



*Leabharlann
Náisiúnta
na hÉireann*

National Library
of Ireland

Strategy 2016-2021

Chairman's Foreword

The National Library of Ireland is an inherent and important part of the Irish State. It is central to our nationhood and essentially belongs to the people of Ireland. The breadth and depth of services that the National Library delivers is remarkable, particularly when one considers that, in common with our fellow cultural institutions, the Library is emerging from a period of severe financial constraint.

It is my privilege to introduce the 2016-2021 strategy for this venerable institution. This strategy aims to be ambitious. It is the result of a wide ranging consultation process involving management and staff under the auspices of an overall vision set by the Board. I am grateful for the extensive and diligent work done by Board members in the development of this strategy and I am confident that the National Library will contribute to the wider national cultural objectives of our Government.

The 2016-2021 strategy speaks for itself but I would like to draw attention to a few issues that I believe are important for its realisation.

It is incumbent upon us to articulate the value of the National Library to the people of Ireland and the wider diaspora in enriching our cultural identity.

The Library's case for support, both financial and non-financial, from the Government is not without an economic aspect, and includes our commitment to contribute to and promote cultural tourism for Ireland. I would like to acknowledge the Government's commitment of capital funding to redevelop our main library building which will be implemented during the period of this strategy.

Government funding remains a key enabler for the achievement of this strategy. To enable the Library to fulfil its mandate we ask that funding be regularised towards historic levels as Government finances improve. We do however recognise the limitations of central funding in achieving our ambitions. Therefore an element of this strategy is to actively promote investment from philanthropic and commercial sources to supplement our core funding to achieve our wider ambitions.

The Library possesses an important asset in its staff, and their expertise and skills, and I also recognise as an important factor, the support the Board provides to our executive leadership and staff.



Chairman

Director's Foreword

This is an exciting time to work in libraries, as we develop and evolve whilst remaining true to our fundamental ethos of knowledge collection, preservation and sharing. Increasing user expectations and digital technologies allow us to reach communities across the world that we never could have before. With this opportunity also comes the responsibility to get it right - to make a strong and leading contribution to the open democratisation of knowledge for everyone - and that is at the very heart of what we do in the National Library of Ireland.

The National Library has a special role to play in Irish society, culture and learning; we care for the national collections, holding them in trust and in perpetuity for the people of Ireland. As an Irish memory institution, we have a central role to play in remembering our past and capturing our present, for now and for our future generations, wherever on the globe they may be. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, our sense of identity can remain a deep and anchoring foundation. In the collections of the National Library our unique and living cultural heritage can be discovered and explored.

I am confident we have set the right priorities for the National Library for the five year term of this strategy. These priorities are ambitious and will challenge us, but I believe we are well prepared to deliver them, building on the strengths of our staff, the beauty and richness of the national collections, and our long traditions of welcome and engagement. I am also proud of the values of our organisation as laid out in this document; they emerged naturally in vibrant conversation with our staff and our users, and I feel they are a part of the very fabric of the National Library.

I am hugely grateful to our Board and our staff for their commitment to the National Library and for their work in the development of this 2016-2021 strategy. I am grateful also for the support and sponsorship of the Irish Government, and the wonderful generosity of our many donors.

I feel very privileged to lead the National Library in this period and very optimistic about what we can achieve together. This is an exciting journey for the National Library and our growing community of users here in Ireland and across the world.



Director



Sapientia (wisdom), detail of the floor mosaic in the entrance hall.

Setting the Scene

The National Library of Ireland is the library of record for Ireland; our collections are permanent, and accessible by all. Established in 1877, our mission is to collect, protect and share the material that comprises Ireland's literary and documentary heritage, in whatever form it takes. We do this on behalf of the State for the people of Ireland, and it is a great privilege and an enduring responsibility.

Our mission is constant, but the environment in which we work is changing. In this digital age, new knowledge may be born in digital form and live entirely online. Increasingly fast-paced changes in digital technology and online access mean that democratisation of knowledge is within reach. Digitisation can enable access to high-quality information across the world, and while digital copies do not negate the desire for the physical experience of the object, they can help preserve the original, and offer new forms of engagement beyond the physical. Digitised and born-digital collections are the new responsibilities facing libraries across the world.

In Ireland the economic recession has led to reduced budgets and resources available for cultural institutions. The National Library has shown resilience and fortitude during the last five year period, and now we welcome the coming five years as an opportunity to "re-imagine the National Library" through our physical spaces, our services, our changing collections and our growing user community. The development of our main library building and major collaborative projects such as the Seamus Heaney Exhibition in the Bank of Ireland, College Green (originally the Irish Houses of Parliament), and our partnership with University College Dublin on the Ulysses Centre will mean new experiences, new services and new users.

