Southeastern region ran the Two day Nutriscience classic.

I'd like to express our gratitude to all regions but in particular to those regions and individuals who worked tirelessly to make these festivals happen. They are not only a great motivation for riders but are also an opportunity for judges to have judges training while visiting international judges are on duty here.

The judges committee also organised several judge training events throughout the country and in the UK in an endeavour to encourage and train new judges and to up skill others. Again thanks to the judges committee for all their work in this area and to the many judges throughout the country that support and assist at regional and National shows.

The Dressage Demonstration at the RDS took some organising and the promotional video that was made has been great in increasing our image among the public and potential sponsors. In an effort to acknowledge and celebrate Para Dressage Rider Michael Murphy's achievements Dressage Ireland flew him in to be our guest of honour at the demo where he proudly showed off his double individual bronze medals won at the Para Dressage World Championships in Herning in Denmark.

Grant applications to increase participation were also processed and DI and the IPS joined forces in an initiative to encourage grassroots young riders through a joint programme to be delivered throughout the country. Three days took place in Co Armagh, Kildare and Co Mayo with coaching from International riders Heike Holstein and Kate Dwyer. DI Elevate provides affordable training to riders throughout Ireland across a series of regional events that incorporates flatwork training and workshops to improve skill levels in the saddle and on the ground with a range of topics designed to cover essential horsemanship skills. Most of all it provides opportunities for children to learn while having fun!

The southeastern region also continued with their very successful youth training scheme, with coaching delivered by level 3 coach Anne Marie Dunphy and test riding and horse care management with Dressage Ireland List 3 judge and BHSI coach Jillie Rodgers.

In September the Slieve Bloom Stud National Championships were held in Barnadown; 740 tests ridden which was an increase of over 10% on the previous year. The National Championship title was claimed for the second consecutive year by Dane Rawlins on Espoire.

Slieve Bloom Stud, HSI and Childeric were among a list of supportive sponsors. Again, a huge thank you to all our sponsors. After the Nationals we sent out a members

survey which was well supported the result subsequently informed our decision to move the Nationals to a more central location in 2023.

The Dressage autumn development series kicked off in October for young Irish bred horses. The prize fund was very attractive and it rewarded both owners and breeders. The Leinster regional committee kindly hosted the final in Greenogue.

On October 31st the the Judges Gala took place in Spruce Lodge. Five star FEI judge Katrina Wuerst shared her knowledge and experiences with both Riders and judges on the scales of training from young horses to Grand Prix.

2022 also marked the sad loss of two Dressage Ireland supporters, Dressage Ireland's founding member Mrs Joan Keogh and Debbie Osborough; Dressage Ireland judge. May they rest in peace.

On the International stage in the spring of 2022 Heike Holstein on the Irish home bred Sambuca had a third place at the Keysoe CDI3\*. Mid-year HSI announced the three combinations selected to represent Ireland at the World Dressage Championships in Denmark - Sorrell Klatzko and Turbo, Alex Baker and Dutchman and Anna Merveldt with Esporim.

Anna had a good run of success in 2022 with a third in San Giovanni in February, a third in the GP Special in October again in Italy, and also had top ten placings in Austria and Stuttgart.

Alex Baker had a 6th in Le Mans CDI3\* in October.

Abi Lyle qualified two horses for the World Championships - Farrell and Giraldo, her successes included a win in the consolation GP class in Compiègne, a 5th in Hartpury in the GP special and 6th in Wellington. She finished the year on a high with a PB of 70.39% in the FEI Dressage World Cup short GP followed by a 75.25% in the GP Kur.

Other Irish International riders with notable results were Dane Rawlins with Espoire 4th in the GP at Le Mans in April. Carolyn Mellor and VSH Gouverneur M had a 3rd place in the GP Kur in Belgium. At the same show Sorrell Klatzko had a 4th place with Turbo and Judy Reynolds on For fun placed 5th.

Jennifer Hartnett and Eximio also had a 10th place in Meerle.

At small tour level Belinda Brereton also had some good results in the UK.

At junior level Victoria Campbell had a 5th place in Wellington. Martha Jobling had a 1st and 2nd in Le Mans in April. The Irish pony team clocked up some impressive scores at the Europeans in Poland, Oscar O Connor with scores up to 69%, Lily Larkin up to 67%, Ellen Mc Donald up to 65% and Jessica Grogan 63% placing the team 13th.

October also saw some fantastic youth results in Keysoe GB, three riders won four classes, Martha won two, Ellen won a pony class and Maeve Deverell a children on horses class.

