Introduction

This strategy charts a course for the development of archival collections, processes and services in the period to 2020. Although archives and special collections are highly interdependent and jointly located in the Hardiman Research Building and in the Library’s organisational structure, the focus of this document is on archives, but the development of a strategy for special collections is also planned. The strategy is published to all our audiences, notably University Management, the Archives Strategy Committee, academic and Library staff and everyone who uses the archives.

Teamwork and consultation have characterised the drafting of this strategy and will be the foundation for its execution. Archivists and management team members have reviewed recent growth and development and considered how we can maximise all of our resources to enhance our processes, collections and engagement with a range of communities. The strategy has benefited in particular from the expert advice, influence and ultimate approval of the University’s Archives Strategy Committee which represents many disciplines, perspectives and experiences, all of which have shaped this document.

Recent Development of Archives at NUI Galway

The archives service at NUI Galway was established in May 1998, with the appointment of a full-time archivist, initially on a contract basis prior to a permanent appointment in 2001. This was preceded by the first meeting of the Archives Working Group in 1997. Early and enduring priorities were to enable research, support academic programmes and strengthen links between the University and the wider community. Collection strengths in the first decade included theatre, film and the performing arts, literature, history and politics, with a particular focus on material in the Irish language. A brochure published with support from Galway University Foundation in 2010 highlighted a number of the 300 collections added by that date. Notable successes included the accession of collections which continue to attract strong use, the establishment of an expert advisory service and the digitisation of the Ritchie Pickow photographic archive. Some significant challenges emerged too, particularly around storage, cataloguing and resourcing to meet increasing demand.

The period from 2010 to 2015 may be considered a phase of renewed expansion, stimulated in particular by the availability of state-of-the-art facilities for archives in the new Hardiman Research
Building. The quality of spaces for storage, access and engagement in this building proved influential in attracting some major collections and promoting strong use and engagement of new audiences through training, exhibitions, conferences, presentations and other forms of outreach. Digitisation and digital access to collections became a major feature too, resulting in online publication of extracts or whole collections, often in partnership with others and enabled by new equipment and software. Cataloguing of collections was prioritised according to annual plans or, as previously, where contract staffing allowed, notably for the Theatre Archives Listing Project in 2010-2011. The implementation of the CALM system was an essential support to the new scale of operation, enabling new workflows, reporting and searching of catalogued archive holdings. The number of permanent professional archivists had increased from one to three by the end of this period. A new Archives Strategy Committee was established in 2015, its membership reflecting a strategic focus and an outward perspective to maximise connectivity with the University’s academic mission.

Future Opportunities and Challenges

Looking to the future, there is a very strong base on which to build, with excellent staff, facilities and collections, a positive reputation on and beyond campus, committed partners and supporters, and a real appreciation in the University, including its Management Team, of the strategic value of archives. There are vital challenges to address too, including:

- Embedding archives in academic programmes
- Maximising use of archives in publications by NUI Galway researchers as well as by visitors
- Linking archives to the University’s global reputation and recruitment initiatives
- Meeting demand for digital archives while managing resourcing, access, rights and workflows
- Focusing, prioritising and managing the growth and cataloguing of collections strategically
- Matching resources to ambitions
- Balancing effort optimally between public-facing activities and internal management processes
- Engaging multiple audiences: leaders, funders, partners, users, public, collection owners

The development of a strategy for archives to 2020 is opportune in focusing on these challenges to strengthen existing foundations and take new opportunities to enable the next steps forward within the framework of the strategies of the University and the Library to 2020.
Collection Development, Management and Discovery

The Vision for 2020
The Library’s archival collections are a treasure trove of unique material that support the research, teaching and learning activities of the University, as well as being a service to the whole community. These collections enable you to build your understanding and knowledge of events, people and organisations in our past and will help you to create new knowledge and a deeper understanding of our cultural and social history.

Our archival collections are listed according to international standards and are seamlessly discoverable through best in class software and international and national archive discovery platforms. You can access our archives in our world-class Archives and Special Collections Reading Room in an atmosphere of scholarship and research. Where possible, archives are digitized to enhance accessibility and searchability and to preserve the original archive.

