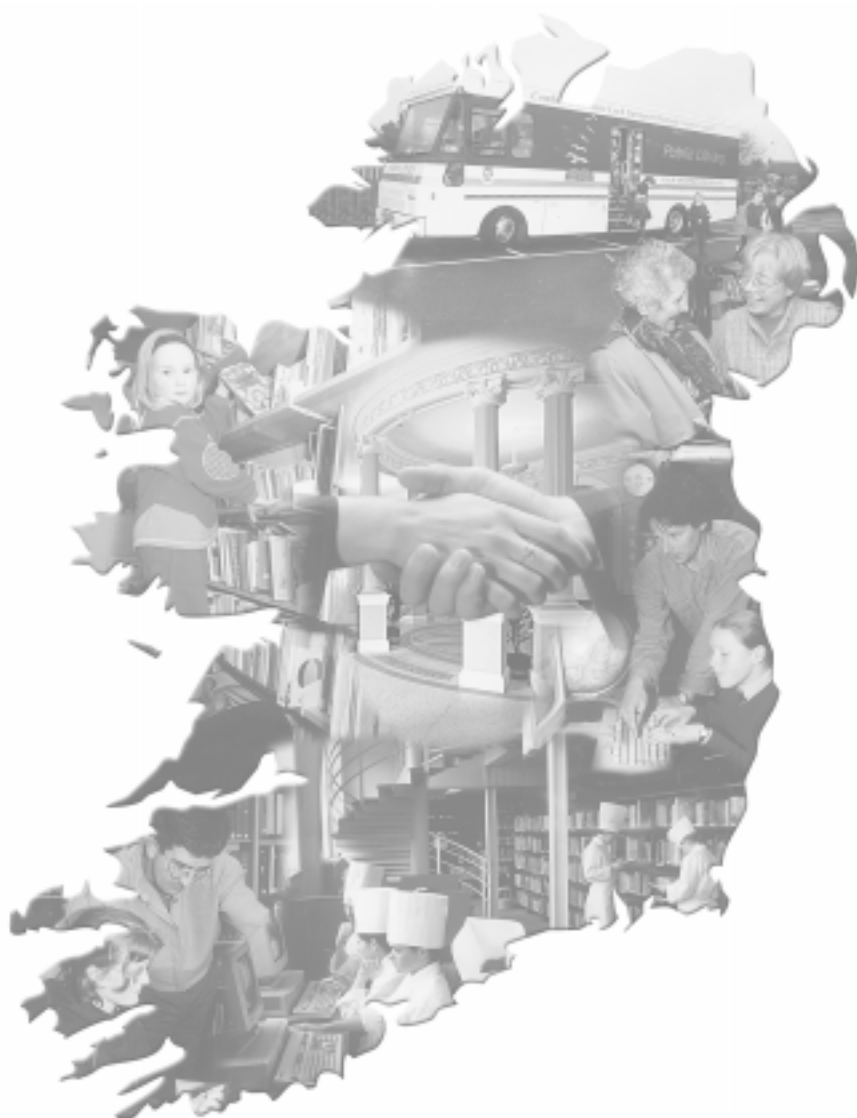


# **Joining Forces**

## **Delivering Libraries and Information Services in the Information Age**

### **Executive Summary**



An Chomhairle Leabharlanna • The Library Council

2000



<b>A Vision of Libraries &amp; Information Services in Ireland in the 21st Century .....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Foreword .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>1.1 Overview of Libraries &amp; Information Services in Ireland .....</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1.1 Introduction .....	3
1.1.2 A Very Human Profession .....	3
1.1.3 Libraries & Information Services Today .....	4
<b>1.2 Executive Summary .....</b>	<b>7</b>
1.2.1 Introduction .....	7
1.2.2 Background .....	7
1.2.3 The Role of Libraries & Information Services in the Information Society .....	9
1.2.4 The Learning Environment .....	9
1.2.5 The Economy .....	10
1.2.6 Social Inclusion .....	10
1.2.7 Arts, Culture and Heritage .....	11
1.2.8 Connecting all Libraries & Information Services in Ireland .....	11
1.2.9 Managing Change—The Library & Information Service Workplace .....	12
1.2.10 Key Recommendations .....	13
1.2.11 A National Coordinating Body for Libraries & Information Services in Ireland .....	14



# **A Vision of Libraries & Information Services in Ireland in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

The vision for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is of libraries and information services in Ireland cooperating to provide universal access to information and resources that enrich the cultural, educational, social and recreational lives of Irish people.

