

Response to Heritage Ireland 2030 consultation

Introduction

The Royal Irish Academy is an all-island independent forum of peer-elected experts. Drawing on its Members' expertise the Academy makes a significant contribution to public debate and policy formation on issues in science, technology and culture. It brings together academia, government and industry to address issues of mutual interest by providing an independent forum for discussion and debate.

The Culture and Heritage Working Group ('the Working Group') of the Royal Irish Academy ('the Academy') welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation *Heritage Ireland 2030* led by the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. The Working Group also wishes to draw the Department's attention to its [discussion papers](#) on creativity in the sciences, music, and vernacular culture and response to the Creative Ireland programme.

On January 29, 2019, the Working Group in partnership with the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht ('the Department'), brought together c. 80 experts and practitioners to discuss their ambitions for *Heritage Ireland 2030*. This consultation input is informed by the Forum discussion and the views of Academy members and committees. The Working Group also wishes to direct the Department's attention to the consultation submission made by the Academy's Standing Committee for Archaeology.

Heritage and the Academy

Established in 1785, the Academy's Charter charges it with a specific role in respect of preserving and maintaining Ireland's cultural heritage. The Academy leads several important national research projects, particularly in areas relating to Ireland and its heritage. It represents the world of Irish learning internationally, has a unique, globally recognised library, and is a leading academic publisher.

Since its formation in 1785 the Academy has, variously, acted as keeper of Treasure Trove, acquired and preserved national antiquities for the Irish people, supported and encouraged academic scholarship and research in disciplines with relevance to heritage matters including – but not limited to - archaeology, history, Irish language, art history, zoology, geology, and botany.

Today, the Academy continues to hold considerable heritage assets that it preserves for the nation, e.g. medieval manuscripts in Latin and Irish (early, middle and late – 6th-16th cent.). The Library holds the world's largest collection of manuscripts in the Irish language from the medieval to the modern period. Through the Digital Repository of Ireland and the Academy's involvement in numerous digital humanities projects e.g. Irish Scripts on Screen, the Academy is an active proponent of the importance of securing and developing Ireland's digital heritage assets.

What is the most important thing Heritage Ireland 2030 needs to deliver?

- Moving beyond enclosed notions of heritage to embrace a more diverse understanding which includes the intangible¹ as well as the tangible, the heritage of Ireland's new communities, preservation and education, landscapes and marine-scapes, flora and fauna
- Acceptance, endorsement and application of its objectives across multiple policy areas such as education, agriculture, environment, urban planning
- A nationally resourced, locally delivered heritage infrastructure that builds upon current successful initiatives and policy tools including local heritage officers, support for local museums and archives, Heritage Council grant schemes, etc
- An activated and active community informing heritage policy and practice that embraces multiple bodies of knowledge and expertise from archaeologists to historians, linguists to folklorists, thatchers to beekeepers
- Achieving balance in meeting local and national interests and needs in a meaningful way to enable local communities to engage with and drive local heritage developments within a larger national framework informed by expert knowledge and data
- A better positioning, and understanding, of heritage issues within Irish climate action plans
- A more informed and engaged citizenship.

What are the biggest challenges facing our heritage?

The current understanding of heritage policy and its concerns as being largely the preserve of a single unit within one government department is perhaps the greatest challenge. Successful heritage preservation, conservation and engagement goes far beyond the remit of a single government department and must be understood to extend across all aspects of government policy and initiatives.

The sustainability, preservation of, and engagement with Ireland's ancient and new heritage must be understood in the context of the threats posed to it by urbanisation, globalisation and the loss of local identity, unsustainable tourism, climate change related disasters, the inadequate integration of heritage consideration in urban and land planning and policies.

What do you think of the draft objectives in the document? In your view, is there something important missing?

