

---

# Northern Ireland Museums Policy



## **Ministerial Statement**

As Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure I want to commend to you this policy framework for the development of our national and local museums over the next ten years. For many years there was an underinvestment in cultural infrastructure but Northern Ireland is now coming towards a place where we have a cultural infrastructure fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is therefore important for us to develop a policy that will help to provide a strong context for the work of our museums; give added focus to our cultural investment and guide further development of the sector.

Of course museums have a primary role as the custodians and conservers of our heritage; they protect the fundamentals of our history in perpetuity and this is tremendously important. However the broader value and social and economic impact of museums is increasingly being recognised.

Museums can play a significant role in education and learning. They are institutions of learning distinguished by their capacity to communicate

knowledge and connect people with their histories through engagement with authentic artefacts. Museums can provide creative environments and deliver innovative initiatives that enhance education and life-long learning.

As stimulating visitor attractions they are key components of Northern Ireland's tourism offering and can also inspire the creative industries and catalyse wider economic development. Museums can also contribute to our understanding of who we are and where we came from. They are the touchstones and the gateway to the root of our cultures and identities. They can help us to see the complexities and contradictions of our history; they can assist with our understanding of the great events that have shaped our world and also help to dispel myths and misunderstandings.

A 'shared and better future' for Northern Ireland, based around equity, diversity, interdependence and mutual respect, is a key vision and goal of Government. It is important for all our citizens that this museums policy contributes towards

that goal. Collaborations between museums and communities can provide a vital role in understanding our shared history, heritage and culture. As we move forward into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, museums can play an important role in addressing issues of social inclusion and cohesion and in supporting the cultural rights and expressions of the people and communities in our society.

Museums are and should be places of excitement and inspiration. I want this museums policy to excite and inspire others in the museums sector, be it through their collections, exhibitions or through the uniqueness of the facilities offered. In doing so we can ensure that our buildings and collections will be with us into the future to be enjoyed and treasured by all.

This policy sets the context and vision to guide the development of our national and local museums. In light of fiscal challenges and increased need for collaborations and creative solutions to service delivery, the next stage will be to work in partnership with stakeholders to determine actions needed to implement the policy and how they might be taken forward and by whom.

**Nelson McCausland**

**Nelson McCausland MLA  
Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure**

## **CONTENTS:**

- 1 The Value and Impact of Museums in Northern Ireland**
- 2 Guiding Principles**
  - Quality, Professionalism, Creativity and Innovation
  - A Shared and Better Future
  - Partnership
  - Sustainability
- 3 A Vision for Northern Ireland's Museums**
- 4 Delivering the Vision: *strategic priorities***
  - Developing Audiences
  - Education and Learning
  - Collections Development, Care, Management and Use
  - Infrastructure, Investment and Resources
- 5 Next Steps: *turning words into actions***

# 1 THE VALUE AND IMPACT OF MUSEUMS IN NORTHERN IRELAND:

*Museums enable people to explore collections for inspiration, learning and enjoyment. They are institutions that collect, safeguard and make accessible artefacts and specimens which they hold in trust for society.*

- 1.1 Museums have an important role to play in society and are uniquely placed to deliver public benefits on a number of fronts. They are not for the few but for everyone and have local, national and international reach. Museums should be respected and reliable sources of information and through their collections and knowledge provide real connections to the past, engage with the present and open windows to the future.
- 1.2 Good museums are rooted in place and community and as such are powerful representations of individual, civic, regional and national pride. They contribute to our understanding of who we are and where we come from. They help us to see the complexities and contradictions of our history, can assist with our understanding of the great events that have shaped our world and help to dispel myths and misunderstandings. They promote public enjoyment and understanding of art, history, science and technology and the natural world. They enable stories to be told and interpretations to be drawn, opening up possibilities for enquiry, sharing and debating histories, exploring identities and nurturing social cohesion. They can be truly inspirational, stimulating creativity, invention and innovation.
- 1.3 As the region's foremost cultural, educational and tourism destinations the collections of National Museums Northern Ireland (NMNI) should present a comprehensive picture of our creativity, innovation and environment. NMNI's statutory duties, as enshrined in the Museums and Galleries (NI) Order 1998, include an obligation to promote the awareness, appreciation and understanding of art, history and science, the culture and way of life of people and the migration and settlement of people, with particular regard to the heritage of Northern Ireland.
- 1.4 Currently there are forty two Accredited Museums in Northern Ireland: In addition to the four national museum sites, there are twenty local authority museums, ten independently run museums, seven National Trust properties and one university collection. The Northern Ireland Museums Council (NIMC) supports local museums in maintaining and improving their standards of collections care and services to the public and promotes a coherent framework of museum provision.
- 1.5 As well as their inherent cultural value and impact, museums can make a major contribution to economic and social regeneration and are a reflection of community confidence and health and well-being. As such, they can help position Northern Ireland as forward-looking and

progressive, an attractive place to visit and in which to live, a place for investment, and a place that has a rich past and a positive future.

- 1.6 The sector makes a significant contribution to education and lifelong learning in Northern Ireland. Museums can support and enhance delivery of the curriculum by providing innovative and inspirational learning experiences and resources that engage and stimulate learners. Professional development opportunities are often provided for teachers and museums can play a key role in supporting Government's priorities relating to the promotion of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and add value to teachers and the learning experiences of students and lifelong learners.
- 1.7 Tourism is a key driver of the Northern Ireland economy. Good museums can promote tourism in Northern Ireland, particularly through inspiring people to discover and share our stories with visitors. In 2009 Museums and art galleries attracted 10% of all visitors to tourist attractions in Northern Ireland. 28% of these visitors were from 'out-of-state'. Museums in Northern Ireland welcome in excess of 1.5 million visitors each year and nearly 1,000 people work in our museums including many volunteers.
- 1.8 Development of the museum sector supports Northern Ireland tourism priorities of investing in people, product and places, and promotion. Specific themes of enhancing the skills of people, investing in the infrastructure for visitors and actively encouraging new visitors can be supported through working in partnership with museums.
- 1.9 Prosperous economies are characterised by a strong creative sector and the creative industries are recognised across the globe for their potential for job and wealth creation. Economic development strategies in Northern Ireland are increasingly recognising the importance of stimulating a culture of creativity in support of broader innovation and research and development. Museums can promote and enable creativity and their artefacts, collections and initiatives can help to develop new creative content, services and experiences. Commercial collaborations and procurement opportunities in areas such as digital technologies can enhance the quality of displays and exhibitions while supporting the growth of creative enterprises in Northern Ireland.
- 1.10 Museums can make a very important contribution to a shared and better future for all based on equity, diversity, interdependence and mutual respect. They can reflect and promote understanding of the history, culture and people of the region and beyond. They can be catalysts for bringing communities together both physically and through formal and informal opportunities to explore the complexities of history and culture. Museums can promote access, encourage participation and support the cultural expressions of the people and communities in Northern Ireland and bring diverse and hard-to-reach groups into

contact with different aspects of heritage through innovative exhibitions and structured learning programmes.

## 2 GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

2.1 Good museums have the inherent capacity to generate memorable and sometimes life-changing experiences through encounters with collections and innovative initiatives. This is their unique quality which can be harnessed to deliver the value and impact on society as previously outlined.

2.2 Public expectations and the professional standards required of museums demand a strategic vision that utilises resources efficiently to safeguard, develop and use collections effectively. Informing this vision and all corresponding strategic priorities are underlying principles and themes which will guide and enhance planning and delivery. They are:

- Quality, Professionalism, Creativity and Innovation
- A Shared and Better Future
- Partnership
- Sustainability

### *Quality, Professionalism, Creativity and Innovation*

2.3 Development of a world class museum sector requires a commitment to the highest quality service delivery informed and underpinned by recognised professional standards and accreditations. Given their role and position within society, museums are expected to operate in accordance with the recognised standards of public life: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership. A commitment to creativity and innovation will instil a proactive culture of developing new ideas, collaborations and better ways of improving service delivery. It will encourage presentation and interpretation of collections with sensitivity, flair and imagination and facilitate continuous dialogue with their visitors and users, constantly seeking and finding ways to engage with new and diverse audiences.

### *A Shared and Better Future*

2.4 Museums should readily embrace the principles of equality of opportunity and developing good relations, beyond any legislative requirement to do so. Culture and identity are important facets of life in Northern Ireland. We have a diversity of culture of which we can be proud, and one which inspires interest around the world. Museums can help us understand our diversity and our interdependencies. As such they have an important role in a shared and better future for Northern Ireland.

2.5 Museums, particularly those with statutory duties, have obligations to collect, preserve, display and interpret aspects of Northern Ireland's tangible and intangible heritage. Around the world there is a growing

recognition of the importance of cultural rights. Such themes have been referenced in several international conventions. These often refer to the representation of cultures and cultural communities and also access to and participation in cultural activity. Work on defining and interpreting this area is ongoing but it is an important concept to explore, develop and reflect as Northern Ireland emerges from a period of conflict and social division. This applies to museums as much as it does to Government and all public bodies and communities in Northern Ireland. In keeping with the Executive's commitment to a shared and better future, and relevant sections of the Code of Ethics for Museums, it can refer to the responsibility of museums to collect and provide access to representations of local and diverse cultural expressions, traditions and identities in a fair manner and to encourage curiosity about other cultures.

### *Partnership*

- 2.6 The value and impact of museums can be enhanced through working in partnership with others. Existing and new relationships with various other bodies and organisations across Government, borders and the voluntary and private sectors, provide opportunities for increased collaboration. While each museum offers a unique experience, the development of a more cohesive and integrated partnership approach can help the sector to better support key priorities of importance to Government and the public interest. Partnerships should be developed with and supported by all relevant stakeholders including community and voluntary groups, education providers, businesses and Government. It is important that all Government Departments recognise and avail of the services and potential of the museum sector to support cross-cutting Government priorities.

### *Sustainability*

- 2.7 Good museums inevitably share the principles of sustainable development, which embrace a respect for the environment, securing a just society, advancing a sustainable economy, and pursuing good governance, all underpinned by sound evidence.

### **3. A VISION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND'S MUSEUMS**

- 3.1 This Policy sets out the vision, priorities and goals necessary for Northern Ireland's museums to contribute to the public benefits outlined in previous sections and to ensure that their contribution is recognised, sustained and enhanced.
- 3.2 Museums can and should contribute to the economic, social, and cultural development of Northern Ireland, and to Government's priorities in these areas, particularly as many are, in the main, sustained through the public purse. Therefore a vision for Northern Ireland's museums is:

#### **A coordinated and sustainable museum sector that**

- develops, preserves and interprets its collections to the highest possible standards
- delivers quality services that inspire, educate and engage local, national and international visitors and users
- harnesses its strengths and diversity to support economic, social and cultural development in Northern Ireland and a shared and better future

#### 4. DELIVERING THE VISION: *strategic priorities*

4.1 Fulfilling this vision will require a concerted effort, not just by museums, their staff and governing bodies, but also by central and local government. The prize is a sector which continues to make a real, meaningful and positive contribution to peoples' lives and society in general. This will be achieved through pursuing a series of goals across four interdependent strategic priorities, namely:

- Developing Audiences
- Education and Learning
- Collections Development, Care, Management and Use
- Infrastructure, Investment and Resources

##### STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1: **DEVELOPING AUDIENCES**

4.2 Museums should strive to ensure the widest practicable access to their buildings, collections and services. They must strengthen their engagement with people, both in greater numbers and diversity than at present, and through creatively enhancing the ways and means by which visitors engage with collections and services.

4.3 While Northern Ireland's museums have intrinsic and significant economic value, their full potential in contributing to the development of tourism in particular has yet to be fully unlocked. The keys to this are ensuring a co-ordinated approach to raising the profile of museums both at home and abroad and making sure that services align with the needs and demands of those visiting and using museums.

4.4 Museums must actively gain an understanding of the needs and aspirations of visitors and users and refine their methods of communication with the public. Developing products and services for particular and diverse interest groups will help to attract new audiences as will tackling the intellectual, economic, social, physical and cultural barriers that may reasonably be thought to restrict or prevent involvement with museums.

