



Strategy 2022–2026



*Leabharlann
Náisiúnta
na hÉireann*

National Library
of Ireland



NATIONAL LIBRARY OF IRELAND

Strategy 2022–2026

Image: Domed ceiling in the National Library of Ireland's Reading Room

Chairperson's Foreword

The National Library is Ireland's memory keeper. This leading library and cultural institution collects and protects the extraordinary national collections in order to share the stories of Ireland with people across the country and the world.

The National Library's strengths are its collections, its people, its physical and digital infrastructure and all the relationships and memories formed by the millions of visitors over the years.

The coming five years will see great opportunities for the National Library, particularly as we enter into the next phase of our ongoing capital development project. This once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the Library will mean the complete renovation of our former book storage in the West Wing of the Main Building into an exciting cultural experience – creating a major new public space for a new generation of visitors.

There are undoubtedly challenges ahead, with constrained budgets and staffing levels and the continuing global impact of Covid-19, but I believe the future looks bright for the National Library. Over the last five years we have achieved much, including extensive collection development, major acquisitions, digital leadership, new partnerships with the Bank of Ireland Cultural and Heritage Centre to create the 'Seamus Heaney: Listen Now Again' Exhibition and the development of the Museum of Literature Ireland (MoLI) with University College Dublin. This five-year strategy builds on these achievements and opens up new opportunities and even greater ambitions for the National Library.

I am delighted to present this five-year strategy, which was developed by the Board and the Director and Executive of the National Library. I would like to thank the staff of the Library and everyone who contributed through the stakeholder and public consultations, all of which have helped enhance this strategic vision.

I wish to acknowledge and thank Ms Catherine Martin, Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media and her officials for their strong support for the National Library. The Minister's support has enabled major acquisitions, digitisation projects, new exhibitions, the ongoing major capital development project and more. I would also like to thank the Office of Public Works for their dedication to the development of the National Library campus and particularly the skills and expertise they bring to the renovation of the West Wing of the Library's building on Kildare Street.

I would like to also acknowledge the great generosity of all our donors and supporters, who make valued and unique contributions to the collections and the work of the Library. Finally, I would like to thank all the staff of the Library for their dedication to this wonderful institution.

**Eoin McVey,
Chairperson**

Being welcoming and inclusive is central to all we do. We hold the national collections in trust for all the people of Ireland, and our vision is to share these unique collections with the world

Who is the National Library for?

The National Library of Ireland is for everyone with an interest in Ireland, wherever in the world they are based. The National Library's services are freely provided to the public thanks to funding provided by the Irish Government.

Visitors can enjoy a wide range of public services, both onsite in our buildings in Dublin, or online from anywhere in the world including:



Exhibitions



Learning Activities



Family history services



Tours + Events



Readers' Tickets

Anyone over 16 years of age with photographic identification can apply for a Reader's Ticket to access all the collections in our reading rooms.



Online access available to everyone

Digitised collection material can be accessed by everyone using our online catalogue.

Image: View of people on the steps of the National Library of Ireland, Kildare Street, taken by Noel Moffett, ca. 1940



Image: Consulting material in the National Library of Ireland's iconic Reading Room

The context we work in

The National Library of Ireland is the library of record for Ireland; our collections are permanent and accessible by all. Established in 1877, we have collected, protected and provided access to the national collections that comprise Ireland's literary, cultural and documentary heritage over decades, and will continue to do so for decades to come. The collections are at the heart of everything we do in the National Library, they are a unique resource that we keep safe for the people of Ireland, so everyone with an interest in Ireland can explore and enjoy them.

This new strategy for the National Library is developed in a context of extraordinary global and local events. It is a strategy that will guide the organisation in an era of global pandemic, of increasingly severe impacts from climate change, and of significant political events for the island of Ireland particularly Brexit. Future generations will depend on the success of this strategy to have access to collections that will give them a window into the experience of Ireland and the world during the period 2022-2026.

