

# **Meeting of the National Archives Advisory Council**

**15 September 2021**

**Present:** Mr. John Hedigan, (Chair); Dr. Hiram Morgan; Dr. Ciara Breathnach; Mr. Kieran Hoare; Ms. Catriona Mulcahy; Mr. Michael Nolan; Mr. Brian McGee; Dr. Natalie Harrower, Professor Deirdre Raftery, Mr. John Grenham

**Apologies:** Comdt. Stephen Mac Eoin, Dr. Elizabeth Mullins

**In attendance:** Ms. Orlaith McBride (NAI Director)

## **1. Minutes of Meeting on 13 April 2021 (for approval)**

The minutes were approved subject to the correction of 2026 in reference to the release of the 1926 census.

## **2. Update on meeting with Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, Catherine Martin TD**

The Chair updated the members on a meeting held with the Minister in June. The Chair commenced the meeting by congratulating the Minister on her appointment and success in securing unprecedented funding for the sector. He acknowledged the progress in relation to 20 Year rule commencement order.

The Chair then reiterated the role of the NAAC in advising the Minister on all matters relating to archives and in particular the fundamental role of the National Archives in this regard, a position the NAAC take very seriously with a Council of committed professionals familiar with the field.

He presented the Minister with the different challenges identified by the NAAC in terms of the position of the National Archives, in particular the decades long neglect in terms of staffing and resourcing stating the alarm of the NAAC in terms of how the National Archives falls way behind other National Cultural Institutions in Ireland in terms of its capacity and staffing as well as other international comparators. The Chair specifically cited the 2019 Forsa report

which reviewed the National Archives alongside other similar institutions of size and scale.

In discussing the firm position of the NAAC that the National Archives is not fit for purpose in terms of staffing, digital capacity, ability to deliver on its statutory position as well as the pressing need to review the National Archives Act 1986, the Chair asked the Minister to consider establishing a high level review group to examine the role and position of the National Archives, thus recognising the critical role it plays across government and how it can be truly valued and supported by the State.

It was **agreed** that the Chair would again write to the Minister in advance of the budget to ask her to approve additional staffing as a matter of urgency.

There was further discussion in relation to how else the NAAC can advocate on behalf of the National Archives in terms of political commitment from the Taoiseach.

It was proposed that a ‘friends’ of the National Archives might be explored comprising former members of the NAAC and other interested individuals.

NAAC members agreed to consider ways of reaching key political figures of influence.

### **3. Update from the Director**

The Director updated the Council on the following:

- Current delays in the commencement of the Archives Repository Project (ARP)
- Census 1926 and the approval to commence the project
- Staffing and the submission of sanction requests
- 20-Year Rule and release in December 2021 of records from 1991-1998 from DFA, Taoiseach’s, Attorney General’s Office and Justice.
- Update on Commemorations Programme including the Autumn Talks series, the Treaty Exhibition opening in London in October and the main

exhibition in December at Dublin Castle as well as the artist-in-residence programme.

#### **4. National Archives Act 1986 (Schedule of Bodies)**

The Chair updated members of a meeting he attended recently with officials from the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media in relation to amending the schedule of bodies to include An Bord Pleanála.

It was **agreed** to circulate to members the letter received in relation to this matter by way of background and context.

Members specifically referenced the piecemeal nature of this approach when a more comprehensive review of the Act was required given the number of bodies outside the Act.

However, as a first step, it was **agreed** to propose the addition of An Bord Pleanála to the schedule of bodies. It was further **agreed** that the Chair would write to the officials to confirm the position of the NAAC but to also reiterate its position in relation to an overall review.

#### **5. AOB**

It was **agreed** to reconstitute the group to look at a public talk/event that would bring attention to the National Archives and the role of the NAAC in advocating on its behalf. The group is currently made up of Natalie Harrower, Elizabeth Mullins, Ciara Breathnach and Deirdre Raftery. Deirdre Raftery is to convene a meeting of the group to begin to explore options.

It was **agreed** that the November meeting will be held in person.

There was no other business.