

**BARRIERS
TO PARTICIPATION
IN CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE
FINAL REPORT**

INDEPENDENT RESEARCH SOLUTIONS

39 Loughanhill Industrial Estate

Coleraine

BT52 2NR

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CONTENTS

1. Introduction and background	1
2. Methodology	7
Structure and distribution of focus groups	9
3. Analysis of data	12
3.1 Structure of analysis	12
3.2 What the terms culture arts and leisure means to people	14
3.3 Experiences of accessing services	17
Differences in levels of accessibility	18
Time considerations	19
Cost implications	20
Geographical considerations	22
Issues related to levels of awareness of services	25
Electronic delivery of services	27
Direct contact with service providers/consultation	28
Perceptions of eligibility of services	31
Co-operation between departments/agencies	32
Issues related to funding applications	33
3.4 Specific issues affecting sub-groups	35
People with disabilities	35
People from the LGBT community	39
People from the elderly community	42
People with dependents	43
People from the rural community	44
People from the nationalist community	45
People from the unionist community	45
3.5 Issues related to specific services	46
Issues specific to sports provision	46
Issues specific to arts provision	50
Issues specific to museums provision	51
Issues specific to library provision	54
Issues specific to PRONI provision	55
Issues specific to Ordnance Survey	57
Issues specific to the Northern Ireland Events Company	57
Issues specific to inland waterways and inland fisheries	57
Issues specific to DCAL language policy	58
Issues specific to transport	58
Issues specific to Lottery provision	59
3.6 Examples of good practice	60
3.7 Increasing interest in culture, arts and leisure	62

4. Recommendations	63	
Tables		
Table 1: Focus group composition and location	9	
Table 2: Key informants	10	
Table 3: Community Subgroups		11
Table 4: Respondents' views on the activities under culture, arts and leisure	17	

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Running through much of Government social policy, and expressed in a range of Departmental programmes and initiatives, is the theme of unimpeded access to programmes and services, for all those who are in need of or entitled to such access. Unimpeded access cannot, however, be taken for granted, since there can be many reasons - not all of them immediately obvious - why a person is unable to take advantage of government programmes, including programmes related to culture, arts and leisure. Possible barriers to access include:

- ignorance about the existence of programmes and services;
- an inability to make contact with providers, or other appropriate personnel;
- the information about access arrangements being presented in inappropriate formats; the location of facilities is unsuited to the needs of individuals or groups;
- the costs involved inhibit access.

1.2 As a result of such potential barriers participation in culture, arts and leisure activities may be particularly difficult for specific groups of people. These may include those who are socially disadvantaged and for whom the cost or location may be a problem; those whose first language is not English and who may therefore have difficulty in finding out about, and/or participating in culture arts and leisure activities; or those who, through disability, find it difficult to access activities that are designed primarily with able-bodied people in mind.

1.3 In pursuit of commitments in its corporate strategy, and government's wider commitments to equality, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure indicated that it 'wishes to commission an investigation into barriers to participation in culture, arts and leisure.' The Department has suggested that meeting this overall aim will involve an investigation:

'To provide an in-depth assessment of the factors which inhibit and prevent participation in culture, arts and leisure. The intention is not to determine what services should be provided or to whom, nor to evaluate existing services but to identify general and specific barriers to accessing and participating in culture arts and leisure.'

1.4 Before considering the nature of the research which was carried out to meet these requirements a brief overview of relevant government policy is necessary, since this was a significant factor shaping the structure of the investigation. A number of recent policy developments are significant in this context. At the level of broad government policy, these include the *Good Friday Agreement*, *New TSN (Targeting Social Need)*, *PSI (Promoting Social Inclusion)* and *Section 75* of the Northern Ireland Act. (1998). At departmental level, DCAL's own *Corporate Strategy* sets a very clear policy context and rationale for the delivery of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in a manner which promotes equality of opportunity to participate and benefit from sport, arts, heritage, culture and leisure.

1.5 Much of recent policy development is founded upon commitments in the Good Friday Agreement, signed on 10 April 1998. The Agreement recognises 'the right to equal opportunity in all social and economic activity, regardless of class, creed, disability, gender or ethnicity'. Barriers to participation in any aspect of social or economic life, including barriers to participation in Culture, Arts and Leisure, run counter to these rights. The Agreement also placed 'a statutory obligation on public authorities in Northern Ireland to carry out all their functions with due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity in relation to religion and political opinion; gender; race; disability; age; marital status; dependants; and sexual orientation',

1.6 The Agreement also made explicit reference to the development of 'a new more focused Targeting Social Need initiative'. The New TSN initiative was launched in July 1998 following the publication of the White Paper *Partnership for Equality*. New TSN has a particular focus on unemployment and employability, but is also intended to address inequalities in other areas of policy. Whilst health, education and housing receive prominence in *Partnership for Equality*, inequalities in any area of government provision are also considered relevant. Against this background the provision of access to sport, arts and culture facilities and events is important not only in itself but also through its potential to deliver wider benefits, for example improved health and social well being.

1.7 In June 1999, the Government announced its initiative '**Promoting Social Inclusion**' (*PSI*), which parallels developments in Great Britain relating to social exclusion. *PSI* is pertinent to Culture, Arts and Leisure in a number of ways. Exclusion from sports, the arts or other aspects of culture or heritage is, in itself, counter to the principles of social inclusion; but, in addition, providing wider access to culture, arts and leisure will, as the DCAL Corporate Strategy points out, encourage 'cultural tolerance and understanding coupled with a sense of social responsibility and inclusion'. In this context, barriers to the access of culture, arts and leisure are barriers to full participation in the richness of our cultural heritage and to achieving understanding and empathy with all aspects of our diversity and history.

1.8 In **Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act**, government sets out more clearly than ever before, its commitment to equality for all the people of Northern Ireland. Section 75 brings together commitments to the equality rights of a wide range of groups. These include people who are long term unemployed, people with disabilities, people from minority ethnic groups, people from the gay, lesbian and transgendered community, people of differing marital status, people with and without dependants, people in different age groups, people of different gender and people of different religious belief and political persuasion. Clearly, any examination of barriers to Culture, Arts and Leisure will have to take account of the specific barriers that may operate to deny or discourage access by people belonging to any of these groups.

1.9 In addition identifying barriers to participation in culture, arts and leisure activities is an element in DCAL's contribution to the achievement Government's proposals for **delivering services electronically**. In this respect, access to culture, arts and leisure is centrally relevant, not least because of the rapid expansion of the use of new forms of media in both the production and consumption of culture, arts and leisure.

1.10 Turning to DCAL itself, the **DCAL Corporate Strategy** makes very clear linkages between the policies outlined above and the delivery of the services within its own remit. Indeed, Goal One of the Strategy is 'to increase participation in culture, arts and leisure through enhancing access to, and the quality of, facilities and services'. In this context, identifying barriers to participation will be vital if DCAL is

to be in a position to ensure that impediments to people using their leisure time in pursuits related to culture, arts and leisure are reduced or where possible removed entirely.

1.11 The Corporate Strategy goes on to make a number of further references to barriers. For example ‘helping to remove barriers to participation’ is one of the objectives set out under Goal One (p9), which also stresses ‘our role in overcoming the barriers to equality of opportunity ... ’ (p10). Particularly significant from the perspective of this study is the commitment to ‘identify existing barriers, including pricing, to participation in culture arts and leisure ...’ which appears under Key Tasks (p11).

1.12 Other relevant elements in the Corporate Strategy also focus on the importance of identifying barriers. For example, promoting understanding and respect for cultural diversity (Strategic Objective under Goal Two) will be easier to achieve, if exposure to the ‘other’ culture can be encouraged and barriers to such exposure identified and countered. Also, if DCAL is to ‘further develop and enhance the range of cultural, arts and leisure facilities and activities available in Northern Ireland’ (Strategic Objective under Goal Three) it is seen as vital to understand and remove barriers and impediments that might stand in the way of people taking advantage of such an enhanced range of opportunities. Finally, identifying barriers to information and services is essential in order to achieve one of the Strategic Objectives under Goal Four – ‘to improve access to and availability of information and services’.

1.13 DCAL is forwarding many of these issues through the Cultural Forum which will provide a context in which a wide range of providers and consumers can exchange views and consider policy initiatives. In relation to the issues central to this study the proposed subgroup on Universal Accessibility is likely to be particularly relevant since it will be concerned with all aspects of accessibility and the needs of physically, socially, economically and culturally disadvantaged groups.

1.14 Such policy documents highlight the importance of identifying barriers to participation in culture, arts and leisure. Two further points are, however, worth making, as they provide justification for researching access to culture, arts and leisure

by means of an investigation that listens to the people who are potential participants. The first point may seem obvious, but is often overlooked: things can go wrong in practice, even when they seem appropriate at the design stage of a process. However well intentioned a sports, arts, heritage or leisure programme might be, it is always possible that the programme will not get through to the right people at the right time. Reasons for this can be both structural and personal, and might include: information not getting through to the people for whom it is intended; particular problems concerning the location of facilities; transport difficulties; language difficulties. The second point relates to perceptions. It is rarely possible to predict accurately the barriers people will actually encounter, since only they know, from their actual experiences, how difficult it can be to access and make use of programmes and facilities. More subjective issues, such as the perceptions that people have of specific elements within arts, sports, heritage or leisure, or the stigma that might attach to them if they were to avail of or participate in certain aspects of them, make it vitally important to understand how people perceive and understand culture, arts and leisure.

1.15 This study, therefore focuses on the barriers to participation which may affect DCAL's ability to achieve the objectives set out in its corporate strategy. This involved identifying:-

- Barriers to participation which may impede efforts to 'enhance access to, and the quality of, facilities and services'.
- Barriers to participation that relate to 'equality of opportunity, be they physical, geographical, monetary or social'.
- Barriers to participation related to 'increasing access to disabled and socially disadvantaged people'.
- Barriers to participation specifically related to 'pricing'.
- Barriers to participation that would limit the effectiveness of efforts to promote 'wider geographical and social use'.
- Barriers to participation that should be taken into account in 'devising action plans to attract a wider range of geographical and social users'.
- Barriers to participation relevant to work in 'promoting understanding and respect for cultural diversity'.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 A combination of focus groups and key informant interviews provided the main data collection techniques used to meet the requirements outlined in the previous section. Focus groups provided a basis for identifying and establishing the views, experiences and suggestions of a range of individuals and groups. They are especially apposite in this type of study since they diminish the pressure, sense of isolation, and perceived vulnerability of individualised data gathering, and allow ideas to be generated and expressed through reaction and response to other views. The focus group data was supplemented and informed by information obtained from individual interviews with representatives of groups involved in developing and delivering culture arts and leisure facilities and programmes.

2.2 In consultation with DCAL and the steering group a series of 35 focus groups were set up and facilitated. These were designed to provide a bank of data which would give a geographical spread across Northern Ireland, cover the general population (with six focus groups), and allow analysis in relation to social disadvantage, PSI groups and those listed in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act. In efforts were made to ensure that there was a balance of men and women, people of different ages, people of varied marital status and a range of religious backgrounds.