During 2020-2021 the spread of Covid-19 across the world caused millions of deaths and impacted every aspect of society and economy. In the National Library we rapidly moved to work remotely and adapted our services to deliver them online. Our buildings closed and opened in line with Government guidance and public health advice, and all our onsite services were modified to accommodate physical distancing and contactless delivery. We collected the Irish experience of Covid-19, and continued to collect and develop the national collections. The longer-term impacts of Covid-19 are not yet evident but will be addressed during this strategy period.



Image: A tour of the West Wing in the Library's building on Kildare Street

Reimagining the National Library

We are in the midst of the most substantial building project in the history of the National Library. Our major capital development entitled 'Reimagining the National Library' commenced in earnest in 2017 and will continue through this strategy period. It is the most significant investment in the physical infrastructure of the Library since our beautiful Main Building opened to the public in 1890. To date, much-needed building works have taken place across our Kildare Street campus including the decant and relocation of the prints, drawings and ephemera collections, and the published collections comprising more than 350,000 items from six storeys of Victorian book stacks. We have launched a new onsite book repository and also relocated our seminar room and much of our staff accommodation and behind-the-scenes operational areas. This major undertaking is an exceptionally ambitious project and essential for the future of the National Library as it will deliver safe storage for the national collections, universal access for all our visitors, and brand new exciting public spaces for all. Delivering the bold ambitions of this tri-partite partnership with the Office of Public Works and the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, involves a major commitment of budget, resources, time and expertise.



Image 1: Beginning family history research on the National Library of Ireland website;
Image 2: Viewing the National Library of Ireland's Instagram account on a mobile phone

Looking ahead

This strategy also sits in a period of great change in the global library sector, where the increasing prominence of digital creation, new technologies and online delivery is racing ahead, creating a challenge for national libraries across the world for whom long-term commitments mean hundreds of years. Our goal is to capture and preserve the recorded memory of Ireland in all its forms, which increasingly means born-digital formats such as websites, social media, audio and video streams, emails and digital documents and photographs. Although it is a challenge, we addressed it during the last strategy period when we launched a series of pilot projects to collect, preserve and make accessible a number of complex born-digital archives. This crucial work is ongoing and will in time enable us to collect comprehensively across the Library, guided by our Collection Development Policy and regardless of format.

Diversity and inclusion are central to all we do, building on a long tradition of welcome for all. We published our first Diversity and Inclusion Policy, established a diversity and inclusion working committee and consulted with minority and under-represented groups during the last strategy period, and we are determined to continue prioritising equality and incorporating diversity and inclusion in all aspects of our work, our collections and our relationships and collaborations.

The National Library carries out a wide range of services and functions with its highly dedicated staff, including the provision of multiple reading rooms, acquisition and cataloguing, family history services, multiple exhibition sites, onsite and online events, tours and learning, digitisation, reprographics, conservation, digital preservation, online engagement, social media, and all the administration that supports this public-service organisation. We punch well above our weight when you consider we have 110 staff, well below our European peer national libraries.

Finally, we work in the context of national and international developments in the library and cultural sectors, and more broadly in the public service realm. We are influenced by and contribute to: the National Development Plan Project Ireland 2040; the policies and strategy of the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media including policies promoting the Irish language; Government policies with regard to good governance, modernisation and innovation in the public sector; the global sustainable development goals, and CONUL, LAI, CENL and IFLA amongst many more. We are very grateful for the continued support of the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, and all our partners and donors without whom we could not achieve all we are setting out in this strategy.

Report on progress against 2016–2021 Strategy

This new strategy builds on what was achieved during the last strategy period of 2016–2021. To inform the development of the new strategy we commissioned an independent review of progress which found that the 2016–2021 plan was ambitious and focused on achieving impact, and strengthened the Library’s connection and relevance with the people of Ireland.

The review found:

“An extensive series of achievements across the five-year term, chief among those being the development of new sites for public engagement, an increase in visitor numbers, the development of additional safe and secure storage space, advances in the digital journey and the leadership taken by the National Library in respect of diversity and inclusion.”

“The strong diversity and inclusion orientation and the development of the National Library’s first formal Diversity and Inclusion Policy is recognised as a catalyst for the promotion of the Library as an open and welcoming space. In addition, it has provided a new lens for the Library to consider gaps in both the collections and the audiences that engage with those collections.”

