

Response to consultation Paper for the Development of a Successor to the Strategy for Science, Technology & Innovation

Having received the document in the past couple of days, it is not possible to give other than a brief response to the consultation paper.

Firstly, it is surprising that the Department of Arts, Heritage & the Gaeltacht were not represented on the Interdepartmental Committee. It would be important for this Department's views to be canvassed and that it be included in any further deliberations. As a consequence the draft has one major flaw. The importance of Ireland's rich cultural heritage – both tangible and intangible and covering all aspects from its material culture to its natural history – and the role of agencies (museums, galleries, libraries, archives, heritage services and educational institutions) in promoting research in this area are overlooked.

The National Museum of Ireland is one such agency and is actively engaged in research with other bodies and institutions both nationally and internationally in a number of fields, including the natural sciences, archaeology, digitisation of cultural assets and conservation. For example, the conservation laboratory of the National Museum of Ireland is the leading authority on wetland conservation methods in the world, the Museum is a key partner in the National Biodiversity Data Centre and is also working with other heritage agencies to develop means of managing, preserving and making accessible Ireland's rich cultural heritage resource.

The importance of culture and heritage as drivers of cultural tourism has long been recognised (*Fáilte Ireland People, Place and Policy – Growing Tourism to 2025*, 2015, pp 22-24). In more recent times, the importance of culture and of museums to the health and wellbeing of society is being recognised.

Collections are becoming increasingly accessible through digitisation and the use of social media and other technical platforms. This democratization of museums will continue as such institutions become more audience focused and they also have the potential to act as neutral spaces to promote diversity and inter-cultural dialogue. Object-based learning is now seen as a key method of engaging audiences of all ages by using collections in imaginative ways.

Museums are also now seen as leaders in creativity and innovation as

increasing dialogue between the heritage sector and the creative arts fosters new thinking in ways to communicate with their varied audiences.

Cultural heritage should thus form an important element of any national strategy on science, technology and innovation. It forms as much a key sector ‘of relevance to the economy and society’ (p. 2) as health, agriculture, marine, energy, environment and communications. Its value was recently recognised by the European Parliament in its *Draft Report towards an integrated approach to cultural heritage for Europe* (2014/2149(INI)).

Some specific recommendations:

Pillar 1: Culture should figure in any exploration of Ireland’s ambition for STI (p. 16).

While the importance and potential of Ireland’s cultural heritage is acknowledged both nationally and internationally, little research has been undertaken as to how best this might be harnessed for the benefit of Irish society and the economy. The Strategy might consider R&D funding into how this asset can enhance public health and wellbeing and also enable an understanding of how best to develop and integrate cultural and heritage tourism initiatives.

Pillar 2: The preservation, management and accessibility of cultural data should be included under Priority C: Digital Platforms, Content and Applications. Ireland has an opportunity to lead in providing an integrated approach to such data and make it accessible to its own citizens and to the world, in order to support the heritage/cultural tourism sector and provide for ‘a better society’ (p. 21).

Pillar 4: Ireland’s participation in Horizon 2020 and other EU Programmes (p. 33) could be enhanced by the inclusion of the National Cultural Institutions as Designated Institutions eligible for EU funding under the HEA.

Pillar 5: Under ‘Study into future investment needs’ there is an urgent need to look at current resourcing and infrastructure in the cultural heritage field and consideration of a research centre devoted to the area of culture.

Pillar 7: In the context of the benefits of museums to public health and wellbeing, the museum sector (severely under-resourced for decades) is an area worthy of consideration in terms of investment and job-creation, particularly as the population ages over the coming decades.

Pillar 8: Museums are knowledge-based institutions which require specialist training and research in order to make their collections more engaging and accessible to as wide an audience range as possible. Research into the advantages and opportunities which research on museum collections might offer in order to realise their full potential for educational, tourism and commercial possibilities should be considered.

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