

WP3.1: Overview of Current State Report

Case Study of the Republic of Ireland

August 2009

Abstract

This is an overview of the development of the digital humanities infrastructure in the Republic of Ireland. The aim of the case study is to identify the development of a digital humanities infrastructure and to map all the relevant recommendations, strategies and initiatives put forward to enable the development of future policies. It also identifies the key policy makers and planning processes and accounts for achievement and under-achievement to date. It will address the challenges to the future development of a digital humanities infrastructure in Ireland.

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1. A General Overview

1.1. Setting the context for digital humanities in Ireland: a review of reports

A report from HEAnet¹ in 2008 clearly stated that it is unlikely that Ireland's digital records and information will survive by accident; *'rather we will have to take action to preserve and renew our digital assets to ensure that future generations can make use of our valuable information'*.² There has been some recognition by the Irish Government of the importance of digitisation in relation to the preservation of Ireland's cultural heritage. In the National Development Plan (NDP) 2007-2013, under the Cultural Sub-Programme, the Government committed to invest €1,130 million in Ireland's cultural infrastructure. Under this sub-programme, it is stated that Government policy on universal access to arts and cultural facilities will be supported by exploitation of technological developments through the commencement of a digitisation programme.³ However, a number of reports since 2006 have emphasised Ireland's continuing deficit in digital infrastructure.

In 2006, the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and Forfás commissioned a review of the research infrastructure in Ireland's higher-education institutions. The objective of the review was to internationally benchmark the research infrastructure in the higher-education sector and to identify any gaps in the national platform of research infrastructure. According to the report,

Data archives and repositories remain at an early developmental stage—data access (to existing national and international sources) and data acquisition (storage and updating across the spectrum of disciplines/areas) is weak... The lack of major data repositories and a national depository for qualitative data and repository for research papers is a significant gap.⁴

In 2007 the Irish Manuscript Commission (IMC) and the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism (DAST) identified the absence of a digital policy in Ireland. To this end, the Department invited the IMC to consider the issue of digitisation in detail with view to (a) advising the Minister for Arts, Sports and Tourism on best practice in the area and (b) devising a possible framework for developing digital infrastructure in Ireland.

The IMC established the Digitisation Task Force (DTF) in 2007 to consider these issues. As part of its remit, the DTF held a best practice workshop in April 2007, which was attended by representatives from across the cultural institutions, policy makers and academics. A policy document was prepared with input from international practitioners in the area of digital humanities and preservation. In this, the DTF made a number of recommendations to the board of the IMC, including *inter alia*, that a national digital strategy for a digital infrastructure linked to a single national Trusted Digital Repository (TDR) should be developed.⁵ It also recommended that any national digital infrastructure should be capable of interfacing with the infrastructure then under development in Europe through projects such as DARIAH and DRIVER. Furthermore, in order to ensure the longer-term sustainability

¹ HEAnet (Ireland's national education and research network) provides a high-quality telecommunications network and value-added Internet services to Irish researchers.

² Nowlan, Michael and Reddan, Marie, *HEAnet's Strategy in Digitisation and Long-term Preservation of Irish Research Output* (Dublin, 2008) p.6

³ Irish Government, *National Development Plan 2007-2013: Transforming Ireland – A Better Quality of Life for All* (Dublin, 2007), p.225

⁴ HEA/Forfas, *Research Infrastructure in Ireland – Building for Tomorrow* (Dublin, 2006), p.15

⁵ Irish Manuscript Commission Digitisation Task Force *Digitisation Policy* (Dublin, 2007), p.10

of national digital assets, researchers applying for public funding (HEA and IRCHSS) should be required to include a technical appendix in their research application and to deposit their data according to agreed standards and protocols within the designated national TDR.

In 2007 the Royal Irish Academy (RIA) published a report, *Advancing Humanities and Social Sciences Research in Ireland*. The report was commissioned in response to the perception that Ireland's higher-education institutions were perhaps turning away from their historical commitment to the humanities and social sciences, as institutions are under pressure to become more utilitarian and 'vocationally relevant'.⁶ As part of its remit, the report reviewed the research infrastructures for the humanities and social sciences in Irish higher-education institutions. Among other things, the report recommended:

- the development of a national register of research and a repository for published research papers to address the lack of major data repositories for Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS) research;
- the establishment of a Digitisation Stakeholders Forum to provide a direct mechanism for the input of all relevant stakeholders in the development and implementation of a national digitisation policy.