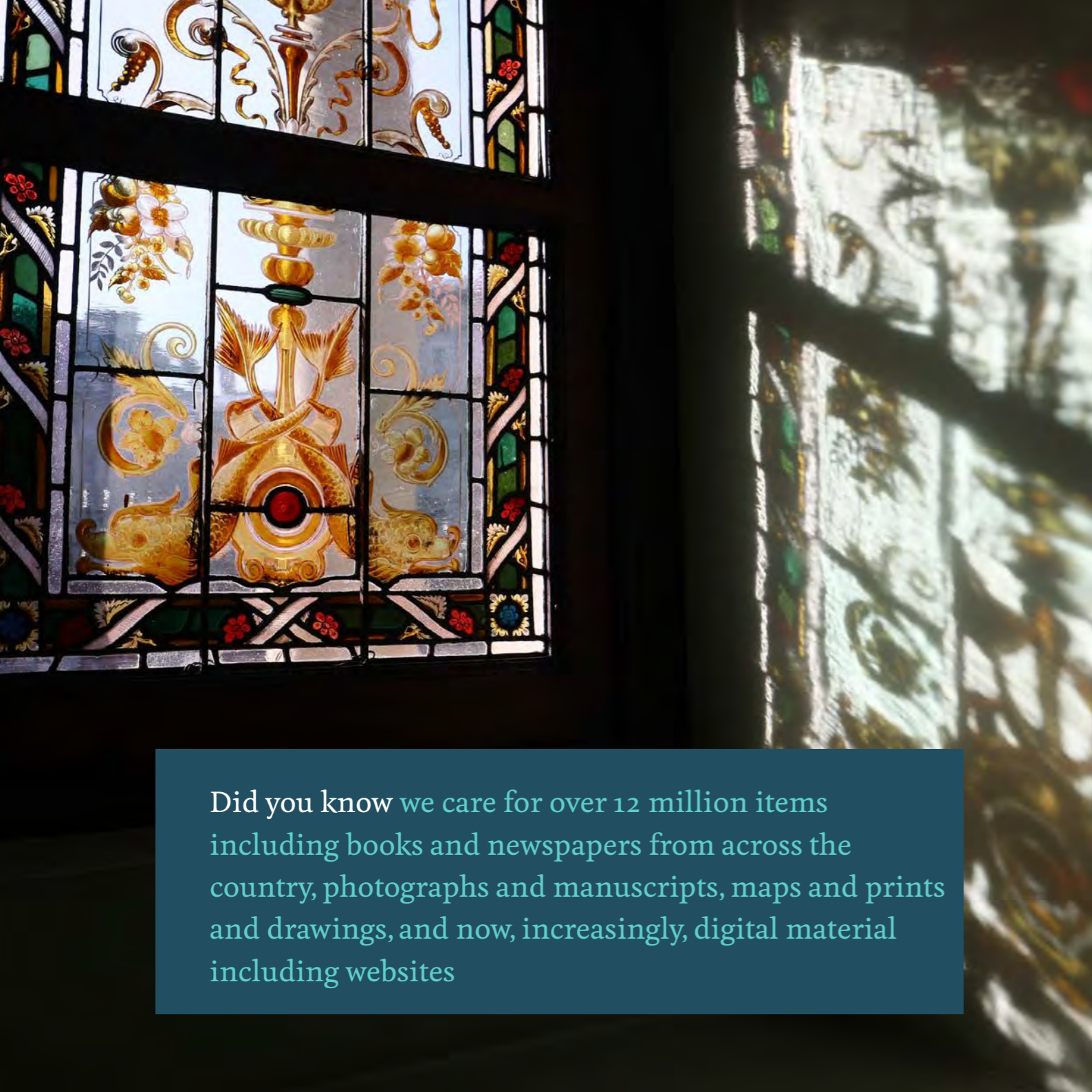
“Collaborative actions led to a number of significant partnerships which in turn have facilitated large scale public engagement projects. Most significant amongst these included the Museum of Literature Ireland (MoLI) joint venture with UCD and the Seamus Heaney collaboration with the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and Bank of Ireland.”

