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

I’m writing as Director of Library Services at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) in support of extending the policy of collecting, preserving and making available the published output of the nation to include all contemporary publication formats, especially online digital formats.

RCSI Library both supports the education, research and clinical activities of the College and preserves the Heritage Collections of RCSI, which include the archives of the College dating back to its foundation in 1784. Today RCSI library is predominantly online and 85% of our interactions with our customer base are online.

Please find RCSI Library’s 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?

Yes, the policy should be extended. As a non-legal deposit library we, and other research-supporting institutions, rely on the National Library of Ireland (NLI) and other legal deposit entities to collect and preserve the published output of the nation. That published output is increasingly digital and is likely, if it hasn’t already, to supersede print output.

Within a year of publication, 50% of web resources are gone or unrecognizable. Government publications, online newspapers and websites documenting all aspects of life in the 21st Century will be lost to future citizens, policy makers and 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% have digital legal deposit legislation in place including the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Spain, Sweden, and Denmark, as well as newer members such as Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. These countries are already actively collecting digital material.

The extension of this policy to include all contemporary formats, including online digital formats is a necessity in a digital environment and 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 Internet and digital publishing have been mainstream since the mid-1990s; to not include online, digital formats in this policy is to ignore today’s working and research environments and the preferred, and sometimes mandatory, output format of content producers, i.e., online and digital. It is also to ignore the preferred access mechanism of most researchers, citizens and policy makers.

The balance between digital and physical material will shift, if it hasn’t already, to a time when more digital than physical material is produced. None of this digital material will be collected and preserved for future research and its absence will only add to the ever growing digital black
hole created by the absence of legislation in this area.

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

Digital publications will be as important for future generations as printed books have been to past generations to understand life in Ireland in the 21st century and they need to be captured now. They are important to researchers and citizens alike as they document the local, the national, the creators and innovators as well as the machinery of the state. Life in the 21st century is increasingly documented in digital form, in blogs, vlogs, and digital newspapers/journals. 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 etc.*

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