It pointed out that the international trend for the digitisation of research materials offered many opportunities to encourage humanities and social sciences researchers to collaborate nationally and internationally.⁷ To this end, it recommended that a national digitisation strategy should be established to guide digitisation initiatives. It also addressed the issue of funding for digitisation projects, stating that,

Few national agencies provide substantial funding for HSS digitization projects. Although the IRCHSS did include infrastructures as a fundable theme within its 2005 call, this was not continued in 2006. Consequently, important European and international initiatives, especially those which involve the collaboration of the Irish HSS research community with international networks, do not have either a secure or predictable source of domestic funding from module to module. This policy absence contrasts sharply with other European countries that typically have a defined policy on digitisation for higher-education research.⁸

The Institute of International & European Affairs (IIEA) published a strategic report on the trends of change in the digital sector and government opportunities for action in November 2008, *The Next Leap – Competitive Ireland in the Digital Era*, which reiterated the findings of the IMC and the RIA. The report calls for a new governmental vision in the digital sector, including, inter alia, the following main action points:

- Draft a national mission statement that expresses Ireland's intention to assert itself in the digital sector;
- Establish a government department, or specialised cross-cutting unit within an existing department, that can propel the national digital strategy and guarantee a whole of government approach; and
- Launch a Cabinet endorsed drive to transform the education system as a national priority.⁹

⁶ Royal Irish Academy, *Advancing Humanities and Social Sciences Research in Ireland* (Dublin, 2007), p.xi-xii

⁷ *Ibid*, p.xxii

⁸ *Ibid*, pp 47-48.

⁹ Institute of International and European Affairs, *The Next Leap – Competitive Ireland in the Digital Era* (Dublin, 2008), p. 25.

1.2. Role of policymakers and researchers in the development of digital humanities in Ireland

A significant factor in the growing support for digitisation and in particular, digital humanities in Ireland is the role of policy makers and researchers. Ireland's small size is a strategic advantage, as it allows key policy makers and researchers to interact through a number of fora. The membership of a number of academic committees and organisations overlap, for example, Professor Maurice Bric is chair of the IRCHSS, but also a Member of the Royal Irish Academy (MRIA) and a member of the IMC, both of which published reports highlighting Ireland's deficit in digital infrastructure. Professor Jane Ohlmeyer, chair of the IRCHSS DARIAH National Steering Committee, is a member of the IMC and also the Principal Investigator on a digital project, *the 1641 Depositions*, which is partly funded by IRCHSS. In addition, funding agencies such as the HEA and IRCHSS work closely with academics in a number of areas. The governing structures of each of these bodies also reflect these interactions. The Authority of the HEA comprises academic members and representatives from the business community. The Council of IRCHSS comprises academic members, who input into, and influence, the strategic direction of the Research Council. The IRCHSS DARIAH National Steering Committee comprises representatives from academia, the cultural heritage sector and from DAST. This is important as it provides IRCHSS with links to cultural heritage institutions and introductions to inter-department committees that have responsibility for IT and digitisation at government level.

As part of the process to identify projects to be included on the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI) roadmap, the Social Sciences and Humanities Roadmap Working Group (SSH RWG) proposed two Expert Groups should be established – European Cultural Heritage Expert Group (ECH EG) and European Research Observatory for the Humanities and Social Sciences (EROHS EG).¹⁰ The two experts groups were established to assess infrastructural needs for the humanities and social sciences and to recommend new or upgraded research infrastructures in the areas. The SSH RWG identified six current and future infrastructure needs for the two fields:

- Data collection;
- Digitisation;
- Interoperability of data;
- Interoperability between fields and languages;
- Control access/location services;
- Harmonisation of data access policies.¹¹