2.3 Focus group participants were selected in a number of ways. For many of the target groups, it was appropriate to work through a relevant organisation or representative. These were able to provide contacts in both urban and rural areas, which made it possible to set up focus groups made up of, for example, people from ethnic minority backgrounds, disabled people, and gay, lesbian and transgendered people. In some cases organisations felt that it was inappropriate for them to identify people directly (for example, long-term unemployed) because of issues related to data protection legislation. In such cases approaches were made through alternative organisations which had a less direct involvement with the relevant groups of individuals, or people were approached directly by means of personal contacts established for example through community groups and networking. In most cases initial contact was made by telephone, when an explanation of the project was given, including information about the researchers and the client.

2.4 Venues were arranged in a number of ways. In some cases the premises of the organisation which had helped to set up the group were used. This was particularly helpful, for example in facilitating focus groups comprising disabled participants since such venues are designed to facilitate access. In other cases a venue which was considered neutral was used whilst a central geographical location was the key factor in other cases. Where appropriate an interpretation or sign language service was provided. Overall, particular attention was paid to ensuring that participation in focus groups was not affected by access barriers.¹ Travelling expenses for participants were covered by a payment of up to £10.

2.5 Each focus group began with a few minutes of general conversation in which the facilitator introduced him or herself and provided a brief explanation of the nature and purpose of the study, the main goal being to set participants at ease. Issues covered in all focus groups included:

- Participants definitions of and understandings of the scope of the terms culture arts and leisure.
- The experiences of groups members in their contact with culture arts and leisure events and organisations e.g. sources of information, experiences of participation, any difficulties in connection with participation.
- Possible solutions to any barriers they have identified to participation, and the difficulties, if any, in implementing such solutions.
- Views on policy in relation to ensuring/improving equality of access to facilities.

2.6 *Structure and distribution of focus groups*

The focus groups are listed below. The numbers in column 1 will be used in the text, where appropriate to identify the comments from specific groups.

Table 1: Focus group composition and location

Focus Group Number	Composition of Focus Group	Urban location	Rural location
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¹ IRS has recently completed a study of ‘Barriers to Access to Essential Services’ for the OFMDFM, 2001.

1	General population	X	
2	General population	X	
3	General population	X	
4	General population		X
5	General population		X
6	General population		X
7	Long-term unemployed	X	
8	Long-term unemployed		X
9	Disabled	X	
10	Disabled		X
11	Minority ethnic	X	
12	Minority ethnic		X
13	Teenage parents	X	
14	Teenage parents		X
15	Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered	X	
16	People with dependants	X	
17	People with dependants		X
18	People without dependants	X	
19	People without dependants		X
20	Married	X	
21	Married		X
22	Single	X	
23	Single		X
24	Older people	X	
25	Older people		X
26	Catholic disadvantaged area	X	
27	Protestant disadvantaged area	X	
28	Mixed disadvantaged area	X	
29	Catholic disadvantaged area		X
30	Protestant disadvantaged area		X
31	Mixed disadvantaged area		X
32	Nationalist	X	
33	Nationalist		X
34	Unionist	X	
35	Unionist		X

2.7 The selection of key informants was also the result of consultation with DCAL and the steering group. As result the following interviews were carried out with individuals representing the following groups and organisations: -

Table 2: Key informants

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure
Arts Council of Northern Ireland
Sports Council for Northern Ireland
Public Records Office for Northern Ireland
Ordnance Survey for Northern Ireland
Northern Ireland Museums Council
Museums and Galleries Northern Ireland
Chief Librarians of the ELBs
District Council Leisure Officers
District Council Sports Development Officers
District Council Arts Officers

The key informant interviews gathered information from organisations with experience in delivering aspects of culture, arts and leisure. This data, was used to triangulate and inform that coming from the focus groups. The general areas for discussion in the interviews replicated those used in the focus groups. The key informant interviews also provided insights into existing models of good practice in relation to access and inclusion.

2.8 The raw data from the focus groups and the face-to-face interviews was in the form of transcripts and moderators' notes. This was then analysed using content analysis. In the first instance, findings were analysed by focus group type as given in the following table. However, the final analysis used a division based on the various subgroups within the community such as people with disabilities, those from a rural community, or the elderly.

Table 3 Community Subgroups

General selection of the population
People who are long term unemployed
People with disabilities
People from minority ethnic groups
Teenage parents
People from the gay, lesbian and transgendered community

People with dependants
People without dependants
Married people
Single people
Older people (60+)
People in disadvantaged areas
Political affiliation

2.9 An interim draft report was produced after the first 15 focus groups had been completed and this was discussed with DCAL and circulated to members of the steering group. Their comments and suggestions were useful in refining the subsequent stages of data collection and analysis.

3. ANALYSIS OF DATA

3.1 Structure of the Analysis

3.1.1 In order to provide a structure within which to report the large volume of data obtained from the focus groups and the key informant interviews an initial analysis of the whole data set was carried out. This suggested that the material could be examined from three main perspectives – general experiences in accessing culture, art and leisure provision, the specific experiences of groups with particular needs and issues relating to the various categories of provision. Clearly there is considerable overlap between the issues likely to be included in each of these three major categories and this raises problems in reporting, for example it may involve repetition of some points. A further complication is the considerable contrast in the perspectives of the focus group members and the ‘key informant’ interviewees on some of the issues considered. One way of approaching this would have been to treat the responses of the two groups of respondents separately. However, it was eventually decided that working in terms of three major divisions in the analysis of the data and incorporating the views of both focus group members and interviewees in the various sections would be the most useful approach. Structuring the material in this way does necessitate some re-visiting of issues under different headings, but it also facilitates specific stakeholders who are likely to be concerned to identify the issues, which may be especially relevant in reviewing their provision. This part of the report is, therefore, presented in 6 sections with sub-divisions in the 3 main sections which deal with public experiences of access, needs of specific groups and the different forms of provision. :

- What culture, arts and leisure means to people
- Experiences of accessing services
 - Uniformity of access issues
 - Time considerations
 - Cost implications
 - Geographical considerations
 - Level of awareness of services
 - Electronic Delivery of services
 - Direct contact with service providers/ consultation
 - Perceptions of eligibility for services
 - Co-operation between departments and agencies
 - Funding application issues
- Specific issues affecting sub-groups

- People with disabilities
 - People from the LGBT community
 - People from the elderly community
 - People with dependants
 - People from the rural community
 - People from the nationalist community
 - People from the unionist community
- Issues Relating to Specific forms of provision
 - Issues specific to sports provision
 - Issues specific to arts provision
 - Issues specific to museum provision
 - Issues specific to library provision
 - Issues specific to PRONI provision
 - Issues specific to the Northern Ireland Events Company
 - Issues specific to inland waterways and inland fisheries
 - Issues specific to language policy
 - Issues specific to transport
 - Issues specific to Lottery provision
 - Examples of good practice
 - Increasing interest in culture, arts and leisure

3.1.2 In each section the findings from the focus groups provide the main source of evidence. However, the study also included a series of individual, semi-structured interviews with key informants, including civil servants working in DCAL, representatives of bodies with responsibilities for culture, arts and leisure provision and officials in Local District Council who have a remit in these areas. They were asked to discuss the areas and issues for which they have responsibility and also to comment on the views being expressed in the focus groups. The interviewees did not provide comments on all the issues raised in the focus groups but they did illuminate important issues in relation to ‘Experiences of accessing service’ and ‘Issues related to specific services’. Therefore, in these sections, where it is appropriate, their contributions are reported after those of the focus group members.

3.2 WHAT THE TERM ‘CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE’ MEANS TO PEOPLE.

3.2.1 Asking people to try to define ‘culture, arts and leisure’ produced a very wide range of responses. In general it was seen as encompassing the things people did in their spare time, things financed out of disposable income and things they were ‘interested in’. There was also a feeling that these areas should provide relaxation, ‘a

diversion from the stresses of modern life'. In some cases the use of phrases such as 'gracious living' and the 'way different people live' suggested a rather more restricted or differentiated interpretation of culture, arts and leisure,

3.2.2 Most respondents had considerable difficulty in separating out the three areas. For example it was suggested that attending an 'arts' event could also be considered a leisure activity and going to a museum could be described as culture or arts or leisure. Whilst precise definition of the relationship between arts and leisure was problematic the issue was not seen as contentious. They were terms which could be used in different ways by different people or in different contexts. Using the term 'culture', however, was seen as a potentially controversial issue in several of the focus groups. For the majority of people culture was described as encompassing areas such as heritage and history 'a background, a way of life' (Focus group 11) but others saw it in more religious or political terms. A number of respondents from Protestant areas and Unionist backgrounds talked about Orange parades and the Twelfth of July as events, which represented the Protestant culture (Focus groups 27, 30, 34 and 35). Certainly there seemed to be more sensitivity over the term and culture was regarded as an almost threatening subject in some groups. In one focus group where the respondents came from a mix of Unionist/Nationalist - Protestant/Catholic backgrounds the members appeared very uncomfortable discussing 'culture'. In other cases there was no such concern and the emphasis was on the definition of sub-cultures linked to people's location or common interests which might produce a rural culture, a gay culture or a disabled culture. (See recommendations 1 and 2)

3.2.3 There was also a strong social class element in some of the definitions, especially those relating to 'the arts'. Things seen as falling under this heading, such as the theatre, the opera and art exhibitions were 'not for the working class'. A number of people from working class backgrounds said that 'the arts' were of no interest to them and indeed they had developed negative perceptions of what was involved. These were expensive events which were 'not meant for us'.

3.2.4 There was very limited awareness of the role of DCAL in promoting or supporting culture, arts and leisure. In some groups (Focus groups 8 and 23) no one had heard of the department and in many others only a small minority were conscious

of its existence. On the other hand a few people had had direct experience of interacting with the department and they had found staff ‘accessible and helpful’ (Focus group 31).

3.2.5 Even when people had heard the name DCAL, they were unclear about the extent of its responsibilities. It was interesting that people did not mention libraries as an aspect of ‘culture, arts and leisure’ and, when a list of the Department’s areas of responsibility was provided, most people were surprised at libraries being included. They saw libraries as being linked to Education & Library Boards and, therefore, part of the Department of Education. There was also confusion in other areas; for example inland fisheries and inland waterways were expected to be the responsibility of the Department of Agriculture. Similarly most people saw leisure centres as the sole responsibility of local authorities and were not aware that DCAL has an input into policy developments in relation to activities in leisure centres. On the other hand there was surprise that tourism did not fall under the umbrella of DCAL. The reasoning here was that tourism is closely linked to many cultural and arts events. The majority of respondents were unaware of the work of some organisations linked to DCAL, such as the Ordnance Survey and the Northern Ireland Events Company and a considerable number did not know anything about the Public Record Office. A few felt that the whole situation was simply confusing and wasteful and that there was no need for a separate department for culture, arts and leisure. This view was strongly supported in one of the focus groups made up of people from Unionist backgrounds.

‘this is a made up department ... a catch all for areas that can’t be designated into other department ... it’s a waste of money’.

3.2.6 Overall, many people viewed the range of activities falling under the headings ‘culture, arts and leisure’ as things they carried out on a personal basis and therefore not directly the responsibility of service providers or Government departments. In many cases the things they enjoyed such as playing or listening to music, painting, taking exercise or play team sports were things they did in their own home or through a private club or organisation, so the involvement of government seemed peripheral.