Other achievements noted included improvements in respect of cataloguing, enhancements to off-site storage, the enhanced profile of the Library due to major acquisitions, the West Wing project which has ensured the safety of a significant proportion of the collection from fire and flood damage while also providing valuable space for public engagement, the development of significant exhibition and learning programmes and an investment in the Library’s online and digital capabilities, the increasing number of collections which are searchable online, and the pivot to online delivery during the pandemic.

The review notes the enduring nature of the Library’s strategic pillars and advises an increased focus on staff development and funding diversification in the coming period.



Left page: George Morrison at the Library, 2018; Edna O'Brien in her home, 2021; Eoin O'Malley creator of the National Library Christmas card artwork 2021. Right page: Staff on the steps of the Library; Michael Tient, Senior Category winner from Marino College, Dublin with his teacher Joan Lyne, 2019.



Did you know we care for over 12 million items including books and newspapers from across the country, photographs and manuscripts, maps and prints and drawings, and now, increasingly, digital material including websites

Image: Stained glass window in the front hall of the National Library of Ireland



Our Mission

To collect, protect and make accessible the recorded memory of Ireland.



Our Vision

To share the story of Ireland with the world through our unique collections.



Our Values

Welcoming to all

With principles of equality and diversity at the centre of all we do, we are committed to being welcoming and inclusive to all our users and staff, and to delivering high standards of service to all our users.

Trustworthy

We collect and provide access with integrity and independence to reflect the breadth of the Irish experience.

Collaborative

We believe in building strong relationships and working constructively with a diverse range of partners and across the organisation.

Progressive

We are committed to inspiring innovation, inclusion, creativity and learning, and are always open to new ways of working.

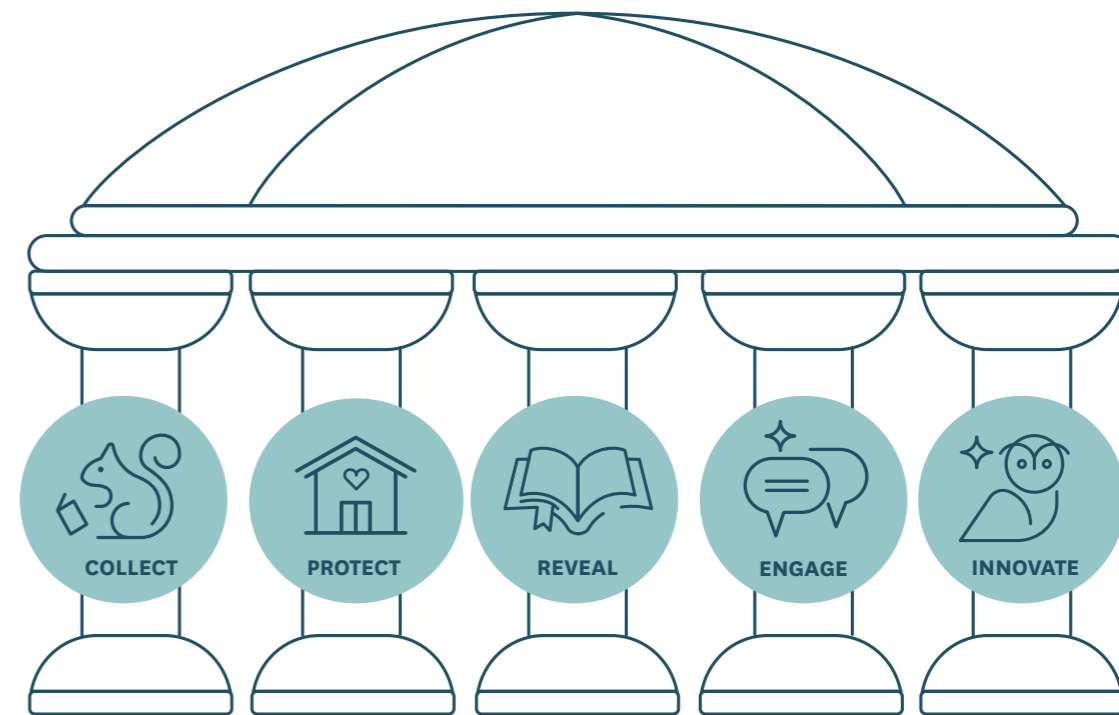


Image: Exterior of the National Library of Ireland

Strategic priorities

This strategy is developed with a framework of five strategic pillars, which will give focus and direction for the National Library over the period 2022-2026. They continue the work of the strategic period 2016-2021 which highlighted enduring priorities for the National Library such as collecting and protecting, and began a number of decade-long projects and commitments.