Professor Maurice Bric, chair of IRCHSS, was appointed chair to the ECH EG. The ECH EG recommended three projects – DARIAH, CLARIN and EURICA - to be included on the roadmap.¹² Each of these infrastructures represented facilities. They were either based on existing European infrastructures that require major upgrade and new functional modes, or on national facilities, which should be joined to enhance pan-European distributed facilities.¹³

Through his involvement with the SSH RWG, Professor Bric was able to identify technology, and in particular digital humanities, as an emerging priority for the humanities in Ireland. Following the presentation of the first European roadmap for new, large-scale Research Infrastructures by ESFRI in November 2006, the Higher Education Research Group in Ireland, established under the Strategy for

¹⁰ Roadmap for European Research Infrastructure: *Report of the Social Sciences and Humanities Roadmap Working Group* (September 2006) p.4.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, p.6.

¹³ *Ibid.*

Science, Technology and Innovation¹⁴, sought to agree a process with other relevant national agencies that would set out national priorities within the ESFRI roadmap. This process also sought to identify the roles of funding agencies in supporting Irish interests within the ESFRI roadmap, as participation by Irish research groups would require the support of national government departments and agencies.

In this context the IRCHSS was asked to identify two programmes at the preparatory phase, one in humanities and one in social science, and to take into consideration the HEA/Forfás report on research infrastructures and the templates, catchment and potential of the proposed infrastructures. DARIAH was accorded the highest priority for the humanities, because the Research Council noted that a wide number of researchers in the Irish community could benefit from the project since it is concerned with the provision of access to a wide range of data across all humanities disciplines. As noted above, the Council comprises academics from the university and institute of technology sector, and some Council members were engaged in research projects which had a digital humanities dimension. DARIAH also reflected emerging priorities in the humanities sector in Ireland. The decision to support DARIAH dovetailed with the Humanities Serving Irish Society (HSIS) proposal submitted to Cycle 4 of the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions (PRTL¹⁵) which proposed the establishment of a Digital Humanities Observatory (DHO). The decision to support DARIAH was driven by a policy perspective with the input of academics into the process.

The driving force behind the DHO was academics (some of whom were involved in digital humanities projects) in response to the HEA's PRTL¹⁵ Cycle 4 call for submissions to establish collaborative national research infrastructures. The RIA's report (written by Maurice Bric) and the IMC's report by the DTF (chaired by Jane Ohlmeyer) had just been published, and as noted above, both had identified a gap in Ireland's digital infrastructure. The HSIS consortium behind the DHO recognised that no single institution possessed strengths in all areas of digital humanities and while they all worked to conform to best practice, there was no single inter-institutional acceptance of what was best practice in any domain. The HSIS proposal was guided by the possibility that Ireland's small size could be turned to strategic advantage by achieving strength from unification of effort that would not be possible in larger countries. It was believed that the co-ordination of effort around the DHO would not only have benefits for research and teaching, but it would add strength to combined efforts to reap maximum benefit for Ireland from EU funding for cultural and heritage digitisation.

¹⁴ Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation (SSTI) was published in 2006 by the Irish Government. It is a roadmap for developing a world-class education and research system in Ireland. Key objectives include doubling PhD output by 2013 and defining career paths for researchers. The Higher Education Research Group was established to advance the recommendations of the Strategy.

See <http://www.entemp.ie/publications/science/2006/sciencestrategy.pdf> for a copy of the SSTI.

¹⁵ PRTL¹⁵, administered by the HEA, is the largest research infrastructural fund in Ireland. Since 1998 it has invested €865 million into strengthening research capacity through recurrent and capital infrastructure. Please see <http://www.heai.ie/en/prtl> for more information.

2. An Overview of Digitisation Projects Underway¹⁶

Within the cultural institutions sector, and in particular, the library sector, there has been significant activity in the area of digitisation. Responsibility for Ireland's cultural heritage is divided primarily between three government departments:

- The Department for Arts, Sports and Tourism, through its Cultural Institutions Division (National Library of Ireland and National Archives of Ireland), promotes the development of these institutions including a digitisation programme;
- The Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government has responsibility for libraries, museums and archives at local level, i.e. at county level;
- The Department of Education and Science has responsibility for academic libraries in higher-education institutions.

