

## Meeting of the Expert Advisory Group on Commemorations

Monday, 5<sup>th</sup> December 2016, from 1.00 pm to 3.00 pm  
Room 301, Department of the Taoiseach

### Minutes

#### Attendees:

Dr Maurice Manning (Chair)  
Dr Martin Mansergh (Vice Chair)  
Dr. Sandra Collins  
Mr John Concannon  
Mr Gabriel Doherty  
Professor Diarmaid Ferriter  
Dr Mary Harris  
Mr Jerry Kelleher  
Ms Orlaith Lochrin  
Comdt. Stephen MacEoin  
Ms Sinead McCool  
Professor Eunan O'Halpin  
Dr Éamon Phoenix

#### Guest Attendees

John McDonough (National Archives)  
Secretary General Seán Ó Foghlú (D/E&S)  
Dr Kevin McCarthy (D/E&S)  
Commissioner John McMahon (OPW)  
Ms Sarah McGrath (D/FAT)  
Ms Fionnuala Callanan (D/FAT)

#### Apologies:

Professor Mary Daly  
Mr Francis Devine  
Dr. Leeann Lane  
Mr Feargal Ó Coigligh

#### Key Points:

1. The minutes of the previous meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> November were agreed and there were no issues arising.
2. Representatives from a number of key organisations were invited to attend this meeting to give their observations on the 1916 centenary commemorations and legacy and also their views on how the State might approach the second half of the Decade of Centenaries, i.e.
  - Dr Sandra Collins, Director of the National Library;
  - Secretary General Seán Ó Foghlú and Dr Kevin McCarthy, Department of Education;
  - Sarah McGrath and Fionnuala Callanan, Department of Foreign Affairs;
  - Dr John McDonough, Director of the National Archives; and
  - Commissioner John McMahon, Office of Public Works.

3. **Dr Collins** reported that the National Library has collected printed and digital material and ephemera relating to the 1916 centenary commemorations, (both nationwide and amongst the Diaspora), including over 400 websites. The Library will host a special *Web Archive Award Ceremony* on 13<sup>th</sup> December to promote the importance of collecting and preserving such records. A large scale public engagement programme took place during the year, which attracted over 100,000 visitors. Members of the public have customised materials digitised by the library to make it personal to their locality and their own narrative. Dr Collins circulated to the group details of some of the collections of papers to be digitised during the next phase of the Library's major digitisation initiative during the second half of the Decade of Centenaries.
4. **Secretary General Ó Foghlú** gave an overview of the *Ireland 2016 Education Programme*, which included the *National Flag Initiative* and *Proclamation Day* on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2016. He noted that the most significant factor in facilitating schools' engagement was that the programme was perceived as a national endeavour rather than a State or a Government one. The Department is reviewing the legacy of the education programme to identify elements that might be continued throughout the Decade of Centenaries, such as the all-island history competition and enhanced engagement with higher education.
5. **Ms McGrath** reported that the Reconciliation Pillar of the *Ireland 2016 Centenary Programme* was very significant in facilitating all-island engagement. A number of key events took place during the year with a focus on reconciliation, including the *Rising to Reconciliation* event, in the Abbey Theatre and in Belfast; and the service at Grangegorman Military Cemetery to commemorate the British soldiers who died during the Rising. It was noted that the all-island elements of the programme assisted the engagement of schools in Northern Ireland. Forthcoming centenaries in Ireland and in Northern Ireland will present particular challenges. However, the *Ireland 2016 Centenary Programme* template has been very helpful in determining how future commemorations might be approached by the State (e.g. inclusive, unapologetic, respectful, etc.).
6. **Ms Callanan** noted that the centenary programme's broad framework and use of pillars allowed Irish missions abroad to determine which elements would work best in the local context. The engagement and interest from the Diaspora in the 1916 centenary commemorations was unexpected and very significant. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade would very much appreciate the guidance of the Expert Advisory Group concerning future engagement with the Diaspora about commemorations.
7. **Dr McDonough** gave an overview to the group of the highlights of the National Archives programme for 2016, (he referenced the Jacobs Garrison exhibition in DIT; Property Losses (Ireland) Committee Website; Battle of the Somme website; DMP Movement of Extremists file; and genealogy toolkit for schools). Dr McDonough noted that the National Archives makes material accessible in the public domain but that the NAI does not determine or shape people's experience and engagement with that material. Two significant digitisation projects are planned for the second half of the Decade of Centenaries; 1) FINCOMP for the Civil War, 1921 – 1923; and 2) General Secretarial

foundational records of the State from the first to the fourth Dáil. A number of strategic projects are also planned, including legislative changes; warehouse development; records management across the Civil Service; and collaborations with key partners.

8. **Commissioner John McManus** confirmed that the Office of Public Works will be happy to support new commemorative initiatives over the second half of the Decade and stressed the importance of early engagement, planning and communication with all stakeholders.
9. After the guest attendees gave their input to the group, the Chair summarised the current status of the Group's work. He advised that the Statement of Principles is currently being revised for the second half of the Decade of Centenaries and is due to be published in March/April 2017. He indicated that the Statement will identify significant themes and events for commemoration and that these will be marked with sensitivity, restraint, inclusivity and openness that have characterised the commemorations to date.
10. A number of further observations were made by members of the group.
  - The close collaboration and co-operation between Departments and National Cultural Institutions in delivering the *Ireland 2016 Centenary Programme* was commended by the group. It was noted that this approach placed young people at the heart of the programme and greatly facilitated their engagement.
  - It was also noted that other States, whose centenaries are also approaching, are likely to study the Irish approach to commemorations, particularly in the context of the 1916 centenary commemorations and future plans to commemorate the War of Independence.
  - It was recommended that the State should continue its capital investment in arts and culture beyond 2016. In particular, it was noted that digitisation and archiving projects will be of great significance in the future and also that such projects require intensive staffing and financial resources. It was suggested that the 'setting of context' could be a critical priority for future digitisation projects. It was also suggested that the Expert Advisory Group could usefully recommend archiving priorities.
  - A member of the group queried if the Expert Advisory Group should express a view about the auctioning of materials into private ownership. The question of access to 1926 Census records and Land Commission records was also raised. It was agreed that these issues would be considered further as appropriate.
  - It was noted that a number of very sensitive 50<sup>th</sup> anniversaries will coincide with centenaries in the coming years.
11. To close the meeting, Mr John Concannon introduced the new Creative Ireland programme and gave a brief overview of the pillars of the programme.

12. The Chair expressed his appreciation to all of the guest participants for their very important input and suggested that it might be useful to have a number of bi-lateral meetings in 2017 to discuss further the matters raised.
13. Date of next meeting to be confirmed.

*Ends.*