

HARDIMAN RESEARCH BUILDING EXHIBITIONS GROUP ANNUAL REPORT, 2014/15



1 OCTOBER 2014 – 30 SEPTEMBER 2015

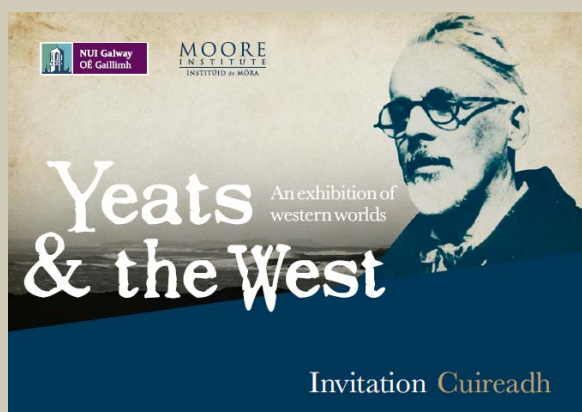


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INTRODUCTION

This is the first annual report of the Hardiman Research Building (HRB) Exhibitions Group and it records an impressive amount of progress over the course of the period from 1 October 2014 to 30 September 2015. The Group represents a range of constituencies, with membership as follows:

Professor Daniel Carey, Director, Moore Institute for Research in the Humanities and Social Studies
Dr John Caulfield, Internal Communications Officer, Marketing and Communications
John Cox, University Librarian, James Hardiman Library (chair)
Ann Cullinane, Library Administrator, James Hardiman Library (secretary)
Dr Conn Holohan, Lecturer, Huston School of Film & Digital Media
Liz McConnell, Director, Public Affairs, President's Office
Ann Mitchell, Head of Staff Development and Service Environment, James Hardiman Library
Dr John Morrissey, Senior Lecturer, Geography

The HRB opened officially on 1 May 2014 and represents an exciting space at the centre of the University campus, promoting engagement with research in the humanities and social sciences as well as the range of archival collections, paper and digital, available in the building. The atrium between the James Hardiman Library and the HRB includes a large, accessible and well located exhibition area, something the University had previously lacked, with the potential to be a major addition to the quality of campus life. The Group saw an opportunity to establish the exhibition space as a key location for engagement of diverse communities on campus and beyond and identified some key outputs at its first meeting: an exhibition policy and procedures document; a calendar of events; infrastructure procurement; decisions regarding applications to exhibit; and monitoring of engagement with approved exhibitions.

Substantial work has been done by the Group, in collaboration with others, across these and other areas, as documented in this report. Three highly engaging exhibitions have staged the year, and more are planned for 2016 (some as part of the University's commemoration of 1916); plans are well advanced to develop the attractiveness and functionality of the space significantly; procedures to guide prospective exhibitors are in place and an excellent platform exists to showcase University scholarship to the full. The Group has also looked outwards for advice and hosting of exhibitions, notably through engagement with the Museum of Country Life, the Irish Woodturners Guild and the Mary Robinson Centre.

In addition to recording the successes to date it is very important to note the range of challenges in delivering a high-quality exhibitions programme. Goodwill, passion and dedication have made this possible to date but it is clear that a longer-term approach to resourcing is needed, both in terms of annual programme funding and staffing. Otherwise it is likely that high standards will not be maintained and that exhibitions will not achieve their full potential, particularly in terms of maximum engagement, external reach and positive contribution to University recruitment and reputation.

A strong start has been made and the Group looks forward to building on this in the coming year.

