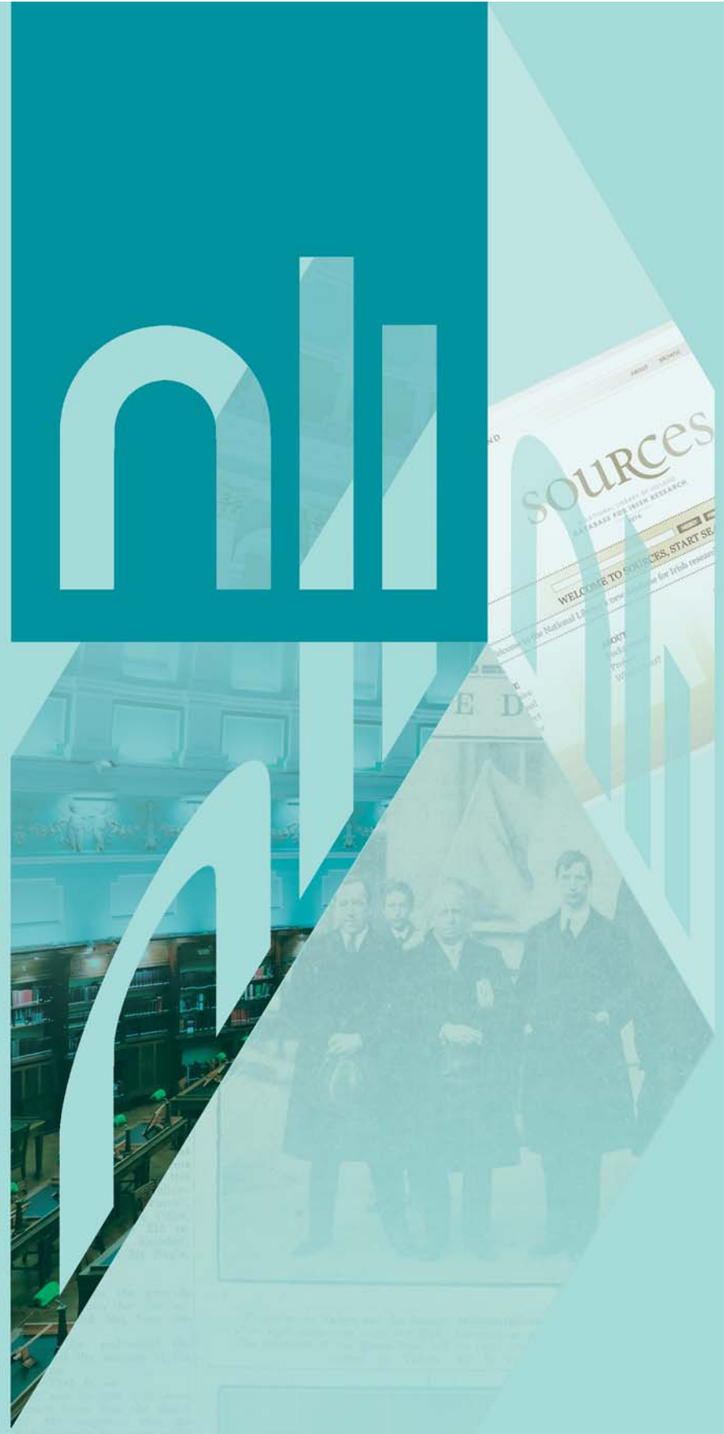


STRATEGIC PLAN 2012–2014

‘Building a Future for our Past’

National Library of Ireland

ISSN: 2009-0730

Chairman's Foreword

The National Library of Ireland, in common with many other major cultural institutions, faces significant challenges as it seeks to fulfil its mission to *collect, preserve, promote and make accessible the documentary and intellectual record of the life of Ireland and to contribute to the provision of access to the larger universe of recorded knowledge*.

The economic and fiscal difficulties facing the country at present have been well documented but their impact on the cultural life of the nation has perhaps not received due attention. Government funding to the National Library has been cut by some 40% – from €11.875m in 2008 to €7.1m for 2012. It is anticipated that funding will be reduced further in the coming years.