2.1. Local Library Sector

The development of a national policy for the digitisation of cultural heritage content was influenced by a number of EU initiatives including e-Europe 2002 and the adoption of the Lund Principles. The e-Europe 2002 Action Plan called on Member States to create a coordination mechanism for digitisation policies and programmes under the EU. The Lund Principles established a number of actions to carry this objective forward; one of these actions included the development of good practice in relation to digitisation. Following from this, the Library Council in Ireland established the Cultural Heritage Project, a national project, which was completed in 2003. It involved local libraries, museums and archives in the digitisation and online publication of their local studies materials. The results are published on the Internet, using the project website at www.askaboutireland.ie. Its aims and objectives were to carry out a programme of pilot digitisation projects in libraries, museums and archives in order to demonstrate the viability of a national digitisation strategy and to prepare the ground for a national digitisation strategy for important library holdings. The first phase of the project supported five pilot projects in the digitisation of particular types of media.¹⁷ In addition, the project has published a set of best practice digitisation guidelines as part of its final report; the guidelines are targeted at local authorities and cultural institutions.¹⁸ The guidelines contain suggestions for each step of the digitisation life cycle. In 2004 the second phase of the project was completed; aspects of that project included digitisation of newspapers. Within the project report¹⁹, issues such as interoperability, copyright and cross-institution provision were discussed. In addition, in 2001 the Library Council managed an EU-funded project, ACTIVATE, for one year; the project tested the use of new technology, digitisation, to open up new ways of accessing cultural content and records on the Internet.

2.2. National Library of Ireland and National Archives of Ireland

The National Library of Ireland's Digital Library Programme includes digitisation of substantial sections of their visual collections. To date, it has digitised almost 5,000 images, which are available on

¹⁶ This is a succinct summary of digitisation activities currently underway in Ireland; a more detailed document on these activities is available.

¹⁷ Please see the following link for more information: http://www.askaboutireland.ie/info_narrative.do?title=resources

¹⁸ For a copy of the guidelines, please see

http://www.askaboutireland.ie/resources/ACL_BestPracticeDigitisationGuidelines.pdf

¹⁹ The Library Council, *Our Cultural Heritage: Building the Gateway* (Dublin 2004) please see www.askaboutireland.ie

its website.²⁰ The Library has received funding from Europeana to digitise some of its texts. It is currently digitising two key reference works for Irish Studies, Richard Hayes' *Manuscript Sources for the History of Irish Civilization* and *Sources for the History of Irish Civilisation: Articles in Irish Periodicals*. The NLI through participation in the European Digital Library (EDL) project is making their catalogue available through the EDL. The National Archives of Ireland has two major digitisation projects underway; it is digitising the 1901 and 1911 census records. The resulting website will contain 9 million names, and will be free-to-access and fully searchable through all of the information in both censuses. This will make it unique among census websites internationally. It will also contain contextual historical and illustrative material, to enhance the basic genealogical information and promote the use of the website for scholarly and educational purposes. With nine counties online, the site has received over 40 million hits. This work is being undertaken in partnership with the Library and Archives Canada.²¹

2.3. Higher-Education Sector

The Consortium of National and University Librarians (CONUL) conducted a survey in 2006, which indicated that a modest level of digitisation activities was taking place in third-level institutions. It highlighted the need to prioritise investment in the digitisation of existing print resources. The funding of digital projects in the arts and humanities has happened by accident rather than design; funding instruments hitherto have not included any specific foci on digital humanities.

However, under the current call (Cycle 5) of the Programme for Research in Third-Level Institutions (PRTL), there is a digital humanities dimension. There are three separate strands under which institutions can submit proposals. Strand 1 is concerned with infrastructures; under this strand, institutions may submit proposals for a digital/audio/visual/textual repository.²² PRTL recognises that this infrastructure could, for example, include the provision of robust and up-to-date IT infrastructure, access and maintenance support for archives, access for researchers, storage and digitization through the provision of a shared TDR. Applicants are advised to take note of the central role of existing cultural institutions in this area. PRTL Cycle 5 is a five-year programme with funding commencing in 2010.