John Cox, University Librarian, James Hardiman Library (chair, HRB Exhibitions Group)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **New Platform:** The Hardiman Research Building (HRB) provides the University for the first time with a unique, large and well-equipped exhibition space at the heart of the campus.
- **Central Location:** Its location offers particular strengths in terms of proximity to the James Hardiman Library whose visitor numbers approached 1,000,000 in 2014 and to the University's major research centres for the humanities and social sciences, the Moore and Whitaker Institutes.
- **Major Exhibitions:** Three major exhibitions were hosted in 2014/15: *Interpreting Landscape: Tim Robinson and the West of Ireland*; the *Dreaming Vessels* Woodturning Exhibit; and *Yeats & the West*.
- **Engagement:** Each exhibition attracted more than 100 attendees at its launch, along with a strong engagement from the university community, alumni and members of the public, including many international visitors.
- **Visitors:** Exhibitions also engaged a range of on-campus visitors attending conferences, open days, graduation ceremonies and other events, promoting the University regionally, nationally and internationally.
- **Media Interest:** The exhibitions programme generated significant media interest, including press, radio and online coverage.
- **HRB Exhibitions Group Work:** The key objective of the HRB Exhibitions Group was to maximise the potential of the space through a stimulating exhibitions programme, planned development of the infrastructure and establishment of facilitative policies and procedures.
- **Creative Partnership:** A particular feature enabling the delivery of a high-quality, engaging programme was the highly creative partnership of academic, archives/special collections and design personnel.
- **Ongoing Investment:** Experience to date has shown that achieving and sustaining a continued high standard as well as maximising reach and engagement will require ongoing investment of resources.
- **Future Plans:** Plans for 2015/16 include further development of space and infrastructure, exhibitions to mark the 1916 centenary, encouragement of the fullest possible use of the space to showcase university scholarship and the implementation of a visitor tracking system.
- **Vision and Ambition:** An ambitious vision should guide future development, and there is potential for the HRB exhibitions space to emulate the success of similar attractions at other universities such as the TCD Science Gallery.

SHOWCASING SCHOLARSHIP: TOWARDS A COMMUNITY OF PUBLIC INTELLECTUALISM

The HRB exhibition space offers a centrally located forum in which to showcase the range of scholarly excellence from across the University. In a university environment today in which demonstrating academic values and public intellectual utility is increasingly vital, the HRB Exhibitions Group endeavours to play a leading role in supporting individual academics and schools in disseminating and celebrating the broadest range of intellectual productions in the public realm.

To this end, we especially encourage Heads of Schools and College and School Research Committees to see the opportunities for showcasing scholarship that not only captures the research excellence of NUI Galway but also embraces the challenge of demonstrating to a more broadly constituted public the very *raison d'être* of the contemporary university. All prospective exhibitors are encouraged to submit a completed *Hardiman Research Building Exhibition Proposal Form*, where the criteria of assessment signal the diversity of public intellectual enterprise that we wish to support, including educational merit and community value. All exhibitions will be publicised and networked across every appropriate media.



The HRB exhibition space engages with our various community stakeholders – here in Galway, nationally and internationally. In addition, the HRB Exhibitions Group will encourage exhibitors to consider all potential publication outlets for their respective exhibits, thereby maximising the intellectual and community engagement. In addition to members of the University, Schools, societies and visiting groups, and individuals from across the local community and beyond will be introduced to new research developed at NUIG, enabling us to carry out the core university mission of civic engagement.

Perhaps the most important community engagement function of the HRB exhibition space, however, is to be a space of genuine inclusiveness, of a vibrant community of scholars committed to the very foundational urges of public universities: to promote independence of intellectual thought, to show why academic critique and knowledge are important, and to make that richness of knowledge count. This signifying and showcasing of the values, functions and public utility of university scholarship is the central mission and ambition of the HRB Exhibitions Group.

Dr John Morrissey, Senior Lecturer, Geography

Interpreting Landscape: Tim Robinson and the West of Ireland

Running from the 30th of September 2014 to the 31st of January 2015, *Interpreting Landscape: Tim Robinson and the west of Ireland / Rianú Talún: Tim Robinson agus iarthar na hÉireann*, featured photographs and extracts from the Tim Robinson archive held at NUI Galway. A screening of 'Unfolding the landscape,' a filmed interview with Vincent Woods and Tim Robinson commissioned by NUI Galway also formed part of the exhibition. The exhibition launch, on Tuesday September 30 2014 by Vincent Woods, was marked by a one-day symposium at the Moore Institute entitled 'Interpreting Landscape,' and also saw the launch of *Connemara and Elsewhere*, a collection of written and photographic essays by Robinson and others. The exhibition attracted a significant level of national interest, including feature pieces in *The Irish Times* and two dedicated episodes of the *Arts Show* on RTE Radio 1.

Dreaming Vessels Woodturning Exhibit

Coordinated with the Galway Chapter of the Irish Woodturners Guild, the *Dreaming Vessels* woodturning exhibit ran from February 9th until May 29th 2015 and featured a half-scale Claddagh Hooker, with its sails covered in a variety of turned bowls and platters.



