

Meeting of the Expert Advisory Group on Commemorations

Monday, 16th January 2018, from 1.15 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
Professor Mary Daly
Mr Francis Devine
Professor Diarmaid Ferriter
Dr Mary Harris
Dr. Leeann Lane
Comdt. Stephen MacEoin
Ms Sinead McCool
Professor Eunan O'Halpin
Dr Éamon Phoenix
Mr Andrew Munro (*D/Taoiseach*)
Ms Miriam Dollard (*D/Taoiseach*)
Mr Jerry Kelleher (*D/Taoiseach*)
Mr Feargal Ó Coigligh (*D/CHG*)
Mr Kevin Lonergan (*D/CHG*)
Ms Orlaith Lochrin (*D/CHG*)

Guest Attendees:

Mr Joe O'Flynn, *SIPTU General Secretary*
Mr Brian McGann, *SIPTU*
Mr Pádraig Yeates, *1913 Committee*
Mr Kevin McCarthy, *D/E&S*
Mr Ger O'Sullivan, *NCCA*
Mr John Dredge, *PDST*

Mr John McDonough,
Director of the National Archives
Mr Cormac Halpin, *CSO*

Apologies:

Mr Gabriel Doherty
Professor Patrick Geoghegan

Key Points:

The minutes of the previous meeting (4th December) were agreed and there were no issues arising. Three presentations were made to the Expert Advisory Group as outlined below.

1. Plans to mark the Anti-Conscription Campaign and General Strike of 1918
Joe O'Flynn, SIPTU General Secretary
Pádraig Yeates, 1913 Committee
2. History education at school level in support of the Decade of Centenaries, Challenges and Opportunities
Kevin McCarthy, Department of Education and Skills
Ger O'Sullivan, NCCA
John Dredge, Author of the PDST resource for senior cycle

3. 1926 Census Data

John McDonough, Director of the National Archives

Cormac O'Halpin, Central Statistics Office

1. SIPTU provided a high-level overview of its plans to mark significant historical events and themes in 2018 and beyond. This year, SIPTU will focus on the role of women (with Lá na mBan of particular interest), the anti-conscription campaign and general strike, and the challenges that faced the labour movement during that period. SIPTU plans to host various commemorative events and activities in its own right but would also be interested in exploring possibilities for collaboration with the State.

The Advisory Group recommended that it is best to avoid making very direct links with the politics and issues of today when remembering the historical events of a century ago.

SIPTU will submit shortly a detailed proposal outlining its commemorative plans for 2018 and estimated costings for consideration. It was noted that the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht has provided modest assistance in the past to support SIPTU's commemorative activities. The Department will consider how it may be in a position to support SIPTU in its current plans following receipt of the detailed proposals.

2. The ongoing commemorative supports and initiatives provided for teachers and students by the Department of Education were outlined to the Group, including -
 - Continuation of the Decade of Centenaries schools' history competition;
 - Continuation of the *Adopt a Soldier* initiative;
 - Ongoing provision of supports and resources via <https://www.scoilnet.ie/>
 - Provision of support to the Houses of the Oireachtas when that body was recruiting an Education Officer;
 - Provision of guidance to the National Famine Commemoration Committee regarding schools' engagement;
 - Exploration of possibilities for collaboration with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade as it plans to mark the 20th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement;
 - A significant focus on the role of women in the historical events that took place between 1918 and 1923 and in their place in society at that time;
 - In the summer of 2018, courses are planned for teachers around women's history, politics and society, with a strong emphasis on gender identity;
 - Ongoing close engagement with Glasnevin Trust; and
 - Ongoing collaboration with the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and Sinéad McCoole.
 - A special resource has also been provided for teachers, *'TEACH – Teaching Emotive and Controversial History'*

The opportunities for learning presented by the new junior and senior cycle history syllabi for students were also outlined. They focus on age-appropriate tailored research; evidence-based approaches to historical events; local and context-based themes;

opportunities for project work; and making connections between Europe and the wider world and Irish history.

Mr McCarthy advised that the Department of Education and Skills would welcome support from the Advisory Group 1) in keeping the public profile of historical understanding as high as possible; and 2) in providing age-appropriate guidance around the commemoration of complex issues. The Advisory Group suggested that its Second Statement of Principles could be a useful support for teachers. If the Department of Education and Skills wished to adapt it for this purpose, the Group would be happy to endorse this additional teaching resource. It was noted also that there is a large quantity of materials online, including local authority archives and the Military Service Pension Collection, which offers great possibilities for schools' engagement and the Department could encourage schools to avail of these resources.

3. The various technical and logistical challenges involved in digitising the 1926 Census Records were outlined to the Group. An initial, conservative estimate of the resources required to complete this project was 6 years, with 10 people working on this project each year, to prepare the material for digitisation, at an estimated cost of €7 million, (including labour, hosting, equipment and ICT support).

The 1926 Census was undertaken with an understanding at that time that the data would never be released. In 1993, legislation was introduced to provide for release of the data after 100 years. It was noted that any diminution, perceived or real, of the guarantee of data protection and confidentiality could significantly adversely impact the CSO's ability to undertake its functions. It was agreed that these records have significant historical value – the data will illuminate the period during the Civil War and War of Independence, giving a better sense of population flows. It was proposed that the early release of some high-level statistical data, while adhering to the principles of data protection and confidentiality, might be a satisfactory option. The Expert Advisory Group endorsed this approach and it was agreed that the matter will be considered further by the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht in consultation with relevant stakeholders.

The Chair thanked all of the guest attendees and acknowledged their successful contribution and collaboration to date during the Decade of Centenaries. It was agreed that these initial discussions with the Advisory Group marked the beginning of a process of ongoing, positive engagement to share and explore ideas. The remaining items on the agenda were deferred to the next meeting of the Advisory Group. It was proposed that meeting will take place on Tuesday, 20th February.