3.2.7 A tentative list of the activities and organisations described by focus group members and interviewees as falling under the headings ‘culture’, ‘arts’ and ‘leisure’ is shown in Table 4. Although an attempt has been made to use individual and group responses to classify under the three headings the divisions were sometimes blurred. So, for example, some areas/activities - such as listening to music, reading poetry and visiting museums - are included in more than one category.

Table 4: Respondents’ views on the activities under culture, arts and leisure

ARTS	LEISURE	CULTURE
theatre-including plays, opera and ballet	leisure centres- including swimming pools	Twelfth of July and band parades
cinema-it was sometimes unclear whether this referred to commercial or films shown at art centres	sporting events- including national, regional and local	museums
music including listening to orchestras and concerts	physical activity	heritage centres/ sites
poetry readings	playing fields - including football pitches	National Trust sites
art galleries/exhibitions	public parks	languages
community arts events - including street festivals	fishing	music
dance - local line dancing, dance classes run by art groups	shooting	poetry
painting	walking	GAA
museums	golf	gay
Talks and Tours programme	ice rinks	disabled
drama organised by local groups- for example Women’s’ Institute	gyms- private	rural

3.3 EXPERIENCES OF ACCESSING SERVICES

3.3.1 It is unlikely that any one individual has accessed the whole range of services for which DCAL has responsibility. Even where people have accessed a number of different services their interactions have not always been frequent. As a result the reactions from focus group members reported on, in this section, may be based on a limited range of experiences with specific elements of the provision of DCAL and its associated organisations. In addition some people made it clear that their views were

based on memories of accessing services some time ago – in a number of cases several years ago – and that they were not familiar with recent changes in provision. However public perceptions of, and attitudes towards services, even when they may not reflect the situation entirely accurately, are important to the service provider/s. The inclusion of specific comments and reactions from the key informants helps to highlight, both the existence of misconceptions and the extent to which service providers are conscious of the need to address problems.

3.3.2 In an effort to structure the range of access issues which were raised they are reported under the headings:

- Differences in levels of accessibility,
- Time considerations,
- Cost implications,
- Geographical considerations
- Issues related to the level of awareness of services,
- Electronic delivery of services,
- Direct contact with service providers – consultation facilities
- Perceptions of eligibility of services,
- Co-operation between departments/agencies
- Issues relating to funding applications.

3.3.3 *Differences in levels of accessibility*

At a very general level, it was clear that many respondents saw some services as much easier to access than others. However, there was considerable variability both in the services which different individuals saw as easy to use and in the reasons they gave for rating some services as easy to access and others as problematic. This makes analysis complex and suggests that care must be taken over generalisations and stereotypes. For example running alongside views related to specific needs, such as those linked to disability or location, there often seemed to be connection between people's past or current level of interest in a specific aspect of culture, arts or leisure and how easy they felt it was to become involved. Where interest was high people often stated that a service was easy to use and any apparent barriers could be overcome without difficulty, whilst others, with apparently similar circumstances, but

who were unfamiliar with the service or had limited interest, described the same facilities as difficult to use. In addition, areas of perception and interpretation such as ‘friendliness’, ‘bureaucracy’, or ‘awkwardness’ were a significant element in many of the judgements about accessibility. Such subjective issues and their probable causes, therefore, have to be considered alongside physical constraints such as opening hours, location etc. All these areas are considered in more detail in the sections which follow but they do highlight the range and complexity of the forms of diversity which must be addressed. In particular it is clear that alongside the differences linked to physical considerations there is an important area of ‘cultural diversity’ which impacts strongly on many people’s experiences of accessing culture arts and leisure facilities.

3.3.4 Time considerations

3.3.4.1 Many of these services were described as things which people used in their free, spare or leisure time. For the large number of respondents who had extensive work and family commitments the limited availability of such time put considerable constraints on their use of any culture, arts and leisure services.

‘some people just don’t have time to visit a museum or take in a play’

‘people don’t want to involve themselves in anything when they come home in the evening’

‘I rarely go out at night, there’s enough on the TV to entertain me’

3.3.4.2 Problems of juggling busy schedules also led to criticism of the opening hours of many of the services. For example the fact that local libraries often close at about 5.30p.m. was criticised by people who would like to be able to go and select books or use reference material after finishing work. Similarly the opening hours of some leisure centres were described as not ‘fitting in’ with many people’s schedules. A number of people suggested that having more facilities open on a Sunday would make access much easier for many people with work and family commitments. In the case of services, where information in response to some queries could be given without a personal visit, it was suggested that some system which allowed contact outside normal office hours would help to alleviate the time problems. (See Recommendation 3)

3.3.4.3 The fact that it was necessary to travel considerable distances, for example to go to many arts events, magnified the time difficulties. This issue was brought up most frequently by people living outside Belfast. They suggested that the concentration of musical events and other arts presentations in the city restricted access for them. There was not enough time to travel to Belfast after work in order to attend weekday evening performances. Whilst this was a common response from people in urban centres outside the city, it was a particular problem for those living in rural areas.

3.3.5 *Cost Implications*

(See recommendation 4)

Another element in the complaints about the need to travel long distances was the additional cost burden it imposed. Overall the costs of a number of culture, arts and leisure services were seen as restricting access for considerable sections of the community. In a number of the focus groups cost was said to be the greatest barrier to use of most of the services being studied. Clearly this was linked to socio-economic status and the problems were most severe for people living on benefits, those on low wages and people with dependants. Indeed there was a view that the cost of some cultural events is deliberately kept high in order to discourage 'ordinary people' from attending 'they deliberately keep the costs of plays and cultural stuff high so it is beyond the reach of ordinary people'.

3.3.5.2 This view was reinforced by comments in one focus group about the expense of having to wear formal clothing for some cultural events.

'some events don't allow jeans so it can cost to get an outfit – or you risk embarrassment'

3.3.5.3 Amongst the specific events mentioned as 'costing too much' were a considerable number of arts events. So, for example the theatre in general was viewed as expensive and the Grand Opera House and The Millennium Theatre were singled out for particular comment. Musical events such as concerts at the Odyssey, the Waterfront Hall and The Millennium Theatre were also described as high cost.

3.3.5.4 However, other events such as Talks and Tours (Coleraine/University of Ulster summer programme), the W5 Interactive Centre, museums and leisure centres were also cited. Some sections of the community find cost a particularly serious barrier and these include parents wishing to take a number of children to events, the elderly and other groups on low incomes. The cost problems were further compounded when people had to travel any distance to access services and face the added expense of the need to buy refreshments or pay for extras such as programmes.

‘Once you add up transport, entrance and eating it’s too expensive for people on benefits’

‘To go to the Panto was almost 40 pounds for two adults and a child’

3.3.5.5 The cost barrier seemed to affect all areas of culture, arts and leisure, for example two respondents from separate focus groups mentioned the ‘excessive cost’ of fishing licences/permits and the charges for using the Internet in public libraries was regarded as too high in one group. In addition it was suggested that even when local communities work hard to get arts venues in their own local areas they can still feel ‘left out’ because of the costs. For example it was suggested that some new arts centres charge so much for the use of their facilities that local drama groups cannot afford to hire them.

3.3.5.6 The overall feeling was that service providers should consider reducing the cost of services in order to encourage participation by groups such as families, the elderly, those on low incomes and the unemployed. A concrete suggestion was that a ‘combined pass’ might be introduced. This would entitle holders to attend a specified number of culture, arts and leisure activities at a rate lower than that charged for the same number of individual admissions.

(See Recommendation 5)

3.3.5.7 When these points were discussed with the service providers in the individual interviews there was a range of responses. Many of the Sports Development Officers interviewed agreed that high admission charges could make access difficult for some groups and that this was a particular problem when people also had to face

considerable transport costs. On the other hand those involved with museums and galleries emphasised that most of their exhibitions are free. Charges have to be made for some special exhibitions, in order to help meet extra costs and there would be a welcome for extra government support for such events. It was suggested that the devolved assemblies in Scotland and Wales had been more proactive in this area. The range of concessions offered, to low income groups and older people, for many venues and events was also stressed, although the DCAL representative that there could be a stigma attached to taking advantage of concessions and this might put some people off.

3.3.6 Geographical considerations

(See Recommendation 6)

3.3.6.1 Geographical location appeared to have a significant impact on ease of access to many culture, arts and leisure facilities. There were clear divisions between Belfast and the rest of Northern Ireland, between east and west of the Bann and between urban and rural areas. In all the focus groups held outside Belfast there was a clear view that there was an over-centralisation of services in Belfast and that other areas of Northern Ireland were suffering as a consequence. Even when local facilities were available respondents still felt that this did not compensate for 'over provision' in Belfast. For example in one particular group in a rural area west of the Bann one person felt that, even though a new theatre had recently opened only a few miles away, the arts were still 'a treat for us compared with Belfast'. Particularly in the rural groups, there was a very strong feeling that access to culture, arts and leisure services was being denied to them because of location. The problems in this aspect of community provision linked in with the general loss of services in rural areas – schools, post offices, shops etc. Phrases such as 'erosion of rural culture' and 'raping the countryside of culture' were used to describe the situation.

3.3.6.2 When these issues were discussed in the individual interviews the responses were mixed. Officials working in areas outside Belfast, and especially west of the Bann, agreed that there was over-centralisation in Belfast. For example some Sports Development Officers in the west of the province felt that the majority of events and programmes were located in and around Belfast and that much more support was needed in rural areas since the existing provision 'is little help to clubs in this area'.

The organisations, which serve the whole of Northern Ireland, were conscious of those problems but also emphasised that since population is concentrated in the Belfast area it is inevitable that many services are focused there. Thus a Sports Council representative agreed that there was a perception that they were 'Belfast orientated' although they were addressing regional development through the network of Sports Development Officers. Similarly a DCAL official who was interviewed stressed the wide range of activities in arts and sport which do go on outside Belfast but conceded that the concentration of population meant that many services were located in Belfast. One approach to solving such problems was suggested by PRONI who felt that 'outreach' could be developed more extensively. The infrastructure of local libraries could form the basis of a series of 'information hubs' through which a range of services, including those for which they were responsible, could be delivered. Overall there was a feeling that the perception of concentration was greater than the reality, so that, for example a MAGNI representative indicated that most of the facilities they administered were actually outside Belfast.

3.3.6.3 It was clear that in many areas a lack of local facilities meant that a considerable journey had to be undertaken to access most culture, arts or leisure facilities or events. Yet these same areas often had very limited public transport, especially in the evenings and on Sundays. As a result, if people were non-car owners they would be unable to access many of the services. Poor and costly public transport was frequently raised as a barrier in rural groups but also affected some groups in towns outside Belfast and even in suburbs of the city. Not surprisingly it was suggested that some co-ordination between the providers of culture, arts and leisure services and of public transport would be very valuable. Even those with access to private transport could still find travel a problem. In one group it was suggested that rural roads were particularly badly affected by adverse weather conditions, 'so even if you are a car owner you would not venture out when the weather is bad'.

(See Recommendation 7)

3.3.6.4 Specific problems of location were identified for some services. For example PRONI was seen as being 'off the beaten track' and difficult to access for that reason. Some services were located in busy and heavily built-up areas where there were parking restrictions and off-street parking was expensive. The Lyric Theatre, The

Grand Opera House and the Ulster Museum were quoted as examples of locations where parking poses difficulties. One further issue regarding location was where leisure centres were situated with some suggesting that they were not in suitable areas. One leisure centre was described as being in a 'dodgy area' whilst a few others were said to be situated in close proximity to one traditional community background area and was therefore unappealing to those from the other traditional community background.