PRTL Cycle 4 (2007-2010) is funding the largest digital project currently underway in Ireland. The Humanities Serving Irish Society (HSIS) consortium successfully secured €3.5 million to create a digital infrastructure, the Digital Humanities Observatory (DHO, for more detail, please see below). Another HEA funding instrument is also funding a digital project in third-level institutions; the Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF)²³ is a multi-annual fund, which aims to stimulate innovation in higher-education institutions. Under Cycle 1 of SIF in 2006, the Irish Universities Association (IUA)²⁴ secured funding for the creation of a sector-wide institutional repository. The repository is an online database where digital copies of research items are held and are made freely available on the Internet. The records in the repository are stored according to international standards. It is a three-year project,

²⁰ Please see the following link for more information:

<http://www.nli.ie/en/digital-library-printed-resources.aspx>

²¹ Please see the following link for more information: <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/about/index.html>

²² Please see

<http://www.heai.ie/files/files/file/PRTL%20C5%20EOM.%20FINAL/National%20VisualAuditory%20Repository%20Annex%20pdf%20version.pdf>

²³ Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF), administered by the HEA, is a multi-annual fund amounting to €510 million over a seven-year period, 2006-2013. It will support new approaches to enhancing quality and effectiveness within higher education and research. More effective use of existing resources (including capital resources), as well as new funding, is a desired outcome of the fund. Please see <http://www.heai.ie/en/sif> for more information.

²⁴ The Irish University Association is the representative body for the seven Irish universities. Please see www.iua.ie for more information.

which is managed by the IUA's Librarian Group.²⁵ The project will form the basis of future proposals to develop a national university digital library infrastructure.

In addition to the SIF and PRTL I funded projects, Irish university libraries have been engaged in digitizing material, particularly from their Special Collections. For example, the Long Room Hub in Trinity College, Dublin (TCD) has a number of digital projects underway including the Bridge-IT project.²⁶ In University College Dublin (UCD) the Irish Virtual Research Library & Archive (IVRLA) is a major digitisation and digital object management project, which launched in January 2005; the project is funded by PRTL I Cycle 3 (2002-2006).²⁷ Irish Script on Screen (ISOS) is a project of the School of Celtic Studies, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies. The object of ISOS is to create digital images of Irish manuscripts, and to make these images - together with relevant commentary - accessible on a WWW site.²⁸ The project received funding from the Irish Heritage Council.

Since its establishment in 2000, the IRCHSS has funded a number of projects with a digital dimension through its Research Project schemes. With the exception of a call made in 2005, these schemes generally do not have a digital aspect. The call for proposals in 2005 included a theme on research infrastructures in the humanities and social sciences. This theme sought to respond to the challenges of creating a research infrastructure in the third-level system in Ireland. Project Grants awarded within this rubric included the creation and development of datasets, digitisation of archives, surveys and methodologies.

2.4. The Digital Humanities Observatory

The establishment of the Digital Humanities Observatory (DHO)²⁹ represents a major milestone in the development of digital humanities in Ireland. The goals and objectives of the DHO are very much in harmony with the DARIAH project. The DHO aims to manage and co-ordinate the increasingly complex e-resources created in the arts and humanities. It will enable research and researchers in Ireland to keep abreast of international developments in the creation, use, and preservation of digital resources.

The DHO is the central focus of the Humanities Serving Irish Society (HSIS) consortium, which successfully secured funding in Cycle 4 of PRTL I in 2007. It is managed by the Royal Irish Academy (RIA) on behalf of the consortium. The HSIS consortium comprises the RIA, six of the seven Irish universities and the two universities in Northern Ireland, University of Ulster and Queen's University, Belfast. The consortium aims to build a joint national platform for the coordination and dissemination of humanities research, teaching and training at an all-island level.

Cycle 4 of the PRTL I sought to encourage major collaborative projects; a key feature of this Cycle was to encourage the national institutions that had heretofore competed for funding to collaborate at national level. When the key players sought a theme that would benefit the community of humanities researchers in Ireland, it decided to focus on the theme of digital humanities, which previously was nascent in Ireland. The establishment of the DHO dovetailed with IRCHSS's decision to support DARIAH on the national roadmap for Ireland.