On the reverse of the sails the Guild presented a selection of various wood turning pieces, with the sails containing a total of 170 turned pieces alongside a further 30 individual pieces on display. Described by its creators as 'an expression of individual creativity rather than a nostalgic longing for a preindustrial age,' this exhibition set out to show that preconceived limits of what woodturning can express could be pushed to a scale not previously imagined. The film *Croí an Ćladaig*, which captures the building of the iconic Galway Hooker, screened alongside the exhibit. The exhibition schedule included two well-attended talks by Ambrose O'Halloran, Chairman of the Galway Chapter Irish Woodturners Guild, in which he presented the historical background to contemporary woodturning.

Yeats & the West

The exhibition *Yeats & the West* celebrates Yeats's connection with this part of the country on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of his birth. The next section provides a full account of this exhibition, including the different stages from planning through launch to engagement.

Dr Conn Holohan, Lecturer, Huston School of Film & Digital Media

MAKING IT HAPPEN: THE YEATS & THE WEST EXHIBITION

The success of the *Yeats & the West* exhibition (on display from June–December 2015) depended on a substantial range of academic, creative, and archival inputs. The following review offers an insight into the challenges involved in making an exhibition work and offers some pointers for the future.

The exhibition was curated by Dr Adrian Paterson (English) and co-curated by Barry Houlihan (James Hardiman Library), with design by Mel Durkan (Proviz Ltd.). A committee was formed to develop the exhibition, consisting of Adrian and Barry together with Prof. Adrian Frazier, and Niall McSweeney, Marie Boran and Aisling Keane (all Library), chaired by Prof. Daniel Carey (Director of the Moore Institute). Daniel Carey project managed the exhibition, particularly during Adrian Paterson's absence in semester 2, 2015, while he was on a faculty exchange with Clemson University. At least 18 dedicated meetings were held as part of this process. The first informal meetings took place in September 2014 and the first formal meeting of the Yeats Exhibition group in March 2015.



A budget of €10k for the exhibition was secured by Liz McConnell from the President's Office, based on the costs associated with the Tim Robinson Exhibition. In terms of curation, *Yeats & the West* had a number of features that made it more complex than the Robinson exhibition: materials for use on panels came not only from the archives (Shields Collection, Lady Gregory/Colin Smythe, Lyric Theatre, Abbey archive, Thomas Kilroy collection, etc.), but also from Loughrea Cathedral, the National Library of Ireland, the photographer Nicolas Fève, Deirdre Holmes, and the estate of Fergus Bourke. Original Jack B. Yeats watercolours from his notebooks, owned by the University, were digitized for the exhibition panels and then remounted for display in Special Collections beside two original oil paintings on loan, by Jack B. Yeats and Gerard Dillon. Fionnuala Gallagher, Arts Officer, served as the Art Consultant. Extensive use was made of display cabinets to exhibit original material from the Library collection. Cuala Press broadsides were digitized and also displayed as posters in the hallway leading to Special Collections. A video of the West of Ireland and Yeats-related sites (with some audio) was commissioned for the LCD screen and produced/filmed by John Conway (Búlabosca Films). Three touchscreens, featuring material from the Abbey archive, the Lyric Theatre and the Cuala Press broadsides, were prepared by Aisling Keane.

The Exhibition opened near the end of June and was formally launched on 13 July by the poet

Moya Cannon, the President, Dr James Browne, and Senator Susan O’Keeffe, Chair of Yeats2015. It will run until the end of December 2015.



Highlights and Future Potential

- The Galway Tourist Office displayed a *Yeats & the West* poster in one of its windows from 19 October to 16 November. Throughout the period of the exhibition the Tourist office accepted flyers for the exhibition and reported substantial uptake.
- 1500 flyers were distributed to national schools by the Schools Liaison Office as part of its major mailshot in September 2015.
- Tuskegee University in Alabama (one of the leading historic black universities, led by Booker T. Washington) features in the panel concerning the American tours of the Abbey company. Daniel Carey contacted Tuskegee to draw attention to this connection and Tuskegee University has commissioned a two-panel display in their library with potential for a permanent panel in the Tuskegee Legacy Museum.
- During Culture Night (18 September), Adrian Paterson and Barry Houlihan led a series of tours of the exhibition.
- University Autumn Open Days: Adrian Paterson led tours and discussions for students, visitors and family members on Friday 2 October and Saturday 3 October. The opportunity could have been advertised more widely. Judging from the comments book and responses this is an effective recruiting tool. 17 people signed the visitors’ book on the 2nd and 3rd, with addresses recorded from counties Cavan, Clare, Cork, Galway, Kildare, Offaly, Roscommon, Sligo, Tipperary, and elsewhere.
- Bridge Mills Language School regularly brought groups of students to the exhibition during the summer. Villanova University Summer School brought students to it. The University of Kentucky Library and Information School also visited.
- The visitors’ book has reflected a wide audience for the Exhibition with individuals signing with a range of addresses in Ireland, and internationally from Austria, Macedonia, Denmark, Munich, Brussels, Helsinki, New York, Portland, Maine, Krakow, Naples, San José, the Czech Republic and Australia.