3.3.6.5 The difficulty surrounding travel to access services was further compounded for those from the disabled communities, the elderly and those with low incomes. Travel can be a problem for disabled people for various reasons including their disability may not permit them to drive and public transport may not be suitable as far as physical access is concerned. Many elderly people felt that having to travel was very tiring and for that reason would desist whenever possible. Those on low incomes could not afford the cost of travel particularly those with children. People who could identify with two or more variables, for example to have a disability, be on a low income and come from a rural location were said to be further disadvantaged as far as access to services was concerned.

3.3.6.6 In the individual interviews, officials agreed that transport problems could be a serious barrier to access with comments such as 'public transport is appalling'. There was strong support for initiatives which would allow people to purchase travel and entrance to an event, as a package and several organisations indicated that they were actively considering the implementation of such schemes. The provision of better parking facilities was also being considered, for example by MAGNI.

3.3.7 Issues related to level of awareness of services

3.3.7.1 Across all the focus groups there was concern about lack of information at a number of levels. At the most basic level a considerable number of people were unsure about the actual range of services included under culture, arts and leisure umbrella. It seems that many are simply not aware of what is available and they see this as representing a failure in advertising and in the promotion of services.

3.3.7.2 Libraries and leisure centres were the services which people were most familiar with but even here there was often uncertainty about the full range of

provision. At the same time many people did use their local library and the information which many libraries provide about local culture, arts and leisure events and facilities was praised. It was seen as particularly helpful when such details are supported by a widely distributed local news sheet or leaflet giving details of 'What's on in xxx'.

3.3.7.3 Overall, however, there was a widespread belief that there is simply not enough easily accessible information. There was a feeling that, quite often people simply 'missed out' because by the time they heard about an event it had already happened. A number of people who did visit theatres or museums fairly regularly stated that they were on mailing lists and so received information about upcoming events. Similarly members of cultural or musical societies usually got relevant information. This led to a further discussion of the links between social class and access since it was suggested that information was 'just getting to the select few' or that only those 'at the upper end' of society were being kept informed. This was felt to be particularly the case in relation to events and services in the arts.

(See Recommendation 8)

3.3.7.4 A number of concrete suggestions were made about how information could be distributed to the general public more effectively although there were also differences of opinion about how successful different approaches might be. For example, people were divided on the effectiveness of free flyers or leaflets giving details of special events in the local area, which could be distributed door to door. Some saw these as useful, but others said that such material could easily be seen as 'junk mail and just binned'. However, there did seem to be widespread support for a co-ordinated approach from service providers. It was suggested that this might take the form of a booklet describing all types of culture, arts and leisure activities and events which could be distributed to every house. Similar leaflets giving a clear breakdown of all departments and agencies involved in culture, arts and leisure provision and their responsibilities might also be valuable. The local 'What's On' guides were cited as examples of good practice and a more comprehensive, Northern Ireland wide, version was suggested. At the same time the fact that there is so much unsolicited mail of limited relevance coming into most homes was recognised. This was seen as making the task

of getting people's attention when trying to disseminate information about culture, arts and leisure, increasingly difficult.

3.3.7.5 Posters displayed in prominent public places were also viewed as a simple and effective way of providing information, although these should define details, such as the cost, clearly. The local and national press and local radio stations were also considered good mediums through which to inform the public of events/activities. Such information needed to be clear but comprehensive, including for example information about parking arrangements and the availability of refreshments.

3.3.7.6 A number of people also emphasised that consideration should always be given to those with visual impairments or hearing impairments when designing publicity material. This meant that material should be available in large print and Braille format, clearly set out and in plain English.

3.3.7.7 The officials interviewed for the study were all aware of the need to publicise events and DCAL in particular had given considerable thought to the issues involved. They believed that the local media and local community based networks, such as schools, churches, Women's Institute branches and Young Farmers' Clubs could play an important part in disseminating information. In addition part of work of the Sports Development Officers and Arts Officers involved 'taking the product to the public' and the increased use of Information Technology, which could be accessed through local libraries, could also be very valuable. At the same time the cost of publicising events and facilities also had to be recognised and one Sports Development Officer emphasised that when new facilities were provided a publicity budget should be included in the costing, otherwise however good the service it might well be underused.

3.3.8 Electronic Delivery of services

(See Recommendation 9)

3.3.8.1 There was a mixed response in the focus groups to the effectiveness of distributing information through electronic systems, for example via the Internet and/or email. A number of problems were highlighted. These included the large number of people who either do not have easy access to the necessary equipment or

do not feel confident using the Internet or e-mail. In the case of e-mail there was also concern that the increasing volume of 'junk' being sent to individuals via e-mail could generate resistance and a tendency to delete material without reading it. Once again there were concerns about possible social inequality. Disadvantaged groups were the ones least likely to be able to use the Internet and e-mail on a regular basis, so using these media could reinforce social class differences in access.

3.3.8.2 However, the benefits of using electronic methods of presenting information were highlighted in some focus groups. For instance the Internet was regarded as a very good medium for presenting clear information about the structure and responsibilities of departments and agencies involved in culture, arts and leisure. For example many people were unaware of the services, or even the existence, of the Ordnance Survey and suggested a web-site as a helpful way of giving information to non-specialists about their activities, publications etc. (the Ordnance Survey do in fact have a website but it was obvious that some people are unaware of this). Similarly electronic methods of accessing the Public Record Office would be very valuable, particularly if catalogues and even documents could be consulted electronically.

3.3.8.3 The fact that comprehensive listings of specific events in different parts of Northern Ireland could be provided on Internet sites and regularly updated also attracted favourable comment. This could be made even more useful if people were able to register their own interests, home address etc. and so receive information, which was tailored to their circumstances. This might even include 'tasters', short musical extracts in promotions for concerts or visual material to illustrate details of art exhibitions. At the same time web sites which were not regularly maintained were regarded as particularly frustrating and irritating. Being able to actually access services on-line could also be a considerable benefit. For example facilities for booking tickets for cultural or leisure events or ordering and renewing library books would be useful to all the groups who have transport difficulties.

3.3.9 Direct contact with service providers/ consultation

3.3.9.1 Some respondents felt that none of these 'indirect' approaches would achieve the level of increased involvement they would like to see. They suggested that a more personal touch, that is direct contact between representatives of departments and

agencies and the public, was necessary. In their view officials from DCAL, the Arts Council and the Sports Council should be travelling to different parts of Northern Ireland and talking to local organisations, community groups and even individuals, in other words providers should be adopting a more proactive stance. Such direct contact would be useful in a number of ways. In particular it would encourage active local participation and would enable the providers to get a clearer picture of what people actually want; what access problems they encounter and what measures they believe would help to improve the situation in their local area and nationally. This would also help to avoid replication of the sort of situation in which facilities were provided and then under utilised because there had not been prior consultation with local people about what they wanted. For example:-

‘the Ecos Centre cost millions of pounds to construct and due to a lack of interest is losing thousands of pounds each month’

‘the Nerve Centre has a full screen cinema and it is hardly ever used’

(See Recommendation 9)

3.3.9.2 The need for much more direct consultation between providers and users was stressed in the focus groups which included people who had specific difficulties or needs which made them feel excluded from many events and facilities. For example disabled groups, those in rural areas, those in socially and economically disadvantaged areas, those from the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) communities, the elderly and families on low incomes all expressed a desire for direct consultation and discussion.

3.3.9.3 In addition direct consultation was seen as necessary to address the frequently voiced concerns about the elitist and middle and upper class bias in some culture and arts provision. For example it was suggested that arts events often appeared to be geared towards middle and upper class people with special knowledge and interests, whereas they should be of wider general interest. This perception could only be effectively discussed and analysed if representatives of the Arts Council came and worked with groups ‘on the ground’, ‘at the grassroots’, and ‘across Northern Ireland’.

3.3.9.4 The concerns noted above relate to major policy issues but more specific and detailed aspects of direct interaction between providers and users were also raised. Many people had never had any experience of trying to interact directly with service providers in these areas but amongst the minority who had there were a number of concerns. The main problems which people had experienced when contacting any of the culture, arts and leisure services centred on lack of expertise amongst staff answering telephone calls. People found it particularly frustrating to be passed from one person to another; to be kept on hold for considerable periods; and in many cases, eventually, to fail to obtain the information requested.

‘there should be older and more experienced staff to deal with the public’.

3.3.9.5 The lack of a service outside normal office hours was also criticised by a few people. They could not seek information whilst they themselves were at work; many culture, arts and leisure events and facilities are used after work or at weekends and yet in most cases information cannot be obtained at these times.

3.3.9.6 Asked to comment on such responses the representatives and officials suggested that there was a considerable range of provision outside ‘office hours’. A number of groups provide a 24 hour telephone answering service, voicemail services or have staff on duty beyond the 9-5 slot. At the same time they felt that in many areas limited resources made it difficult to provide a more extended out of hour’s service. For example PRONI would prefer to substitute a personal response system to handle enquiries but the cost of additional trained staff made this impracticable and so an automated system had to be used. In relation to direct interactions with the public the importance of staff training to ensure that the public received ‘patient, understanding and knowledgeable’ responses.

3.3.10 Perceptions of eligibility for services

(See Recommendation 10)

3.3.10.1 It has already been suggested that some focus group members believed that certain services were aimed at particular audiences and this dissuaded them from participating in or making use of those services. This was particularly prevalent in

relation to some aspects of the arts. Here it was frequently stated that these services were designed for people in the upper strata of society.

‘they operate like private clubs for the well heeled’.

3.3.10.2 In one group an interesting distinction was made between the ‘elite arts’, with ballet and opera given as examples, and the ‘ordinary arts’, which encompassed the rest of the arts. In this case there appeared to be a view that this was a justified distinction and that the ‘elite arts’ should be kept that way, in other words not opened up to the ‘ordinary’ people. More frequent were expressions of dissatisfaction with the ‘elitist’ model. For example the cost of attending such events was regarded as placing them out of the reach of those on lower incomes and reinforcing a perception that much of the arts provision was targeted at the middle and upper classes. When people from working class lower income backgrounds had attended an arts event they had often felt ‘uncomfortable’, ‘out-of-place’ or ‘self-conscious’. In some cases this had been such a negative experience that they would not participate again.

‘people involved in arts activities feel they are above ordinary people, they are snobs’.

3.3.10.3 Others expressed less defensive views and suggested that the fault lay with the type of event or facility being provided. They felt that ‘their’ culture was not being recognised and provided for in culture, arts and, to a lesser extent, leisure provision. This at best discouraged participation and at worst made it impossible. Those from disabled groups, the LGBT communities and elderly communities all referred to problems of this type. Thus, for example, disabled people felt that the lack of arts and leisure programmes where facilities were provided for them, gave the impression that their participation was not considered important. Some of the older people in the focus groups felt that many culture, arts and leisure services were geared towards the younger members of society. Members of the LGBT community felt that services were often based on the assumptions of heterosexual society with little thought given to ways in which provision might be adjusted to make them feel keen to participate.

