

**Address by Dr. Jimmy Devins, TD  
Minister for Science, Technology and Innovation  
At the Launch of the Digital Humanities Observatory and DRAPIER, the database  
of Irish digital humanities projects for the higher education sector,  
Academy House, Dawson Street  
Wednesday, October 22 6pm**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**I would like to begin by thanking the Royal Irish Academy for the invitation to launch both the Digital Humanities Observatory and DRAPIER, its innovative database of Irish digital humanities projects for the higher education sector.**

**These initiatives originate from Humanities Serving Irish Society project, which was one of the successful national collaborative projects under Cycle 4 of the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions. They are an excellent illustration of the tremendous contribution digital technology is making to scholarship on the island of Ireland.**

**The Irish have always been rightly proud of their heritage. But it is perhaps fair to say that most Irish people are unaware of the true wealth of knowledge and learning that has been gathered and preserved by generations of scholars.**

**So this initiative which raises public awareness of, and access to, both that historic heritage and the new knowledge and discoveries being made every day by Irish researchers, is to be greatly welcomed.**

**From its foundation in 1785, the Royal Irish Academy has always been at the**

forefront of this important work of conserving the past and promoting scholarly exploration of it.

This fine building houses some priceless fruits of that labour; its library contains, among other rare things, the entire collection of books owned by Thomas Moore.

It also houses some of the country's rarest manuscripts in its 2,000-strong manuscript collection, including the famous *Cathach of Colm Cille* as well as original manuscript volumes of the *Annals of the Four Masters*.

You may have noticed when entering this fine building tonight, its walls are hung with portraits of some of Ireland's most important scholars, men like George Petrie, who has been called the 'founder of Irish archaeology' and Charles O'Connor of Belnagare who understood only too well the importance of conserving for future generations the riches gleaned from disciplines as varied as history, literature, music, archaeology, medicine and science.

These men understood the value of making that material as accessible as possible and the Academy has always made its material available to students, and its reading room welcomes literally thousands of scholars every year.

We live in an age where technology is increasingly shaping the way we access information in all its forms. Emails are replacing letters as the principal method of written communication.

**Authors turn on their laptops in the knowledge that the book they write may well be read by someone using an e-reader; musicians now think in terms of downloads and *ipods* when they compose new songs.**

**As a result, one of the key questions for current and future scholars is how we will ensure that this newly created digital material will be preserved and made fully accessible.**

**In this digital age, it is important that scholars in general, and the higher education sector in particular, explore and exploit fully the potential being offered by technology to broaden access to all that wealth of knowledge gathered and preserved over the years.**

**The Humanities Serving Irish Society initiative, which received funding of €28 million under the last cycle of the PRTLII, is a national collaborative project of eight institutions.**

**Collaboration enables institutions to identify their own niche areas of expertise and to collaborate with each other to strengthen overall national performance in these areas.**

**Each institution contributes something unique based on its own particular strengths, but by collaborating instead of competing with one another, a higher value output is achieved. The Digital Humanities Observatory is the latest venture which demonstrates yet again the determination of our higher education institutions to seek**

**out opportunities to work together.**

**The funding being provided to the Humanities Serving Irish Society initiative makes it the single largest national investment in the area of digital humanities in the world. This investment is already reaping rewards in that Ireland is now providing other countries with a model of best practice in creating a collaborative network of digital humanities centres, experts and projects.**

**The Digital Humanities Observatory (DHO), which is being launched here tonight, will contribute to the Initiative's (HSIS) general priorities of promoting the co-ordination of humanities research in Ireland and helping to provide a more complete picture of the research competencies on the island.**

**The mission of the DHO is to support the creation and use of digital arts and artefacts and to promote the use of digital humanities through knowledge transfer, advising third level institutions and organisations already involved in the creation of such archives, and consulting with those who are about to embark upon the process.**

**While it is true that Ireland has not had an early involvement in the area of digital humanities, it is also true that we can take advantage of the lessons learned in the past to create a generation of scholars, scholarship, and resources which is extremely well positioned to take advantage of the newest advances in technology in order to create new models and modalities of scholarship.**

**In helping to shape this generation of digital scholarship, the DHO will also be**

**facilitating access to a wide variety of new research; research which is valuable in itself when read and studied, but which will accrue even greater value by being integrated with other projects currently being developed in Ireland.**

**For example, a scholar studying nineteenth-century Irish history will have available a plethora of related materials which are being made available via projects in Irish literature, music, and folklore, all discoverable through one central portal.**

**In this way Ireland has the opportunity of developing a national model for digital scholarship in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that will become the envy of other countries.**

**The activities of these partner institutions, many of whom have been demonstrating their projects here tonight, gives you a sense of the extraordinary range of material coming online and becoming more readily available to scholars in Ireland and elsewhere.**

**I do not think it is an over-statement to suggest that, by making these projects available via a shared technical infrastructure and by promoting awareness of digital practice, the work of the DHO will revolutionize the way researchers go about their work in the future.**

**I am sure that Professor Nicholas Canny, President of the Royal Irish Academy and Chairman of the Management Board of the DHO, and Dr. Susan Schreibman, the Director of the DHO, will give us further details about work being carried out by the Observatory.**

**Suffice for me to say that the Government is proud of its role in supporting the development of this exciting new initiative and feels sure that generations of scholars will benefit from the work being done in this cutting-edge field of digital humanities.**

**Thank you**