Other Irish International riders included Laragh Byrne, Sophie Doheny, Cillian Curran and Lily Kelly.

2022 was a busy year both nationally and internationally. It is exciting and encouraging to see so many Irish riders both Senior and junior having come through the national circuit to progress to the international stage. Being an island on the edges of Europe it takes a lot to travel to European shows, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all our riders and their families for flying the flag for Irish Dressage abroad.

## 2. Financial Statements

Richard Twomey presented the 2022 accounts which were displayed on the screen. He then asked if there were any questions on the accounts.

Killian Gaffney asked what the long-term projections are going forwards for DI due to incurred losses.

Joe Reynolds discussed that relying on grants and sponsorship to keep the organisation afloat is not viable.

Marguerite Kavanagh summarised that the Board has tried to curtail costs for the NC and NWF and for professional fees. She also worked on attracting sponsors to support the NWF and the NC and is glad to see the sponsors coming back year on year. MK discussed that the financial position has improved in the years from the new Board took over in 2020 and the Board is working on a members survey which will inform strategy going forward to assist DI in being a member led organisation. Rising insurance cost, associated costs to comply with governance and a High Performance contribution of 25k certainly make it challenging but the Board are aware of it and are managing it.

Killian Gaffney queried should the membership fees not increase in order to cover the deficit or that DI needs to improve the membership figures again to make up the deficit.

David Keane discussed that at some point the membership would have to increase their contribution to make the financial position viable.

Lucinda Blakiston Houston discussed that the grants were given to keep the organisation afloat during the covid pandemic. She also discussed that the proposed member survey will get the member's input and the new participation grants will provide new initiatives for current members as well as attracting new members which will lead to more show entries and revenue ultimately.

Jonathan McNeela asked whether it is the summer championships or the winter championships which is costing DI money?

MK summarised the costs of the championships for 2022 and 2023 – outlining that in 2022 the winter championships made a small loss but that the summer championships had made a profit and that overall the two combined had made a profit. For 2023 with the information she has to date the Winter championship lost approx. 3k and the summer championships nearly broke even. This is a significant improvement because for years before 2000 both incurred losses. Mk went on to summarise that the sponsorship is improving and expected to increase over the coming years. MK also discussed that the membership has only now returned to the level of pre covid and that the trajectory looks to be that it will continue to improve going forwards.

JR suggested that one year himself and Jane Whitaker had run the NC and that the event had made a profit and questioned was there an intention to do this again? Kevin Kavanagh responded that perhaps it's not so important that the Championships make money, as it should be a way of giving back to the members, but if they break even then that would be great.

Jane Whitaker discussed that costs have increased hugely in the last number of years and that the sponsorship for 2022 had made a profit for the Championships and that this year we only made very small losses. She then went on to discuss that the survey will address many of the member's questions.

Dane Rawlins discussed that the Board made a conscious decision not to over inflate entry fees when the membership are already living through the cost of living crisis.

JW discussed that CE has made contacts with new sponsors who are interested in contributing for next year.

DR discussed that there is an intent to make the Championships pay.

JW discussed that we have to be wary about charging huge fees that riders can't afford.

Joe Reynolds discussed that he felt that the figures were unsustainable.

JW discussed that there are new initiatives in the works to attract new members.

MK discussed that when the new Board took over in 2020 the DI finances were at an all-time low with only approximately 75K in the bank. The previous Board in 2019 had agreed to contribute 50K to the HSI HP programme. That 50k with Sport Ireland funding released 150k to HP for a team to go to the Olympics, but as we all know a team did not go, but the money was spent. That 50k decimated the financial reserves and that the current Board had worked hard to rebuild those reserves and be discretionary in their spending. As a chairperson she informed the room that in her three and a half years as chairperson attending championships etc she had never stayed in a hotel room or had a dinner on the Dressage Ireland account as it's important to lead by example.

DK discussed that the net assets of over 300K means DI are in a good place and that the new Board will have a good position to work from and that the outgoing Board have done well to build the reserves and as with all boards they would cut their cloth according to their measure.

MK stated that the Board had worked very hard to rebuild reserves and that she was proud of them.

LBH discussed that for the next AGM we will produce a financial plan and budget.

MK discussed that she believes the bookkeeper did a budget early in 2023 but she did not have this to hand for this meeting.

DK questioned the breakdown of the financial reserves held by the regions as that this is a significant amount of money that is not controlled by the Board and that it is important to have sight or where it is.