²⁵ Please see for more information: <http://www.iua.ie/iua-activities/documents/OpenAccessToIrishUniversityResearch.pdf>

²⁶ Please see the following link for more information: <http://www.tcd.ie/longroomhub/>

²⁷ Please see the following link for more information: <http://www.ucd.ie/ivrla/>

²⁸ Please see the following link for more information: <http://www.isos.dias.ie/>

²⁹ Please see the following link for more information: <http://www.dho.ie/>

2.5. Objectives of the DHO

The DHO will work to ensure a set of common standards based on best international practice to enable the fullest exploitation of existing national research collections and data repositories, such as DRAPier.³⁰ DRAPier is a database of digital humanities projects underway or completed in Irish higher-education institutions. In this regard, the DHO is meeting a critical gap in Ireland's humanities research infrastructure, as identified by a wide-range of policy documents and reviews including the Academy's report, *Advancing Humanities and Social Science Research in Ireland*. The report described the lack of leadership for an Irish digitisation programme as a significant issue.³¹ In serving as a "knowledge resource", the DHO conducts its business via educational activities, providing infrastructure, and equally importantly, promoting new modes of scholarship enabled by the technology. The DHO will incorporate a strong teaching and learning aspect by contributing seminars to an HSIS bi-semester postgraduate seminar series as well as organising its own annual standards seminars and technical workshops.

To date, the DHO has hosted a number of seminars and workshops on various aspects of digital humanities. It has drawn on expertise from within Ireland and from Europe and North America. In April 2009 it co-hosted a digital scholarly edition spring school with NUIG, which was funded by IRCHSS. The week-long event provided Irish researchers the opportunity to engage with cutting edge theories, methods, and technologies through a mixture of specialised workshops, master classes, and project consultations. In July 2009, it hosted a week-long summer school to facilitate scholars undertaking digital projects to develop their skills, share interests, and work towards common goals.

2.6. Standards

A significant element of the DHO's remit is to recommend metadata formats, standards and file formats based on Fedora Architecture in order to provide sustainable technologies to create, manage, publish, share and preserve digital content. In this, they seek to create a common framework in digital humanities research in Ireland for the first time so content-driven projects can leverage this work allowing for discovery across projects and avoid the perils of silos that have occurred elsewhere.

³⁰ Please see the following link for more information: <http://dho.ie/drapier/>

³¹ RIA (2007) p.47

3. Towards the Future: challenges and opportunities for the development of digital humanities in Ireland

Despite all the reports and recommendations that have been put forward by national institutions, funding bodies and other agencies, there is still no national, cohesive strategy for digitisation or a TDR in Ireland. It is clear that there are number of organisations involved in digitisation projects across various institutions and sectors. Due to this fragmentation, a number of problems arise such as duplication of research and no set of agreed standards to which to adhere. According to the IMC report fragmentation in the system makes it difficult to ensure that digital projects are achieving value for money, as projects cannot avail of a community of practice.³² Perhaps the most challenging obstacle to any digitisation strategy and to digitisation projects underway is the issue of funding. In Ireland, as elsewhere, research funding is not infinite and if projects do not find alternative sources of funding to ensure sustainability, projects may be lost. Hence, the argument that Ireland urgently needs a national policy on digitisation and digital preservation is strengthened. As the report from HEAnet points out, the DHO is playing a major role in promoting standards and best practice and has the potential to expand its brief on a national basis and take responsibility for defining the requirements of a trusted national digital repository.³³ There are also concerns about the capacity of the research system's ability in relation to digitisation. The DHO is addressing this concern by holding workshops to provide information and training for humanities researchers,³⁴ but this does not negate the need for the establishment of a TDR.

Within a European context, there are important opportunities for Ireland. Most countries do not have a fully formed strategy for the whole of the digital research life; there is an opportunity for Ireland to make significant progress in leveraging investment in research and ensuring future access to research output.³⁵ The HEA/Forfás report on research infrastructures in Ireland has emphasised the importance of the ESFRI roadmap to the future of Irish research communities.

