

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM CHOMHSHAOL, CULTÚR AGUS GAELTACHT

JOINT COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT, CULTURE AND THE GAELTACHT

Dé Máirt, 25 Feabhra 2014

Tuesday, 25 February 2014

The Joint Committee met at 2.15 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy,	Senator Cáit Keane,
Deputy Luke 'Ming' Flanagan,	Senator Fiach Mac Conghail,
Deputy Kevin Humphreys,	Senator Hildegard Naughton,
Deputy Michelle Mulherin,	Senator Ned O'Sullivan.
Deputy Catherine Murphy,	
Deputy Gerald Nash,	
Deputy Brian Stanley,	

In attendance: Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell.

DEPUTY MICHAEL MCCARTHY IN THE CHAIR.

The joint committee met in private session until 3.10 p.m.

Scrutiny of EU Legislative Proposals

Chairman: COM (2013) 697 is a proposal for a Council decision on the position to be taken by the Union in the administrative committee of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe regarding the draft regulation on uniform provisions concerning the recyclability of motor vehicles. It is proposed that this proposal does not warrant further scrutiny. Is that agreed? Agreed.

Next is COM (2013) 758, a proposal for a Council decision concerning the placing on the market for cultivation, in accordance with Directive 2001/18/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council, of a maize product, *Zea mays* L., line 1507, genetically modified for resistance to certain lepidopteran pests. It is proposed that this proposal does not warrant further scrutiny. Is that agreed?

Deputy Luke ‘Ming’ Flanagan: No, it is not agreed. This proposal needs more scrutiny. We need to look at it further. How do we do that?

Chairman: We can do one of two things. We can either write to the Secretary General of the Department asking for more details on it or we can invite officials from the Department to a meeting to discuss it.

Deputy Luke ‘Ming’ Flanagan: I would be happy with the latter.

Chairman: I am informed that it is a decision that has already been taken at Council level. However, if the Deputy is agreeable, we can write to the Secretary General and ask for more details. We can revisit the issue on receipt of a response. Is that agreed?

Deputy Luke ‘Ming’ Flanagan: That is fine, yes.

Chairman: COM (2013) 867 is a proposal for a Council decision on the accession of the European Union to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). It is proposed that this proposal warrants further scrutiny by way of a letter to the Secretary General of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht requesting that the joint committee be kept updated on significant developments relating to this proposal. Is that agreed? Agreed.

COM (2014) 20 is a proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning the establishment and operation of a market stability reserve for the Union greenhouse gas emission trading scheme and amending Directive 2003/87/EC. Due to the importance of this proposal and the consequent effects, it is proposed that this proposal warrants further scrutiny by way of a letter to the Secretary General of the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, requesting that the joint committee be kept updated on significant developments relating to the proposal. Is that agreed? Agreed.

I now propose that we suspend our meeting, because the chairman designate of the Arts Council has not arrived yet. We will resume at 4 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 3.25 p.m. and resumed at 4 p.m.

Arts Council: Chairman Designate

Chairman: We will now discuss the nomination of Ms Sheila Pratschke as chairman of the Arts Council. I welcome Ms Pratschke and congratulate her on her nomination. I thank her for her attendance today.

I am obliged to read out the following caution regarding the protection of witnesses at meetings. By virtue of section 17(2)(l) of the Defamation Act 2009, witnesses are protected by absolute privilege in respect of the evidence they give this committee. However, if they are directed by the committee to cease giving evidence in relation to a particular matter and they continue to do so, they are entitled thereafter only to a qualified privilege in respect of their evidence. They are directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given and they are asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, they should not criticise nor make charges against any person or persons or entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable. The opening statement and any other documentation you supply to the committee may be published on the committee's website after the meeting has concluded.

Members of the committee are reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person outside the Houses or an official either by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable.

I invite Ms Pratschke to address the committee.

Ms Sheila Pratschke: I am privileged to be here and I thank the committee for giving me the opportunity to speak about myself and the Arts Council, which I hope to serve as chair.

The committee will have received my written statement. My background in the arts spans all the art forms and I have worked both in Dublin and County Monaghan. In the past seven years I have been responsible for the Irish cultural centre in the Irish College in Paris. I believe I have a background and experience that is not tied to any particular sector in the arts. I can pay attention to all of the art forms with a very objective and even hand. I will also bring some of the experience in Europe to bear and an international aspect to how the Arts Council develops over the next five years.