RT outlined the finances as below as it stood at year end 2022;

ER - 34,584 in the bank and 500 in paypal.

LR – 12,549 in the bank and 617 in paypal.

MWR – 15,767 in the bank.

NR – 10,989 in the bank.

SMR – 11,038 in the bank and 185 in stripe.

NMR – 14,107 in the bank.

SER – 10,179 in the bank.

Members present at the meeting questioned why Eastern Region have so much money accumulated in the bank.

DK discussed that LR for example use their money for the members and that an accumulation of 30K+ should be used for the members or returned to Central.

KG discussed that he felt some regions wasted money unnecessarily.

Clare Fitzsimmons stated that it is the members money and should be spent on the members and to run good quality shows etc. rather than just sitting in the bank.

It was noted that the Board needs to discuss a resolution on the issue of large amounts of money sitting in regional accounts.

DK discussed that around 10K is an acceptable limit for regions to hold in their accounts.

JR questioned again how losses can be contained , DK then reported that on his reading of the accounts that the actual losses at central level was circa €22K he then asked Richard

Twomey what was the depreciation figure on assets, RT answered 11k, whereby DK informed the room that the actual loss was circa €10,500 and that would not be considered unusual for an organisation of this size coming out of covid . He then proceeded to say that in the event if DI had absolutely no reserves which isn't the case, all it would mean was a €10 from the 960 members and the losses would be recuperated.

JR then proceeded to ask about the cost of updating the constitution.

MK stated that she thought it could be approximately 15K but as that was paid out in 2023 as opposed to 2022 she could not be sure as those accounts have not yet been finalised.

The accounts were then proposed by Ivor Harper and seconded by Killian Gaffney.

### **3. Re-appoint the statutory auditors of the Company**

MK asked for a show of hands to re-appoint the statutory auditors of the Company and declared the motion carried.

MK asked for a show of hands to approve payments of the auditors and declared the motion carried

### **4. Chairperson's Closing Address**

Thank you all for your attendance, as you know I have completed six years on the board of

Dressage Ireland, two and a half as a board member and three and a half as

Chairperson. As

with all organisations rotation of Directors is most important for the dynamic life blood of any progressive organisation. So tonight marks the end of my term on the board. When I took over as Chair in February 2020, I knew it would be no easy task. The challenges

began early as the admin, company secretary, finance and IT roles became vacant as all these

had been filled by the very knowledgeable Norbert Von Cramon who retired from

Dressage

Ireland after decades of service. So, we set about filling the roles one by one and concentrated in running the organisation in the best way we could.

The finances were the first issue we needed to get to grips with as the finances were at an all time low due to the substantial figure of €50,000 being contributed by the previous board to HSI High Performance for a team to go to the Olympics. As Chairperson I set about leading the board in some cost cutting exercises to increase finances.

Of course, it didn't stop there we had a website that was on its last legs and was unfit for purpose.

So, with limited resources we set about the website revamp. This was a considerable undertaking

and the scoping took many months of work from then board Director Richard Mc Cracken and DI

member Sarah Logan and the admin staff. As with all projects of this type we had teething

problems and like any change, some members found the unfamiliarity hard to cope with. Over

time and with suggestions from members: I must say it is now much more user friendly, albeit if

we had an unlimited budget at the time we could have had a much better one already tried and tested, however this could have cost over €100,000 and we couldn't have afforded that.

Another board director at that time Sarah Mellor was also a great help to get the banking more streamlined. As we were still managing our way through all that; the world was hit by covid.

Covid as we all know was life changing, and administratively it was a nightmare as guidelines changed weekly and the worry of running the sport in a compliant manner was at times a major struggle.

But with every cloud there is a silver lining, which came in the form of the covid relief grants for sporting organisations. Grant applications are inordinately detailed and difficult especially in relation to financial figures, predictions and estimated losses from lack of activity ect. Sarah assisted us with our first grant and subsequently office staff Jane, Claire and I worked on the subsequent grants. I am pleased to say our efforts paid off and we were successful in all three applications.

Covid made us all look at things differently and to allow the sport to continue we had to think of alternatives to the Winter Championships which in 2021 ran over two separate days in two different venues . We also held a AGM and election by zoom , which with limited resources we ran ourselves with assistance from the board and DI members and I'm glad to report it went well.