We build and preserve our archives for today and tomorrow, ensuring compliance with international standards and best practice in the storage, handling and description of all collections. We optimize the available storage space, to ensure maximum capacity as well as speedy retrieval.

The Agenda
The Library’s archival collections are a source both of pride and competitive advantage for the University with particular strengths in the following areas:

- Irish-language and literature collections
- Academic papers of relevance to NUI Galway
- Landed Estate papers
- Political collections
- Theatre, Film and the Performing Arts collections
- Business collections
- Collections relating to the socio-economic, cultural and political development of the West of Ireland, and that strengthen the University’s links to the region and local community.

We will work in partnership with academic colleagues to acquire collections with academic and research value, building on these areas of strength, and to ensure our archives are contributing to and facilitating academic activities, in accordance with our acquisitions policy.

Our collections are listed in accordance with ISAD (G) to the level most appropriate to the information a researcher is likely to need, balancing the staff time required for listing against the granularity needed for discoverability. We carefully manage our stores ensuring they conform to BS5454 and optimizing use of the space to maximize capacity. The growing success and reputation of our archival service, and the resulting increase in the number of collections we are offered, mean that our capacity in terms of staff time to list collections and storage space to house them is
becoming stretched. We will work to maximize the resources available to us, while also seeking funding to increase capacity.

Technology is greatly enhancing the accessibility and discoverability of archives via search functionality and digitisation. We will exploit the potential of current and evolving technology, to maximize the visibility and discoverability of our archives, through digitization and through enabling discovery via our own local discovery platform and through aggregator sites, e.g. Irish Archives Resource, so as to facilitate the process of finding and using archives, but also to raise the profile of NUI Galway and attract researchers to work here.

Collection Development, Management and Discovery will advance by:

Reviewing and developing acquisitions policies and procedures

We will review and develop our appraisal, acquisition and accession policies and procedures to ensure they reflect best practice, NUI Galway research priorities and our space and resource capacity.

Exposing our archives through prioritized listing

We will ensure discoverability of our archives by listing them to an appropriate level and standard of archival description, allowing us to expose our metadata to local, national and international discovery platforms. We will prioritise listing activities according to research potential and preservation need. We will seek resources to process and list larger collections before acquiring them, so as to ensure their discoverability in a timely fashion.

Reviewing and optimising archival storage space

We will review our collections to ensure space is being used optimally and will seek funding for additional archival storage to increase capacity. We will maintain the highest preservation standards in all stores.

Developing digitisation policies and procedures

We will enhance the accessibility and preservation of our archives through the creation of surrogate copies via digitisation where appropriate. We will develop policies for audio-visual preservation and digitisation, recognising the need to balance between local delivery or partnership and commissioning to external parties. We will review listing procedures where archival collections (or parts thereof) are being digitised.
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Publishing Digital Archive Collections for Learning and Research

The Vision for 2020

The Library publishes rich digital archival content, with enhanced context and functionality in the online environment, to enable innovative, often interdisciplinary, learning and research. Digital collections are aligned with academic programmes but accessible globally to the maximum extent possible and are a source of reputational gain for the University. Attractively presented, well described and easy to navigate, they promote discovery, engagement and participation. Planning and prioritisation of digital publication projects emphasise partnership with the academic community, University stakeholders, donors and external bodies to ensure and to maximise necessary resources, infrastructure, standards and rights management.

The Agenda

Online access to archives and special collections is increasingly expected and this challenges the Library to find ways to execute and fund digitisation at a new scale but also to manage expectations of what is involved. The Library is a key and keen player in digital publishing, with much to offer, including unique archival collections, digital platforms, staff expertise, spaces and equipment.

Recent experience with projects at differing scales has shown the benefits of digital access, including new ways of conducting research and learning, innovative presentation of material, partnerships around exhibitions and conferences, and success in attracting funding and recruiting students. Some challenges, shared worldwide, are also evident. Among them are project sustainability and resourcing, the need for selectivity, and the variety and novelty of much of the work involved in digital publishing which needs skills in areas such as rights management, processing of born-digital material and robust digital preservation to ensure perpetual access.

Our local environment offers many opportunities. The quality and diversity of other players on campus in digital humanities, social sciences and data analytics offers the potential for partnerships which leverage a range of skills and perspectives. There is scope too for a Library-driven digitisation programme based on our unique archives and special collections in Irish, English and other languages. Other areas for development will include digital preservation of exhibitions, collaborative funding bids, engagement with national and international partners, and shared approaches to capacity development around skills and equipment. A core operating principle will be to integrate the processing of print and digital collections closely, maximising discovery and access.

Publishing Digital Archive Collections for Learning and Research will advance by:

Establishing a Framework for Sustainability

This will generate a model for planning, prioritising and costing projects such that resource needs, methodologies, opportunities, constraints and responsibilities are understood by all parties at an
early stage. It will guide decisions on how, when and whether digital projects are executed. A standing fund for digital collection infrastructure and projects will be an objective.

*Developing Partnerships Locally and Nationally*

Partnership is vital to success. It promotes sharing of resources, expertise and perspective as well as providing a strong support base for digital projects in terms of resourcing, use and impact. The Library will work with academics, University stakeholders, funders, archival donors and projects at national and international level.

*Enhancing and Promoting Digital Collections*

There will be a focus on adding value to the presentation and use of archival collections online, incorporating additional editorial, exhibition or other content and functionality. Collections will be published on an open access basis where possible to maximise exposure while meeting rights management requirements. Opportunities to enable the public to interact with digital collections through crowdsourcing and other initiatives will be taken.

*Developing Capacity*

We will invest in developing skillsets and infrastructure to enable maximum capacity in terms of publishing digital collections, while recognising the need to maintain a balance between local delivery or partnership and commissioning to external parties as scale or complexity requires. Learning from local or commissioned projects and international practice will always be a priority.
Academic Skills, Engagement and Outreach

The Vision to 2020

The Library is an active partner and driver of academic engagement for collections, providing leadership and innovation in developing and embedding collections into teaching and research. We provide for our users a dedicated and expert collections knowledge that is shared through first-class pedagogical methods and experiential learning from Archives staff.

Critical and independent thinking, analysis and questioning is at the heart of the pedagogical focus. Our users receive a transformative learning experience through engagement with original items, through digital platforms and through informative and multi-dimensional exhibitions. The Library is a recognisable academic partner in teaching, research, publication and dissemination of ground-breaking research, through our collections, staff, digital expertise and academic rigour. We are a collaborative and welcoming space for on and off-campus communities and work with our users to cultivate and maximise an internationally-recognised environment of academic engagement that creates dynamic interdisciplinary research.

The Agenda

The Library is an increasingly important and central partner in the provision of foundational and also innovative academic skills and academic engagement with archive collections. Archives are the raw materials for collaborative and diverse research and the Reading Room acts as the workshop space that allows for exploitation of these unique resources via a range of platforms. We are a leading stakeholder in a building that acts as a hub for research, teaching and engagement with the humanities and social sciences. We have successfully moved from a support role to being an active shaper of academic direction of the University as well as offering a unique attribution to the marketing and identity of the University both at home and abroad.

Our recent engagement with academic departments as project partners includes major exhibitions, international conferences, world-leading digital projects, high-impact publications and community-engaged outreach events. This has also resulted in an Archivist-developed module, creating a visible academic presence. The reach and impact of the module and related academic engagement could be expanded but with recognition of the demands upon the resources and balance of duties of archive staff.

We occupy a unique position within campus, academic and research communities that provides an opportunity to further establish the Library as an academic leader. Key to this continued success is a dynamic and progressive programme of academic skills provision centred on archives literacy, digital discovery and innovative pedagogical foundations. Academic partnership must continue and expand in order to maximise the potential for the Library as a recognisable driver of academic excellence.
Academic Skills, Engagement and Outreach will advance by:

*Devising Dynamic and Varied Partnerships and Promotion Programme*

We have built successful relationships with faculty within the College of Arts such as English, History, Gaeilge, Drama and others. We must maintain and build on these academic partnerships while also expanding our own remit to foster new relationships with a wider campus community. Archival collections provide the raw materials for innovative in-class teaching as well as for dedicated research. Archival material embedded into on-campus and online teaching resources offer innovative opportunities for collaboration. This partnership is also cognisant of the role Academic staff play in the process of acquisition of collections and their future exploitation in teaching and research.