These five pillars set forth an ambitious strategic programme for the period 2022-2026 that will see the National Library transformed and reimagined through a once-in-a-lifetime capital redevelopment programme and extensive work across all our services and functions. These five pillars support the National Library as a whole, and the actions presented under each pillar may be cross-cutting and impact ambitions set out in the other pillars.





Collect

The National Library has collected the most outstanding collection of Irish documentary material in the world. We are the library of record for Ireland, mandated to develop a national collection of library material relating to Ireland by the National Cultural Institutions Act 1997. As a legal deposit library we are entitled to a copy of everything published in the State, and we actively collect Irish material published outside of the State, so that our Published Collections include a comprehensive record of Irish books, newspapers and periodicals.

The Library's Special Collections are extraordinary and include manuscripts, prints, drawings, photographs, maps and ephemera. This material has been collected since our foundation and much is unique to the National Library and almost all of it rare or unusual. We have collected literary papers of internationally acclaimed writers such as WB Yeats, James Joyce, Edna O'Brien and Seamus Heaney. We have collected extensive papers of Irish landed estates, Irish politicians, cultural bodies, family papers, Irish language collections, and the records of trade unions, political parties and campaigning bodies. Five million photographs have been collected in our National Photographic Archive in Temple Bar.

Our Digital Collections include more than 140,000 items digitised from the Library's collections, and we increasingly collect born-digital material that has been created entirely in digital format, such as websites, social media, digital photography and emails. New and important audio and visual as well as written material is being created every day and published online, and these digital materials are essential to collect as a record of contemporary Irish life and are growing exponentially with each passing year. We are also increasingly adding the voices of women and underrepresented groups to the national collections.

Collect: Key Objectives

1. Collect representatively and inclusively to capture the diversity of Irish experience
2. Publish a new Collection Development Policy and Guidelines
3. Invest in enhancing expertise and capacity to enable us to proactively collect the evolving breadth of contemporary materials
4. Expand the range of formats we collect and develop holistic processes for acquiring contemporary materials regardless of format
5. Continue to collect the nation's published and historical record, adding e-legal deposit materials, and the entire Irish web domain if legislation allows



Protect

Protecting and safeguarding the national collections and our staff and users as they engage with the National Library continues to be an enduring priority for us. Collection care is a core function of the National Library which enables us to ensure sustainable access to the national collections and includes preservation actions, conservation treatment, preventive conservation, the provision and maintenance of fit for purpose accommodation for collection storage and use, cataloguing and metadata, digitisation, digital preservation, security and disaster recovery planning. These critical tasks underpin all we do.

The collections in our care range from fragile glass photographic plates and 14th century Gaelic manuscripts, to 25kms of books and the archive of Irish websites. The diversity and breadth of these collections and the complexity of our estates mean that conservation, preservation and security are an ongoing challenge for us, both physically and digitally. We care for more than twelve million items across multiple sites, and we provide services for hundreds of thousands of people onsite and millions online. With our ongoing major capital development project, we are making significant progress on addressing concerns about protecting the national collections, but there is more to do across all our sites and activities.

Our work during this strategy period will keep the national collections safe for generations to come, we are making these commitments so that future generations of Irish people, across the island of Ireland and across the globe, will be able to learn about their culture and heritage and their national memory.

