



THE BIG GIG

AN ADVERT for one of the more prestigious jobs in the arts sector has just been posted by the National Concert Hall (NCH) on its website. It turns out that the well-regarded institution is seeking applications for the role of chief executive, the position held since 2021 by **Robert Read**.

Given the massive redevelopment project due to be carried out on Earlsfort Terrace, it comes as something of a surprise that the pivotal position is being advertised, with Read set to have completed a single five-year term by next February.



Maura McGrath

He has been overseeing the Project Ireland 2040-funded revamp that is set to be the largest redevelopment project ever in a national cultural institution, so if the CEO is exiting the stage there will be big shoes to fill. The job description makes it clear that the NCH is "currently undertaking an ambitious redevelopment".

For board chair **Maura McGrath**, the appointment of a CEO is a significant undertaking at a time when she has plenty on her plate, having been installed as chair of the troubled Arts Council a year ago.

It is unusual for anyone to find themselves chairing two national cultural institutions simultaneously and it would have been expected that McGrath would have stepped down from the NCH by now. It may be that she wants to oversee the CEO appointment, although this means if a new person is *in situ*

(probably from the start of 2026) McGrath's successor in the chair will not have had any input into this crucial decision. Her term officially ends in June next year.

If Read is interested in extending his contract, he will now have to apply for the post, which was the subject of a recent failed approach to the Department of Public Enterprise and Reform to have it upgraded to a higher salary point. Nevertheless there should be significant interest in the €130,000-a-year gig.

COUNCIL ARCHIVED

GOLDHAWK NOTED Orlaith McBride popping up in the media last week on foot of the Government's plan for the 1926 census, the first of the Irish Free State, to be published online at an overall cost of €5m. While the National Archives of Ireland (NAI), where McBride is director, will obviously be centrally involved, there will be no input from the National Archives Advisory Council (NAAC).

If the 1926 census is uploaded on schedule, it will be available to search from April next year. What is clearly not on schedule, however, is the appointment of members to the NAAC, a body set up back in 1987 to advise the arts and culture minister "on all matters affecting archives and their use by the public".

Remarkably, the last council – appointed back in 2017 and chaired by ex-appeals court judge **John Hedigan** – concluded its five-year term in July 2022, almost three years ago.

Goldhawk raised the issue of the empty seats back in 2023 (see *The Phoenix* 3/11/23). At that time, the arts department told Goldhawk: "A new process has commenced to reappoint members of the previous NAAC."

Fast-forward 14 months to January this year and the department was sticking to its story: "A competition to appoint a new NAAC via the public appointments system will be launched in the coming weeks."

A curious Goldhawk wondered if the forgotten council might be in place for the 1926 census. The less-than-surprising news is that, according to the department last week, "the minister [Patrick O'Donovan] will shortly seek nominations for the NAAC". Fans of *The Phoenix* will not be holding their breaths.

Moreover, on each occasion that Goldhawk has asked why the vacancies have not been filled, as is required under legislation (The National Archives Act, 1986), no explanation has been provided by the department. At the same time, the NAI is the subject of a huge ongoing upgrade project.



TONY MULLINS'S MEMORIES

EARLIER THIS month, **Tony Mullins** – brother of **Willie** – failed to overturn a Workplace Relations Commission award of a chunky €86,000 made to **Yasir Ali**, a former stable hand at the trainer's Watree Stud in Co Kilkenny. Probably the most eyebrow-raising evidence from Mullins was that he did not recall if he had attended the Cheltenham jamboree two years ago. There was certainly enough going on at the time.

The original award – for assorted breaches of employ-



Tony Mullins

ment legislation – was made to Ali in March 2023 and Mullins subsequently lodged his appeal outside the period allowed. The Labour Court heard last month that there had been "exceptional circumstances" that led to the deadline being missed, including Tony's illness at the time and the Cheltenham and Fairyhouse festivals.

Goldhawk was surprised that Mullins could not recall attending Cheltenham considering he had saddled his then stable star, **Princess Zoe** (ridden by Tony's son, **David**), to finish fifth in the 2023 Cheltenham Jack De Bromhead Grade 2 Mares Novice Hurdle.

A cursory glance at Mullins's X account includes numerous videos posted of the trainer at Prestbury Park with his beloved mare (which was later transferred out of Watree due to a difference of opinion with her owner, **Pat Kehoe**).

An irate Kehoe had responded to one of Mullins's Cheltenham tweets – that had suggested

the mare ran well – saying: "What a load of rubbish. You did not give proper instructions to the jockey who will never ride Zoe again."

Memorable stuff.

TED WALSH'S WOES

Ted Walsh – the trainer, pundit and patriarch of the Walsh family of racing TV presenters – was back in hot water with the Irish Horseracing Regulatory Board (IHRB) stewards earlier this month.

Following the running of the TC Cullen Memorial Novice Steeplechase at Wexford, the race-day stewards enquired into the running and riding of Walsh's charge, *Ta Na La*, with the IHRB veterinary officer finding the nag's condition to be normal.

Evidence was heard from **Brendan Brady**, the trainer's authorised representative on the

day, and the horse's rider, **Shane O'Callaghan**, who stated his riding instructions were to get the mare settled and not to use his whip.

The stewards – **Nicolas Lambert** (chairman), **Charles Cunningham**, **Patrick Coveney** and **Colman Sweeney** – reviewed the race and found that both the rider and trainer were in breach of the rule relating to a rider not seen to have attempted to obtain from the

horse "timely, real and substantial efforts to achieve the best possible place".

O'Callaghan was suspended for 14 race days, while Walsh was fined €3,000 but this was dropped on appeal.

This encounter with the Bowler Hats follows hot on the hooves of

the victory of *Buachaillbocht* at the Punchestown Festival, after which the handler's explanation for the improvement in form of **JP McManus's** horse – which had landed a colossal gamble – was noted by the stewards.



Ted Walsh