National Report: Ireland

Current Activity

Consensus is growing in Ireland on the benefits of the Information Society objectives that enable a wealth of unique material in Irish cultural institutions to be available on - line. This is evident through various initiatives including the promotion and support for broadband take-up and the funding of digitisation programmes.

The Cultural Heritage Project was completed in March 2003. The major outputs are

- The final report *Our Cultural Heritage: a Strategy for Action for Public Libraries*, which will be launched by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in September 2003. This report recommends that a National Digitisation Strategy for public libraries be established. The strategy will be implemented by a National Digitisation Programme, a network of autonomous digitisation projects on the history and culture of their county/city. There will be with links to a programme portal which will present aspects of the history and culture of Ireland. The project team estimates that the cost of the total investment in a two-year digitisation programme is approximately €3.2 million.

- The website www.askaboutireland.com. The national profile for Ireland is available on this website together with a database of digitisation initiatives and a link to the MINERVA homepage.

The Cultural Heritage Project has clearly demonstrated that a National Digitisation Strategy supporting local digitisation projects and managed centrally will be a success. It will have significant impact on the Information Society objectives and make an important contribution to the cultural sector.

Global Report

The report *Coordinating Digitisation in Europe* was circulated to all managers of national and cultural institutions in Ireland. Senior managers in cultural heritage policy areas in national and local government were presented with copies and were advised of comparative developments within Europe in order to reinforce their support for this initiative. The response to the report has been uniformly positive and supportive of further development.

Foreseen Developments

It is envisaged that a number of developments will accelerate the progress of digitisation of cultural heritage material in Ireland:

- Affordable broadband availability.
- Funding programmes for digitisation.
- Proposed autonomy of the National Library of Ireland and National Museum of Ireland facilitating the increased development of strategies for digitisation programmes.
- Recognition of relevant local content as a driver for information society take-up.

Terms of Reference Endorsement

The Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism has endorsed the Terms of Reference.

Comment and Suggestions

Ireland is delighted to play its part in progressing the NRG agenda during its presidency from January-June 2004. We look forward to working with Greece and Italy to carry forward this agenda and to working with the Netherlands and the UK on future strategies.