Protect: Key Objectives

1. Secure, conserve and preserve our extensive and growing physical and digital collections
2. Develop a masterplan for the long-term development across all sites, including evaluating and addressing the long-term collection storage needs for the National Library
3. Deliver initial phases of the masterplan including optimised service delivery spaces and staff accommodation, enhanced storage conditions for the national collections and improved accessibility
4. Implement energy saving and sustainability initiatives across our campus, and actively contribute to combatting climate change and protecting our environment
5. Review and renew our risk management, security and cybersecurity, business continuity and disaster recovery planning, and all the policies that protect our collections, staff and users

Image: Conservator at work on a playbill from the National Library of Ireland's collections



Reveal

The National Library has been revealing the story of Ireland for more than 140 years. Since our landmark library building opened on Kildare Street in 1890, many generations of writers, artists, historians and researchers have explored the national collections in the beautiful domed reading room. Today, we have family history services and research spaces for Special Collections, and we reach out beyond our physical buildings, as digital access makes our collections available online to unprecedented numbers of users and our online engagement attracts young people and new global audiences. Cataloguing remains a core function which makes the holdings of the National Library visible to people across the world and digitisation allows users to access materials wherever they are. During this strategy period we will reveal the riches of the Library's holdings with our commitment to create a catalogue record for all our collections, and we will continue to catalogue and digitise our Irish language collections.

The biggest reveal will be the delivery of our major capital redevelopment of the Library's Main Building on Kildare Street; this once-in-a-lifetime building project will deliver major new exhibition galleries, universal access for all, new learning and event facilities, a new shop and café, and enticing new public spaces and reading nooks for everyone to enjoy. The new exhibition galleries will showcase the Band Aid archive, treasures of the National Library, Nobel Laureates WB Yeats and Seamus Heaney, and more. This reimagining of the National Library is our most ambitious undertaking since 1890 and is made possible with the support and partnership of the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, and the Office of Public Works.

Image: Consulting material in the National Library of Ireland's Reading Room

Reveal: Key Objectives

1. Complete the redevelopment of the West Wing of our Main Building to reveal new public spaces and services, in this once-in-a-lifetime ambitious project
2. Reveal all the collections of the National Library by listing or cataloguing all the collections we hold
3. Share the national collections online through our ongoing programme of digitisation and develop partnerships to increase our capacity to digitise large collections
4. Continue to review and develop our reference and research services so that they are easy to use and accessible for everyone
5. Develop our communications across multiple platforms, including a new fully bilingual website, to reveal all the National Library has to offer





Engage

The National Library's tradition of welcome and engagement underpins everything we do and public engagement is a vibrant and central part of our work. Exhibitions, events, tours and learning activities help us to promote inclusive engagement with the collections we hold in trust. With artists in residence, online exhibitions and an extensive primary and secondary schools engagement programme, we can connect with a broad range of communities in imaginative and participatory ways, right across the world. Engaging through Irish is an ongoing commitment and includes bilingual exhibitions and Irish language programming. Accessibility has been central to the design of our new website and the designs for our capital development project. Engaging, consulting and partnering with diverse, minority and underrepresented groups makes the National Library more inclusive and representative, and ensures we are a National Library for all.

Over the last five years, we have worked with more than a hundred partners to achieve more together than we ever could alone. Our biggest partnerships created the exhibition 'Seamus Heaney: Listen Now Again' in the Bank of Ireland Cultural and Heritage Centre on College Green, and the Museum of Literature Ireland, or MoLI, in UCD's birthplace, Newman House on St Stephen's Green. These new exhibition sites have welcomed hundreds of thousands of visitors to date. We have worked in partnership with diverse communities to deliver co-curated exhibitions and programming including our flagship 'Living with Pride' LGBTI+ campaign. Our next big partnership project is the major redevelopment of the National Library's West Wing to deliver a world-class destination to welcome hundreds of thousands of visitors per year, and during this strategy period we will focus on this major investment of resources to deliver the best possible experience for all our visitors.

Engage: Key Objectives

1. Make everyone feel welcome and included in the National Library
2. Focus on the development and animation of the West Wing to deliver a world-class destination for the National Library's public engagement
3. Engage, consult and collaborate with diverse communities to develop more inclusive and accessible onsite and online services
4. Continue developing our online programming to grow our engagement across Ireland and the world, and to keep our loyal audiences engaged
5. Tailor promotion, marketing and communications to increase visitor numbers onsite and online
6. Develop a programme of engagement to attract donors and investors



Image: Poetry Aloud competition readings in the Main Reading Room in 2019



Innovate

The National Library of Ireland has always been innovative, indeed the very concept of a national library as a repository of the knowledge, heritage, culture, and memory of a nation, all openly and freely available to all, is a radical innovation.