Each year the national collection grows through donations, purchases and legal deposit. We want to raise public and scholarly awareness of the unique and varied collections of the National Library, from hidden treasures to newly digitised resources, which capture our individual and collective memory. Our digital collections also continue to grow, with more than 100,000 digitised objects openly accessible through our online catalogue and our archive of the Irish internet. In the next five years we will address other forms of born-digital content to ensure we can capture the contemporary record of Ireland in an increasingly digital world.

The National Library of Ireland has always fostered and supported research, learning, debate, and the diversity of Irish culture and heritage. Our programme of engagement aims to anticipate the expectations of our many users. We have never before been able to reach as many people as we do now through our online resources, our reading rooms, and our events, exhibitions and learning programmes.



Readers' desks in the main Reading Room.

Our Mission

To collect, protect and make available the recorded memory of Ireland, caring for more than ten million items including books, manuscripts, newspapers, photographs, prints, maps, drawings, ephemera, music and digital media.

Our Vision

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

Our Values

Welcoming and helpful

We are committed to delivering high standards of service to all our users.

Open, equal and inclusive

The collections belong to everyone and we share the knowledge they hold.

Supportive and collaborative

We believe in forging strong relationships and working constructively with all partners.



Strategic priorities

We live in a rapidly changing and complex world with competing priorities and limited resources, and where new technologies require new skills and indeed new professions. Digital content is growing at an exponential rate; every minute hundreds of millions of emails are sent and tens of thousands of digital photos are published online.

In this evolving context, it is our responsibility to set ambitious yet grounded strategic priorities that optimise the services we deliver and that ensure the national collection is safely and expertly cared for. In setting these priorities we balance the needs of the physical and the digital, and the needs of the public and our scholars, researchers and writers. We take into consideration our funding, our physical and digital infrastructure, our policy and legislative environment, our expertise and our capabilities, and our unique and rich collections.

The five strategic priorities for the National Library of Ireland for 2016 – 2021 are to collect, protect, connect, innovate and collaborate.



We will develop our unique,
living national collection



The National Library's holdings constitute 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 Ireland. Our books, stored on 25km of shelving, are a remarkable resource for Irish studies, and all the newspapers from across Ireland can be found in our holdings.

The Library's Special Collections are extraordinary, including unique landed estate papers, political papers, maps and drawings, and Gaelic manuscripts. Our archives and manuscript collections are regularly consulted for women's history, heraldry and genealogy, theatre, and music, and our literary papers include internationally acclaimed writers such as WB Yeats, James Joyce, Edna O'Brien and Seamus Heaney.

Five million photographs are stored in our National Photographic Archive in Temple Bar. They show us Ireland in all its diversity from the 1850s up to the present day, from images of landed gentry life through to major sporting events and Pride parades; from images of the 1916 Rising to photographs documenting Ireland's social and cultural changes.

To develop our unique, living national collection, we will:

- fulfil our role as the natural home for collections that record the memory of Ireland and our diaspora
- build on the research and educational strengths of our unique collections
- evolve our collecting practices to include new and diverse forms of content



We will create a modern, safe infrastructure for our Library

Europa, page from Abraham Ortelius, Theatrum orbis terrarum (Antwerp, 1592) during conservation.



Collection care is a core function of the National Library which enables us to ensure sustainable access to the national collections.

Collection care includes preservation actions, conservation treatment, preventive conservation, the provision and maintenance of fit for purpose accommodation for collection storage and use, cataloguing and metadata, the production of digital surrogates, digital preservation, security and disaster recovery planning. 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. We will focus over the next five years on ensuring that our physical and digital infrastructure meets modern standards for storage and use of the national collections and provides the best possible experience for our users.

An important goal for us is to provide safe, inclusive and equal access for everyone, in the many different ways that people choose to engage with the Library. The capital funding committed by the Government to develop our Victorian main library building in partnership with the Office of Public Works is an essential element in achieving this.

To create a safe, modern infrastructure for our Library, we will:

- optimise investment in our buildings
- preserve the national collection for future generations
- provide equal and safe access for everyone
- protect our digital and physical collections



We will inspire all our users, however they wish to engage



The National Library has been connecting people with the story of Ireland for almost 140 years.

Since our landmark library building opened on Kildare Street in 1890, many generations of researchers have explored and been inspired by the collections in the beautiful domed reading room. Today, we have additional family history services and research spaces for special collections, with dedicated reading areas for manuscripts, photographs, prints and drawings. We also reach out beyond our physical buildings. Digital access makes our research collections available online to unprecedented numbers of users, with 21.1 million visits, in 2015 alone, to our web presence. The award-winning online publication of the Catholic Parish Registers in 2015 demonstrated the demand for open digital resources and has enabled us to serve millions of users from across the globe.

Exhibitions, events and learning activities help us to promote inclusive engagement with the collections we hold in trust. With music performance, adult education courses, our much-loved W.B. Yeats exhibition, major public lectures and more, we connect with all our communities in imaginative and participatory ways. A priority for us is to grow and further strengthen our connections across all of Ireland.