Deputy Gerald Nash: I welcome Ms Pratschke and I wish her every success. I hope she is appointed as chair of the Arts Council, a very significant body. Her reputation and experience speak for themselves.

First, I have a question about a matter that is currently receiving considerable media coverage. I accept that this issue did not occur under Ms Pratschke's watch, but it raises some potential governance issues in the Arts Council and I would appreciate her opinion on it. It relates to the awarding of a grant to an individual in respect of a project in County Louth. Ms Pratschke might be familiar with this and have seen the coverage in recent days. It is the grant award to the Sliabh Gullion traditional music project. I will not go into the details because it is clear from the media reports that it is the subject of an internal review in the Arts Council. However, given Ms Pratschke's experience as an experienced arts administrator, from the point of view of governance is she concerned about an issue such as this arising and would she, in the event that

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she is appointed chairman of the Arts Council, furnish this committee with a copy of that internal review so we can consider it? Would she know at this stage, given that she has not yet been appointed, if the terms of reference of that review stretch to the possibility of the Arts Council improving its governance and oversight in respect of how decisions are made in the awarding of grants? That is the first question.

If Ms Pratschke is appointed, will she give a commitment that no member of the council would gain financially from any funding decision of the council, either directly or indirectly? To clarify, I am also referring to instances that might occur where an individual might not in fact make the decision but might delegate that decision to a subgroup or a group panel of the Arts Council. As far as I am concerned, a decision of the Arts Council is a decision of that body regardless of whether it is made by an individual senior staff member, a panel or otherwise. I would appreciate a straightforward “Yes” or “No” answer if that is possible.

Ms Sheila Pratschke: Obviously, we are all concerned about this issue. From my short experience in the Arts Council in the last couple of weeks, I am immensely impressed by the staff and the respect and integrity with which they approach their work.

There are two separate issues. There is a disciplinary procedure in process-----

Deputy Gerald Nash: It is an external procedure, not an internal one. The disciplinary procedure is in train at present.

Ms Sheila Pratschke: Yes, that is how we are dealing with that matter. More importantly, we will revisit all of the issues of conflict of interest with regard to the governance of the Arts Council and ensure that such an issue cannot arise again. The procedures are very strict. They have been developed and improved over a number of years. The panels are created by peers of the artists, so it is a delegated authority, not the Arts Council, which makes the decisions. The authority is delegated to independent panels and their recommendations are then approved by the council.

However, we will revisit all of this and go through it with a fine-tooth comb to ensure, hopefully, there can never be a recurrence of such an issue.

Deputy Gerald Nash: Will Ms Pratschke make that internal review report available to this committee and will she commit to appearing before the committee if the committee took the view that there were outstanding issues it wished to discuss about that review if it had implications for the overall governance of the Arts Council?

Ms Sheila Pratschke: I would have to take legal advice about the rightness or otherwise of making such things public. My big concern would be to protect any individual involved. We are talking about people’s livelihoods-----

Deputy Gerald Nash: I accept that.

Ms Sheila Pratschke: -----and it is a delicate matter. However, I wish to be as open as possible and to appear before the committee at any time it might wish to invite me.

Deputy Gerald Nash: On balance, if Ms Pratschke did not have concerns such as those she described, would she be happy to appear before the committee to discuss that review and report and make the report available to the committee?

Ms Sheila Pratschke: If it were the legal advice that it was proper to do so.

Deputy Gerald Nash: I have another question. The Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht has made it clear on the Department's website, and this has been communicated to the Arts Council, that appointments to the Arts Council board will be made on a *pro bono* basis. Is that correct?

Ms Sheila Pratschke: I am not certain of that.

Deputy Gerald Nash: That is the case and I understand it is still on the Department's website. I assume it is still the Minister's and the Department's policy. Would Ms Pratschke confirm that she would not let a situation arise where newly appointed members of the Arts Council would seek some form of remuneration for that position, given that it would not be Government policy, and will she ensure that newly appointed members of the Arts Council are very clear on the Minister's policy that their appointment is on a *pro bono* basis and that this would not be allowed to lapse?

