Dear Consultation Team,

I write as Chief Librarian of the British Library, one of the six Legal Deposit Libraries serving the UK and Ireland, in support of the extension of the policy of collecting, preserving and making available the published output of the Irish nation to all contemporary publication formats, including online digital formats.

The British Library is the national library of the UK, one of the world’s largest libraries holding over 150 million items and welcoming over 1.6 million visitors every year. Under the Legal Deposit Libraries Act 2003, the British Library is required to receive a copy of every published print item in the UK, and under subsequent regulations in 2013 to receive non-print published items such as e-books, e-journals, microfilm and web content. We welcome the Irish Government’s public consultation on this issue and are responding in order to share some of our own experience in implementing Non Print Legal Deposit since 2013. There is a history of successful reciprocity between UK and Irish legislation for physical legal deposit, and we believe it would be mutually beneficial for UK and Irish readers if this was also the case in the digital world.

The British Library’s underpinning purpose is to build, curate and preserve the UK’s national collection of published, written and digital content. We believe the extension of Legal Deposit to Non Print formats has been vital to ensuring we are able to continue performing this key role in what is a radically changing context for intellectual and cultural creative output. The UK is one of twenty of the twenty eight member states of the European Union that has some form of digital/legal deposit scheme.

Since 2013, the British Library, on behalf of the UK Legal Deposit Libraries captures approximately 4.5 million websites of the United Kingdom’s web presence annually and last year collected nearly 73,000 eBooks and over 1m e-journal articles. Research by the British Library comparing the UK web archive to the live web found that within a year of publication less than 50% of content captured could be found in similar form at its original URL, and that over 10 years nearly 30% of web resources couldn’t be found in any location. The UK Web Archive therefore has a vital role in preserving key content that would otherwise be lost to future generations. Without a change in policy in Ireland, a valuable range of digital content from websites to online newspapers and government publications will also be lost to future researchers and citizens.

It should also be noted that effective legislation in this area must take care to secure an appropriate balance between future access by citizens to collected digital content (particularly where it is free at the point of collection) and the legal rights and economic interests of digital content owners. The British Library, along with the other Legal Deposit Libraries, is very familiar with these particular issues and we would be happy to engage further in order to share our experience.

Yours sincerely,

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