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**Public Accounts Committee Hearing 29 January 2015**

**Vote 33: An Roinn Ealaíon, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta  
2013 Appropriation Accounts and Report of Comptroller and Auditor General**

**Opening Statement by Joe Hamill, Secretary General,  
Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht**

**Introduction**

A Chathaoirligh agus a Chomhaltaí den Choiste,

Ba mhaith liom buíochas a ghabháil libh as an deis a thabhairt dom an ráiteas seo a dhéanamh. Gabhaim buíochas freisin le hOifig an Ard Reachtaire Cuntas agus Ciste as an mbealach proifisiúnta a rinne a cuid oifigeach an obair a bhí riachtanach i ndáil leis an gcuntas sin.

The Committee will be aware that, as part of the restructuring of Departments in March 2011, a new Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht was established. It essentially brought together

- the Arts functions of the then Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism;
- the Heritage functions of the then Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government; and
- the Irish language, Gaeltacht and Islands functions of the former Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs.

In establishing this new Department, a strong focus was maintained on ensuring an effective system of internal financial control with an appropriate framework of administrative procedures, management reporting and internal audit. At present, the Department has some 560 staff located in its main offices in Dublin, Killarney, Wexford and Na Forbacha in Galway, as well as at a number of other smaller regional locations around the country. It oversees, and has policy responsibility for the conservation, preservation, protection, development and presentation of Ireland's rich heritage and culture. It also supports the promotion of the Irish language, the development of the Gaeltacht and the sustainable development of island communities. In addition to promoting the inherent importance of our language, culture and heritage, the Department is also conscious of their value as a resource for business and tourism, as well as a means of supporting economic renewal and presenting Ireland as an attractive destination for sustainable inward investment

**Work of the Department**

The briefing note provided to the Committee outlines the financial allocations across the four programme areas of the Department:

- Arts and Culture;
- Natural and Built Heritage;
- The Irish Language, the Gaeltacht and the Islands; and
- North South Co-operation.

The note also sets out

- key aspects of the Department's achievements in 2013;
- the priorities of our work programme for 2015; and
- some of the main challenges facing the Department at this time.

Much of the Department's work is delivered through a range of intermediary bodies, including the statutory bodies and agencies funded from the Vote. The briefing note outlines the arrangements in place to oversee and monitor the delivery by those bodies of their services and business targets.

A key challenge facing the Department, in common with most other public bodies, has been the pressure on resources, both human and financial, in recent years. In overall terms, the Department has seen funding across its programme areas reduce by some 50% since 2008. That said, 2015 is the first year since then in which reductions were not imposed on current funding and, indeed, there has been some increase in the allocations to the Arts Council, the National Cultural Institutions and for Commemorations. Clearly, this is a very welcome development.

### **Legislation**

With regard to legislation, the Department's A List has two Bills - the National Concert Hall Bill and the Official Languages (Amendment) Bill. Both have been the subject of pre-legislative scrutiny and are expected to be published in the coming weeks. Proposals in the Government's *Public Service Reform Programme* have resulted in Heads for two National Cultural Institutions Bills also being submitted for pre-legislative scrutiny – one relating to the National Gallery, the Irish Museum of Modern Art and the Crawford Gallery Cork; the other to the National Museum, the National Library and the National Archives. Work is being advanced on a new National Monuments Bill and Heads have been approved for a Heritage Council (Amendment) Bill. Proposals to amend the National Archives legislation are also under consideration.

### **National Gallery of Ireland**

Before concluding, Chairman, I might refer briefly to Chapter 9 of the 2013 Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General regarding accounting for certain National Gallery of Ireland expenditure. In line with a recommendation in that Chapter, the National Gallery has now been brought within the ambit of the Vote of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht on the same basis as the other national cultural institutions and I can confirm that I assumed the role of Accounting Officer in relation to the Gallery with effect from 1 January 2015.

### **Conclusion**

I will be happy to expand on any of these areas, as the Committee wishes. Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirligh.