

Introduction

The National Library of Ireland was established in 1877. The main concern of the National Library is material and services of Irish interest. There are close to a million books and extensive collections of newspapers, manuscripts, photographs, maps, and prints.

The Library in politics

For purposes of administration the National Library of Ireland is part of a Government Department - the Department of Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht. This means that the staff have the status of civil servants and the Library has to adhere closely to civil service policy. This may cause problems, for example when, as now, general embargoes are placed on staff recruitment or when, as is also the case, there is a policy decision that all government departments should await the development of a full government network before making services accessible over the internet.

However, the present Minister responsible for the Department has stated that he favours greater independence for cultural institutions such as the Library. As a consequence, an Act is being drafted to put this policy into effect.

Legislation

The Library is keen to see changes made to the present Irish Copyright Act (1963) which restricts the right to claim items under legal deposit to printed materials only. The proposed Act giving the Library a new status, referred to above, may also provide an opportunity to make changes to copyright law prior to more general changes being introduced.

New Buildings

Planning work nears completion on the renovation of premises near the main Library building. This building will house a microfilming unit for the NEWSPLAN project. It is clear from the published NEWSPLAN report that many of the rarest files of Irish newspapers are in the National Library of Ireland. It is envisaged, therefore, that the microfilming unit will concentrate at first on the Library's own newspapers.

The building will also contain the Library's conservation services.

Work nears completion on a building in the Temple Bar area of Dublin that will enable the Library to establish a national photographic archive. The new building will allow the Library's 200,000 photographs to be stored in optimum conditions and give the Library the opportunity to launch new services. An imaging project is being planned which will allow users to search and browse images from the most important of the Library's collections.

Automation

The Library is at present considering options for retrospective conversion and is seeking the funding necessary for what is considered a priority. It is hoped to load records contributed by the Library to the English Short Title Catalogue database (ESTC) into the Library's own database in the immediate future.

Conservation and Preservation

A project to conserve the Library's map collection is now in progress. A new Conservation Room has been equipped and a survey of the collection carried out. Work on the Library's print and drawings collection is being carried out in the Delmas Bindery, Marsh's Library.

Public Relations

The promotion of the Library's collections and the fostering of a greater public awareness of its collections remains a priority. A growth in the sale of publications and the rental of the Seminar Room for functions represent a useful source of income for the Library and a means of increasing public awareness of what it has to offer.

A travelling version of the Library's exhibition **Treasures of the National Library of Ireland** has been prepared, a copy of which was purchased by the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs for showing at venues overseas.

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