It is about access to services of high standard that make a difference to the quality of people's lives.

This vision will be shared with all members of society through regular consultation and communication.

It will be delivered by organisations that are flexible and innovative, anticipating and adapting to change.

Staff are critical to realising this vision. They will be given every opportunity to develop their potential for the benefit of all.



# Foreword

I was delighted to be asked by An Chomhairle Leabharlanna to contribute the Foreword to this report on libraries and information services in the Information Society.

The importance of this report is twofold. Firstly, it provides us with a comprehensive overview of library and information services in this country. Secondly, it demonstrates the potential of this sector to contribute to an Information Society that is inclusive of all.

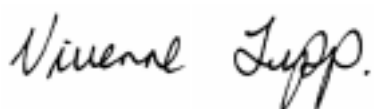
What particularly strikes me in this report is the enormous, but largely untapped, potential that libraries and information services have. This potential must be harnessed so that they can play a central role in building an inclusive Information Society in Ireland.

The Government is committed to ensuring our development as an Information Society that will include everyone. Therefore, it is essential that everyone be given equal access to new technologies, and that everyone gets full benefit from this access. Undoubtedly, this is where libraries and information services have got so much to contribute.

Traditionally, libraries were regarded as reliable centres of research and learning in an appropriate environment. We must now build upon this and adapt our libraries and information services to exploit the exciting opportunities that information and communications technologies have to offer. In turn, we must offer these opportunities to society. Our ultimate view must be of libraries and information centres operating as knowledge resource centres and points of access to new information technology. Most importantly, we must do this for the benefit of all of us.

In working toward this goal, it makes sense to make the best use of the existing libraries and information services network. This report clearly identifies the wide variety of libraries and information services that exist in Ireland. This ranges from third level to public, to cultural, to business, right down to the libraries in our schools. The advantages of networking between all of these services are obvious. The potential offered by such networking, quite simply, is staggering.

On behalf of the Information Society Commission, I would like to congratulate An Chomhairle Leabharlanna for producing this comprehensive and thought provoking report. I am confident that it will be seen as a milestone in the development of libraries and information services in Ireland.



Vivienne Jupp

*Chairman, Information Society Commission*





# Acknowledgements

An Chomhairle Leabharlanna gratefully acknowledges all those who joined forces to deliver this milestone report on a framework for a national policy on libraries and information services in Ireland.

We would particularly like to thank the Chairman and Members of the Euro-Focus on Libraries Committee and Mr. Brendan O'Donoghue (National Library of Ireland and formerly with the Department of the Environment and Local Government) for having the vision to see the benefits of having a national policy and for supporting the project from the beginning. The continuing support of the Secretary General and the Officials of the Department of the Environment and Local Government are very much appreciated.

Special thanks are due to Professor Michael Casey, University College Dublin, who prepared the consultative document that was the forerunner to this report.<sup>[1]</sup>

For all their hard work and dedication, we would like to pay tribute to the Chairman and Members of the Consultative Council and the Chairman and Members of the Working Party.<sup>[2]</sup> They kept us on the right path throughout the process.

We would also like to thank all those, particularly the general public, who took part in the consultation process, made submissions, completed questionnaires and provided research reports and materials.

The policy would not have been possible without the support and financial contributions of the following bodies: the thirty four Local Authorities, the Higher Education Authority, the Department of the Environment and Local Government, the Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands, the Department of Health and Children, the National Library of Ireland, Enterprise Ireland and the Local Government Computer Services Board.

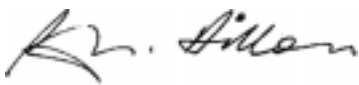
The following individuals deserve particular mention for their help at various stages in writing the report, Siobhán O'Rafferty, Royal Irish Academy, Elizabeth McNamara, Trinity College Dublin, Aidan Beatty, Department of Health and Children, Anne Tierney, South Eastern Health Board, Hugh Brazier, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland and Valerie Coughlan, Church of Ireland College of Education.

We are particularly pleased that the Chairman of the Information Society Commission, Vivienne Jupp, wrote the foreword for the report and would also like to gratefully acknowledge the editorial assistance and support of Kate Kavanagh.

Thanks also to Trinity College Dublin and to the Central Library, Dublin Corporation Public Libraries, for arranging photographic opportunities and to the National Library of Ireland, Dublin Institute of Technology and Wexford County Library for donating photographs.

The staff of An Chomhairle Leabharlanna deserve a special mention for the support they gave the project leader and the project team throughout the process. Their dedication and hard work is very much appreciated.

Finally, I would like to thank the project leader and all the members of the project team for their tremendous effort and work in pulling the whole process together and showing us how joining forces really can work.



Noel Dillon

*Chairman*

An Chomhairle Leabharlanna

## References

- [1] Casey, Michael Prof. *Libraries and the Information Society. Towards a National Policy for the Republic of Ireland: A Proposal for Policy Formulation and Implementation, Final report*. Dublin:Euro-Focus on Libraries, 1996.
- [2] Members of these committees are listed in Appendix 6.

## Overview of Libraries and Information Services in Ireland

### Executive Summary





# 1.1 Overview of Libraries & Information Services in Ireland

## 1.1.1 Introduction

Libraries and Information Services in Ireland are strategic assets that deliver the Information Society. We support research and education and enable the individual to learn at a pace that suits their own needs—**lifelong learning**. We foster community empowerment and identity, and include everybody in the process—**active citizenship and social inclusion**. We anticipate and supply the information and research needs of our industries—**supporting the economy**. We also inform all who use our services of the story of Ireland and how it has changed—**promoting culture, heritage and the Arts**.

Our research has identified approximately two thousand organisations that provide a library or information service in Ireland. As many of these organisations do not have staff designated exclusively to library and information services work, it is difficult to know how many people are employed in the sector. However, we estimate that, at least, three thousand people are employed directly in our Irish libraries and information services. A brief description of our libraries and information services sector is given in *Appendix 7*.

## 1.1.2 A Very Human Profession

Speaking at a library conference in Newry Mr. Noel Dempsey, TD, Minister for the Environment and Local Government, said “*Yours is a very human profession. Long before technology, your predecessors knew that helping a person to gain knowledge and understanding was a noble thing. Technological advances may have opened up many new ways of doing this, but they have not changed the essentials. This is why, when we talk of the communications revolution, we should not limit ourselves to talking about the technology, wonderful though it may be.*”<sup>[1]</sup>

The Internet is driving the Information Age and has changed users’ expectations of libraries and information services. With developments in information and communication technologies we can now reach wider audiences than ever before and include

users who were previously excluded, particularly those in remote areas, or those with disabilities.

The Government's aim is to make IT access available to everybody. Libraries and information services can facilitate this. We can go one step further. We can train communities to use the technology and we can teach them information-handling skills.

However, we need further investment to realise this potential. We need to invest in staff and we need to invest in the technology and the information resources. Our staff, our *'very human profession,'* are the key to delivering this potential.

### 1.1.3 Libraries & Information Services Today

Today, libraries and information services are in transition. Improved investment in recent years is leading to more flexible opening hours, better and more buildings and information resources, and more staff training and development. However, we are starting from an extremely low base and the rate of demand on our services is increasing at such a speed that we still have a very long way to go.

The rate of change in the environment in which we work, particularly in regard to information and communication technologies, require us to rethink and restructure the way we provide services. We need a new approach.

#### Managing change

Our main task is to manage all this change. We are cooperating, collaborating, forming consortia, integrating, converging, networking and outsourcing, all in an effort to share resources, improve our services and give value for money.

We are trying out new ways of working (job-sharing, contract work, flexitime, teleworking) in order to attract and retain top rate staff.

We are reviewing and measuring our performance, and adopting standards and guidelines, in order to deliver quality services.