Ms Sheila Pratschke: Obviously, it is not my decision, but I believe members serving on the council would like to feel that their contribution and their work are valued. Serving on the Arts Council is a big commitment. It is a much more onerous commitment of time and work than for any other board. We are all of one mind that we wish to have our work valued.

Deputy Gerald Nash: I accept that. I am familiar with the work of the Arts Council and I value its work. There is no doubt that we all appreciate its work. As far as I can recollect, it is the Minister's policy that newly appointed members operate on a *pro bono* basis and I ask everybody to reflect on his policy. That is his own position. I would like to reach the stage where the Arts Council accepts that policy.

Ms Sheila Pratschke: That is the Minister's decision.

Deputy Michelle Mulherin: I welcome Ms Pratschke and wish her well in her new position which I anticipate that she will accept.

I shall make a few points for which I hope to get feedback. The past few years here have been very important and somewhat revolutionary from an arts point of view. The arts have reached out to the four corners of the country through the advent and construction of many arts venues, art spaces and theatres rather than being confined to cities. A lot of that work has been done under the stewardship of the Arts Council which worked in conjunction with local authorities to get venues that would match and fit the needs of a place. That move is welcome. Sports have been well catered for around the country so much so that nobody can contemplate a time when one did not have a football pitch. However, it is not seen as essential to have a venue for people to express themselves culturally even though such activities are the lifeblood of any community. The Arts Council receives taxpayers' money so outreach activities in communities should be to the fore. People should be able to see and feel the relevance of the arts in their lives, not something just for an elite group of people notwithstanding how accomplished they are. That is the measure and value that should be applied to taxpayers' money that is spent on the arts.

I have a particular concern about the way funding is spent. There are now many venues around the country which provide a platform for local young talent, regardless of their background or financial background, to develop and have access to professional artists. Also, there are venues for professional artists to attend. Unfortunately the venues are not so well funded by the Arts Council. Traditional iconic venues absorb most of its funding and smaller arts centres

must limp on with some funding from local authorities. The Arts Council encouraged smaller venues to build and expand yet community arts does not get the same priority or recognition. It is essential that they do. When funding is being distributed it is important to be mindful of their value. I suggest that a cost benefit analysis is carried out. It would ascertain how people are being reached out to and how relevant the arts is in every part of this country. That should be the measure of success for the Arts Council, the Minister and anybody involved in arts. Promoting the arts is about bringing the talent and expertise that exists in cities to a wider audience. The arts is not just for one group and I would welcome feedback on the issue.

Ms Sheila Pratschke: We have a big concern with reaching out to the entire country. We have developed a good working relationship with the 34 local authorities. We have developed a number of touring schemes which included, most recently, a joint North-South touring scheme. Obviously the scheme can grow further and we feel that we can do so only in partnership. Local authority funding for the venues is critical. In tandem with such funding, the Arts Council can support many groups, theatre groups, exhibitions, dance, etc. to travel to the four corners of Ireland. Within our limited means - having suffered fairly severe funding cuts - the policy is to continue to build on that foundation.

Deputy Michelle Mulherin: How might such an initiative be measured? In my experience the initiative was carried out in an *ad hoc* fashion. I am from County Mayo and acknowledge that there has been some welcome funding and input from the Arts Council for venues in Mayo. I know that a lot of the venues operate on a shoestring budget. Notwithstanding receiving funding from local authorities, it is important to have a partnership approach. The Arts Council has stipulated its desired arts programme on many occasions but has not provided the necessary funding. Instead, funding is given to long established arts venues located primarily in the cities. I do not wish to diminish those venues but we need more outreach work that is not done on such an *ad hoc* basis and per arts venue. More support should be given to community arts.

Ms Sheila Pratschke: I understand the Deputy's concern. The Arts Council does not get involved in capital funding.

Deputy Michelle Mulherin: I am talking about programme funding.

Ms Sheila Pratschke: I can just repeat that we are doing the best that we can within the limits of the resources available to us. We try to maintain a very close relationship with local arts officers and people who work in the field. For many years I have lived in Monaghan so know the difficulties and perception that some places feel neglected. We are working to make sure that is not so.

Senator Fiach Mac Conghail: I welcome Ms Pratschke as chairman designate. I wish to acknowledge that I am the director of the Abbey Theatre and as such receive State funding which is delivered through the Arts Council. I mention this fact in case there is a potential conflict of interest with my questioning but the post does not mean that I cannot ask questions.

