

Cathaoirleach, Deputies and Senators,

I am responding to the request from the Clerk of the Committee who asked that I forward a short submission which relates the credentials and work experience that I bring as Chairperson Designate of the National Library of Ireland and which details my key priorities in that role.

I spent most of my working life in The Irish Times. After completion of my articles in Coopers & Lybrand, Chartered Accountants (now PWC), I joined the newspaper as a Financial Journalist. My primary responsibilities concerned reportage on the activities of companies, both publicly-owned and in the private sector (particularly quoted companies) in all of Ireland. This involved analysis of financial performance and drawing comparison with the performance of similar companies in Ireland and abroad. I moved on to edit business pages and shortly afterwards was promoted into the Editor's Office.

My longest-lasting (and final) position was that of Managing Editor. In that position I had responsibility for the budgets of all editorial activity, for all editorial Human Resource issues and for legal matters pertaining to the editorial function. I was appointed a Director of the Board of Irish Times Ltd.

I was appointed to the Board of the RDS in 2013 and served as Chair of its Audit & Risk Committee. I was recommended by the JOC as a director of RTÉ and served from 2016 to 2020; I did not put myself forward for re-appointment. Last year, at the invitation of the Policing Authority, I joined the Audit & Risk Committee of An Garda Síochána.

Most important of all, I was appointed to the Board of the National Library in 2015 and served a full term. I chaired the Library's Audit & Risk Committee throughout that time. I was re-appointed to the Board by Minister Catherine Martin in February of this year and was appointed Chairperson by the Minister on July 29th. I am very familiar with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies and have a deep understanding of all matters relating to Corporate Governance.

I have a firm grasp of the activities and ambitions of the National Library and its ethos; I am an ardent admirer of the Library and all that it does. My role as Chairperson is to assist the Library and its staff through the many challenges that lie ahead. The Library is fortunate in having a very effective executive and a motivated staff, all led by Dr Sandra Collins.

A major priority is to ensure that the ongoing capital development programme is completed to the satisfaction of the Library, its staff and its users. The programme constitutes the biggest development of the Library in the last hundred years consisting, as it does, of a fundamental re-ordering of the Kildare Street premises to make them more responsive to the needs of its users, particularly as regards exhibitions and seminars and accessibility for all.

The work on the building is being carried out by the Office of Public Works. The Library however is tasked with ensuring that the development will deliver a safe infrastructure to house the most important and valuable collection of Irish documentary material in the world. The Library must also ensure that it will function throughout the development programme and that its completion will assist in maximising the impact of the Library for users and potential users.

Among the other priorities is the need to build on the Library's Diversity and Inclusion policy. The Library's Photographic Archive in Dublin's Temple Bar is currently running an exhibition entitled 'Living with Pride'. It provides an insight into the evolution of the LGBTQ-rights movement in Ireland. This exhibition will be built on. The National Library of Ireland has a responsibility to reflect the diversity that is Ireland today in an inclusive manner.

Another priority is to increase the presence of the Library throughout Ireland. The Library reaches out from Dublin through events and exhibitions and will look to grow this programme. The Library can also reach out to Ireland - and, indeed, the world - through digitisation.

Digitisation is a major priority for the Library. The Library has more than 130,000 digitised objects accessible through its online catalogue and its internet archive. It intends to digitise more although a scarcity of resources, relative to comparable national libraries, places severe limits on what can be done. What could be done and is not, to an acceptable degree, is the capture and storage of digital content that is being produced in Ireland every day. The Library is prevented from archiving the content of many websites of general, social and political interest (to name a few) because the legislation which would allow it to do so is not in place. Huge amounts of historically-important digital content are not being captured and will not and will never be available. It behoves the Library to be the leader in digital collecting and delivery. Nobody else is better placed to do it.

The overall priorities of the Library remain; they are to collect, protect, connect, innovate and collaborate. The Library had achieved much in recent years - the Museum of Literature Ireland (MoLI) in Dublin's Newman House and the Seamus Heaney exhibition in College Green, for example. But I genuinely believe that the Library, mainly thanks to the provision of funds for the redevelopment of Kildare Street, is entering into a phase which offers its greatest opportunity ever to increase its impact and its contribution to Ireland's cultural collection.