

Meeting of the Expert Advisory Group on Commemorations

Tuesday, 20th February 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*)
Professor Mary Daly
Mr Francis Devine
Mr Gabriel Doherty
Professor Diarmaid Ferriter
Dr Mary Harris
Comdt. Stephen MacEoin
Ms Sinead McCool
Dr Éamon Phoenix
Mr Jerry Kelleher *D/Taoiseach*
Mr Feargal Ó Coigligh *D/CHG*
Mr Kevin Lonergan *D/CHG*
Ms Orlaith Lochrin *D/CHG*
Mr Rónán Whelan *D/CHG*

Guest Attendees:

NI Decade of Centenaries Roundtable:

Mr Paul Mullan
Ms Jacqueline Irwin
Ms Deirdre MacBride
Breandan O'Corrain *D/FAT*

Apologies:

Dr Sandra Collins
Professor Patrick Geoghegan
Dr. Leeann Lane
Professor Eunan O'Halpin

Key Points:

The minutes of the previous meeting (16th January) were agreed and there were no issues arising.

Three representatives from the Northern Ireland Decade of Centenaries Roundtable made a presentation to the Advisory Group –

- Ms Jacqueline Irwin, CEO Community Relations Council
- Mr Paul Mullan, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund Northern Ireland
- Ms Deirdre MacBride, Cultural Diversity Programme Director, Community Relations Council

They provided an overview of the role of the NI Decade Roundtable, the principles that govern its work, the challenging context in which it operates, and the various positive impacts delivered. They acknowledged the ongoing support from individual members of the Advisory Group and would like this spirit of collegiality and the sharing of ideas to continue. They suggested that the complexities of Northern Ireland should not be underestimated when the State is framing its approach to commemorations over the remainder of the Decade. It was agreed that this

discussion was very useful and that continued, structured engagement between the Advisory Group and the NI Roundtable would be helpful. There may be possibilities for adopting a bilateral, collaborative approach when addressing particular historical events and themes over the next five years.

It was reported that the Government launched *Project Ireland 2040* on 16th February. Under this new national development plan, the Government has committed significant funding to support the National Cultural Institutions over the next ten years. The sectoral investment plan will be launched on 1st March and further information will be provided to the Advisory Group about this event.

The Chair advised that the key item for discussion at the next meeting will be to formulate the guidance that the Group will provide to inform the State's approach to the remembrance of the events of the War of Independence.

Further consideration was given to the potential ceremonial role that the Defence Forces may have in commemorations over the remainder of the Decade and the practical issues arising too in this regard. It was suggested that degrees of scale could be usefully applied to the level of potential Defence Forces participation. It was noted also that locally organised, annual commemorations of particular events already take place regularly, without any State involvement. The State could now consider giving some of these events a degree of recognition, under the guidance of the Expert Advisory Group, by providing a Colour Party when requested to do so, without interfering unduly in these events. It would be helpful also for the significance of particular historical events to be acknowledged rather than the individual personalities involved – an approach which, it was agreed, worked well for the commemoration to mark the centenary of the funeral of O'Donovan Rossa on 1st August 2015. It was noted that the emphasis must always be on the remembrance and commemoration of these events and the avoidance of any sense of celebration.

The Advisory Group will consider how cultural events of reconciliation might usefully mark these significant historical events and it's envisaged that the Arts Council and Creative Ireland may have a role in this regard. The new Creative Ireland Director will be invited to attend a future meeting of the Advisory Group when she takes up her post.

A brief overview was provided to the Advisory Group concerning the 52 submissions received to date under the the Decade of Centenaries public consultation process. It was noted that the closing date has been extended to 28th February 2018.

It was provisionally agreed that the next meeting of the Advisory Group will take place on Tuesday, 27th March at 1.15 pm.

Ends.