- Arts in Action has commissioned a related play focusing on Mary O'Malley, founder of the Lyric Theatre, for performance on 19 November 2015.
- On 27 November 2015 a symposium will be held on '*Western Worlds: Yeats and the West*' and further individual sessions with visiting speakers will be convened.
- Adrian Paterson set up a dedicated website to publicize the exhibition (yeatsandthewest.org) featuring visual material from the exhibition, regular updates, and a series of blog entries.
- A presentation on the exhibition was given by Adrian Paterson at the inaugural International Yeats Society Conference in Limerick, October 2015.
- The exhibition attracted substantial publicity. The curators conducted two live interviews on Galway Bay FM in July 2015; the exhibition was featured on the national Yeats2015 website; a piece on Yeats was published in the *Irish Independent* 10 June 2015; *SIN* newspaper published a review on 29 September 2015.
- The exhibition has had a substantial impact on teaching:
 - i. For the English module EN100, first-year students were offered tours of the Yeats exhibit. 50 students signed up and were led by Adrian Paterson, and another 50 visited the exhibition independently as part of their field work. The tour itself featured a specially designed assignment while other students will write about it as part of their field work assessment.
 - ii. 2BA English ENG214 (Irish Literature): (up to 300 students) exhibition tour.
 - iii. 3BA English EN387 Twentieth Century Literature (up to 300 students) exhibition tour.
 - iv. Tours have been given for students on the MA in Culture & Colonialism; MA Literature & Publishing, MA in Writing, MA in English, and MA class in textual histories/20th century literature (35+ students in total).
 - v. Tours will be available as part of the postgraduate open day on 11 November 2015.
- Thoor Ballylee (Yeats's Tower) has reopened to the public and is interested in future in using the panels as part of its exhibit, potentially on a permanent basis. In the early stages of their relaunch they have had visitor numbers of 1,000 per month; based on this figure a substantial audience will be reached by having the exhibition on display there.

Issues and Opportunities

- On-campus advertising of the exhibition has been greatly facilitated by the notice in the corner window of the Archives and Special Collections Reading Room and by two banner-length notices in the plaza in front of the Library/HRB.
- A number of comments in the visitors' book indicate that the exhibition is 'great but hard to find'. Signage at the entry points to the campus, especially on University Road, is essential to maximize the potential for public access and impact.
- The Schools Liaison office has indicated the potential for school visits to Sligo and Gort. The latter is regarded as a battleground area for recruitment to NUIG.

- The Orientation Day for new students is an occasion when families visit the campus and are often looking for activities of wider interest. An exhibition would be a valuable addition to advertise and make available.
- The *Yeats & the West* exhibition might be remounted in some fashion for future open days to provide an additional amenity for students and families on campus.
- It is clear that the budget underestimated the cost associated with the exhibition. We would benefit from having a system for evaluating ad hoc additional costs when they arise (e.g. posters and flyers for the school mail shot). The cost overrun was borne by the Moore Institute and the Library.
- The scale of work associated with project managing the exhibition and the need fully to realize the potential in terms of impact within the University, in the community, the region, nationally and beyond, underlines the importance of having a dedicated role allocated to exhibitions.
- We plan to prepare a publication based on the exhibition which will draw on the panels and related academic discussion.
- We plan to hold an event in Roundstone on the Yeats celebration, using material from the exhibition and linking with Tim Robinson's Folding Landscapes initiative.

Professor Daniel Carey, Director, Moore Institute for Research in the Humanities and Social Studies

INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

The benefits of the Hardiman Building foyer space for hosting high profile exhibitions are many. It is a visible and accessible space located right at the heart of the campus and within view of the entrance to the Library, which attracts almost one million visits each year. It is also housed within one of the University's most active research environments, and with easy access to the Archives and Special Collections Reading Room, as well as two modern seminar rooms ideal for supplementary events. For these reasons it has served the University's exhibition needs well over the past year.

