Response to Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs public consultation, run on behalf of the National Library of Ireland, regarding digital legal deposit

I write as University Librarian at National University of Ireland Galway 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.

National University of Ireland Galway is one of Ireland’s seven universities with 18,000 students and 2,600 staff. Its Library is a major research resource, both for its own campus community and for the many visitors we receive from within and beyond Ireland. Holdings include over 530,000 printed books, with access to more than 60,000 electronic journal titles in full text, along with over 350,000 electronic books. Archives and special collections are vital to the academic mission of the University. Areas of focus for archives are literature, theatre, film and the performing arts, and historical and political collections, all including significant Irish-language and regional material. A major project to digitise the archive of the Abbey Theatre was completed in 2015 and reflects an increasing focus on digital publishing, curation and access. Complementing the archives are special collections, whose particular strengths include folklore, Irish-language materials and travel literature relating to Ireland.

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., .ie websites?**

   Yes, the policy should be extended. Within a year of publication, 50% of web resources are gone or unrecognizable. This means government publications, online newspapers and websites documenting all aspects of life in the 21st Century will be lost to future researchers.

   Many countries have already amended legal deposit legislation to incorporate deposit of the published digital output of that country e.g. websites and electronic publications. This is digital legal deposit. 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.

   The extension of this policy to include all contemporary formats, including online digital formats is a necessity in this era of a changing publications landscape. It is an important precursor to amended digital legal deposit legislation.

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 to access, free of charge, the total published output of the nation. The balance between digital and physical material will shift,
and eventually there will be more digital material produced than physical, and none of this digital material will be collected and preserved for future research. The loss of publications that document all aspects of 21st century life in Ireland will only add to the ever growing digital black hole created by the ongoing absence of legislation in this area.

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

We believe these digital publications will be as important as printed books for future generations to understand life in Ireland in the 21st century, and that they are more fragile than books so we need to capture them now. They are important to researchers and citizens alike as they document the local as well as the national, the creators and innovators as well as the more formal machinery of the state. Life in the 21st century will increasingly be documented in digital form, in blogs, vlogs, and digital newspapers. 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.

Yours sincerely,

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