We have established ourselves as an innovative leader in digital collecting and digitisation, having digitised over 140,000 items from the national collections – all freely available in our online catalogue – and having developed a range of pilot projects to pioneer the collection of complex born-digital archives. We share our digitised materials across multiple online platforms enabling us to reach new audiences, and to build our relationship with young people and the Irish diaspora. Our use of digital innovation has brought great benefits to users across the world.

During Covid-19 we demonstrated innovation in adapting to work remotely and deliver our services online, and also onsite where every aspect of our work practices had to be adapted to physical distancing and contactless delivery. The redevelopment of our events, tours and learning activities for online platforms has brought the benefit of enabling us to be more inclusive and further reaching than we could be when operating within our buildings. The spirit of innovation is to seize opportunities for improvement, efficiencies, and new ideas, and during this strategy period we will build upon what we demonstrated during Covid-19 for the continued benefit of our users and our staff.

Image: National Library of Ireland staff member preparing a bound map for digitisation

Innovate: Key Objectives

1. Develop a vision for the future of our Reading Services
2. Develop research partnerships to explore the use of emerging technologies and to enable others to innovatively re-use our digital collections
3. Play an active role in our communities, developing and sharing experience and skills in conferences, workshops and events
4. Foster innovation across the organisation so that new ideas, improvements and efficiencies can flourish
5. Deliver an innovative programme of HR supports for our staff including training, support to develop Irish language proficiency, development and succession planning, and a flexible and responsive work environment