We are particularly concerned about including all communities and we are exploiting technologies to the full to achieve this.

Above all, we are consulting with users and non-users. We recognise the increasing segmentation and fragmentation of our user groups and are dedicating more resources to understanding and meeting their diverse needs.

Indeed, libraries and information services are learning organisations. We have learned that in order to respond to change we need flatter structures in our organisations and well-trained staff.

We have also learned, however, that while we have the potential to do so much more, there is a limit to what we can achieve on our own and with existing investment.

*Joining Forces* will allow all libraries and information services to expand to their full potential. This needs funding. In our current economic climate, it makes sense that we get this funding now. Then, we will be able to deliver the Information Society. Moreover, we will deliver the Information Society to all. This will ensure that everybody will benefit from this investment.

## A learning experience

## Joining Forces

## References

- [1] Speech given by Mr. Noel Dempsey, T.D. at *Progress through Partnerships: Libraries, Information and the Arts*, the Joint Conference of LAI/LANI, Newry, Co. Down, 20–23th April 1999.





## 1.2 Executive Summary

### 1.2.1 Introduction

*Joining Forces: Delivering Libraries and Information Services in the Information Age* is about the combined effort of approximately two thousand libraries and information services in Ireland coming together to deliver an inclusive Information Society. In taking this global and holistic view, ‘the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.’ Together we can achieve what no one library or information service can do alone. We can build a unique network of cultural, scientific, civic, business, administrative and technical information resources. We can make this network accessible to all and with the support and expertise of over three thousand staff, we can support, sustain and enhance the social, cultural and economic lives of the population of Ireland.

By embracing and harnessing new information and communication technologies and by training and developing our staff, we can build on our long tradition as centres of knowledge, research, creativity, learning and recreation. This way, we can provide access for all to the challenging and exciting opportunities afforded by the Information Age.

To realise this potential, we need further investment. In our current economic climate, it makes sense that we get that investment now.

### 1.2.2 Background

In 1995, the Euro-Focus on Libraries Committee, recommended that a policy to develop the potential of the combined libraries and information services in the Republic of Ireland be explored. This Committee commissioned Professor Michael Casey, University College Dublin, to prepare a consultative document on this topic.<sup>[1]</sup> This document was circulated widely to policy makers and to library and information service bodies.

Following a consultative process, An Chomhairle Leabharlanna/ The Library Council, with the support of the Department of the Environment and Local Government, agreed to provide research and secretariat support for a project to develop a framework for a national policy on libraries and information services in the

Republic of Ireland. An Chomhairle Leabharlanna appointed a project team to undertake the research and to manage the project.

The project began in August 1997 and was completed in June 1999. Details of the project structure can be found in the *Scope and Methodology* section of this report.

A unique aspect of the project was the wide consultative process that was put in place, not just in the project structure itself but in the research process. One hundred and twenty five submissions were received from stakeholders who replied to public advertisements in the national newspapers; almost seven hundred questionnaire were sent to libraries and information services; and one hundred and seventeen key stakeholders were interviewed. Another unique factor was the number of government departments and semi-state bodies that were represented on the Consultative Council. It was very valuable to have access to this advice and expertise.

Funding for the project was provided by the combined forces of the thirty four Local Authorities, An Chomhairle Leabharlanna, the Higher Education Authority, the Department of Health and Children, the Department of the Environment and Local Government, the Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands, the National Library of Ireland, the Local Government Computer Services Board and Enterprise Ireland.

The terms of reference for the project were:

- To make recommendations on a national policy for the overall planning, coordination and development of library and related information services, resources and systems;
- To recommend mechanisms for the implementation, monitoring and review of the national policy;
- To identify appropriate developments and strategies, within and outside Ireland, which will affect national policy and to recommend appropriate action;
- In view of rapid developments in the environment in which libraries and information services operate, to identify and prioritise targets to be achieved on a phased basis, and within defined timescales.

## 1.2.3 The Role of Libraries & Information Services in the Information Society

Libraries and information services have a crucial role to play in the Information Society in Ireland. As institutions traditionally associated with books and other printed matter, we are now transforming to suit our users' needs. We are adapting our means of delivering information, and with it our image, to fully contribute to the Information Society.

