

Virtual Meeting of the Expert Advisory Group on Centenary Commemorations

Tuesday, 3 November 2020, 1.15 pm

Minutes

Attendees:

Dr Maurice Manning (*Chair*)
Dr Martin Mansergh (*Deputy Chair*)
Dr Sandra Collins
Professor Mary Daly
Mr Gabriel Doherty
Dr Anne Dolan
Professor Diarmaid Ferriter
Dr Mary Harris
Dr Leeann Lane
Comdt. Stephen MacEoin
Dr Sinéad McCooile
Dr William Murphy

Mr Conor Falvey *D/TCAGSM*
Ms Sinéad Copeland *D/TCAGSM*
Ms Orlaith Lochrin *D/TCAGSM*
Mr Jerry Kelleher *D/Taoiseach*

Guest Attendees:

Ms Orlaith McBride, *Director of the National Archives*

Apologies:

Mr Francis Devine
Professor Patrick Geoghegan
Professor Eunan O'Halpin
Dr Éamon Phoenix

Key Points:

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting, particularly the Director of the National Archives, Orlaith McBride, who made a presentation outlining the National Archives' plans for the forthcoming commemorative period, 2021 – 2023.

The NAI programme for 2021 will consist of an exhibition focusing on the events leading up to the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty; an artist-in-residence programme; and the digitisation of key collections – including the records of the Constitution Committee 1922 and the early Cabinet minutes. 2022 will see the opening of the new repository, continued partnership with the *Beyond 2022: Ireland's Virtual Record Treasury* research project; and an exhibition in collaboration with the Irish Architectural Archive.

The opening of the repository will be a significant step in the repositioning and promotion of the archive as one of our most important National Cultural Institutions. The Expert Advisory Group welcomed these initiatives and agreed that the final phase of the Decade of Centenaries offered a great opportunity for the National Archives to enhance its public profile and for its very important work to be recognised and acknowledged.

It was noted that the State has made a capital investment of €22 million in the National Archives. It was also noted that the National Archives has an important leadership role with regard to archival matters – local and county archivists look to the NAI for guidance and there is great potential to strengthen these connections. It was suggested that consideration could be given to establishing a committee to assist with the assessment and prioritising of collections for digitisation.

The minutes of the previous meeting (03 September 2020) were agreed.

The proposals from the Military History Association of Ireland and Military Archives for a jointly organised conference in 2021, exploring military aspects of the Struggle for Independence were raised. It was agreed that Comdt. Stephen MacEoin will follow up in this regard.

The Dept. of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (D/TCAGSM), provided an overview of the proposed approach, currently under consideration for the remainder of the Decade of Centenaries. It is envisaged that the final phase (2021 – 2023) will be marked with a three year outline programme comprising four thematic strands; State Ceremonial, Historical Exploration, Community, and Creative Imagination and with a common set of broad themes covering the remainder of the Decade of Centenaries, all based on EAG advice. It is intended to publish the outline programme, when consultation with all stakeholders and potential partners has been completed. It was agreed that a cohesive, collaborative, cross-governmental approach will be very important in navigating through this challenging and sensitive phase. This approach was welcomed by the Group.

The Chair advised that he recently met with the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, Catherine Martin T.D. and they discussed plans for the remainder of the Decade of Centenaries. Minister Martin has secured an additional €3 million in current funding to support the Decade of Centenaries programme in 2021. This represents a significant increase from this year's current funding allocation of €2 million and was welcomed by the Expert Advisory Group.

The Chair provided an update following his recent engagement with Professor Lord Bew, Chair of the Northern Ireland Centenary Historical Advisory Panel. The Chair noted that where appropriate opportunities arise, engagement between members of the Expert Advisory Group and the Northern Ireland Centenary Historical Advisory Panel could be very helpful and constructive. Consideration will be given to a potential collaborative initiative, which would explore the fates of minority communities on both sides of the border following partition.

An update was also provided to the Group regarding the President's *Machnamh 100* initiative. Further details will be shared as plans are confirmed.

The *Art in Defence* proposal from the Defence Forces was welcomed and endorsed by the Group. It was agreed that this is a very fitting proposal for this phase of the Decade of Centenaries and the Group offered any assistance that would be helpful.

Dr Sinéad McCoole gave an overview of the new women's strand for 2021 – 2023. This online platform will explore a number of themes, including; the role of women in advocating for Ireland internationally; the role of women's organisation in the Struggle for Independence and the Civil War; the role of women in politics, public life and the professions; women and violence during this period; the introduction of universal suffrage; and the lives of women in Ulster following the passing of the Government of Ireland Act 1920. The women's strand will showcase various collaborative initiatives, featuring new material.

The Group considered a proposal on behalf of family members of the delegation who participated in the Anglo-Irish Treaty negotiations. The group welcomed this correspondence and agreed that while this proposal may not come within the protocols for a State-led commemorative event, there may be scope within other elements of the programme to highlight the themes raised in the proposal. Gabriel Doherty undertook to consult with colleagues in University College Cork to explore possible opportunities for engagement.

The Expert Advisory Group welcomed and endorsed proposals from D/TCAGSM, under the Community Strand of the programme, to facilitate local authorities who wish to use a portion of their funding to support Tidy Towns Committees or other community groups in planting commemorative trees, gardens or other related initiatives, to mark the final phase of the Decade of Centenaries.

The date of the next meeting will be confirmed in due course (subsequently agreed for 16th December 2020).

Ends.