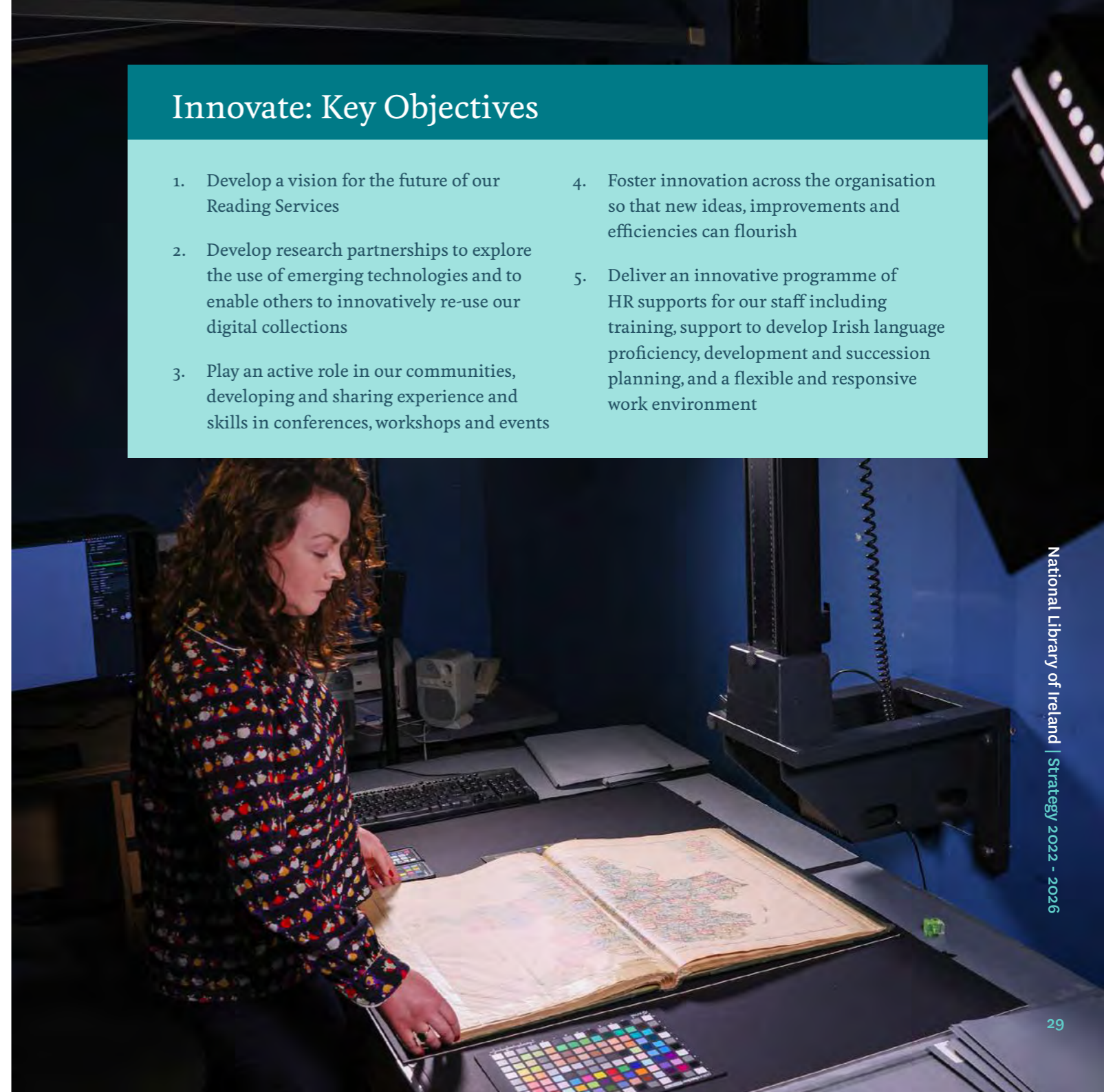




Image: Entrance to the National Library of Ireland

Delivering our strategy

What we achieve during this strategy period will be remembered for decades to come. Our ambitions are high, including the complete renovation of the West Wing of the National Library's Main Building, extensive and diverse collecting, the development of safeguarding policies, practices and plans, major cataloguing and digitisation programmes, the enhancement of our research services and our communications, and the development of a more flexible, innovative workplace.

In this period we will work in partnership with the Office of Public Works and the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, to bring to life our 'Reimagining' of the Victorian Main Building, and our vision for a major new public space that is welcoming and accessible and shows off the extraordinary collections of the National Library, shining a spotlight on the Band Aid archive, treasures of the National Library, Nobel Laureates WB Yeats and Seamus Heaney, and more. We will animate this special space with welcoming and inclusive visitor experiences and fully accessible services, and the National Library will be a shining beacon in the cultural and educational life of Ireland.

Our engagement with people will be inclusive, welcoming, accessible, and will reach out across the country and across the globe. A new generation of users will be attracted by our dynamic physical spaces and our vibrant online engagement, and we will continue to deliver the very high standard of customer service and visitor experience that people know and love us for. Our vision is to share the story of Ireland with the world through our unique and extraordinary collections, and we will seize new opportunities to do this online and onsite during 2022-2026.

We acknowledge the challenges ahead and the risks of decreased funding, increasing costs, low staffing numbers, insufficient high-quality storage, and the urgency to address the ever-growing physical and digital record and new and emerging technologies. The exceptionally high level of staff expertise and commitment in the National Library is a key factor for the successful delivery of our ambitions, and investing in enhancing our work environment and continually developing the skills and expertise of our staff is both important and essential. This ambitious strategy cannot be achieved without the amazing staff in the National Library and they have contributed to every stage of its development.

Lastly, nothing would be possible without the vision and support of the Board of the National Library. This strategy has been developed with their guidance and leadership, and we will set out annual business plans and budgets, and robustly evaluate and measure our performance with the National Library Board, to ensure that we can deliver on the grand ambitions set out in this five-year strategy.

Our Board

With thanks to the Board of the National Library of Ireland:

Chairperson Eoin McVey

Dr Marie Bourke

Professor Maeve Conrick

John Grenham

Lisa Grimm

Lorelei Harris

Dr Conor Kostick

Katherine McSharry

Professor Ciarán Ó hÓgartaigh

Professor Kalpana Shankar

Caitriona Sharkey

Jennifer Taaffe

Cover image: Marc O'Sullivan

Image: Exterior National Library of Ireland





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