3.3.10.4 Most of the providers were emphatic that the services and events which they organise are open to the whole community and that they are always seeking to widen access across the whole social spectrum. At the same time there was recognition that if there is a public perception that some elements of culture, arts and leisure were targeted at particular social groups this must be taken seriously and addressed. . As the representative from NIMC said, ‘this is not what people working in museums believe or intend, but it is important if this is what people are saying’.

3.3.11 Co-operation between departments/ agencies

3.3.11.1 Many surveys of public services have suggested that the public would like to see more effective inter-departmental and inter-agency co-operation and such views were reflected in this study. The central point was that better links between departments/agencies/providers would result in a much more effective service. For example more co-operation was essential to ensure that services and activities were not being duplicated. Such duplication could occur when co-ordination between DCAL and the local District Councils was poor. The need to establish links between transport providers and those organising culture, arts and leisure activities has already been discussed but it was raised again in this context. Those in rural areas were particularly anxious that DCAL should work with public transport authorities to try to make access for those living in the countryside easier. The potential value of collaboration between DCAL and those involved in promoting tourism was also discussed. It was suggested that such a link would be an important element in promoting a positive image of Northern Ireland. At a more specific level the development of closer contacts between the Sports Council and the Departments of Health and Education would be useful in making more people conscious of the importance of healthy exercise. In several groups a closer link between DCAL and the organisations which represent groups with special needs was advocated. For example co-operation with the organisations representing minority ethnic communities, LGBT groups, low-income groups and older people could be valuable as could direct contact with community centres and women’s groups.

3.3.11.2 There was some criticism of what was perceived as the high level of autonomy of some arts and culture bodies, such as the Arts Council. Thus the effectiveness of the Arts Council would be increased if it worked more closely with a

range of other departments/agencies. For example, the Council could liaise with the Department of Education to encourage young people to have an interest in the arts; with LEDU to promote local employment in the arts; with The Tourist Board to give people outside of Northern Ireland information about arts events; with Translink to improve access to arts events and venues; and with the Department of the Environment to ensure that significant buildings were preserved. The lack of action over the demolition of Seamus Heaney's old house was cited, as an example of what happens when there is failure to collaborate.

3.3.12 Issues related to Funding Application

3.3.12.1 As well as organising events, managing venues and providing a forum for policy development many agencies also handle funding applications from individuals and groups. There were a number of people in the focus groups who had had experience of seeking such funding and they raised issues, which suggested that they had experienced considerable difficulties. Perhaps the most common concerns were over application forms and application procedures.

‘Forms and procedures are much too complicated for the ordinary person and this is why larger group - /organisations are more successful in accessing funding.

‘The forms are full of jargon and if you aren't aware of the proper buzzwords then it's impossible to access funding’.

3.3.12.2 In other cases the application criteria for many grants were reported to be very narrow and this could mean that it was very difficult for any groups to prove eligibility. Some people were anxious of how criteria were arrived at and felt that there should be more open discussion of the process and who was involved. Indeed there was some suspicion that the bureaucracy involved in accessing funding might be part of a deliberate strategy. It could be designed ‘to put certain people off’, for example, people from working class backgrounds who did not fit the traditional image of those involved in cultural and arts activities.

‘Maybe the criteria are made to fit those they (funding agencies) want to fund’.

3.3.12.3 This was seen as not only an equality issue but also as entailing loss of valuable talent. Skills were being lost or going undiscovered because so many individuals and small groups found it difficult to get any support from funding bodies which had a remit to encourage talent in their area.

3.4 SPECIFIC ISSUES AFFECTING SUB-GROUPS

(See Recommendation 11)

3.4.1 In the previous sections the concerns of specific sub-groups have been mentioned in a number of contexts. Here, however, a more structured presentation of the issues raised by groups with particular needs will be made.

The groups identified for this study were:

- People with disabilities,
- People from the LGBT community,
- People from the elderly community,
- People with dependants,
- People from rural communities,
- People from the nationalist community,
- people from the unionist community.

3.4.2 People with disabilities

(See Recommendation 12)

3.4.2.1 Access to the venues where services and activities are provided is particularly problematic for many people with physical disabilities. At present many are not able to access culture, arts and leisure services because of such difficulties. Problems arise not only for people who use wheelchairs but also for those who have difficulties with mobility (problems with walking long distances, climbing steps etc.) and those with visual or auditory impairments. Access to services is further complicated when people with disabilities live in rural areas. Not only is the general availability of public transport limited but in addition much of it is not adapted to accommodate those with disabilities. Access to individual buildings is often a problem; narrow doors, multiple levels, stairs etc. and although some service providers have addressed this issue in recent years, a number of museums and leisure centres were singled out as being particularly inaccessible for many disabled people.

3.4.2.2 Although local branch libraries were reported to be, on the whole, accessible, serious problems – in particular steep, narrow access steps - were identified with mobile libraries. Yet, the visit of the mobile library often provides the only

opportunity for disabled people in rural areas to make a personal choice of books, tapes, etc.

3.4.2.3 Many respondents felt that there needed to be more opportunities for disabled people to participate in arts events and sports activities. For example it was suggested that programmes should be provided to develop wheelchair basketball, whilst facilities to help disabled people become involved in clay pigeon shooting were also mentioned. Often individuals were able to use their own experiences to point out where improvements might be made. Thus one person said that he enjoyed fishing but as he was visually impaired there were very few opportunities for him to participate. Many riverbanks were inaccessible and sea fishing was almost impossible, as boats were not equipped to deal with visually impaired individuals. Although some leisure centres were physically accessible, few had programmes designed to help disabled people make use of their facilities. Indeed examples were given of leisure centre staff who either did not seem to have time or interest to explain how disabled people might be able to use equipment or, in some cases, actively deterred disabled individuals from participating:

‘I was told that they wouldn’t take responsibility for me (for insurance purposes) because I used crutches’.

(See Recommendation 13)

3.4.2.4 In the arts area opportunities were also limited. It was suggested that there were many disabled people who were, or could become, accomplished as artists but most were going unrecognised and/or were unable to develop their talents because there were few opportunities for them to take part in classes.

3.4.2.5 There was also a strong feeling that services should be mainstreamed so that disabled persons could participate alongside able-bodied people. As a practical way of beginning to improve the situation, it was suggested that representatives of the Sports Council and the Arts Council should arrange to visit disabled groups in different parts of Northern Ireland. Workshops could be held where providers would be able to listen to the concerns of a range of disabled individuals and groups. Another

suggestion was that a disability officer whose remit would include culture, arts and leisure should be appointed in each District Council area.

3.4.2.6 Overall there was a belief that Government departments and agencies did not understand the range and extent of the problems facing disabled people who wished to participate in culture, arts and leisure activities. The majority felt that the Government was just 'paying lip service' to meeting their needs and was only taking any action under duress,

'they have to be seen to be doing something as far as new legislation is concerned'.

3.4.2.7 In support of the contention that government commitment was limited, one respondent recalled being asked to attend a consultation process at Stormont, but although he lived a considerable distance from Belfast he was not allowed to claim travel expenses. Because he is in a wheelchair normal modes of transport are not suitable and so a taxi would have been required. This would have been costly and so, because no expenses were available in the end he declined the invitation. Many of the other people in the group felt that this was a significant example and believed that if the Government had been serious about the consultation process they would have provided a budget for travel. Other examples involved the provision of suitable toilet facilities and here the situation could be deeply distressing. One focus group member described how he had attended an arts festival and had witnessed a wheelchair user having to empty his colostomy bag in a drain as no facilities were provided. Not surprisingly he described this as extremely degrading for the individual.

3.4.2.8 Another set of difficulties related to the ways in which the staff in culture, arts and leisure venues react to people with disabilities. Many respondents gave examples of situations in which they had felt stigmatised as a result of staff comments and attitudes to their disability. They suggested that much more should be done to ensure that all staff were trained in disability awareness. Although attitudes in some areas were said to be improving there were still things that could be done to speed this process along. One suggestion was that agencies such as the ACNI and SCNI could

use disabled people in their advertising and so promote a more positive image of disability.

(See Recommendation 14)

3.4.2.9 For people with certain disabilities - for example those with visual or hearing impairment - actually getting information about the time, location and cost of events and facilities may be a problem. Information should be provided in formats which people with a range of disabilities will be able to access easily. The Internet can be a useful medium in many cases and the provision of training to enable disabled individuals to take advantage of Internet based information services would be very useful.

3.4.2.10 In discussing these views the representatives of service providers acknowledged the existence of problems but drew attention to limitations in relation to staffing, physical layout of buildings and costs. For example museums are often housed in older buildings which are often difficult to adapt to the needs of people with physical disabilities. MAGNI has tried to improve access by providing such things as lifts, adapted toilets, entrance ramps and hearing loop systems in some of its museums and galleries. Efforts are also made to consult with groups representing disabled groups when specific exhibitions are being planned or building refurbishment is being undertaken.

3.4.3 People from the LGBT community

(See recommendation 15)

3.4.3.1 Members of the LGBT communities feel that many of their difficulties stem from the fact that services are designed on the assumption that users are heterosexual. As a result they believe that little consideration is given to ensuring that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people feel included. Many feel, for instance, that arts activities and events are not reflective of their culture. Examples were given of the small number of plays and arts exhibitions that feature LGBT themes, in spite of the fact that a considerable number of people involved in the arts world are from the LGBT communities. Even when there is something available which is likely to be of direct interest to them it is often not widely advertised and therefore they miss it: -

‘if it’s got a gay theme it is kept very hush hush’.

3.4.3.2 They did praise a few events in which they felt they had been represented, including the community based Gasyard Faile in Derry and an ACNI supported event called 'Art Attack'. However they felt that the first event had been a locally organised community initiative with little or no input from DCAL or the major service providers and on the whole they were being 'sadly neglected'.

3.4.3.3 This neglect was felt to extend to libraries, which did not have a LGBT section and often would not facilitate people wishing to access books on subjects related to their communities. One focus group member described how he was rebuked when he asked a member of staff in his local library for books on gay subjects. Similarly museums were said to concentrate on 'mainstream' events and history but they failed to acknowledge the existence and contribution of the LGBT community. A specific exhibition chronicling the history of LGBT culture would help to dispel misconceptions as well as recognising the value of their contribution to culture and the arts.

3.4.3.4 A range of concerns were expressed about facilities in leisure centres, with issues relating to changing rooms causing particular difficulty. Lack of privacy in changing rooms was said to be a deterrent to taking part in any sporting activities for many gay and lesbian people since 'straightsville' - heterosexual men and women - feels threatened by their presence in changing rooms. This hostility could actually create physical dangers for the gay and lesbian individuals, especially gay men who could easily be attacked by heterosexual men if the latter felt they were being 'looked at'. Changing facilities were also a problem for transgendered individuals since changing rooms are often exclusively for males or females. The preferred solution was the provision of unlabelled, direct access, individual changing rooms or cubicles, which could be used by people of any sexual orientation. This whole area of ensuring safety is of the utmost importance to LGBT individuals since they feel very conscious of hostility from heterosexual people. Individual experiences were cited to show that such concerns were well founded. One man described how he was attacked outside a leisure centre early one evening because he was perceived to be gay. Indeed some people felt that in order to be really protected they needed specific allocated LGBT time slots in leisure centres. They indicated that they believed such provision was made in leisure centres in some parts of England.