We acknowledge the economic circumstances but care must be taken to ensure that the National Library is not placed in a position where it is unable to realise its potential to make a positive contribution to the cultural and economic life of the country.

The creativity and capacity for innovation of the Irish people has long been a source of national pride. The darkest hours of our history have been brightened by the work of our poets, dramatists, novelists, and writers of all hues. When our playwrights conquer Broadway and our screenwriters bring home Oscars they are delivering a clear message internationally of a vibrant country with a rich heritage.

Our cultural heritage has the power to move us, inspire us, cheer us, and much more. Its value transcends mere finance; it is literally priceless.

It can also make a valuable economic contribution. Our vast store of literary, photographic and genealogical material is a veritable treasure trove of content for industry sectors such as film, computer gaming, tourism, commercial exploitation and education.

This Strategic Plan 2012–2014 sets out a pragmatic programme of actions which the National Library wishes to undertake in order to fulfil its potential and deliver value for money to the Government and the citizens who we serve. While the implementation of the Strategic Plan in full will be dependent on the availability of funding, it is our intention to maximise the commercial opportunities open to us and develop collaborations with partners in the public and private sectors in order to enhance the resources available to us.

It is important that this plan takes into account two recent announcements by Government, the first in relation to the merger of the National Archives and the Irish Manuscripts Commission into the National Library while maintaining separate identities. The second is the announcement that our parent Department would conduct a review into the Board structures of the National Museum and the National Library. We look forward to engaging with our parent Department on these issues over the lifetime of this plan.

The development of the Strategic Plan would not have been possible without the work of the previous Board of the National Library of Ireland which oversaw the institution's transition to an autonomous cultural body in May 2005 under the National Cultural Institutions Act, 1997.

In particular, I would like to pay tribute to all the staff of the Library who have put in such an enormous effort during the transition, and whose contribution has been vital to the development of this strategy document. I would also like to acknowledge the contribution of my fellow Board members in this regard.

We may face enormous challenges but this should not curb our ambition. Our goal is to become a dynamic and world-class institution and this document outlines how we intend to achieve it.

David Harvey
Chairman

Director's Foreword

This is an exciting time for the National Library of Ireland. Despite the economic downturn and the other challenges facing us, we have crossed the threshold of the digital age and are moving into a new era of collaborations and partnerships with other institutions and organisations which would not have been possible before now. These are great opportunities and it is up to all of us involved in the collection, preservation and delivery of Ireland's culture and heritage to seize the day and avail of them.

This Strategic Plan is based on three imperatives – our mission to collect, make accessible and transform.

We must become better at collecting and preserving the documentary and intellectual heritage of Ireland. Our extraordinary collections are a testament to the expertise and hard work of Library staff over many years. We must continue to develop our historic collections while also developing strategies for the collection and preservation of the vast volume of new material which is increasingly 'born digital'.

The realisation of our vision of a shared repository with other similar institutions for the storage and preservation of existing material and collections must be an urgent priority in this regard. The digitisation of our catalogues and collections, both to preserve and make them more accessible, is also a pressing issue.

Accessibility is a central theme of the strategy document and will underpin our service delivery in future. Our long-term vision is of digitised and catalogued National Library collections, available to citizens 24/7, which deliver on all aspects of the Library's mission.

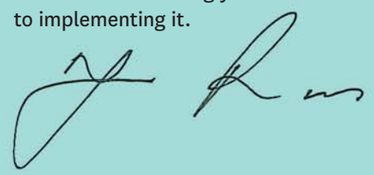
However, we will not make any progress in either of these areas without undergoing a fundamental transformation in all aspects of our organisation, processes and protocols. We have to accept the new reality that we must do more with less and do it better. This will often mean having to take painful and difficult decisions.

The National Library was established in 1877 and many of the processes and systems established then remain in use today. One of the core objectives of this Strategic Plan is to transform the National Library into a 21st century institution which offers access to all and contributes to the greatest degree possible to the cultural life of the nation.