4.5 The goals for Developing Audiences (DA) are:

**DA1. To increase the number and diversity of people visiting Northern Ireland's museums.**

**DA2. To increase the number of people using the services provided by our museums.**

**DA3. To better understand, and be responsive to, the needs and aspirations of museum visitors and users.**

**DA4. To strengthen the position of museums as a key component of Northern Ireland's tourism offering.**

**DA5. To maximise the role and impact of museums as cultural ambassadors abroad.**

**DA6 To enhance the quality and range of services provided by our museums.**

**DA7 To increase the number and range of volunteering opportunities across the museum sector**

## STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2: **EDUCATION AND LEARNING**

- 4.6 Education and learning are advanced by museums through engagement with their collections, events and initiatives, through inter-generational activities, and by the outreach programmes they deliver. Museums contribute to the formal education curriculum, to lifelong learning and personal development. They are also a fundamental resource for the arts and creative industries.
- 4.7 Museums should build upon their significant achievements to date and strengthen their reputation and capacity as centres of learning excellence and consolidate the relationship between museums and the formal and informal education sectors. This culture of learning should also embrace those who work and volunteer in museums to ensure that they have the knowledge and skills essential to deliver high quality services to the public.
- 4.8 Museums must develop a clear understanding of their learning offering and its links with the education curriculum and the needs and aspirations of visitors and users. They must continuously evaluate the effectiveness of their learning and educational programmes and invest in the continuous professional development of their staff and volunteers via access to appropriate in-service training. Museums must develop collaborative partnerships and engagement with other educators and learning organisations and strive to make their learning services as accessible as possible.
- 4.9 The goals for Education and Learning (EL) are:
- EL1. To further improve the standard of learning and education services in Northern Ireland's museums.**
  - EL2 To ensure that every child in Northern Ireland has the opportunity to visit a museum, or encounter a museums outreach programme, as part of curriculum-based activity.**
  - EL3. To ensure that high quality museum learning services are consistently available across Northern Ireland.**
  - EL4. To support the delivery of informal, life-long learning through museums.**
  - EL5. To provide educational programmes which complement and support the work of the formal education sector.**
  - EL6. To strengthen the commitment of museums to community engagement.**

- EL7. To develop museums' capacity to deliver and support high quality research on and around their collections.**
- EL8. To consolidate and strengthen continuous professional development of staff and volunteers across the museum sector.**

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3:  
***COLLECTIONS DEVELOPMENT, CARE, MANAGEMENT AND USE***

- 4.10 It is essential that the artefacts and specimens within collections, as well as intangible heritage, such as oral and sound archives, are displayed and preserved to the appropriate standards. Public engagement with collections is facilitated by the professionalism and creativity of museum staff through, for instance, temporary and permanent exhibitions, loans, handling collections and a dynamic approach to the development of their collections.
- 4.11 Public engagement is also enhanced through the availability of high-quality, well-researched information about the objects and the collections, which can extend to involving the public in the process of establishing the meaning and significance of objects, and through exploiting digital technologies as a means of capturing and disseminating such information.
- 4.12 Collections are held in trust for current and future generations and museums must therefore safeguard their holdings to the highest standards and effectively preserve the objects and specimens they hold. Museums must document and record what is held in collections and develop the knowledge base about their collections in order to be able to interpret them appropriately for the public. Museums must continually seek to develop their collections and identify what aspects of heritage are not being collected, interpreted and presented and how any gaps can be filled.
- 4.13 The goals for Collections Development, Care, Management and Use (CD) are:
- CD1. To improve the standards of collections care and management within Northern Ireland's museums.**
  - CD2. To establish clear priorities amongst museums, both individually and collectively, for the development and protection of their collections.**
  - CD3. To develop the knowledge base on the objects and collections held in Northern Ireland's museums.**
  - CD4. To improve the quality of exhibitions at Northern Ireland's Museums.**
  - CD5 To encourage more partnerships between museums by way of increasing public access to objects and collections.**

