

Meeting of the Joint Committee on Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht

Wednesday, 11th December 2019 at 1.30 pm

Dr Maurice Manning, Chair of the Expert Advisory Group on Centenary Commemorations

Opening Statement (5 minutes)

The Expert Advisory Group on Centenary Commemorations was established by An Taoiseach in 2011. The Expert Advisory Group's role is to advise the Government on historical matters relating to the Decade of Centenaries and to provide guidance to inform the State's approach to the remembrance of the significant historical events of the period. The group is non-partisan, comprising independent historians, cultural practitioners, and custodians of archives from around the country.

Since 2012, the Expert Advisory Group has published 3 papers:

Initial Statement, published in 2012:

The Expert Advisory Group's *Initial Statement* was widely commended for providing a supportive structure of guiding principles, which underpinned the State's approach to commemorating the significant historical events that took place between 1912 and 1916, culminating with the centenary commemorations of the 1916 Easter Rising.

The commemorative programme for the first half of the Decade of Centenaries was widely acclaimed for its inclusive, measured, and sensitive approach, which recognised the legitimacy of all traditions and valued mutual respect and historical accuracy. The programme remembered not only the seminal events that marked Ireland's journey towards independence and self-

determination but also those which enhance our understanding of the wider international context during this period.

Second Phase Mission Statement, published in October 2017:

The guiding principles expressed in *Initial Statement* are still significant and relevant and they are re-affirmed in the Expert Advisory Group's *Second Phase Mission Statement 2017 – 2023*. The guiding principles provide clarity and a broad template, intended to empower and support all those involved in delivering authentic, citizen-focused and appropriate commemorations, at national and community level, throughout the second half of the Decade of Centenaries.

In this Statement, the Expert Advisory Group advocated that *'the opportunity to encourage scholarship at national and local level must be used as fully as possible, with particular emphasis on archival investment and development*. This significant capital investment will ensure that our cultural institutions and archives will continue to have a central role in continuing the process of broad public engagement, creating an important, tangible legacy that endures well beyond the Decade of Centenaries for generations to come.

Public Consultation, launched in October 2017:

The Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht launched a public consultation process to assist the Expert Advisory Group in its work to provide guidance to the Government over the remainder of the Decade. Its objective was to give interested parties the opportunity to submit their views and ideas around how the significant historical events from 1918 – 1923 might be appropriately and respectfully remembered, in line with the principles expressed in the Expert Advisory Group's *Second Phase Mission Statement*. 73 submissions were received and 20 of these were made by local authorities. The rich diversity of ideas and perspectives was of great assistance to the EAG as it developed its guidance to Government.

Second Phase Guidance, published in January 2019:

The Expert Advisory Group's most recent guidance, entitled *Decade of Centenaries Second Phase Guidance 2018-2023*, makes specific recommendations on how the significant historical centenaries in the forthcoming phase of the Decade might be meaningfully, proportionately and sensitively remembered by the State. These centenaries include:

- The Struggle for Independence
- The Civil War
- The Foundation of the State
- Partition and the Foundation of Northern Ireland
- The admission of the Irish Free State into the League of Nations

Northern Ireland and Brexit:

The Expert Advisory Group was conscious, in formulating its guidance for this period, that the approaching centenaries present particularly complex and sensitive challenges, coinciding with significant 50th anniversaries in Northern Ireland. The backdrop of Brexit and the continued absence of agreement on operating the devolved structures in Northern Ireland also present particular challenges. The Expert Advisory Group encourages continued co-operation between the two jurisdictions, where appropriate. The the exploration of potential cross-border engagement will require careful, thoughtful and sensitive navigation.

The Community-led Approach to Commemoration (Soloheadbeg Ambush Centenary):

The Expert Advisory Group recommends a three-tier approach comprising a small number of State-led commemorations, augmented by local authority and community-led commemorative initiatives. This approach advocates a leading role for local authorities in supporting and driving community-led commemoration, augmented with appropriate State recognition, support and participation.

The community-led model was very effective in the remembrance of the centenary of the Soloheadbeg Ambush on 21st January 2019. This was a respectful, community-led

commemoration, jointly organised by the Solohead Parish Centenary Commemoration Committee and the Third Tipperary Brigade Old IRA Commemoration Committee. Their plans were supported by Tipperary County Council as part of a broader commemorative programme across the county to mark the centenary of the Struggle for Independence, and by the State.