(See Recommendation 16)

3.4.3.5 Staff awareness of and attitudes to LGBT issues were also seen as problematic. Staff were often embarrassed by interactions with people in these communities. One person described how he went to register for an advertised series of dance classes but was told by the staff member concerned they were ‘not suitable - as children attended’. He felt a judgement was being made because he appeared ‘camp’. The implication was that there was a link between paedophilia and gayness and so because he was gay he was an unsuitable person to be around children. Another gay man reported that he had been using Internet facilities in a local library and had accessed the website ‘gay.com’. He was approached by a member of the library staff and told that he would have to close the site down as another library user had complained. He asked whether the same request would be made of a heterosexual man, if he was using a site entitled ‘heterosexual.com’. Overall the view was that staff in libraries, leisure centres etc. were inexperienced in dealing with members of the LGBT communities. For example they rarely reacted when individuals were abused by members of the heterosexual community who were using the facilities. Terms such as ‘faggots’ and ‘queers’ were commonly used and provoked little reaction whilst sectarian abuse was not tolerated in public places. An important element in remedying such problems would be training for staff to increase their awareness in relation to LGBT issues and to help them to deal with homophobia.

(See Recommendation 14)

3.4.3.6 Cost was also seen as a barrier to access by many members of LGBT communities. They suggested that ‘there is no truth in the notion of a pink pound’, mainly because gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people often have difficulty gaining employment in what is perceived as a heterosexual world. This was regarded as a particularly serious problem in Northern Ireland where social attitudes are very conservative and there is a stigma attached to ‘differentness’. Indeed it was suggested that the department in the Republic of Ireland which has responsibilities equivalent to those of DCAL was much more progressive in terms of addressing LGBT issues. Since many members of the communities were on low incomes they often found it difficult to access culture, arts and leisure services due to the ‘excessive’ cost of

entrance fees. The Millennium Theatre was particularly singled out for criticism in this respect as a cheapest ticket for performances was reported to cost £8.

3.4.3.7 Providers were conscious of the equality issues involved in this area and were anxious to promote best practice. At the same time several indicated that they face a dilemma when trying to meet the needs of members of the LGBT communities and also a public concerns about child protection and child safety and public perceptions of risk.

(See Recommendation 16)

3.4.4 People from the elderly community

3.4.4.1 A number of the access problems facing older people were linked to their limited mobility and lack of energy. So for instance travelling a considerable distance to events could be 'off-putting' and, as many arts and cultural events are held in the evening, elderly people often feel too tired to make the necessary journey. A number of issues already discussed in relation to those with physical disabilities were also relevant to some older people. Those with mobility problems sometimes could not access services as a result of the need to climb stairs or because the lack of parking close to the venue meant they would have to walk a considerable distance. In any event many felt that sports events were aimed at the young and therefore not for them:

'at our age sport is something we watch on TV rather than participate in'.

3.4.4.2 Others suggested that they would be self-conscious about engaging in sports when young people were present. They suggested that separate times/programmes for older people might be one way to overcome such concerns.

3.4.4.3 Many did use local libraries and they were generally satisfied with the service provided. However, most used libraries only for book loans and they did not make much use of the computers and Internet access provided in many libraries. They felt that such new technology was inaccessible to them and that the staff were not very 'forthcoming' in providing help and explanations to enable them to use the equipment. More generally the concept of using electronic means to access services was not something they were attracted to. Such approaches were felt to be for the younger generation, 'too new-fangled for us'. Even those who either had some

knowledge of using computers or were interested learning about them indicated that even if they became competent they would not use electronic means for things such as booking tickets or finding out about the provision of services.

(See Recommendation 17)

3.4.4.4 Cost was also a barrier, with some events seen as particularly expensive; examples given included the theatre, concerts and opera. Even when the concessions for 'senior citizens' were taken into account many events were still reported to be outside the reach of a considerable number of older people. They suggested a review of charges with perhaps as 'pay what you can' scheme to widen access to some events. Some felt that there should be 'taster courses' for culture, arts and leisure activities to encourage older people to take up new interests or revive their involvement in things such as sports activities.

3.4.4.5 Many respondents said that they lived on their own and had a limited circle of friends. As a result if they wanted to go to an event they would often have to go alone and this was a barrier, although they did not see how service providers could do much about this.

3.4.4.6 In general many older people praised the services available and compared the current situation favourably with the early post-war years when there was 'nothing'. Particular praise was directed at the mobile library service and the University of the Third Age although they were unsure whether the latter received any Government funding.

3.4.5 People with dependants

3.4.5.1 Many of those with dependants felt that the extent of their work and family commitments made it either impossible or at least very difficult for them to participate in many culture, arts or leisure activities. However there were a number of suggestions about things which service providers might do to encourage them to begin to get involved.

3.4.5.2 The majority of these were linked to the perception that many current culture, arts and leisure services are not 'family orientated'. For example they felt that, where

possible, events/activities should be made more interesting for children. This would help to alleviate the problems which arose when they had to take a child with them to an event, the child became bored and began to behave badly and they became embarrassed and sometimes had to leave. Another possible approach to this problem would be to have specific events or performances, which were advertised as welcoming children. People who found the presence of children disturbing would be able to avoid these sessions and those with children would feel less anxious about causing annoyance. Offering practical 'child friendly' facilities such as access for buggies, baby changing rooms and feeding rooms and affordable refreshment facilities were also suggested as practical measures to facilitate access.

(See Recommendation 18)

3.4.5.3 One of the most serious barriers for those with dependants was the cost of attending events. For example one person suggested that to take her whole family to a major concert in the Waterfront Hall in Belfast could cost in the region of £150, even without taking travel costs and the purchase of refreshments into consideration. Some focus group respondents were critical of family concessions, which they saw as too rigidly defined. Often the special price was only applicable for two adults and two children when many families have more than two children.

3.4.6 People from rural communities

3.4.6.1 The difficulties caused by the lack of culture, arts and leisure facilities in rural areas and the resulting need to travel has already been discussed. The time and cost involved in travel were seen as the major barriers to participation by members of focus groups held in rural areas.

3.4.6.2 However a number of other issues were also raised. For example it was suggested that some people from rural communities feel intimidated at the prospect of attending events in the 'big cities' since they did not feel as confident as 'city dwellers'. The crowds and the unfamiliarity of the situation and the surroundings made some people feel uncomfortable. Visits by those involved in the provision of culture, arts and leisure services might be useful. They could come to talk to rural communities about the range of services and events available and how to access them. In a few cases lack of confidence might be related to literacy problems and in such

cases basic education courses delivered in a familiar and non-threatening environment might be the most appropriate action.

3.4.7 People from the nationalist community

In one nationalist group there was the feeling that much of the cultural activity in Northern Ireland was divided on religious and class lines. For example, they believed that there was strong perception amongst working class Catholics that the theatre and a number of other cultural performances and events were not intended for them and as a result there were some cultural and arts events which they would feel uncomfortable about attending. The location of some venues, in areas identified with the 'other' community, could also act as a barrier

3.4.8 People from the unionist community

In one unionist group it was suggested that, in contrast with Catholics and their 'GAA culture', Protestants did not understand and support their cultural background. They also felt that certain cultural events had an exclusive 'one community' dimension, which made it difficult for them to participate. The West Belfast Festival was quoted as an example in this connection, although the group did also recognise that the Twelfth of July celebrations have an exclusive quality. The difference in their view was that the Festival received government funding and so should be welcoming for all sections of the community.

(See Recommendation 19)

3.5 ISSUES RELATED TO SPECIFIC SERVICES

3.5.1 Many issues which were raised in the focus groups in relation to specific services have already been reported but in this section a summary of the comments which focus group members made about individual services is provided.

3.5.2 Issues specific to sports provision

3.5.2.1 In a number of groups the need for separate sessions for specific groups was discussed. The argument was that this would encourage them to participate in leisure activities since it would meet their concerns over issues relating to safety, cultural considerations and self-consciousness. Amongst the groups who would welcome such provision were members of the LGBT community, women from the Asian community and some older people.

3.5.2.2 Some members of the disabled community criticised the lack of programmes to encourage them to participate in sporting activities. They also felt that staff in leisure centres did not have the time or inclination to assist them in the use of equipment. One group differentiated between what they perceived as 'energetic sports' (such as team sports and swimming) and 'leisurely sports' (such as shooting, walking, golf and fishing). They felt that the 'energetic sports' were less easy to access and often had poor or non-existent facilities for those with disabilities.

3.5.2.3 A considerable number of references were made to the new private gyms, which have opened in various parts of Northern Ireland. They were perceived to be 'more modern and appealing than leisure centres'. Some leisure centres were said to be particularly uninviting due to their location. These were centres situated in areas where some people felt unsafe either because the surrounding area was run down and attracted 'undesirables' or because it was in an area associated with one religious/political community and members of the 'other' community would be deterred from going there.

3.5.2.4 There were suggestions about changes, which could increase use of facilities at particular times of year. For example the provision of more floodlit facilities would help to increase participation in outdoor sports during the winter months whilst in

other cases more summer schemes would encourage greater involvement in sport by children during school holidays.

3.5.2.5 One group was concerned about poor directions to sports venues and events. They suggested that both permanent facilities, such as leisure centres, and individual events should be clearly sign-posted and so that they would not be so difficult to find.

3.5.2.6 There were also indications that making bookings for the use of sports facilities was sometimes difficult, for example booking local pitches for soccer.

3.5.2.7 The high cost of leisure centres for families with several children was a barrier to those on lower incomes.

3.5.2.8 A number of interviews with representatives of DCAL, the Sports Council and District Council Sports Development Officers produced a wide range of responses to these comments and concerns. For example, requests for facilities to meet the concerns of specific groups brought a mixed response. For example the Sports Council stressed the practical problems involved in trying to meet the needs of people with a range of different sexual orientations. They felt that:

‘a sensible approach must be taken - maybe by looking at multi-use changing areas with individual facilities’.

3.5.2.9 Some were also conscious of the sensitivities involved in some of these areas, for example the interplay of equality and human rights issues and child protection requirements. There was awareness of the problems and a desire to meet the needs of groups with specific concerns. On the other hand it was sometimes difficult to reach a satisfactory solution because of the physical limitations of existing buildings and the lack of financial resources. A number of interviewees also believed that it was important to integrate groups such as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people into the community, rather than providing special sessions for such groups. Efforts should also be made to ensure that they felt secure in ‘integrated’ situations

3.5.2.10 Access to sports facilities for people with disabilities was recognised as a serious issue by the Sports Council and by Sports Development Officers. It was felt that progress was being made in improving the situation and that the key factors were improved training of staff and the provision of additional resources. It was reported that a number of leisure centres do already provide sessions specifically for people with disabilities and older people. The Sports Council has invested in an umbrella group which employs a Sports Development Officer who works with providers encouraging best practice. Some of the District Councils are addressing the issues through partnerships with local Health Trusts and Disabled Sport Northern Ireland. At the same time lack of resources is an ongoing problem. One Sports Development Officer pointed out that:

‘there is only one person to develop disability sport in the whole province. In England, Scotland and Wales there would be person in each local authority. Time and resources are limited of the development of disability sport in Northern Ireland is restricted’.