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4:  
**INFRASTRUCTURE, INVESTMENT AND RESOURCES**

- 4.14 The museum sector requires sufficient investment and resources to carry out responsibilities effectively. However, no organisation will have the capacity to single-handedly meet the total cost of delivery; a genuine partnership approach to funding the implementation of the Policy will be essential. Government will have a key role, but so will a range of other funding partners, including public bodies, trusts, private organisations and even individuals. For its full and collective potential to be realised, an effective support infrastructure also needs to be in place to drive the cohesive, 'joined up' advancement of the sector. Sound governance and management are required and museums increasingly need to look at the sustainable use of resources and their capacity to develop streams of self-generated income.
- 4.15 These elements can be fostered through an infrastructure based on the strategic co-ordination of museums and museums services and be guided by the vision, principles and strategic priorities as set out in this policy. Such an infrastructure will inform, and be shaped by, any structural changes to public administration and associated legislation
- 4.16 Maintaining a rational and continuous programme of capital development is important as is ensuring high quality and consistent standards across the sector. Ongoing work will clarify and communicate the contribution of museums to broader policy agendas across Government, both centrally and locally. The principles of sustainable development will be fully embraced along with the use of current, new and emerging technologies.
- 4.17 The goals for Infrastructure, Investment and Resources (IIR) are:
- IIR1. To strengthen governance, management and leadership across the museums sector.**
  - IIR2. To consolidate the Museum Accreditation Scheme as the sector standard and as the gateway to public funding.**
  - IIR3. To ensure provision of high quality museum services across Northern Ireland and maximise their levels of support and income.**
  - IIR4. To clarify how and what museums, both individually and collectively, contribute to local and central government objectives.**

- II R5. To ensure that local museums, especially the voluntary and independent museums, have adequate and effective guidance and support.**
- II R6. To gather up-to-date intelligence on the sector in support of policy implementation and strategy development.**
- II R7. To maximise the use of digital and new and emerging technologies to enhance museums and the services they offer.**

## **5. NEXT STEPS: *Turning words into actions***

5.1 This policy will have been effective if the following indicators of success have been realised:

- Museums are considered welcoming places, visited, valued and enjoyed by greater numbers.
- Museums are seen as safe places in which to explore and participate in diverse types of community activity.
- Museums have developed better ways of communicating with the visitors and users they serve.
- Museums have made a significant contribution to good community relations and a shared and better future in Northern Ireland as envisaged by the guiding principles of the Museums' Policy.
- Museums are widely recognised and used as centres of education, scholarship and learning, with more people participating in organised educational and learning visits.
- The museum sector is more cohesive and integrated, well supported, governed and managed.
- The people who work and volunteer in museums have the necessary skills and access to training in order to provide high quality visitor experiences.
- Museums have developed their collections and raised standards in collections management and care.
- Museums are recognised by Government and the public as important and valued contributors to education, tourism, economic, social and cultural development.
- Museums have contributed to enhancing the profile of Northern Ireland abroad.
- Museums are connected with national and international agendas, networks and professional practice to ensure they continue to be at the forefront of contemporary standards.
- Museums are actively seeking a sustainable future.

- 5.2 This document has set out the vision and key goals for the museums sector. All museums and relevant organisations in Northern Ireland should incorporate the Policy's strategic priorities and goals into their business plans. They should also work together to determine the strategies, actions, resources and structural arrangements needed to realise this vision and objectives.
- 5.3 In addition to articulating a vision for the sector, the Policy's key strength is the template it provides to take forward necessary next steps. The Policy's underlying principles will guide and shape the manner in which such steps are planned and taken. Adherence to such principles will embed a commitment to work in partnership to develop strategies that are founded on the highest quality and professional standards and integrate work to build a shared, better and sustainable future for Northern Ireland.
- 5.4 Responsibility for monitoring, evaluating and reporting progress against the Policy's strategic priorities and goals will rest with the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. A set of high level targets (both quantitative and qualitative) will be developed with the museums sector based around the goals and indicators of success in this document. Clear responsibility for actions will be allocated in an implementation plan which will be developed in conjunction with National Museums Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Museums Council and the wider museum sector.
- 5.5 The four key priorities and related goals identified by the Policy provide a high level strategic direction for individual museums and the sector as a whole. They highlight the clear potential of the sector to contribute to key priorities across government. By working towards a common vision, and working together to achieve common goals, the museum sector in Northern Ireland can harness its resources to maximise its impact on society and collectively move forward into a new era for our museums.