Being aware of the need to contain costs I set about a concentrated effort in developing contacts with new sponsors to assist us in the running of the National championships and Winter finals .in the previous three years The National Championships and Winter finals had incurred accumulative losses of up to €38,000 so it was important to reach out and engage with sponsors. Thankfully our efforts have been successful and it's fair to say that in 2021 we ran the Winters and Nationals without any losses. In 2022 in amalgamating the Winters finals and Nationals we didn't incur any losses and in 2023 with my information to date the Nationals ran more or less within budget and the winters a little over budget. So significant improvements have been made.

With rising inflation and insurance costs, it's vital to keep finances in check. As Chairperson I have endeavoured to ensure we as a board are discretionary about spending and continue to build bridges with sponsors and members within our organisation with specialised skill sets. Health and Safety is a subject I took seriously and I advised the board to engage a Health and

Safety specialist Olga Murphy, to assist with health and safety requirements and to ensure Dressage Ireland complied with Insurance and governance criteria. Olga streamlined Health and Safety documentation and also provided training to regional committee's.

A lot has also been done during my term to facilitate good financial oversight. The use of sage a financial management system, a bookkeeper and the use of online banking by central and

regional committee's has been monumental in keeping finances transparent and easily identifiable.

Board Members attended Governance workshops ran by HSI, and we in the board are in the process of updating policy documents in accordance with our governance adoption journey.

As Chair I have always tried to be as open and as available as possible to regional committees

and members in general. I have used every occasion to promote Dressage Ireland among other

disciplines, the public at large by media interviews with Horse & Hound, The

Grassroots Gazette,

The Independent, The Irish Field, through our social media platforms via podcasts and demos

ect. Our Dressage showcase at the RDS has grown hugely in popularity, with full spectator

stands on the Dressage demo day. This has only been achieved through a very professional

approach, public relations videos and with the help of our amazing riders. The public love the dressage to music displays.

In the promotion of Dressage, inclusiveness and making the sport accessible to all is vital to its growth. It is the one sport whereby young, mature, able and Para and neuro diverse athletes can

compete and participate in and it's also gender neutral. In relation to neuro diversity Dyspraxia, Asperger's, and dyslexia are only some conditions that come to mind. To assist such

athletes I led the board to a better understanding of dyslexia and any conditions that impair

memory and in doing so we made the decision to change our rules to allow callers at the National

championships and Winter finals. After all Dressage is primarily about harmony between a horse

and rider it should not be about memorising a test, which was actually blocking many athletes from

participating. I am proud to have made a difference to the confidence and ultimate happiness of such athletes. Life is short we need to make it easy and enjoyable.

Another rule amendment in 2024 will state that beige or white competition jodhpurs may have a

black, navy or grey seat. This is as a result of a growing awareness of female riders concerns to

be able to compete in comfort and free of anxiety. It is worth noting that 72% of all riders are female.

Another initiative I on behalf of Dressage Ireland got involved in was the Grassroots Gazette HAY

campaign, The HAY Campaign – "How Are Ya" is an Equestrian Mental Health Campaign for the

purpose of getting people talking about mental health. It has increased awareness that it's ok not to be ok, and the steps people can take to help get better, and in doing so has educated people to support each other during difficult times.

Another opportunity I identified was for the judges committee to access funding through the latest

covid grant application. We have recently been informed that they were successful in their



application and with the funding they now hope to develop an online judges training system. The judges committee are an integral part of Dressage Ireland and the close ties with the Board means that we can collaborate to improve and grow the sport.

Another proactive role I took in agreement with the board was to seek the advice of a

Human

resource's expert to oversee the recruitment process for a full time Office Administrator. The position became vacant as Jane Averil our previous office admin was snapped up by Dublin City Council.

I was also fortunate enough to have the services of a David Kearney an advisor on data protection law and GDPR to assist with Board with such matters.

I have always put the interests of Dressage Ireland first and in doing so set aside my own personal goals. I suspended my training on the High-Performance squad as I needed to advocate for the rights of Dressage Ireland, one cannot point out conflicts of interests or of loyalty or unfair practices if one is in any way conflicted.

Being assertive to the needs and rights of Dressage Ireland as the national affiliate running the sport in Ireland didn't occur without difficulties or controversies. I can honestly say I have always led by example, always mindful of being courteous, politically correct, transparent, straight and accountable, leading with open communications. All decisions and actions were taken with the knowledge or agreement of the board. Of course, I wasn't always liked for exposing governance issues at higher levels, but time has now shown that there was substance and fact behind mine and the boards concerns. However, that said it's now important to move forward as there is no future looking back!

As you can see being Chair of Dressage Ireland with a membership now nearing 1000 members entails a lot, it meant I had to become proficient in lots of areas, leadership, governance, finance, Human Resources, Insurance, Health and Safety, Safeguarding, GDPR, data protection, grant applications as well as manage the day-to-day activities of a busy sporting organisation, strategise and at times but not too often manage conflict.