I acknowledge that Ms Pratschke is only starting her job. Perhaps we can invite her back here again in a year's time when she has settled into her role. Some of my questions set up the interests of the committee. Deputy Nash mentioned a particular incident. One of my bug bears is how to manage conflicts of interest at board level. Ireland is a small country and there are clear and apparent conflicts of interests. In such instances board members leave meetings when there is discussion of his or her project, within funding parameters, but he or she returns to discuss the same topic within the same funding parameters or when his or her organisation

is being discussed. I am not asking the committee to address the matter now but we should acknowledge it some day as there is a difficulty with that perception of the Arts Council. I know a lot of arts organisations that suffer because of this scenario. After claiming a conflict of interest due to being a member of a board or in receipt of payment from an organisation, a person then must leave a meeting but can he or she return later to discuss the pool of funding for the art form. The Chairman needs to examine that type of work in the foreseeable future and my personal experience might support his query into same.

My next question is on advocacy. Ms Pratschke mentioned the advocacy role played by the Arts Council. It is fair to say, from the broad scope of artists and art organisations, that we are unsure about the advocacy role played by the council. What does advocacy mean? Does the Arts Council play a public advocacy role? Does the council play a behind the scenes role with the Department? How does the Arts Council work with the Department to craft a strategic or cultural policy? How might that work be publicly understood by everybody who works in the arts? My last question covers Deputy Mulherin's comments.

My next question is on measurement. Ms Pratschke was very clear and strong, in her presentation, about the evidence based claims on economics but that is no longer good enough for the arts community. Unusually, I am in agreement with Deputy Mulherin on the local community arts, local support and the sustainability of the arts. How can we find a measurement tool or a way to speak about the arts for its own sake? How do we make the argument to the Department of Finance and the Government for investment in the arts for its own cohesion and sustainability? The presentation is short on that and I wonder whether there is a role in the Department and the Arts Council or whether there is a research unit in the Arts Council which could find a new way of convincing the Government to invest in the arts, other than through secondary measures such as bed nights and employment. What does Ms Pratschke see as her legacy in five years' time? She is hugely committed and has major experience. She understands the role of the artist, which is a great advantage to the Arts Council.

Ms Sheila Pratschke: The Senator has raised many issues that interest me. The Arts Council can have a strong advocacy role behind the scenes and in public. At the moment we are in the process of a strategic review and it is already throwing up some interesting possibilities and ideas. That will be completed in the summer, at which point we will take stock and make some hard decisions about changing the way the Arts Council works and the way in which it focuses on different areas.

That links into the notion of measurement. I agree that a different argument must be made about arts and culture in general. I have had a conversation with Bob Collins, the chairman of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, ACNI, and we both felt strongly about this point. Developing ideas and a new language of describing the arts and highlighting their importance for every citizen's life is something we are interested in developing. We have begun to talk about a forum for ideas. I have been in France so members must forgive me for using words like the "intellectual" and the "philosophical" being tied to the "strategic" and the "concrete". This is what we need and I am very interested in this as we move forward.

If I could have a legacy, it would be to wish that at the end of five years Irish people in general talk about the arts, have a feeling of culture being in their lives and have a sense of its importance. It should be a given so that we do not have to argue about it all the time. People should absorb it into every aspect of their lives as something that is their right and their entitlement and that adds so much to the individual's life when they have this opportunity.

Senator Hildegard Naughton: I welcome Ms Pratschke and wish her well in the new role. My first question concerns the Arts Council and the role it will play in encouraging young people and children to experience the arts. This relates to the point made by previous speakers about the arts reaching out into the local community and being accessible to everyone. The education system is key to this idea, as is the idea of tapping into our young people. I refer to the arts education charter launched last year. What are the views of Ms Pratschke on how the Arts Council will work towards that goal?

As director of the cultural centre in Paris last year, Ms Pratschke organised a reading by Seamus Heaney, which was quite poignant as he passed away a number of months afterwards. What are the views of Ms Pratschke and the Arts Council on developing our literary talent and up-and-coming writers in Ireland? What is the role of the Arts Council in supporting writers?