3.5.2.11 The concerns about the location of sports facilities in areas, which were seen dangerous for some sections of the population, were acknowledged by a several interviewees. For example the DCAL representative agreed that location could be ‘a chill factor’ and that perceptions about areas which they saw as belonging to the other community could present barriers to access. On the other hand some of the Local District Council officials felt that such concerns could easily be overstated. Sports facilities are open to everyone and according to one interviewee, where there are difficulties about location ‘it’s the mindset of insecure people’. The point was also made that some facilities had been built a number of years ago and their location had only become problematic as a result of recent population changes. This was unfortunate but it was difficult to do very much about it and resources did not allow for the building of new leisure centres on these grounds. It was also felt that the problems were mainly in Belfast, so for example an interviewee from Fermanagh did not see this as a major issue in his area.

3.5.2.12 The suggestion that the facilities provided in private gyms and health clubs are often superior was accepted by a number of interviewees. However, they felt that

the comparisons were unfair since in public facilities it is important to keep the costs for users as low as possible so that those on low incomes are not excluded. In addition many of the buildings and much of the equipment is over 20 years old. Public expectations are rising but the resources are not available to meet them.

3.5.2.13 Difficulties over booking pitches and lack of facilities for outdoor sports during the evenings in winter had been raised as specific problems in some focus groups. These criticisms were accepted by a number of Sports Development Officers who felt that there were a number of contributing factors. For example the cost of installing floodlighting, block booking by established leagues, increasing popularity of team sports and the need to restrict use of pitches to ensure that they were not damaged.

3.5.2.14 Similarly the relatively high cost for larger families who wished to use sports facilities was recognised. The availability of special family rates in many leisure centres was cited as one practical attempt to address the problem and some District Councils indicated that they did take this issue into account when establishing their pricing policies.

3.5.2.15 At a more general level several interviewees stressed that sports provision should not be judged solely by the range of public facilities available. Many people were involved in sports and activities involving physical exercise on a personal, individual basis and do not use public venues or equipment. For example many people walk or jog, whilst others are members of clubs promoting individual sports. These groups should also be supported and the emphasis should be on encouraging as many opportunities as possible for all sections of the population to take exercise.

3.5.3 Issues specific to arts provision

3.5.3.1 It was suggested that lack of support was a barrier for many young artists, craftspeople and community groups with an interest in the arts. Channelling more help to those working 'at the grassroots' was advocated. In one group there was particular criticism of the Craft Village in Derry with suggestions that it had 'no artistic merit' and should be filled with real artists and craftspeople rather than 'the rubbish for the American market'. In a similar vein a database for local artists and

their potential customers was suggested as a way of improving contacts between artists, suppliers and customers.

3.5.3.2 The perception of major class issues in arts provision was a recurring theme. There was a strong conviction that many arts events and facilities were aimed at the 'upper classes' and arts such as ballet and opera were described as 'elite'. At the same time, in one focus group, there was support for the view that it was necessary to maintain this elite status for some arts.

3.5.3.3 The new ACNI brochure was criticised by one group for being 'hard to read' and it was suggested that they (ACNI) should go back to the previous format since this had been more user friendly.

3.5.3.4 The cost of attending many events was said to be too high and indeed in some cases 'exorbitant' with the implication that the ACNI should be providing more subsidy. Examples of events where cost had been a barrier included pantomimes, theatre, opera and art exhibitions. Again those with families felt that cost was a particular problem.

3.5.3.5 Many people were critical of the actual range of events available, feeling that there were not enough things of sufficient interest to make them want to participate. Wider consultation by ACNI might make it possible for them to get a clearer picture of what people would like to see. This point was particularly strongly emphasised by disabled, the LGBT community and working class respondents. In a few instances criticism of the ACNI went further with claims that there was 'lack of transparency' and even that there should be formal investigation of the operation of the Council by the ombudsman.

3.5.3.6 At the same time there was considerable uncertainty about what the Council did and was responsible for and what other groups and agencies provided. As a result there were a number of misconceptions. For example, in one focus group it was thought that the Riverside Theatre, Coleraine, was private and not open to the public.

3.5.3.7 The over-centralisation of events in Belfast and related transport and parking problems were seen as serious barriers for many people.

3.5.3.8 Access to funding was also a problem with a perception that ‘the same people/groups’ receive repeat funding whereas new groups find it difficult to get initial support. Arts Lottery funding applications were said to be especially difficult to access.

3.5.4 Issues specific to museums provision

3.5.4.1 The main criticism of museums centred on what many perceived as their ‘static’ displays. This view that museums did not change their displays meant that people did not feel it was worth going to the same museum more than once as ‘nothing would have changed’. At the same time individual museums and displays were praised, for example one group described the Ulster Museum as ‘excellent’ and were very enthusiastic about its displays. Amongst more specific comments were criticisms of the fact that ‘there is too much concentration on Northern Ireland history’ and suggestions that ‘museums here should be more outward looking’ and should have ‘more controversial displays’.

3.5.4.2 The location of museums was also seen as a barrier with the concentration of the larger museums and more important collections in Belfast and the siting of other museums in ‘out of the way places’ attracting criticism. Access to individual buildings was also a problem, especially for disabled people. For them museums were not considered to be user friendly since many were ‘cramped and virtually inaccessible for wheelchair users’.

3.5.4.3 Changes in opening hours to allow people to visit museums in the evenings and provision of more ‘child friendly’ facilities, for example things which would mean that children could touch exhibits without constant fear that they would cause damage, were other suggestions of developments which might encourage wider use.

3.5.4.4 Many of these issues were discussed in key informant interviews with representatives of MAGNI and the Northern Ireland Museums Council. There was recognition that the exhibitions in some museums remain the same year after year. At

the same time there was evidence that some people like to have a sense of continuity and that there would be a complaints if radical changes were made to some of the established exhibits. Similarly displays relating to Northern Ireland in the recent past or to controversial subjects might attract some new visitors but they would almost certainly also cause an outcry from some sections of the public. Indeed there might be a danger of physical attacks on the exhibits, the museums and their staff. MAGNI have a strategy to develop creative programmes which will include challenging exhibitions and indeed they feel that some of their 2002 displays fall into this category.

3.5.4.5 Both organisations are very aware of the need to consult the public about what sorts of exhibitions they would like to see. NIMC goes out to work with community groups to raise interest and awareness and MAGNI is interested in developing more quantitative measures of visitor interest and satisfaction. Specific cultural groups, such as minority ethnic communities, are amongst those consulted and direct consultation is felt to be much more effective than, for example, literature in minority languages.

3.5.4.6 The problems which arise from the location of museums and galleries was recognised by both bodies. However, it was very difficult for them to do much to address some of the underlying structural problems such as the limited public transport system. Efforts were being made to improve parking facilities at as many sites as possible and to work with transport providers at improve the links to popular museums and galleries.

3.5.4.7 Responding to the comments about user friendliness and accessibility the representatives indicated that they were conscious of such criticisms and were trying to address them. Some exhibitions, such as W5, were said to be very clearly family orientated and there was also an emphasis on user-friendliness in staff training. The needs of those with disabilities are being addressed through efforts to make physical access easier and there is also a commitment to improve services for those from minority ethnic communities. The use of signs in several languages has not proved very effective in attracting more people from minority groups but other approaches are being explored, for example exhibits which present and explain minority cultures.

3.5.4.8 There was sympathy for the requests for longer opening hours but also concerns about the resource implications of, for example, opening in the evenings. In some cases evening opening would probably not increase attendance, for example when exhibitions are designed to attract families with children. Some changes have recently been made, for instance, the opening hours at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum have been extended as a result of market research.

3.5.4.9 Overall MAGNI and NIMC try to respond to public demand but they have serious resource constraints. When considering changes they have to balance improved services against the cost implications. For example the corollary of allowing greater public access may be the need to spend more on the preservation of artefacts.

3.5.5 Issues specific to library provision

3.5.5.1 Whilst libraries received considerable praise there was an image of them as rather outdated and appealing primarily to the very young and elderly. Most of the problems associated with libraries were in relation to the shortage of new material and/or material relevant to specific needs. Some people thought the older stock was actually dirty and musty and should be replaced for that reason. More specific difficulties were also highlighted, for example students suggested that there was a shortage of things such as GCSE coursework books whilst some from minority ethnic communities and the LGBT communities felt there was a lack of material representing their culture.

3.5.5.2 In addition to supplementing stock, a number of other ideas which might attract more people into libraries were put forward. These included locating a coffee bar in the library and having public toilet facilities. The extension of the schemes run in many libraries to have Saturday morning story readings for children was also proposed.

3.5.5.3 Computers and Internet access are now provided in many public libraries but a considerable proportion of the focus group members were unaware of this and felt that it could have been more widely advertised. Amongst those who were aware of the

availability of IT facilities there was some disappointment that there was not more help for those who had no training or experience but wish to access the new technology.

3.5.5.4 The large amount of local information which libraries hold was seen as providing a very valuable service to the community but it the actual library buildings which might be more useful to the community if they could be used for a range of cultural and arts events. This would be especially useful in rural areas where venues, which were not linked to a particular section of the community, were often difficult to find.

3.5.6 Issues specific to PRONI provision

3.5.6.1 A large number of the focus group members were not aware of the existence of PRONI and the majority were not clear about the services it could provide. Some believed that it was a 'specialist' service for students and those wishing to trace their family trees.

3.5.6.2 The overall image of PRONI for the majority of respondents was of a place with high levels of bureaucracy and security. The actual location was a barrier for many since it was being situated 'off the beaten track'. Amongst those familiar with the location, parking was reported to be a problem for car owners whilst public transport was limited and inconvenient. The fact that it was in an 'up-market part of town' put some people off by suggesting that it was 'not meant for the working classes'.

3.5.6.3 The actual internal layout of the building was said to make it inaccessible to many disabled people and the procedure for finding what you wanted was reported difficult and time-consuming. It was suggested that the provision of an on-line catalogue might help to alleviate access problems.

3.5.6.4 In the interview with a PRONI representative it was clear that the Public Record Office are conscious of many of the points raised in the focus groups and are taking steps to address several of the issues. At a general level the PRONI is beginning to explore public relations and the marketing of its services and would

welcome the development of a general PR strategy, possible under the umbrella of DCAL, for the culture, heritage and information sectors. One element of such an initiative might be the development of a common Internet portal. Currently PRONI is launching a project to increase awareness of its services in schools and community groups in deprived areas and hopes to link this to DCAL's learning strategy which seeks to bring together different service providers and which focuses on addressing the needs of the underprivileged.

3.5.6.5 There was concern at the comments suggesting that the Record Office has a 'stuffy, off-putting and bureaucratic' image, since their own surveys indicate a 95% satisfaction level amongst on-site users. At the same time they are re-organising their internal management structures in order to make access easier. At the same time there are limits to what can be done to make archive material 'user-friendly' since it is by its nature often fragmentary, disparate and quite unlike standard book material.

3.5.6.6 The difficulties related to the location of the PRONI and the nature of its site are issues, which they are currently considering in consultation with DCAL. The staff accept that the site is too small and that parking does present problems. A DDA audit identified some difficulties in relation to access for people with disabilities but these were not thought to be very serious and modifications are being made wherever practicable.

