

Meeting of the Expert Advisory Group on Centenary Commemorations

Tuesday, 14th January 2020, 1.15 pm

Room 308, Department of the Taoiseach

Minutes

Attendees:

Dr Maurice Manning (*Chair*)
Dr Martin Mansergh (*Deputy Chair*)
Dr Sandra Collins
Professor Mary Daly
Mr Gabriel Doherty
Professor Diarmaid Ferriter
Dr Leann Lane
Comdt. Stephen MacEoin
Dr Sinéad McCooile
Dr Éamon Phoenix
Ms Katherine Licken, *Secretary General*
D/CHG
Mr Conor Falvey *D/CHG*
Mr Kevin Lonergan, *D/CHG*
Ms Orlaith Lochrin *D/CHG*
Mr Jerry Kelleher *D/Taoiseach*

Guest Attendees:

Niamh O'Connor
Sean Mac Giolla Phadraig
Colm O'Callaghan
John O'Kane
Elizabeth Laragy

Apologies:

Mr Francis Devine
Professor Patrick Geoghegan
Dr Mary Harris
Professor Eunan O'Halpin

Key Points:

Representatives from RTÉ outlined their plans over the remainder of the Decade of Centenaries. Their intention is to continue the provision of a balanced, sensitive treatment of the historical events of the period, through factual content and imaginative programming. RTÉ advised that its approach will continue to be grounded in the principles and guidance of the Expert Advisory Group on Centenary Commemorations. An internal steering group will be established within RTÉ to progress plans within specific strands. It was noted that some of these plans are currently aspirational and will require funding in order to be delivered.

The Chair commended RTÉ for a thoughtful and impressive presentation, which outlined some very ambitious, imaginative and engaging proposals. It was noted that the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht has been engaging with RTÉ over the past year and that the views of the Expert Advisory Group are very helpful in informing this process. Members of the Group proposed a number of observations and ideas to assist RTÉ in further considering its

plans, including perhaps increased consideration of the civil disobedience and State-building aspects of the Struggle for Independence. The Chair noted that this engagement is part of a broader ongoing consultation with the cultural sector and re-iterated that the Expert Advisory Group would be very happy to meet again with RTÉ if that would be helpful, or to provide any other assistance or advice.

The minutes of the previous meeting (19th November 2019) were agreed, with no matters arising.

A broad discussion was held, reflecting on the circumstances surrounding the decision of the Minister for Justice and Equality to postpone an event, planned for 17th January 2020, to commemorate the Royal Irish Constabulary and the Dublin Metropolitan Police. The intensity of the associated political and public discourse should give everyone pause for reflection.

The Expert Advisory Group re-iterated that its role is to provide independent, impartial, authentic advice to Government on historical matters pertaining to the Decade of Centenaries and that the Group does not have executive functions.

Consideration will be given to publishing the minutes of meetings of the Expert Advisory Group online (via <https://www.decadeofcentenaries.com/>) to support the ongoing process of broad public engagement, outreach and consultation.

It was noted that on 11th December 2019, the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Expert Advisory Group, together with officials from the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and Tipperary County Council, attended a meeting of the Joint Committee on Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht to discuss plans over the remainder of the Decade of Centenaries.

The Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht provided an overview of the launch of the 2020 State commemorative programme, which took place in Cork City on 2nd January. It was noted that the Government has prioritised the centenaries of the transformative events that occurred in Cork City and County in 1920, including a State commemoration which will be led by the Department of the Taoiseach, envisaged for later in the year.

The local authority network will continue to have a significant role in leading the Decade of Centenaries programme at county and community level, with appropriate support from the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, underpinned by the guidance of the Expert Advisory Group. It is envisaged that a local authority forum, similar to last year's event, and organised by the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, will take place later this year and this was welcomed by the Expert Advisory Group.

In 2019, the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht convened a Decade of Centenaries Inter-Departmental Working Group to encourage and build collaborative relationships with key stakeholders in relevant Government Departments; to drive and support the process of developing the cross-governmental programme for the coming period; and to support Departments in leading, developing and delivering commemorative initiatives within the areas for which they have responsibility. The Department will continue to brief the Expert Advisory Group on matters arising from these meetings.

It was noted that our National Cultural Institutions are uniquely positioned to offer accessible, familiar, public cultural spaces, where people of all traditions can comfortably reflect upon the complex and difficult events of the period and related themes. These 'safe cultural spaces' are in public ownership and as such, have great potential to play an enhanced role in facilitating and supporting public engagement.

Plans to mark the centenary of the Civil War will be considered further at the next meeting.

It was noted that consideration is being given to potential initiatives by the Defence Forces to explore their establishment, and history from 1913 to the present day, possibly in the form of a publication. It was noted that the Defence Forces are one of the national institutions that emerged from this period. An initiative such as this, could potentially explore the Defence Forces' contribution to the State from inception to the present day, including its international role as peacekeepers. The Expert Advisory Group welcomed and endorsed this proposal.

The next meeting is provisionally scheduled for 25th February (subsequently amended to 3rd March).

Ends.