There are important opportunities here for Ireland. Research communities that are currently less well structured than those appearing in the first ESFRI roadmap will be stimulated to participate more effectively in the process from now on. National representatives will be able to participate in discussions about the realisation of these Europe-wide infrastructures. These opportunities will enable Irish policy-makers and researchers not only to engage with nominated ESFRI projects, but also to begin formulating projects of Irish origin in which prominent Irish researchers could play the lead role in future infrastructures.³⁶

The digital deficit requires urgent investment in infrastructures like DARIAH if Ireland wishes to benefit from these opportunities as well as comply with stated European objectives. The European Commission in its statement 'i2010: digital libraries' (30 September 2005), set out a vision and strategy for promoting digitisation, fostering online availability, and enabling the long term preservation of the collective memory of Europe.³⁷ Beyond broader concerns about promoting economic competitiveness and growth, social concerns about public access to culture, monetary concerns about the place of culture in the emerging knowledge economy, and worries related to the place of culture in the emerging intellectual landscape were some of the motivating factors behind

³² IMC Digital Taskforce Report (2007) p. 28

³³ HEAnet Report (2008) p.13

³⁴ Please see the following link for more information: <http://www.dho.ie/events>

³⁵ HEAnet Report (2008) p.16

³⁶ HEA/Forfás Report (2006) p.19

³⁷ http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/digital_libraries/doc/communication/en_comm_digital_libraries.pdf

'i2010'. A broad range of Commission-promoted activities from funding programmes to Decisions and Recommendations encouraging action by Member States has resulted from the release of this strategy.

Participating in European projects such as DARIAH, MinervaEC, the European Digital Library and the Metadata Image Library Exploitation provides Ireland with the opportunity to contribute to the objectives laid out in the European Commission's Recommendation on the digitisation and online accessibility of cultural material and digital preservation.³⁸ The timeliness and urgency for taking this policy forward was confirmed on 22 March 2007 when the European Commission decided to establish a Member States' Expert Group on Digitisation and Digital Preservation. Its remit is:

to monitor progress and assess the impact of the implementation of the Commission Recommendation of 24 August 2006 on the digitisation and online accessibility of cultural material and digital preservation and of the Council Conclusions of 13 November 2006 on the digitisation and online accessibility of cultural material and digital preservation.³⁹

The Group's Coordinating digitisation in Europe: progress reports 2007⁴⁰ highlights the fragmentation and lack of progress at national level in Ireland in relation to digital preservation. It details the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism's intentions to set up steering committee in cooperation with other agencies to assess progress on digitisation and online accessibility; this has yet to happen.

Ireland has a number of advantages in becoming a leader in digital humanities. As a small country it can leverage the considerable expertise of key stakeholders including industrial partners in this area.⁴¹ In terms of industrial collaboration, Ireland is in a favourable position, as the European headquarters of international computer companies such as Google, Intel and Microsoft located here. The IRCHSS-funded 1641 Depositions project⁴² underway in Trinity College Dublin is an example of successful academic-industry interaction; collaboration with IBM is providing cutting-edge technology to the project. Despite the number of digitisation projects underway, digitisation is almost a 'green field' for Ireland. Ireland can learn from international experience to ensure that there are no 'legacy' projects.

The number of digitisation activities currently underway in Ireland indicates that there is interest and awareness in the importance of digitisation. The issue is one of a lack of co-ordination across the various institutions and projects rather than a lack of awareness and interest. As the HEAnet report notes, a large corpus of digitised work has been accumulated in Ireland, partly due to increased government investment in research, and it is expected that this will grow exponentially in the future. Ireland is in a position to lead the way in terms of putting in place a national framework that co-ordinates existing digitisation services (including digital preservation) and tailors delivery of e-resources (cultural and research) to users' needs.⁴³ However, in order to achieve this, a government-level strategic policy should be in place from the outset rather than a piecemeal reactive measure. A comprehensive national digitisation strategy formulated at government level is essential; the work is being done on the ground, it now requires the input of government to bring it together into a national policy and a Trusted Digital Repository.

³⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/newsroom/cf/itemlongdetail.cfm?item_id=2782

³⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/digital_libraries/doc/commission_decision_on_mseg/mseg_en.pdf

⁴⁰ <http://www.minervaeurope.org/publications/globalreport/globalrepdf07/Ireland.pdf>

⁴¹ HEAnet Report (2008) p.3

⁴² Please see the following link for more information: <http://www.tcd.ie/history/1641/>

⁴³ IMC Digital Taskforce (2007) p.24

Appendix A: Introduction to relevant policy makers

Department of Education and Science (DES) www.education.ie

The Minister for Education and Science and his Department has overall responsibility for the higher-education sector in Ireland. The Department is assisted in the management of the higher-education sector by a number of statutory agencies of the Department.

Higher Education Authority (HEA) www.heai.ie

The Higher Education Authority is the statutory planning and development body for higher education and research in Ireland. The HEA has wide advisory powers throughout the whole of the third-level education sector. It is the funding authority for the universities, institutes of technology and a number of designated higher-education institutions.

Irish Research Council for Humanities and Social Sciences (IRCHSS) www.irchss.ie

The Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences (IRCHSS) was established in 2000 by the Minister for Education and Science in response to the need to develop Ireland's research capacity and skills base in a rapidly-changing global environment where knowledge is key to economic and social growth.

On 15 December 1999, the Minister for Education and Science formally accepted a report entitled The Humanities and Social Sciences: A Case for a Research Council. In November 1997, he had commissioned this report

“(a) to consider options to improve existing arrangements in relation to the support of research in the humanities and social sciences, and

(b) as one of these options, to examine in particular, the potential of, and rationale for, a Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences, to propose a brief for such a Council, and to outline an operational and administrative framework for such a Council”.

With the support of the National Development Plan, the IRCHSS funds cutting-edge research in the humanities, social sciences, business and law with the objective of creating new knowledge and expertise beneficial to Ireland's economic, social and cultural development.

Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism (DAST) www.arts-sport-tourism.gov.ie

The Department is primarily a policy-making Department in the three sectors of Arts, Sport and Tourism. In relation to the Arts, it has a specific remit to enable the national cultural institutions, as integral elements of the national culture, to preserve, protect and present for the benefit of present and future generations our moveable heritage and cultural assets.

Council of National Cultural Institutions (CNCI) www.cnai.ie

The CNCI is a statutory body established under the Heritage Fund. The purpose of the Council is to facilitate the pooling together of talent, experience and vision of the Directors of the National Cultural Institutions in furtherance of the national cultural interest and to make recommendations to the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism on proposed acquisitions using the Heritage Fund Act, 2001. The Council comprises the Arts Council, the National Gallery of Ireland, the National Library of Ireland, the

National Museum of Ireland, the Chester Beatty Library, the Irish Museum of Modern Art, the Crawford Art Gallery, National Archives of Ireland, the National Concert Hall, the Abbey Theatre and the National Photographic Archive.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DENTP) www.entemp.ie

In this Department, the Office of Science, Technology and Innovation (OSTI) is responsible for the development, promotion and co-ordination of Ireland's Science, Technology and Innovation policy and Ireland's policy in European Union and international research activities. The Enterprise Development Agencies, Enterprise Ireland (EI), Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) and Forfás implement policy on behalf of OSTI, through a range of schemes and programmes.

Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DELG) www.environ.ie

The provision of advice, assistance and services to library authorities in relation to the public library service is a central remit to this Department through An Chomhairle Leabharlanna (The Library Council). The Department offers grant-aid towards the construction and refurbishment of public libraries and the computerisation of the library service.

Department of Communications Marine & Natural Resources (DCMNR) www.dcenr.gov.ie

The core policy of the communications sector is to contribute to sustained macro-economic growth and competitiveness and ensure that Ireland is best placed to avail of the emerging opportunities provided by the information and knowledge society. This can be achieved by promoting investment in state of the art infrastructures, by providing a supportive legislative and regulatory environment and by developing a leading edge research and development reputation in the information, communications and digital technologies.

Forfás www.forfas.ie

Forfás is Ireland's national policy advisory body for enterprise and science. It was established in 1994 as an agency of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. Forfás's mission is to contribute to the future success of Ireland's economy as an agency of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, by providing ambitious, coherent and widely understood enterprise and science policy advice that supports growth.