3.5.6.7 In an effort to make the catalogues more accessible an e-CATNI project is being launched. This will provide on-line access to a database containing descriptive catalogue information about the holdings of the Record Office. It will cover a range of holdings acquired over the last 80 years. In addition the Record Office has contributed to the RASCAL (Research and Special Collections Available Locally) project which provides Internet access to material from library, museum and archival domains. This database was launched at QUB in September 2002.

3.5.7 Issues specific to the Ordnance Survey

3.5.7.1 Very few comments about the Ordnance Survey were raised in the focus groups. Many people were surprised that it was included in DCAL's remit and did not see it as linked to culture, arts and leisure.

3.5.7.2 In the key informant interviews the OS representatives were not surprised at this reaction since the 2001 Omnibus Survey had indicated that only 60% of the population were aware of the existence of the OS and its mapping responsibilities. The work of the OS does not usually involve it directly with the public. Its function is more indirect since it helps other organisations to deliver services for example it provides maps which NIE uses in planning the location of power lines. There could be more co-operation with some other organisations involved in culture, arts and leisure in areas such as the provision of maps to help the public locate services. The series of maps specifically designed for ramblers, hill walkers and climbers do make a useful contribution to a leisure activity which increasing numbers of people enjoy, though there have been suggestions that their cost may put some people off.

3.5.8 Issues specific to the Northern Ireland Events Company

Few people seemed to be aware of the existence of the Northern Ireland Events Company and amongst those who were there was a preponderance of critical comment. In one group it was suggested that the company was using taxpayers' money to support concerts for a minority and as a 'public slush fund for entertainment'.

3.5.9 Issues specific to inland waterways and inland fisheries

3.5.9.1 There was very little comment in relation to these services with many stating they had no knowledge of the services and had no experience of trying to access inland waterways and fishery facilities.

3.5.9.2 The limited range of comments, from people who had experience of using these facilities, centred on costs and the bureaucracy surrounding the granting of licences. For example all fishing licences were said to be expensive whilst salmon licences were also difficult to obtain and, even when granted, allowed only a limited catch. Some disabled people stated that riverbanks and fishing boats were inaccessible to them.

3.5.10 Issues specific to DCAL language policy

3.5.10.1 In one group there was criticism of the tri-lingual provision of documentation ‘there needs to be a stop to this waste of money connected with political correctness and politically motivated sponsoring of language translations’. In another group one person suggested that there should be more support for minority languages such as Irish and Ulster Scots, only to be contradicted by the rest of the group.

3.5.10.2 At the same time there was support for greater availability of sign language facilities for the hearing impaired.

3.5.11 Issues specific to transport

Although transport is in a sense peripheral to the concerns of this study, it was an issue which was frequently brought up in the focus groups. The availability and/or cost of transport was seen as a major factor in determining the extent to which individuals and groups, especially those from rural areas, could access culture, arts and leisure provision. Not only were venues and activities out of reach for many rural residents but in addition many urban respondents criticised the fact that venues were often not on regular transport routes and were, therefore, difficult to access. The development of better links between those involved in organising culture, arts and leisure services and transport providers was regarded as a priority. One popular suggestion was that a combined single ticket covering travel and entrance could be made available for many venues and events.

3.5.12 Issues specific to Lottery provision

The application procedures for Lottery Arts funding were said to be particularly complex. Forms were difficult to complete and contained numerous, repetitive questions. Some respondents from the minority ethnic communities had concerns about the fact that forms were not available in their languages and some also felt that there were cultural barriers because of the link with a funding source based on gambling.

3.6 EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

3.6.1 Although the main thrust of the study was to examine the problems involved in accessing services focus group members also reported on a range of positive experiences. In all areas of culture, arts and leisure provision examples were given of situations where service providers were delivering appropriate, high quality services.

3.6.2 The areas that received most praise were libraries and leisure centres. Their location within the community and the fact that many people could reach them without having to travel far were clearly seen as major advantages, although there was also appreciation of the services they provided.

3.6.3 In spite of some criticism about limited stock, most people felt that libraries had a wide range of books and also provided other services including IT facilities and even in one case a crèche. The mobile library service was also viewed as vital by many people in rural areas; those on disadvantaged housing estates, elderly people and people on low incomes. In all these cases the mobile library brought services to people who had limited mobility and /or financial resources.

3.6.4 The facilities in leisure centres were usually affordable and were particularly good as places to take children in the summer months. Some leisure centres also carried out good health promotion work in their area.

3.6.5 Some museums were good at promoting cultural activities and a number, for example the Ulster Museum, were singled out for particular praise for their innovative exhibitions.

3.6.6 Although there were a considerable number of complaints concerning arts services there were also a number of positive statements. These included praise for individual theatrical productions, for specific arts centres and for locally based drama courses. It is perhaps interesting to note that several of the facilities singled out for praise were in the North and North West

‘the Nerve Centre (in Derry) provides a valuable service in training young people’

‘the youth drama classes at the Riverside Theatre are very good’

3.6.7 One group suggested that the Northern Ireland Government’s attempt, spearheaded by DCAL, to copy Glasgow’s strategy for cultural regeneration of culture was improving the city considerably.

3.6.8 Tourist facilities was another area where considerable improvement was reported and the National Trust was praised for the creative way it was allowing its properties to be used for example for weddings and Jazz concerts.

3.7 INCREASING INTEREST IN CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

3.7.1 There was a widespread feeling that many people did not have an interest in culture, arts and leisure because they had never been encouraged to become involved. Their parents and grandparents had not participated in such things; therefore, they had not been taken to events or encouraged to become involved as children or young adults. An emphasis on getting people involved in culture, arts and leisure activities at an early age was vital and, for most of those consulted, this meant that the Education and Library Boards should develop more links with DCAL and the various agencies. For example, in one group the suggestion was made that schools should organise visits to cultural events and encourage the parents to come too, in this way the whole family might develop new interests.

3.7.2 In addition it was necessary to make special efforts to target groups or individuals who had never been exposed to culture, arts and leisure. In order to do this the departments/agencies would have to devise methods of identifying and contacting these people. 'Taster sessions' could then be organised so that people could find out whether 'it was for them'. A positive image of activities must be projected and this could be done through appropriate and attractive advertising. It was important to think carefully about how to 'sell' new interests to people. Some approaches could be 'off-putting', for instance 'high brow language' and it might be better if promotions were done by 'normal, ordinary people'.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

The range and variety of opinions expressed in the focus groups and interviews makes it difficult to provide a simple set of direct recommendations which would address the full spread of suggestions and requests. The points which follow, therefore, mainly take the form of suggestions for further consideration by DCAL or designated bodies such as the Cultural Forum. This would make it possible to assess the practicalities involved in making changes, to gauge their likely impact and to establish an order of priorities.

Cross referencing to the section(s) of the report where relevant issues are discussed is provided.

1. DCAL note the diversity of people's definitions of culture, which sometimes specifically includes aspects of identity such as LGBT/"straight", Unionist/Nationalist, Orange/Green etc. Policy and programming should aim to reflect these dimensions of culture as well as the more traditional facets such as, for example, arts, heritage and history.

3.2.2

2. DCAL promote research regarding chill factors relating to culture, particularly those chill factors that help to exclude the participation of some communities in culture, arts and leisure events.

3.3.2

3. DCAL consider initiating a review of opening hours across all areas of delivery in culture, arts and leisure, perhaps under the auspices of its Cultural Forum. The review should take account of the needs of particular groups of people and the needs of local communities.

3.3.4.2

4. DCAL consider initiating a review of charging policies across all areas of culture, arts and leisure, perhaps under the auspices of its Cultural Forum. The review should take account of the access difficulties faced, in particular, by those on lower incomes, people with families and those who have to travel long distances to attend events.

3.3.5

5. DCAL consider the possibility of piloting a "pass card" that would entitle users of culture, arts and leisure services to discounts and privileges. This might be taken forward through the considerations that the Cultural Forum is giving to the introduction of a smart card. However, should the development of the smart card be held back by technical or other considerations, the discount and privilege card should be pursued as an issue in its own right.

3.3.5.6

6. DCAL consider promoting a number of pilot projects in rural areas aimed at showing how culture, arts and leisure can be used to build community cohesion and reduce the sense of isolation often felt in such communities.

3.3.6

7. DCAL consider developing pilot transport schemes that would assist people in areas of poor public transport to access and participate more fully in culture, arts and leisure activities. Such schemes could be developed in partnership with District Council and community and voluntary groups. Particular attention should be paid to the needs of people with disabilities, elderly people and people on low incomes.

3.3.6.3

8. DCAL, in conjunction with its Cultural Forum, seek ways of coordinating current information sources on culture, arts and leisure and should examine the feasibility of having a central source of information for all events. The means by which such information is made available should take account of the opportunities provided by the Internet, but should also take heed of the needs of people who do not have access to electronic media.

3.3.7.3

9. Whilst a central source of information on culture, arts and leisure would be valuable, this should not displace the use of local media and opportunities for personal contact with information services.

3.3.8 and 3.3.9.1

10. To counteract the perception that certain events are only for the elite, DCAL might, in conjunction with the Arts Council, explore further ways of publicising “high arts” events in a manner likely to attract those who do not currently participate. The chill factors associated with participation in such events should be the subject of research and, where possible, corrective action.

3.3.10

11. DCAL should set up a working group to explore all aspects of access to culture, arts and leisure, including pricing, event location, intellectual barriers and barriers against people who have disabilities.

3.4

12. DCAL, in association with organisations such as ADAPT and Disability Sports, should work to identify the worst cases of poor access to culture arts and leisure facilities for disabled people. In conjunction with facility owners, a programme of urgent actions should be developed to counteract these “worst case” access problems.

3.4.2

13. In the Department’s areas of responsibility for waterways and fisheries, DCAL might consider developing a programme of work to improve access to riverbanks and other fishing areas for people with disabilities.

3.4.2.3

14. To counteract the perception of poor staff attitudes towards people from the LGBT community and people with disabilities, and to offset the chill factor that such perceptions can represent, DCAL should work with appropriate organisations to further develop training and awareness programmes for frontline staff who work in culture, arts and leisure.

3.4.2.8 and 3.3.4.5

15. DCAL, in conjunction with the Arts Council might consider how best to encourage arts programming that has an appropriate balance of material reflecting the diversity of society including disability; lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered themes and themes reflecting ethnic diversity.

3.4.3

16. DCAL should work with appropriate organisations, perhaps through its cultural forum, to identify best practice in providing privacy and safety in changing rooms at sports and leisure facilities, with particular regard to the needs of the LGBT and non-LGBT communities.

3.4.3.4

17. DCAL should encourage the Education and Library Boards, perhaps through the Electronic Libraries Project, to develop programmes for older people that would help to demystify Internet access and provide basic skills in using computers to access information.

3.4.4.3

18. DCAL, through its cultural forum, encourage the adoption of family-friendly culture, arts and leisure facilities and programming. This could include the provision of, for example, changing rooms, infant feeding rooms, buggy areas and special family friendly sessions.

3.4.5.2

19. DCAL should, where possible, help to minimise the “culturally exclusive” perception of some events, such as the West Belfast Festival and Orange celebrations. This could take the form of providing learning and demystifying opportunities regarding other cultures.

3.4.8