Drawbacks of the Current Space

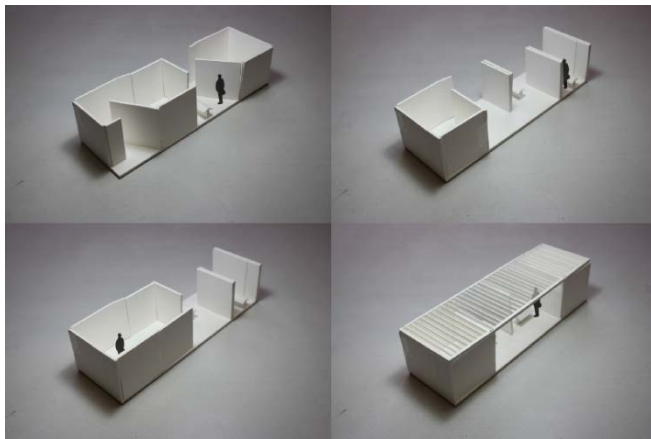
However, since the launch of the first exhibition of archive material from the Abbey Theatre, it has become obvious that the space – as well as the human interaction with the space – has several drawbacks, which can be summed up as follows:

- **Identity:** The exhibition space lacks a visual or spatial identity, a fact that is exacerbated by its porous boundaries.
- **Definition:** The exhibition space is poorly defined, and as a result it is used casually by students as a meeting – and eating – space.
- **Passing Traffic:** The space is used as a passageway between the Hardiman Building entrance and the workspace upstairs in the Hardiman Research Building.

- **Lighting:** The front half of the exhibition space lacks any structure onto which a well-designed lighting rig could be attached.
- **Flexibility:** The exhibition space lacks flexibility – the infrastructure is fixed to the ground and can be too large for small exhibitions and too restrictive for large ones.

John McLaughlin Architects

The HRB Exhibitions Group felt that these drawbacks could be rectified through improved infrastructure and design. To this end, we employed the services of RIAI-registered architect, John McLaughlin, and his team. John's firm has attracted positive attention in recent years for their exhibition structures, in particular for the Irish pavilion they designed for the Venice Architecture Biennale 2014, as well as the Irish Design Showcase Exhibition 2015 that has been used in venues across Europe. In recognition of the quality of these projects and others, John McLaughlin Architects won the RIAI Best Emerging Practice Award 2015.



The HRB Exhibitions Group has been working with John and his associate, Fiona Harte, on designing a new exhibition structure that addresses the drawbacks of the space. The work has been very collaborative and conscientious – towards the requirements of the University and the architecture of the new Hardiman Research Building and the existing James Hardiman Library building, which is protected. We are convinced that the fruits of this collaboration, as shown in the plans below, will have a dramatic and positive impact on the exhibition space – in terms of its identity, its flexibility and its attractiveness to both visitors and potential exhibitors.

Proposed Pavilion

The proposed structure is a wooden pavilion with hinged wall panels and a slatted roof, onto which a lighting rig can be attached. The structure (pictured here) can be easily resized and reshaped making use of the hinged wall panels, to offer a flexible exhibition space. John and Fiona demonstrated many different shape options, from an open-plan rectangle similar to the current exhibition space, to a space broken into smaller shapes that bring the visitor on a journey. There is also an option to create up to two rooms that can be secured at night, therefore opening up the possibility of displaying more valuable objects.



We believe that the proposed pavilion will be a striking addition to the Hardiman Building foyer and will become a destination in itself. It will add greatly to the identity of the exhibition space, and it is hoped that in time it will have its own title and sponsor. Significantly, the structure will be set back in a position adjacent to the James Hardiman Building, and will free up the passageway from the Hardiman Building entrance to the stairway, lift and emergency fire doors. This will help alleviate the current problem of passing traffic and loiterers, and it will add greatly to the visitor experience. It is planned to establish the new pavilion in early 2016, pending the outcome of current fire certificate investigations.

Dr John Caulfield, Internal Communications Officer, Marketing and Communications

POLICY AND PROCEDURES

As interest in exhibiting at the Hardiman Research Building indicated the desirability of having a written policy clarifying the aims of the space, along with guidelines regarding the type of exhibitions possible and the supports that exhibitors can expect. To this end a policy document entitled *Exhibiting at the National University of Ireland Galway Hardiman Research Building* was drafted which outlines the purpose of the space, the application process and associated selection criteria, along with guidelines in relation to presentation standards, insurance arrangements, and related publicity. A supporting document, the *Hardiman Research Building Exhibition Proposal Form*, was also formulated with a view to capturing in some detail the themes and concepts informing any proposed exhibition, along with an outline of the kind of audience experience intended, and any added value attaching to an exhibition in terms of related events, sponsorship or commercial opportunities.