*Providing Innovative and Engaging Archives Literacy and Pedagogy Programmes*

Developing the systematic use of archives in teaching and learning affords students and researchers the opportunity to instil key graduate attributes and transferable skillsets that translate across disciplines. The academic application of learning through encountering unique and original primary sources, through physical and digital media, cultivates critical independent thinking, analytical agility and academic writing skills that benefits users within and beyond the University. The skillsets for future success will be a varied amalgam of critical information skills, archival and collections knowledge, technological ability and academic questioning and analysis.

*Contributing at the forefront of Scholarship*

The Library must emphasise the provision of multi-faceted archival content and malleable data with local and international academic partners so as to exploit high-impact citations in world-leading peer-review publications and research networks while cultivating new and innovative academic partners. By exploiting the archives to the full, the Library can deliver a visible contribution to the knowledge economy and infrastructure in terms of provision and interpretation of dynamic digital projects and skills, unique archive-based teaching programmes, leading publications and information skills provision.
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Resourcing the Archives Strategy, 2016-2020

Aside from the collections themselves, our main resources are staffing and funding. Each needs to be deployed to maximum benefit and supplemented where possible.

Staffing

We currently have three permanent, full-time archivists. One works in the Digital Publishing and Innovation Team, with a focus on digital scholarship and digitisation of archives and two are shared between the Research and Learning Team, focusing on outreach, academic engagement, exhibitions and public facing activities (60%), and the Collections Team, focusing on collection management and description (40%). Achieving the optimal balance between public-facing activities and internal collection management processes will be an ongoing priority. Although the percentage of archivist staff time assigned to the Collections Team is lower, the listing of collections is recognised as vital to enabling teaching and learning, research, exhibition activity and efficient access by Library staff and users. Informed planning and prioritisation of listing activity, backed by adherence to agreed deadlines, is vital to ensuring maximum access to collections. Listing by permanent archivists will complement and be complemented by the work of contract archivists. Engagement with a range of audiences creates awareness of the collections and how to use them effectively. This promotes their use to the full, enhancing the profile of the archives and generating new opportunities.

There are many points of intersection between collections management and public engagement and these will be promoted to maximum effect but within resource constraints. Some activities needing to receive extra emphasis may not belong completely to either category. These include recording, analysing and reporting the usage and impact of the archives service, as well as monitoring funding opportunities and making or participating in bids. Activities of this nature are vital in terms of accountability and funding.

Professional archivist time is a precious resource and maximising its use will be a priority. In this regard it is important to view the archives team in its widest sense. Clearly there will be strong collaborations among the three archivists, with digital and paper formats increasingly linked. Staffing at the Library Assistant grade needs to be deployed to best effect, taking on any functions that do not need to be performed by professional archivists. Four members of the Library’s senior management team have a close engagement with archives and will advance the strategic agenda. All Library teams are a resource for archives. Other opportunities to supplement existing staffing resources, such as interns, trainees and volunteers will be considered on a case-by-case basis, balancing anticipated contribution and management overhead. Developing the skills of the archives team at all grades will be an ongoing priority, systematically planned and resourced as fully as possible.

Funding

Maintaining and supplementing existing resources will be a priority, seeking to build on increased University support in recent years and putting a stronger emphasis on external sources. Work on
promoting an understanding by decision makers and funders of the full cost of archives throughout their lifecycle will continue. Securing funds for the listing, digitisation and promotion of collections will be important in order to extend what is possible through existing resources; it is envisaged that contract archivists will be engaged and that large-scale or complex digitisation will need to be outsourced.

Partnerships, particularly with the University’s academic community but also with external organisations, will be pursued as a means of realising opportunities, sharing resources and bidding for funds. Library participation in academic funding bids will be promoted. While the recent trend has been towards receiving prestigious archives as donations, it is recognised that funding may also on occasion need to be secured to purchase collections of particular importance to the University. Investment in appropriate storage space will also become necessary in addition to optimisation of existing facilities.

A particular issue to be addressed will be the long-term resourcing of the management and storage of the University’s own archives.
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**Implementation Plan, 2016/17-2019/20**
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14 November 2016