Realising this objective will be no easy task. We do not expect to be in a position to recruit one single additional member of staff or replace any retiring members of staff during the lifetime of this plan. It is therefore vitally important that we continue to invest in the team we have here and their skills in order to support them in meeting the challenges ahead.

The biggest test we face is the challenge of change. We have to re-engineer every process in the Library and question everything we do and ask if it can be done better. A sound business case will have to be made for every activity. If we are not doing something well enough, we will have to improve; if we shouldn't be doing something, we will cease; if something can be done better by a partner, then we will have to look at outsourcing or shared services solutions; and most of all, we will have to make the hard choices every step of the way.

This Strategic Plan represents the framework on which those choices will be based. It also represents the full breadth of our ambition in terms of what we hope to achieve in the coming years. We look forward to implementing it.



Fiona Ross
Director

Introduction

In December 2007, the National Library published its first Strategic Plan as an independent body reporting to a non-executive Board and operating under the aegis of the Department of Tourism, Culture and Sport.

Much of the focus of the Library's first Strategic Plan was, of necessity, on establishing procedures and policies to support the transition of the Library from being part of the Civil Service to a standalone body reporting to a Board with its own corporate services functions, as well as on putting the Library's collection, acquisition, preservation and disaster planning policies on a more formal footing.

During this next phase of development, which will cover the three-year period 2012–2014, the Library's focus will be very much on its core collection and delivery activities and the transformation required internally to support those activities.

Review of Strategic Plan 2008–2010

The National Library made substantial progress, as reported in its annual reports, in achieving the six strategic aims set out in the first Plan, including by:

- Publishing a formal collection development policy 2009-2011;
- Developing formal acquisition procedures;
- Preparing a disaster prevention, planning and response policy;
- Finalising a formal preservation policy;
- Implementing a range of service improvements and increased opening hours;
- Launching a major exhibition programme including the launch in 2006 of the flagship *Yeats* exhibition to replace the *Joyce* exhibition;
- Implementing robust governance, ethics, financial, human resources, training, and health and safety policies and procedures;
- Commencing the process of developing a digital library infrastructure to support long-term digital development and access.

Unfortunately, no progress was made in relation to the development of an on-site purpose-built storage facility, which was completely outside the control of the Library Board and management. The ongoing budgetary crisis means that the on-site repository project has now been formally shelved. This has been especially disappointing given the importance of the project for the long-term preservation of the Library's most valuable and unique collections.

Environmental analysis

In preparing the new Strategic Plan, an environmental analysis was carried out, having regard to the specific challenges facing national libraries throughout the world and also the wider economic and budgetary challenges facing the public sector in Ireland.

In terms of analysing the environment and other issues facing national libraries, we were able to draw on research by respected international organisations to support our own conclusions. Of particular relevance in this respect is a recent (2010) discussion paper entitled *Thriving or Surviving? National Library of Scotland in 2030*. The paper, which was prepared with a view to smaller national libraries in particular, identifies three main challenges which support our own analysis:

- ***The transition to digital:*** The greatest single challenge for national libraries will be managing the transformation to a digital environment successfully.
- ***The need for outward focus:*** National libraries will need to cater for ever-increasing diversity – diverse users, increasingly remote and unseen, who want to use diverse collections through diverse means, channels and services.
- ***An adaptable library:*** National libraries will need to be able to justify a share of scarce public funding, to provide a return on investment, and to demonstrate relevance to wider agendas such as cultural tourism. This will require different managerial and strategic approaches and, in particular, the ability of staff to change and be flexible.

In addition to the challenges common to all national libraries, the National Library of Ireland must also take account of:

- the realities of operating in the most challenging economic environment in the history of the State. This has resulted in substantial and ongoing reductions in Government funding to the National Library of some 40% over a four-year period; from €11.875m in 2008 to €7.1m for 2012. It is anticipated that funding will continue to decrease.
- the fact that staffing levels at the National Library, which are beyond crisis point, will mean aspects of our statutory function cannot be fulfilled. The Government has imposed an employment control framework on the National Library which mandates that our staff numbers must drop below 76 by the end of 2014. This is a reduction of 40% from a high of 129 in 2008 while the demand for the Library's services continues to increase. It is worth noting that the national libraries of Scotland and Wales have staff of approximately 300-plus and 274-plus respectively.
- the general ongoing uncertainty about National Library funding and staff resources which makes it difficult to commit to new projects.
- the need for the National Library to offer a return on the Government's investment, as appropriate to its status as a national cultural institution, by making a contribution to education, life-long learning and cultural tourism, taking account of the wider objectives of the National Recovery Plan 2011–2014 and the specific objectives set out in the Programme for Government relating to arts and culture.
- the recently re-announced merger of the National Archives and the Irish Manuscripts Commission into the National Library, and references to rationalisation of Boards/services with the National Museum.
- the requirement that the National Library implement a specific programme of reform and change in the period 2012–2014 as part of the Public Service Agreement and the National Recovery Plan, based on the premise of delivering 'more for less'.

While the National Library is very clear about its business objectives over the three-year period 2012-2014, as set out in this Plan, it is difficult to be specific about the timing and extent of individual actions and projects which are directly dependent on the availability of financial and staff resources. Therefore, the Plan will be delivered through a series of detailed business plans which will be agreed with the Board. The level of ambition of the business plans and the timeframes for delivery of particular actions and projects will be dependent on the availability of resources from year to year. The Strategic Plan is, therefore, a framework document which encapsulates all that the National Library would wish to achieve, but it is equally valid as a framework for a less ambitious work programme constrained by limited resources.

Our mission

The National Library of Ireland is, under statute, the primary repository of Ireland's documentary heritage, past, present and future. The Library's mission, which is directly based on the statutory functions set out in Section 12 of the National Cultural Institutions Act, 1997 remains unchanged:

'To collect, preserve, promote and make accessible the documentary and intellectual record of the life of Ireland and to contribute to the provision of access to the larger universe of recorded knowledge.'

Vision: 2020

Our vision is 'To build a 21st century National Library accessible to all'.

Core objectives

In this, our second Strategic Plan, to be delivered over the three-year timeframe 2012–2014, we have identified three high-level strategic aims and related goals.

The business planning process will ensure that the actions necessary to achieve the core objectives are implemented, monitored and reviewed, and that budget and staff resources are deployed across the National Library to support their delivery.

Performance measurement and review

As national libraries have no specified clientele or primary user group, it is generally acknowledged that it can be difficult to measure their performance. It is also very difficult to assess the ultimate impact of an institution like the National Library in terms, for example, of its contribution to knowledge, academic and professional success, information literacy, social inclusion or cultural life.

Progress in implementing the Strategic Plan will be evaluated against stated core strategic aims and will be reported on in our annual reports using a range of indicators:

- *Process indicators* e.g. the policies and plans the Library has in place to support its activities;
- *Input indicators* e.g. the resources that are invested in particular Library activities, such as the level of funding spent on acquisitions, digitisation etc;
- *Output* and *Outcome indicators* e.g. results and impacts, such as the number of visitors and users, items digitised, items acquired, projects completed etc.

While we will use a mix of performance indicators to ensure a comprehensive evaluation of Library activities in pursuit of our core objectives, there will be a greater focus in this second Strategic Plan on measuring outputs in the form of statistical and usage data which can be compared year on year.

The Strategic Plan and related business plans will be reviewed at least annually by the Board.

Strategic Plan

Core objectives

Collecting and preserving for future generations

Our goal is to collect and preserve for current and future users the documentary and intellectual heritage of Ireland in all formats from digital media to historic manuscripts.

In addressing this goal we will continue to develop our collections, including by encouraging targeted donations and by developing a policy and process for collecting and preserving digital media. We will review the National Library's collection development policy and ensure that all collection development activity is in line with agreed policy objectives. We will continue to collaborate with other institutions to maximise the efficiency and effectiveness of our collecting activities. We will work with publishers to ensure that legal deposit obligations are fulfilled and we will pursue the extension of legal deposit to non-print formats.

Our preservation goals, set out in the National Library's preservation policy, will be implemented. We will seek to resolve the Library's storage crisis by exploring new options, including the development of an off-site, purpose-built storage facility in collaboration with a number of key partners.

