

# Virtual Meeting of the Expert Advisory Group on Centenary Commemorations

Tuesday, 21<sup>st</sup> June 2022, at 1.15 pm

## Minutes

### Attendees:

Dr Maurice Manning (*Chair*)  
Dr Martin Mansergh (*Deputy Chair*)  
Mr Gabriel Doherty  
Professor Diarmaid Ferriter  
Professor Patrick Geoghegan  
Dr Mary Harris  
Mr Jerry Kelleher  
Dr Sinéad McCoole  
Mr Conor Falvey *D/TCAGSM*  
Ms Sinéad Copeland *D/TCAGSM*  
Ms Muirne Lyons *D/TCAGSM*  
Ms Orlaith Lochrin *D/TCAGSM*  
Ms Pauline Kiernan *D/Taoiseach*

### Apologies:

Dr Sandra Collins  
Professor Mary Daly  
Mr Francis Devine  
Dr Anne Dolan

Professor Patrick Geoghegan  
Dr Leeann Lane  
Comdt. Stephen MacEoin  
Dr William Murphy  
Professor Eunan O'Halpin  
Dr Éamon Phoenix

### Guest Attendees:

Comdt. Daniel Ayiotis, *Officer in Charge of the Military Archives*  
Sean Mac Giolla Phadraig, *Head of Factual, RTÉ*  
Ann-Marie Power, *Head of Arts & Culture, RTÉ*  
Colm O' Callaghan, *Commissioning Editor Specialist Factual, RTÉ*  
John O'Kane, *Music and Arts Strategy Executive, RTÉ*

### Key Points:

Comdt. Daniel Ayiotis outlined plans for a conference on 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> September, examining military aspects of the Civil War. It will take place in Cathal Brugha Barracks and is a collaborative initiative of the Military Archives and the Military History Society of Ireland. A very comprehensive overview of the draft programme was provided, including the themes to be addressed and new resources available.

The Expert Advisory Group agreed that this conference will be a very important event in the Decade of Centenaries Programme, highlighting new research and new perspectives, which have not been a focus of other civil war initiatives. It will also offer an excellent opportunity to showcase the holdings of the Military Archives. The Department (D/TCAGSM) is also very supportive of the proposal, noting the modest costs involved and will now proceed to seek approval from Minister Martin for the funding element of the conference.

The Chair welcomed representatives from RTÉ, who outlined RTÉ's significant contribution to the Decade of Centenaries Programme so far and future plans. The content to date has been accessible, informative and very well received. Specific, new, initiatives are planned across all of its platforms – television, radio, and online offerings (<https://www.rte.ie/history/>) – including partnership initiatives with the BAI, Dept. of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, and various institutions of learning. The programming content will include a focus on social history and the role of women in this period, as well as artistic elements.

The Expert Advisory Group commended RTÉ's very impressive proposals for the remainder of the Decade. The Group stressed the importance of placing a significant focus on the foundation of the democratic Irish Free State – not as incidental to other events but in its own right. RTÉ advised that there are plans in development and further scope to explore how this theme can be appropriately reflected in its forthcoming programme offering in a way that will appeal to a broad audience.

RTÉ is in the process of considering how the ending of the Decade of Centenaries next year could be marked, with an appropriately creative and reflective initiative. It expects to have a further update on this in the autumn.

The minutes of the previous meeting of 5<sup>th</sup> April were agreed and there were no matters arising.

The Department (D/TCAGSM) provided an overview to the Group of matters raised at the meeting of the All-Party Consultation Group on Commemorations on 11<sup>th</sup> May. A specific query was raised at this meeting – concerning the provision of funding under the Decade of Centenaries Programme to support the cleaning, maintenance, and restoration of memorials and monuments. The Department (D/TCAGSM) subsequently consulted with local authority co-ordinators to seek their observations on this matter and received very comprehensive feedback, highlighting a number of significant sensitivities and concerns.

The Chair noted that this is a very complex and sensitive issue, requiring a careful and thoughtful approach. It was noted that the current guidance for local authorities has worked very well, providing a supportive structure to maximise broad citizen engagement at community level with the Decade of Centenaries. It was agreed that the views of the local authorities in this matter are very credible and persuasive. As key partners throughout the Decade of Centenaries, the local authorities have important expertise and insights into the challenges and complexities of commemoration at local level.

The Expert Advisory Group reflected on the various points raised, noting that monuments can have complex histories and can be very divisive in communities; local authorities can also be subject to considerable pressures from various interested parties. The Group reiterated that its original advice and guidelines are very important in supporting local authorities in their commemorative endeavours. The Group agreed that in light of current discussions, there may now be scope to facilitate a local authority that wants to allocate a small amount of funding to support essential works to repair or restore a memorial, where the local authority itself determines that this is appropriate.

The Department of the Taoiseach reported that plans are progressing well concerning the September event in the National Concert Hall to commemorate the civil war – a significant cultural element is envisaged and a further update will be provided to the Group at the next meeting.

Under A.O.B., the Group reflected on ‘The Irish Civil War National Conference’, recently hosted by University College Cork to mark the centenary of the Civil War. The Chair congratulated all involved, noting that this was a well organised and well received event, which stimulated very interesting and honest debate, without acrimony.

Dr Mary Harris reported that plans for the NUI Galway hosted conference, examining the experiences of Travellers/Mincéirs since the foundation of the State, are progressing well.

Date of next meeting to be confirmed.

*Ends.*