In so doing, we will continue to facilitate lifelong learning. We will strengthen our support of economic development. We will update our methods of preserving our cultural and heritage resources.

Most importantly, we will encourage all our citizens to participate fully in the Information Society, regardless of religion, race, sex, economic status or disability. This is what the Government means when it refers to an inclusive Information Society.

## 1.2.4 The Learning Environment

Libraries and information services foster and facilitate learning opportunities that are accessible to all from the cradle to the grave. We organise space, establish conditions and provide materials and activities through which learning, research and teaching can occur. We support learning in the community, in schools, in third level colleges and universities, in the workplace, in prisons, in hospitals and at a distance. We are gateways to a world of knowledge, creativity and personal inspiration.

We promote literacy at all levels, encouraging children to read from a very early age and work with adult literacy schemes. The Government is currently concerned with a fall off in reading levels in children and with adult illiteracy. In a recent international OECD survey, 25 per cent of Irish adults scored at the lowest level on the literacy scale.<sup>[2]</sup>

We are part of the national framework of lifelong learning that supports economic and personal development. If we train our staff to be competent in using the new information and communication technologies, we can support media literacy in the population. We will do this by teaching information-handling skills and by providing access to information technology for all.

This will continue our role in informing and encouraging all our citizens in all levels of personal development.

## 1.2.5 The Economy

Ireland is experiencing unprecedented economic growth. To sustain this growth, a skilled workforce and access to information is crucial. Government policies acknowledge this.

Libraries and information services have the potential to support the upgrading of skills for those who are at work and for those who are unemployed. Our libraries in schools and in third level education support teaching, learning and research. They also teach pupils and students information-handling skills and train them how to use information technology (IT). Our public libraries support learners in the community and provide access to IT for all. Our staff in government, semi-state, private, professional, voluntary and community libraries support business activity and educational attainment through providing information, research support and the opportunity for personal development.

Our role in the knowledge-based economy is increasing. With the growth in the complexity and the amount of information published, in all formats, more business people are looking to libraries and information services to satisfy their research and information needs.

Libraries and information services are well placed to support research and development, and with proper funding and staff training, can be instrumental in supporting the widespread use of e-commerce, electronic government information, and the information needs of teleworkers. When we support these developments, we support learners and workers in business, which in turn benefits the economy.

## 1.2.6 Social Inclusion

Everyone has a right to participate fully in society and everyone should be offered the opportunity to reach his or her full potential.

There is no doubt that, as we approach the new Millennium, Ireland is experiencing unprecedented economic prosperity. There is also no doubt that certain sectors of our society are excluded from this prosperity. There is a real danger that the very economic boom we now applaud could be a major contributing factor to widening the gap between the information haves and the information have-nots, particularly when it comes to accessing new technology.

Ireland is also changing from being a largely mono-cultural society to one in which a diversity of ethnic groups has settled. Our libraries and information services should reflect this.

Libraries have always been centres of learning for communities across all economic levels. They continue in that role by providing access to technology, and therefore information, to everyone. Traditionally, libraries have opened doors to all. This can now be extended to opening up the information superhighway to all.

## 1.2.7 Arts, Culture and Heritage

Libraries play an important part in fostering and developing identity as well as interest in our own and other civilisations. We cherish the cultural and heritage collections entrusted to our care. We promote access to arts and culture. We place a particular value on the Irish language and Irish literature.

There is a need for staff development in managing cultural and heritage resources. There is concern about preserving and promoting our collections. There are plans for digitising some of their content.

There is the challenge of providing accessible services to users, and the cost implications. There is a need to market those libraries and information services with heritage roles.

Taking all this into account, we need to collaborate and cooperate with other heritage institutions (museums, galleries, arts, culture and interpretative centres). This will combine our collective resources in a partnership approach in order to serve our users better.

## 1.2.8 Connecting all Libraries & Information Services in Ireland

With the growing need for information, Irish people are increasingly demanding access to all publicly funded libraries and information services.

Advances in information and communication technologies make it possible for us to link our catalogues and to digitise information which we can make available on a public access network, PAN Ireland.