This measured and balanced approach worked very effectively in a complex and sensitive local context. It echoes the most recent guidance of the Expert Advisory Group, which states that:

‘Many of the events of this period have great local significance; it is therefore appropriate for local authorities and local community organisations to be encouraged to lead the commemorative process. Some events have been commemorated annually for decades and it would be inappropriate for the State to compete with these established ceremonies ... All commemorative events should be informed by the principles laid down in the Second Statement of the Expert Advisory Group.’

The Expert Advisory Group recommends that State should continue to support local and county commemorative exercises to widen and deepen a historical understanding of the significance of the events being commemorated among the public at large.

Formal State Commemorations envisaged over the remainder of the Decade:

The Expert Advisory Group has recommended a small number of formal State commemorations over the remainder of the Decade of Centenaries.

- A State commemoration for all of those who lost their lives during the Struggle for Independence; in 2021, the National Day of Commemoration takes place on Sunday, 11th July. The existence of this established State ceremonial event may offer a fitting opportunity for an enhanced State commemoration.
- A State commemoration, focusing on themes of remembrance and reconciliation, to take place on a neutral date for all of those who suffered and died during the Civil War;

- The Expert Advisory Group advocates that the centenary of the foundation of the State be remembered in terms of a process rather than a single event. It began with the handing over of Dublin Castle on 16th January 1922 and ended with the formal coming into being of the Irish Free State on 6th December 1922, in the midst of civil war. To these ends, two formal State commemorations are recommended:
 - a. A State ceremonial event in Dublin Castle to mark the symbolic transfer of power to the newly emerging Irish State with the handover of Dublin Castle, and
 - b. A State commemoration on 6th December 2022 in recognition of the pioneering leaders who helped to embed the democratic tradition in the newly emerging Irish State.

- The Expert Advisory Group recommends that the centenary of the partitioning of Ireland and the foundation of Northern Ireland be remembered with a significant academic conference. It's also recommended that a conference, such as this, could examine comparative partitions in Europe, post 1918, to emphasise that Ireland's experience was not unique.

- A State ceremonial event to mark the centenary of the admission of the Irish Free State into the League of Nations in 2023.

Legacy:

The Expert Advisory Group highlighted the fact that the Decade of Centenaries created unprecedented opportunities for people of all ages to consider and explore some of the most significant events and themes in the history of modern Ireland. The Group recommended that this positive engagement and the associated tangible, long-term benefits should continue to be supported beyond the conclusion of the Decade in 2023 and that State support should be considered for specific, significant Decade of Centenaries permanent legacy initiatives.

One such initiative is the *Beyond 2022: Ireland's Virtual Record Treasury* Initiative, which the Expert Advisory Group has endorsed as a potentially very significant and lasting Decade of Centenaries legacy, combining historical research, archival conservation, technical innovation and international collaboration. It seeks to re-imagine and recreate, through virtual reality, the Public Record Office of Ireland and its archival collections, which were destroyed on 30th June 1922 in the opening engagement of the Civil War.

Ends.

Appendix I

Membership of the Expert Advisory Group on Centenary Commemorations

The Expert Advisory Group on Centenary Commemorations was established by the Taoiseach in 2011 and meets regularly, convening on 6 occasions in 2019.

The Group's role is to advise the Government on historical matters relating to the Decade of Centenaries and to provide guidance to inform the State's approach to the remembrance of significant historical events and related themes of the period. The group is chaired by Dr Maurice Manning and is non-partisan, comprising independent historians, cultural practitioners, and custodians of archives from around the country. The Group's current membership is set out below.

- Dr Maurice Manning (Chair)
- Dr Martin Mansergh (Deputy Chair)
- Dr Sandra Collins
- Professor Mary Daly
- Mr Francis Devine
- Dr Mary Harris
- Mr Gabriel Doherty
- Professor Diarmaid Ferriter
- Professor Patrick Geoghegan
- Dr Leann Lane
- Comdt. Stephen MacEoin
- Dr Sinéad McCoole
- Professor Eunan O'Halpin
- Dr Eamon Phoenix

Appendix II

Links to Publications of the Expert Advisory Group on Centenary Commemorations

Link below to the Group's most recent guidance, published in January 2019:

<https://www.decadeofcentenaries.com/wp-content/uploads/publications/Guidance2018/Guidance2018/index.html>

Link below to the Group's Second Phase Mission Statement (Second Statement of Principles), published in October 2017:

<https://www.decadeofcentenaries.com/wp-content/uploads/publications/Mission2017-23/Mission2017-23/index.html>

Link below to the Group's Initial Statement, published in 2012:

<https://www.decadeofcentenaries.com/wp-content/uploads/publications/Initial/Initial/index.html>