In order to ensure a diverse schedule of exhibitions and related events that engage various University communities, and also strengthen external community partnerships, it was determined that both documents should be made available to as wide an audience as possible, and they have therefore been loaded onto the Library and Moore Institute's websites.

Ann Mitchell, Head of Staff Development and Service Environment, James Hardiman Library

REALISING POTENTIAL

Exhibitions ignite curiosity and stimulate enquiry. They use original materials, digital media and expert interpretative commentary to promote interaction and to create a memorable experience which shapes perceptions of the University. Showcasing of institutional treasures such as our impressive archives and special collections creates a very positive image of the University, as evidenced by recent exhibitions about the Abbey Theatre, W. B. Yeats and the cartographer Tim Robinson. Exhibitions enable the University to highlight its research strengths and can provide an important opportunity to attract graduate students in key areas of academic strength, for example drama and theatre (Abbey), landscape studies (Robinson) and literature (Yeats). In addition to foregrounding scholarship at NUI Galway there are opportunities to develop partnerships with cultural institutions, in our region and internationally, generating the potential for reciprocal hosting of exhibitions or collaboration on other events.

A Prime Location

Situated beside the entrance to the James Hardiman Library, the exhibition space has a captive University audience. There were 952,664 visits to the Library in 2014. The exhibition area is easily accessible by anyone visiting the campus, including prospective students and staff as well as current or prospective donors and the general public. Viewers of our exhibitions to date include external visitors, tourists, conference delegates and Open Day attendees. The *Yeats & the West* exhibition has attracted visitors from a range of countries. Recent investment is defining the exhibition area for maximum flexibility and will deliver options for attractive display of traditional and digital formats. A large video wall beside the space itself promotes and supplements the content of its exhibitions. The HRB Exhibitions Group has steered the development of the space to date and established policies, standards and infrastructure to facilitate future exhibitors.



Public Engagement

The foundations are in place for a significant step forward. Public engagement is a recurring theme in the University's strategic plan, 2015-2020. Exhibitions are a major visitor attraction with potential to promote

the NUI Galway brand in the same way as the Science Gallery at TCD or the Glucksman Gallery at UCC, with positive impact on reputation and recruitment.

Investment in the Exhibition resource at NUI Galway will also offer new opportunities for public engagement with key strategic audiences, both on campus and in regional locations for:

- Prospective students at undergraduate and graduate levels. The Exhibitions resources provide a rich platform to support University activity around student recruitment, transition year programmes, as well as graduate (P/G T and doctoral) study
- Alumni and supporters: touring exhibitions supported by academic talks, provide a series of ready-made events for national and international alumni, potentially supporting the efforts of Galway University Foundation and Alumni Relations activity
- International opportunities, in identified strategic catchment areas, serving international student recruitment agenda and international reputation

A consistently high standard of exhibition and a systematic approach to programming and promotion are vital to realising the same benefits here. Each requires resourcing on an ongoing basis and experience to date indicates that an ad hoc approach will fall short in both respects.



Long-term Success

There is a need for ongoing investment in high quality exhibitions and their programming. The University has already resourced the development of a strong physical infrastructure and designated an Exhibitions Group to manage that process and to establish a framework for initial exhibitions and future use of the space. Our experience so far tells us that long-term success requires resourcing:

- An annual budget to fund typically two major exhibitions annually and to support smaller exhibitions which lack sufficient resources to meet the standard required;
- A role of Exhibitions Manager to develop a distinctive and high-impact programme, manage individual exhibitions, work with sponsors, build relationships and maximise audience engagement, outreach and external connectivity, including touring opportunities for our exhibitions. The cost of an initial contract appointment for three years is estimated at €60K annually.

- A significant public engagement opportunity exists for NUI Galway to leverage HRB Exhibition resources to support alumni activity; student recruitment and schools liaison; and general public awareness by offering the exhibitions to cultural and arts venues in Ireland and beyond.

A full exploitation of the HRB exhibition space has the potential to realise significant benefits for the University and opportunities should be sought to fund the resources needed.

Liz McConnell, Director, Public Affairs, President's Office
