Dear Sir Madam,

I write as Director of the Library of Maynooth University, in support of the extension of the policy of collecting, preserving and making available the published output of the nation being extended to include all contemporary publication formats, including online digital formats.

Maynooth University Library traces its origins to the foundation of the Royal College of St. Patrick in 1795. Today the Library provides services to Maynooth University (MU) and the Pontifical University, St. Patrick’s College Maynooth (SPCM) with a collective student body of over 11,000 students and almost 1000 staff. The Library provides resources and support to a very active research community with significant physical and online collections as well as a growing institutional repository and digital library. These resources are the raw materials for learning, teaching and research locally, nationally and internationally and are an essential driver of innovation and enquiry. Please find our response to the public consultation outlined below.

1. Should the policy of collecting, preserving and making available the published output of the nation for the benefit of the public be extended to include all contemporary publication formats of Irish interest including online digital formats e.g., .i.e. websites?

It is imperative that the policy be extended. For scholarly and other publications which are increasingly moving to electronic only formats, extension of e legal deposit will allow libraries such as Maynooth to continue to collect and make available these valuable sources, in much the same way as is currently undertaken with Irish printed publications. Web archives are a new type of primary sources and offer opportunity for research on contemporary life and the recent past. Their importance as a research resource will grow with time. Any consideration of Irish social, cultural, intellectual, economic and political dimension of the last twenty years will be incomplete without consideration of the outputs of the Web

Within a year of publication, 50% of web resources are gone or are unrecognizable. This means government publications, online newspapers and websites documenting all aspects of life in the 21st Century will be lost to future researchers. For Maynooth University Library, our ability to support colleagues in a variety of disciplines, but notably history, sociology, media studies and law would be critically impacted. It should be noted that amending legal deposit legislation to incorporate deposit of the published digital output of that country would serve to keep us in step with international trends. Of the 28 members of the European Union with legal deposit legislation, approximately 60% of countries already have digital legal deposit legislation in place. This would include long established member countries such as the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Spain, Sweden, and Denmark, and newer members such as Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. These countries are already actively collecting this digital
material. Crucially, the deposit of published digital output should be available to the 13 prescribed institutions that are legal deposit libraries under current legislation. It should also be noted that, with the changing dynamics currently evident in the publishing industry and the increasing amount of valuable content disseminated via ‘self-publishers’ on the web, extending this policy to include all contemporary formats, including online digital formats is a necessity.

2. **What issues arise if a policy extension on digital legal deposit is not provided for?**

If the policy extension is not provided for, it will be harder for Irish people and others to access, free of charge, the total published output of the nation. This removes the ability for people to view material in a context where they can compare it to cognate material – either in print or online. Being able to view information in this way is a critical tool in information literacy and helps support an informed, involved, society. With the balance between digital and physical material continuously changing in favour or the former, a decision not to support the preservation of this material will effectively remove a massive corpus of publications, resources and data from both interested citizenry and active researchers. This is already happening; the current absence of legislation has led to a growing ‘digital black hole’ and the continuing loss of publications that document all aspects of 21st century life in Ireland will only exacerbate this lacuna. It should be further noted that the subscriptions which academic libraries often use to enhance their online collections will never compensate for this, as that material is proprietary, typically extremely limited in focus and cannot be shared with the wider community due to licencing restrictions.

3. **What are the benefits if a policy extension on digital legal deposit is provided for?**

Digital publications are as revolutionary for society as the printing presses of Gutenberg and Caxton in the 15th century, but far more transient. These publications capture contemporary life, current affairs, politics and research and will be a key resource for future generations seeking to understand our society in all its aspects. Just as with the works which came off the press of Gutenberg however, these publications need to be preserved. Life in the 21st century is already being lived and documented in digital form – and this will only increase. The extension of policy, to facilitate amendments to current legislation to enable the capture of this material will ensure collection, preservation and access to the documentary and intellectual heritage of 21st century Ireland.

We therefore support the proposal as outlined in the public consultation and urge the Minister of Arts Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs to consider and act on this response.

*Regards,*

*Cathal McCauley*

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*University Librarian*