Progress towards these goals will be indicated by the continuing development of the Library's collections in line with agreed policy; the implementation and realisation of policy in relation to the collection and preservation of born-digital material; the implementation of the Library's preservation policy, and the securing of appropriate storage, in line with international quality benchmarks for preservation storage, for the Library's collections.

Facilitating access

The National Library's collections have a key role to play in supporting education, research, lifelong learning and personal development, as well as cultural tourism. Our goal is to maximise their availability by providing the full choice of access from personal visits to digital platforms.

In addressing this goal we will devise and implement programmes to catalogue uncatalogued material in line with agreed policy, and we will set and achieve new targets for the digitisation of the rare and unique material in our care.

We will seek to make the most innovative use of the physical space at the Library, including by the redesign of reading room services to meet the current and evolving needs of all our users.

Access to the National Library's collections, activities and services will also be maximised through key collaborative opportunities with other cultural organisations and with educational bodies, at national and international level.

Progress towards these goals will be indicated by significant increases in the number of items catalogued; user numbers onsite and online; the number of exhibitions, events and learning activities in Kildare Street and elsewhere; the volume of digital content available; web traffic and the duration of web visits; the number and quality of collaboration and partnership arrangements with other relevant organisations at regional, national and international level.

Transforming

Our goal is to bring together our founding ideals with the potential offered by technology to transform the 21st century National Library of Ireland into an organisation driven by the pursuit of excellence as it meets the needs of the broadest spectrum of users.

To achieve this we will embrace the latest innovative technologies to transform every aspect of the Library's operations and we will provide our staff with the skills required to meet the challenges this will present.

We will also look at new and innovative funding models and sources of income in order to expand the Library's services and realise our potential contribution to the knowledge economy.

In addressing these goals, we will fully implement the National Library's reform programme under the Croke Park Agreement. We will create a new IT infrastructure capable of storing, managing and delivering access to all our content. We will fully implement our strategic training and development plan and we will develop and implement a strategy to source additional external funding through fundraising, philanthropy, and commercialisation.

Achievement of these aims will see all National Library staff having the necessary skills to fulfil the goals of the 21st century library, a functioning and robust IT infrastructure, and the generation of a significant amount of supplementary funding in excess of that received from the public purse.

Goal	*Success measure*
Collect and preserve for current and future users the documentary and intellectual heritage of Ireland in all formats from digital media to historic manuscripts	Continue to develop our collections, including by encouraging targeted donations
	Develop a policy and process for collecting and preserving digital media
	Review the National Library's collection development policy and ensure it is in line with agreed policy objectives
	Collaborate with other institutions to maximise the efficiency and effectiveness of our collecting activities
	Work with publishers to ensure that legal deposit obligations are fulfilled
	Pursue the extension of legal deposit to non-print formats
	Resolve the National Library's storage crisis by exploring new options, including the development of a collaborative, off-site purpose-built storage facility
	Implement the Library's preservation policy
Maximise the availability of the National Library's collections by providing the full choice of access from personal visits to digital platforms	Implement programmes to catalogue uncatalogued material in line with agreed policy
	Set and achieve new targets for the digitisation of the rare and unique material in our care
	Make the most innovative use of the physical space at the Library
	Redesign reading room services to meet the current and evolving needs of all our users
	Significantly increase the number of National Library users onsite and online
	Increase the number of exhibitions, events and learning activities in Kildare Street and elsewhere
	Increase in the volume of digital content available as well as in web traffic and the duration of web visits
	The number and quality of collaborations and partnerships
Transform the 21st century National Library of Ireland into an organisation driven by the pursuit of excellence as it meets the needs of the broadest spectrum of users	Embrace the latest innovative technologies to transform every aspect of the National Library's operations
	Provide our staff with the skills required to meet the challenges presented by the transformation process
	Identify new and innovative funding models and sources of income in order to expand the National Library's services and realise our potential contribution to the knowledge economy
	Fully implement the National Library's reform programme under the Croke Park Agreement
	Create a new IT infrastructure capable of storing, managing and delivering access to all our content