So, it's been a busy few years but I am confident that the organisation is in a better place going forward, a lot has been achieved and there is more to do. To assist with an informed and effective strategy for Dressage Ireland I'd like to have been able to formulate and create more surveys to get the views of our members so the organisation could be more member led however, time waits for no one but I'm sure the new board will endeavour to do so.

The other thing I'd like to have done is a National convention, whereby coaches, riders and judges could all assemble for a day or two with International Coaches/Judges to provide a day of education for us all. I have made enquires with some International names regarding same which I will pass on to the board.

A Dressage Ireland ball would be a lovely addition to the calendar and if there were any volunteers present to organise I'm sure it would be much appreciated!

Challenges I foresee for the organisation are around continued sources of revenue through grants and sponsorship and increasingly we as equestrian's need to be acutely more aware of social license. Opportunity for increased engagement with Horse Sport Ireland in relation to High Performance planing and execution would also be welcomed.

It's been a busy few years and it has been a role that required me to hit the ground running and I guess I have been ever since! In this time I learned a lot about myself, my strengths and ability to adapt to changing circumstances. I can say whole heartedly that I always acted in the best interests of Dressage Ireland and was the best chair I could possibly be; however that could not have happened without the support of the Board both past and present, the judges, rules and grading, hearings, Elevate, regional reps committees and admin staff who all work as a team to make it all happen.

On a personal note I'd like to thank my friends and family, particular my husband

Kevin, Shane,

Rory and Niamh who like the supporters of other volunteers kept me going when times got tough. But as my parents used to say what's doesn't kill your makes you stronger!

I believe the the board of Dressage going forward are a strong and well-informed team and I know they will, like I did, work relentlessly for the good of the sport.

So, with that I say Goodnight and Thank you.

DR thanked Marguerite and made a presentation to her on behalf of the Board.

## **5. Election of Directors**

Nicholas Metcalfe from Mason Hayes and Curran introduced himself and explained that there were three nominees to the Board and there were three vacant positions and that Petra Larkin was due for re-election.

He then asked the nominees to come forward individually and introduce themselves.

Jane Averill introduced herself following which NM asked for a show of hands in favour of her appointment and declared the motion carried.

Aisling Deverell the introduced herself following which NM asked for a show of hands in favour of her appointment and declared the motion carried.

Eilish Smith then introduced herself following which NM asked for a show of hands in favour of her appointment and declared the motion carried.

## **6. Adoption of the new Constitution.**

MK declared the last agenda item to be the adoption of the new constitution.

MK summarised the purpose of the new constitution and noted that members had received the constitution and supplementary information with the AGM notice.

MK proposed that the new constitution be passed.

Aisling Deverell asked the reason behind not allowing proxy votes.

NM discussed that the Companies Act does not have by default the provision that the type of company that DI is (a clg), can have proxy votes and that the Board had decided that proxy votes would not be permitted. NM stated that it is not inappropriate for a company to expect members to attend an AGM as it is only once a year.

JR stated that he felt that the Board should reconsider this decision.

DR discussed that he and the Board felt that if a member wants to partake in voting they should attend the meeting.

MK discussed that she felt that you get a better understanding of motions and decisions and are generally better informed to vote if you attend the meeting in person.

DK asked NM to clarify that if a member requests to see the register of members names and addresses that they should be entitled to do so.

NM stated that legally yes, any member can ask to see the register or request a copy of same.

DK stated that you required 50% of the membership to call an EGM.

NM clarified that it is 10% of member signatures required in order to request that the Board call an EGM and that if within 21 days the Board has not done so you then require signatures of 50% of the original 10% requesting the EGM to call the meeting.

The meeting moved to vote on the new constitution and NM stated that a special resolution requires 75% in favour to pass. The vote for was 38 and against was 2 – MK declared the motion carried.

## **7. AOB**

KG asked would the NWF take place in 2024.

Joan Adrain stated that it should as it was an important event for the members.

JW confirmed that the event would take place and that the Board is working to secure a venue and date. She also outlined the difficulties in securing a suitable venue at the right date and for the right price but that hopefully this would be sorted by next week.

The Board confirmed the NC24 would take place from 6-8 September 2024 at Mullingar EC.

MK declared the meeting closed. Finally, she thanks all the nominees and thanks everyone for their attendance.

Meeting ends.



**Chairperson**

18/024

Date