Ms Sheila Pratschke: Our policy on children and young people is one in evolution. The director of the Arts Council, Orlaith McBride, is working closely with the Department of Education and Skills on the new charter in education. It is our wish that arts and culture finds its way into the classroom and permeates every educational establishment. We will work as diligently as possible on that. Young writers come out of schools as well as coming out of homes. It is all connected. Until now, Ireland has had a major reputation for its literary output and this needs to be nurtured and continued. We need to support writers centres and workshops. This should take place all around the country rather than focusing on the major cities. We will work on this.

Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy: I welcome Ms Pratschke. My first question concerns the policy on local authority funding for the arts. One of the most significant moves we made as a society was to appoint arts officers in each local authority. We can see the benefit of that. Will the Arts Council review the policy whereby it matches funding up to the figure provided by the local authority? The policy holds back development in counties with a poor rates base and without a huge amount of funding to invest. I am talking about Offaly and I hold my hand up in being involved in a voluntary capacity in a regional theatre and an arts centre. We always felt hard done by because the local authority was doing its level best despite the fact that it did not have much money. We were doubly deprived by the Arts Council, which will not give us any more than the local authority. Does this policy warrant examination?

With regard to the future of young artists and people in the arts, Ms Pratschke referred to the development of multimedia and digital gaming. This also applies to young people coming out of drama colleges. Is Ms Pratschke concerned and will she examine whether there should be a business element to courses? In some countries, any arts course, whether literary, visual arts or drama, has a business aspect that prepares the person for seeking employment or becoming self-employed. Will the Arts Council examine this and liaise with the relevant Department? Are we preparing our young people, who are excellent and talented to the extent that we take it for granted? We must acknowledge that they must earn a living and they are entitled to do so. Are we doing enough to value them? We can all appreciate it but my question is whether we value it. Does the Arts Council have a role in examining this?

Ms Sheila Pratschke: We are engaged in a strategic review, which will open up a new period for the Arts Council. It is a time of change for everyone and all of the issues concerning local authorities will be part of the process. With regard to young people, the Deputy may be right that they need more training in business. One of the big challenges for us is to make the argument for funding because there are many things which need money thrown at them. There is only so much one can do without resources, so our argument and advocacy will be very much focused on the money issue as well.

Senator Ned O’Sullivan: I have listened to the debate so I will not go over old ground, although I have two observations or questions. I welcome Ms Pratschke and wish her well in her very important post. I am going to be parochial. As Ms Pratschke probably knows, Kerry has a very vibrant arts scene with arts centres and arts festivals, such as writers week.

Senator Marie-Louise O’Donnell: It has the Minister.

Senator Ned O’Sullivan: Yes. It has the Minister. I mention north Kerry, in particular.

(Interruptions).

Senator Ned O’Sullivan: We had that seat long before the Minister’s elevation but he is a very welcome addition and is very good to us. I hear two things from people involved in the arts in Kerry *vis-à-vis* the Arts Councils. The Arts Council does not seem to be aware of the disadvantages peripheral areas, such as north Kerry, face in trying to maintain a very good arts programme. I mention the costs incurred by writers week, bringing people from around the country to Kerry, putting them up over night and paying their travel expenses and their fees. Nobody comes cheap anymore. Can the Arts Council build in a kind of balance between the grants given to the more urbanised and highly populated centres and the peripheral regions where there is a reduced business base and local sponsorship is a lot more difficult to come by than it was previously?

Volunteer committees are being totally weighed down by bureaucracy, by form filling and by reports and surveys to be carried out. A great amount of very valuable time of paid staff is going into this. Will it ever stop? Some people believe it is just an exercise in finding work for arts consultancies. Much of the help they give is unnecessary and gratuitous and most of the committees about which I speak believe they have done enough of that.

Ms Sheila Pratschke: I appreciate the difficulty of filling in forms. I have done a fair bit of it in my time but this is the balance between good governance, good decisions and ensuring everything is transparent. There is a price to pay for that. We will try to streamline the system as much as we can. Much has been done in recent years to facilitate online applications and so on but I am afraid that balance will remain for the foreseeable future. People can always get advice from a local arts officers or from one of our people about the best way to approach it.

Senator Ned O’Sullivan: Some of these surveys being carried out are very expensive and these consultants are getting large amounts of money. Is that not a waste?