To inspire all our users, however they wish to engage, we will:

- be a welcoming destination for everyone
- develop services and connections that reach out across Ireland
- grow our number of online visits
- increase the number of people visiting and working in our buildings

Visitors to our exhibition, 'World War Ireland: Exploring the Irish Experience'.



We will become a leader in digital collecting and delivery

Using an interactive touchscreen in the award-winning exhibition, 'Yeats: The Life and Works of William Butler Yeats.'



The National Library, like our counterparts the world over, is facing up to the challenge of collecting, preserving and providing access to information in new and innovative ways as digital content grows at an unprecedented rate.

Every minute hundreds of thousands of tweets are published and hundreds of hours of video are uploaded across the world; more information will be created this year than has ever been available in the history of humankind to date. Our goal is to provide high-quality information with provenance that users can trust, through the growing digitisation of our collections, and our born-digital collections.

Our web archive collection preserves and makes openly available Irish content websites from 2011 to the present. This born-digital collection already includes websites which have since disappeared online and we now maintain the only record of their existence. In 2016 we engaged in our biggest web archiving project to date; to collect and preserve over 400 websites relating to the commemoration of the 1916 Easter Rising.

During the lifetime of this strategy, we will pilot new forms of digital collecting for different digital file formats including electronic literary drafts and publications, digital photographs and emails. We will work to preserve the digital memory of Ireland, and use innovative approaches to presenting and sharing our digital collections for people across the world.

To become a leader in digital collecting and delivery, we will:

- digitise our rich and unique records for the Decade of Commemorations as part of a major online access programme
- implement new approaches to collecting born-digital content for Ireland
- trial innovative forms of engagement with our online and physical collections

**We will create opportunities
to maximise our impact**



Carole Budd Cullen with former British Ambassador to Ireland, H.E. Dominick Chilcott
at the launch of an exhibition held in partnership with the British Embassy.



The National Library's tradition of collaboration and partnership underpins some of our most significant achievements.

Over the last ten years, we have worked with more than a hundred partners to achieve more together than we ever could alone. Partnering with universities and other scholarly and heritage organisations, we have created new lifelong learning opportunities, shared expertise in global initiatives such as the Research Data Alliance, and identified new models for the cataloguing of invaluable research collections such as the Liam O'Leary film archive with the Irish Film Institute. Major collaborations for the next five-year period include our partnership with University College Dublin on the Ulysses Centre, and our much-anticipated Seamus Heaney exhibition in the Bank of Ireland, College Green.

Our reach and impact is always amplified by collaborative working. We have reached schools and students all over the island through the competition Poetry Aloud, working together with Poetry Ireland. Exhibitions like World War Ireland are supported by external sponsorship and our events programme is enhanced by philanthropic investment in landmark lecture series. New acquisitions are made possible by matched funding arrangements and generous donations. Partners like the Google Cultural Institute bring our content to audiences all over the world, and our committed online community tell us more about our collections through crowd-sourcing initiatives.

To create opportunities to maximise our impact, we will:

- build strategic and research partnerships at regional, national and international levels
- attract new donors and investors to build our support base
- try new funding models to develop new services, make acquisitions and stage exhibitions

Delivering the strategy

A national library is the physical expression of a country's regard for its cultural, literary and historical past, present and future. The founders of the National Library of Ireland had the foresight to establish one of Ireland's major cultural institutions, and this strategy will build on their legacy.

Achieving the objectives outlined in this strategy will be challenging, particularly given the budget reductions that the Library experienced following the economic crisis which began in 2008. Throughout this difficult period, the Library still managed to attract increasing numbers of visitors and achieved success on many fronts. We will continue to articulate and demonstrate the value of our work to help secure the public funding that underpins everything we do.

We are not alone in this. National libraries throughout Europe are facing up to new challenges at a time of constrained public finances and are developing solutions using efficient and innovative approaches to deliver public services. The core Government funding we receive and the capital funding committed to develop our main library building are essential enablers for the success of this strategy.

Another essential element in delivering our strategy is our staff, whose expertise and skills are central to making the Library what it is today. We will develop and support our staff to deliver the best standard of service to all our users and to continue to enhance the Library's well-recognised tradition of welcome.

Our national and international networks and partnerships are important to us; we can achieve more together than alone. We look forward to strengthening and growing our partnerships, and also to working with partners across Ireland on plans for a national collaborative library store, an open data strategy, and more.

This strategic plan is a living document that will guide us in our work for the period 2016-2021. We will measure ourselves against the priorities we set here and report our progress to the Board of the National Library and in our Annual Reports. We will also annually review this strategy to ensure it remains ambitious yet grounded and a fit expression of the National Library's priorities.

This is a time of great opportunity. Delivering what is set out in this strategy will ensure that we can strengthen our contribution at the very heart of Irish culture, learning and society while becoming an exemplary 21st-century National Library for Ireland.

NLI Director, Dr Sandra Collins, with a display of material from the library's Special Collections.
Photographer: Clodagh Kilcoyne





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