¹ As per the [UNESCO Convention on Intangible Heritage](#) (2003)

The draft objectives are well crafted and wide ranging. The discussion accompanying each could allow for a more explicit recognition of the following aspects of Ireland's heritage:

- Marine heritage (90% of Ireland's land mass is under water)
- Townscapes
- Biodiversity
- Habitats including peatlands, meadows
- Intellectual heritage e.g. Irish language, Irish literature, traditional skills
- Role of education and schools
- Integration of cultural policy and initiatives.
- The UN sustainable development goals particularly Target 11.4, which calls on all countries to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable by strengthening safeguarding of the world's cultural and natural heritage.
- The role played by museums as the repositories of the objects relating to culture and heritage from our own and other countries. Museums have a responsibility for the acquisition of relevant material, for the curation, display and conservation of the material in their care, for research on the material, both by museum staff and other researchers, and for education and outreach.
- Greater recognition and support for Ireland's scientific heritage which is found across multiple settings from universities to public research organisations, teaching hospitals to museums, to ensure a greater consistency of care, preservation and accessibility.

What changes are happening right now that might impact on our heritage?

The status of history within the Junior Certificate curriculum has sparked considerable debate and the Academy has written to the Minister of Education and Skills on this.

A related but wider issue is that of diversity within heritage: Ireland's society is increasingly diverse and our policy understanding of what sits under the heritage "umbrella" must continue to encompass and accommodate such heritage diversity.

The impact of climate change upon Ireland's heritage emerged as a strong theme in attendees' contributions at the Academy's January 29, 2019 Forum. The impact of extreme weather events upon heritage sites is increasingly evident but archaeological sites, townscapes and museums appear to be a low-level priority in current Irish climate action plans. A key deliverable for Heritage Ireland 2030 would be to achieve a more central positioning and understanding of heritage issues within Irish climate action plans. UNESCO's World Heritage Centre calls for greater understanding of the impact of climate change upon the universal value

deriving from natural and cultural heritage properties. The ICOMOS International Working Group on Climate Change and Cultural Heritage points to the importance of including and drawing on local and indigenous knowledge as well as the most up-to-date science to inform adaptation strategies and this dual approach should also inform climate action plans heritage-focused responses.

How can we work better together and engage all our communities under Heritage Ireland 2030?

Education whether through the formal education settings or informal settings (community groups) or delivered by national and local experts is the most underused but potentially most impactful means of creating a better understanding, pride in and engagement with Ireland's diverse heritage.

The popular success of initiatives such as the digitisation of the 1911 Census demonstrates the powerful impact of access to data and knowledge in building individual ownership and engagement with their own personal as well as national heritage. A continued focus on making knowledge more accessible to local communities, including but not restricted to digitisation and e-access – offers tremendous opportunities to demonstrate the appetite for and impact of engagement with heritage enabled through public investment.

How can we ensure Heritage Ireland 2030 delivers?

Heritage Ireland 2030 is fortunate in that it inherits many existing successful initiatives that while small in scale and scope at present offer great potential for scaling up of activity and impact. In particular, the Academy supports:

- The rollout of local heritage and conservation officers to all local authority areas
- The introduction of local authority biodiversity officers
- Substantial scale-up in funding delivered to local communities through Heritage Council grants
- Ongoing communication with those involved with heritage policy, practice, research and education through yearly discussion forums to ensure that the strategy remains relevant and is updated as needed throughout its lifetime
- The All-Ireland Pollinator Plan a good example of a policy that provided actions at each level from the individual to the community to the government department
- Efforts to build heritage proofing into government policies with an initial focus on planning and development policies, education, climate action, agriculture
- Development of a central evidence base to show impact of public investment in heritage.

About the Royal Irish Academy

The Academy promotes and supports excellence in scholarship across the sciences, humanities and social sciences. It is an independent, self-governing body of Ireland's most distinguished and internationally renowned scholars and scientists. The Academy encourages and facilitates scholarly informed debate and discussion on issues of public interest in line with its members' expertise.

For more information on this submission please contact the Royal Irish Academy, policy@ria.ie