To Whom It Concerns

I am writing as University Archivist and on behalf of the Corporate Secretary’s office at University College Cork, in support of the extension of the policy of collecting, preserving and making available the published output of the nation to include all contemporary publication formats, including online digital formats.

While as an Archive Service we do not generally collect and hold published matter as part of our collections, we do make much reference use of, for example, University Calendars and syllabi. These are now generally published digitally, and are publically accessible through websites. The research public in the future may struggle to locate and use the key information contained in such publications, eg, on the courses, staff, students, structures, and experience provided by universities, unless steps are taken to ensure their digital preservation. In this context, I very much welcome the opportunity to contribute to this timely consultation process on digital deposit.

To address the headings in the consultation document specifically:

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. I gather that, within a year of publication, 50% of web resources are gone or unrecognizable. This means that many varied kinds of publications, including government publications, online newspapers and websites documenting all aspects of life in the 21st Century, including university life, will be lost to future researchers.

I understand that 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.

I agree with the view that 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 relative proportions between digital and physical material is constantly shifting, and eventually there will be more digital material produced than physical. Despite the best efforts of the National Library, through its ‘webcrawl’ collecting of websites, and the work of other bodies, including this
university, there is a great risk that much digital material will not 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, and will leave future researchers at a disadvantage relative to past researchers to whom required research resources were assured through legal deposit libraries.

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

Digital publications are supplementing and taking the place of printed books for a great many types of information and cultural output. These include, as noted, university calendars and syllabi, traditionally important resources for researchers ranging from amateur family historians to institutional historians and statisticians. They also include the many reports on research work, administrative activities, and other digital output which present the university, its findings, and its vibrancy to the world. Extension of this policy extends access to this information and output to future generations, informing their understanding of life in 21st century Ireland. While UCC is working hard to ensure its research output and other digital publications are managed and preserved effectively, we very much support digital legal deposit as providing policy and, in time, legal status to the preservation of digital publications, through extension of the present legal deposit system for physically published material. This status is all the more important as digital publications are more fragile than books. They need to be captured effectively and 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,

Timmy O Connor

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