May the 8th, 2017

Minister Heather Humphrys,
Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs,
23 Kildare Street,
Dublin

Dear Minister,

What is a nation without memory of its history, social and cultural heritage? The World Wide Web has enabled an unprecedented era of knowledge sharing, but it has also created new challenges. The diverse range of material that is now exchanged over the World Wide Web poses a challenge to our understanding of what comprises our intellectual, social and cultural heritage. While other countries have legislation for capturing the country’s web domain, no one is systematically doing this for Ireland. In short we need a ‘.ie’ web domain.

Writing as Professor of Modern History at Trinity College Dublin, I strongly believe that this loss of memory will seriously affect the future understanding of Ireland’s contemporary society. Ensuring digital preservation of the Web is an urgent issue and the prospect that the late 20th century and early 21st century will become an informational black hole is very real. National legislation would provide for a continuity of heritage with those printed works held in the care of the National Library of Ireland and other legal deposit libraries, while recognising the national significance and vulnerability of the Ireland’s digital heritage.

Twenty of the twenty-eight member states of the European Union have digital legal deposit schemes at varying levels in place. As a nation, Ireland has been slow to recognise the necessity to secure the protection and continued access to our intellectual, cultural and social digital patrimony. It is critical that this be addressed as a matter of urgency. In short, we need to put in place a national web archiving strategy and extend Irish legal deposit to digital materials.

Yours sincerely,

Jane Ohlmeyer
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Director, Trinity Long Room Hub
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