Ms Sheila Pratschke: I am afraid I am not aware of what the Senator is talking about. I have only recently come back to the country and I have barely got my knees under the table so I would have to inform myself better on that. I appreciate the Senator’s point about the expense of organising a festival or an event and bringing people from abroad and so on. It is really important that artists, writers and those invited to participate are properly paid and looked after. Getting sponsorship and money is difficult for all of us. It is a very hard time for people who are organising events, no matter where in Ireland

Senator Marie-Louise O’Donnell: I welcome Ms Pratschke and wish her the best of luck as chairman designate of the Arts Council. She may be a somewhat inspired choice, having come from the background in film writing and international culture. I am delighted she is to take up this position and wish her the best of luck in the role.

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I have found this meeting quite joyless. The arts is about joy and it was a bit too serious. The arts is inspiring, elevating and joyous and we sometimes forget that. *Apropos* of something Ms Pratschke and other colleagues said, we need to highlight the arts in every citizen's life and we need to talk about and have a sense of the arts in our own lives. The only way we will be able to do that is through the arts in education, and my colleague, Senator Naughten, mentioned this.

The arts in education is enormous. I am not a member of this committee, hence I am the final questioner. I am a member of the Joint Committee on Education and Social Protection-----

Chairman: I was going to ask that question. I will give Senator penultimate status.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: -----but it does not make me weaker. The arts has sometimes played a second, if not a third or a fourth, role in education and the Arts Council has a huge part to play in perhaps developing the role of the arts in education. What are Ms Pratschke's thoughts on that?

I am delighted to hear Ms Orlaith McBride is working alongside the Department of Education and Skills on a new charter because the last one was appalling. It was aspirational and there was no sense of practicality about it. We all know the arts is about practical implementation. It is about the living of and not just the theory and philosophy of the arts. There was a lot of philosophy and no practicality in the last charter.

The arts in education is key to all of the things Ms Pratschke spoke about in terms of the community, reaching out and young people coming to the theatre and understanding it as a part of their natural lives. Perhaps Ms Pratschke's legacy will be a complete development of all of the arts, including the visual arts, drama, dance, literature and poetry, as independently major areas of education because we consistently capitulate to maths, the sciences and business and we do not give the arts the platforms needed and the job it can do in one thousand different ways. Has Ms Pratschke thoughts on that as part of her policy or advocacy for the future?

Ms Sheila Pratschke: I certainly agree with the Senator. I think I have gone on the record many times as saying that all of these things should be fun. One can work very hard and take things very serious but one can also have fun, enjoyment and pleasure. That is probably the key with young people. I would not underestimate the role of families. There is a lot of work to be done to encourage people to do things as families, such as going to a gallery on a Sunday instead of the shopping centre. That will be part of our ongoing advocacy and this notion we have of trying to develop a new language. I hope we will arrive at having a lot of fun together.

Chairman: I want to confer penultimate status on Senator O'Donnell as a questioner.

I am glad I had the opportunity to meet Ms Pratschke in the Irish Centre in Paris last year where we had a wonderful exchange. I know her commitment to and achievements in the area. It was a privilege to listen to her on that occasion and also on this one. I wish Ms Pratschke and the Arts Council well over the tenure of her chairmanship.

The committee feels very strongly about the 2016 commemorations. What role does Ms Pratschke see the Arts Council, in conjunction with the Minister, playing in celebrating the centenary? It is very important and it is fast approaching. It is almost the beginning of March 2014 and we have had little engagement with the Minister thus far, but we will try to address that as we go forward. What does Ms Pratschke think we should do to mark 2016?

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Ms Sheila Pratschke: I am very raw on this but I think it would be Arts Council policy to support the idea of a cultural centre in the Bank of Ireland building in College Green, if that proves possible subject to planning. We would work with the stakeholders to develop plans. The Chairman is right that there is very little time left and we should learn the lesson from Limerick of what a short lead-in time does to a project such as this. We need to tackle it very quickly if we are to get good ideas and the best results in two years' time.

Chairman: I thank Ms Pratschke and wish her very well in her chairmanship, as does the committee. I propose that the committee notify the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht that we have concluded our discussion with Ms Pratschke on her designation as chairman of the Arts Council. Is that agreed? Agreed. I thank Ms Pratschke for her assistance in our deliberations.

The joint committee adjourned at 4.40 p.m. until 2.15 p.m. on Tuesday, 4 March 2014.