Access to this network and its core content should be available, free of charge in all our libraries and information services. Core content should include:

- Electronic government and public service information;
- Websites for libraries with links to their catalogues;
- Websites for public service and voluntary and community organisations;
- Consumer health information;
- Information on third level institutions and schools;
- Digitised cultural and heritage information.

Other information resources could be made available on the network on a charge basis.

To develop PAN Ireland we need to invest in the technological infrastructure in all our libraries and information services. Most importantly, we need to train our staff to have the basic and advanced competencies that are required to deliver PAN Ireland.

Developing PAN Ireland should be the number one priority for the proposed National Coordinating Body.

## **1.2.9 Managing Change—The Library & Information Service Workplace**

The world in which we work is changing everyday. The Information Society and economic prosperity are driving this. In order to manage this change we are transforming our image.

We are focussing on users and flattening our structures so that we can give an efficient response to demands being placed on our services.

We are consulting our users and non-users. We are tailoring services to meet their diverse needs.

We are cooperating, collaborating, converging and integrating in providing more services, therefore giving better value for money.

We are trying out new ways of working (job sharing, flexitime, teleworking, contracting out) in order to attract and retain top rate staff.

We are investing in our staff so that they can develop the competencies they need to deliver the Information Society.

We are reviewing and measuring our performance and adopting appropriate standards and guidelines so that we can deliver quality services.

New ways of working and joining forces are helping to improve our services but the speed of change is such that it is impossible to keep pace with the rapid developments in our working environment and the increasingly sophisticated and diverse demands of our users.

We need increased funding if we are to realise our full potential and deliver the Information Society to all.

## 1.2.10 Key Recommendations

In the final section of this report, one hundred and fifty four recommendations are made for planning, developing and coordinating library and information services in Ireland. From these, eight key recommendations have emerged which must be implemented if we are to deliver services that are appropriate to the Information Age. Our approach to implementing these recommendations must be coordinated at a national level. This will help to set priorities and to attract funding.

The 8 key recommendations of the National Policy for Libraries and Information Services in Ireland are:

- 1** Set up a National Coordinating Body for all Libraries and Information Services in Ireland;
- 2** Raise funding in libraries and information services to realistic levels;
- 3** Invest in staff training and development;
- 4** Develop the IT infrastructure that is needed to connect all libraries and information services and users;
- 5** Widen access to include everybody;
- 6** Restructure our organisations to be more user-focussed and market-oriented;
- 7** Develop a research culture in our organisations;
- 8** Establish partnerships.

# 1.2.11 A National Coordinating Body for Libraries & Information Services in Ireland

Libraries and information services in Ireland report to different government departments and to various semi-state and private organisations.

The lack of any one body with a remit for all libraries and information services makes it difficult to formulate and implement national policies. It is also difficult to take a global view of the library and information needs of all Irish citizens. For these reasons the national policy Working Party and Consultative Council agreed that:

1	A body should be established, with adequate resources, to coordinate the implementation of the national policy recommendations and to make new recommendations, as and when required;
2	It should address the library and information service requirements of the Irish population and promote a coordinated approach to meeting these demands. This would make optimum use of libraries and information services;
3	It should, initially, be established on a short-term basis and should discuss the feasibility of a permanent cross-sector coordinating body, and make recommendations in this regard;
4	Relevant committees may be established by this body to advise on future policy and to coordinate policy recommendations in specific areas;
5	The key recommendations of the national policy should be the top priority for this body;
6	All stakeholders should be represented on the National Coordinating Body, especially users;
7	Resourcing for this body should be on a co-funding basis, with all stakeholders, including Government, meeting the costs of the secretariat and the overheads.

## References

[1] Casey, Professor Michael. *Libraries and the Information Society: Towards a National Policy for the Republic of Ireland. A Proposal for Policy Formulation and Implementation, Final report.* Dublin, Euro-Focus on Libraries, 1996.

[2] Ireland. Department of Education. *Report to the Minister for Education on the International Adult Literacy Survey Results for Ireland; Education 2000.* Dublin: The Stationery Office, 1997.