## Research and Library Service
## Briefing Note

**Dr Dan Hull**

# Comparison of the DCAL Draft Museums Policy and CAL Committee Recommendations

## 1    Introduction

This Briefing Note provides a comparison between the draft *Museums Policy for Northern Ireland*[1], released for consultation on 24 July 2010, and the recommendations for such a policy made by the CAL Committee inquiry into the development of a museums policy held in 2008[2].

This comparison is presented in the form of a table in Annexe 1. Any committee recommendations which appear not to have been addressed directly by the DCAL draft policy are shown in bold type. A summary of these outstanding issues is also provided below.

---

[1] Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. 24.7.10. 'Museums policy for Northern Ireland: Consultation document'.

[2] Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure. 2008. Report on the inquiry into the development of a museums policy for Northern Ireland: http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/culture/2007mandate/reports/report07_08_09r.htm Accessed 3.11.10.

---

# 2    Recommendations not addressed in the draft policy

## (a) Responsibilities and role of NMNI and NIMC not specified

The issue of sectoral governance and strategic leadership are not explicitly addressed in the draft policy. The Committee had recommended that a strategic body be in place, whether the Northern Ireland Museums Council (NIMC) or a successor body, to co-ordinate development of museums on geographical and thematic lines. The policy mentions the themes of cohesion, integration and partnership on a number of occasions, though no specific structures or governance arrangements are described. Furthermore, a general aspiration 'to strengthen the governance, management and leadership across the museums sector' is stated, but no lead or responsible body is identified. The Committee recommended that NIMC should continue in its present form, noting evidence from the inquiry suggesting that the body is held in high regard throughout the sector. However, no reference is made about the future of NIMC in the draft policy.

## (b) No clear links specified with other government departments

The inquiry report noted the value of raising the profile of museums within government and placing them in a cross-departmental context. The DCAL draft policy states that the 'overarching context' for the policy is the Executive's Programme for Government, and section 8.2 refers more generally to the contribution of museums to the 'broader policy agendas across Government'. However, no further reference is made specifically to cross-departmental contexts. Where the educational context for museums is outlined in section 6 of the policy, no links with the Department of Education or the Department of Employment and Learning are referred to. Similarly, although Goal DA4 identifies the need to 'strengthen museums as a key component of the tourism product of Northern Ireland', no explicit links with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Industry are referred to.

## (c) RPA not referred to in the draft policy

The Committee report made a number of recommendations regarding the impact of the Review of Public Administration (RPA) on museums provision across Northern Ireland. This included concerns that the balance of provision across the new council areas should be considered, that local councils should be provided with guidance on how to develop the museums sector in their area, and that the functions of the NIMC after RPA comes into effect should be addressed. None of these issues are referred to in the draft policy. It is not clear from the draft policy whether either National Museums Northern Ireland (NMNI) or NIMC were involved in the policy-making process.

**(d) Emphasis on minority rights**

Section 9 of the draft policy is dedicated to the issue of 'Cultural Rights'. It is stated that it is 'important that museum collections and exhibitions reflect local identities'. This is expressed as an explicit goal in CR2: 'To ensure museum collections and exhibitions are considerate to the cultural rights of people and communities.'

The issue of linking museum collections and exhibitions directly with 'the cultural rights of people and communities' is not specifically dealt with in the CAL Committee recommendations. Since this is an issue not explicitly explored by the museums inquiry, it may be worthwhile scrutinising this policy area further. Comparison with similar policies or strategies produced for England, Wales and the Republic of Ireland highlights the fact that such an emphasis on minority rights is not present in such documents.

**(e) Specific periods and themes not addressed**

The Committee report recommended that the themes of sporting and maritime heritage are particularly strong in Northern Ireland. However, no reference is made to such themes in the draft policy, suggesting perhaps that such specifics will either not be dealt with at departmental level, leaving museums to decide their own collections, or that more specific guidance will be produced at a later date.

**(f)  Free access to museums not addressed**

The Committee recommended that the issue of free access to museums be addressed, and in particular whether there was a case for extending free access to more museums. This issue is not referred to in the draft policy.

**(g) Links with other museums policies unclear**

In recent years, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council in England[3] and CyMAL[4] in Wales have produced policy or strategy documents. A *Policy Framework for the Irish Museum Sector* was produced by the Heritage Council of Ireland in 2003[5]. The Committee had recommended that the process of policy-making should include examination of museums policies in other countries. It is not clear what use has been made of such documents in forming the DCAL draft policy. There are some key components of policies or strategies used elsewhere which are not present in the DCAL draft document. A summary of the main omissions is as follows:

---

[3] Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. 2009. *Leading Museums: A Vision and Strategic Action Plan for English Museums*.
[4] CyMAL: Museums, Archives and Libraries Wales. 2010. *A Museums Strategy for Wales*.
[5] Heritage Council of Ireland. 2003. *Policy Framework for the Irish Museum Sector*.

- In England, the Republic of Ireland and Wales, policy documents make specific recommendations about the role of key bodies within the sector, of local authorities, and of the respective government departments.

- The MLA document makes specific reference to particular development or educational programmes within the sector, such as Renaissance and the National Museum Directors Conference, as well as to other government policy areas, such as Digital Britain. CyMAL also makes some reference to specific policies and legislation.

- The CyMAL strategy includes a 'Route Map', with a clear action plan, timetable and responsibilities specified. The MLA document also sets out links between the strategy and practical actions in 'Section 5: Next Steps'.

- The Heritage Council and CyMAL documents include case studies which highlight areas of current success and provide examples of good practice.

## Annexe 1: Comparison of the DCAL Draft Museums Policy and the CAL Committee Recommendations

| No. | CAL Recommendation summary | Reference in draft Museums Policy |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Department should develop a formal museums policy | A draft Museums Policy was released for consultation by DCAL in June 2010. |
| 2 | Important to cover all museums in the sector – independents, local council and nationals | Coverage or remit of the policy is not specifically addressed in the draft policy itself, though the accompanying Ministerial Statement indicates that the policy 'sets the framework for the development of our national and local museums'. |
| 3 | National, local council and independent museums should work in partnership; create a cohesive museums sector | The themes of cohesion, integration and partnership are mentioned a number of times throughout the draft policy, especially in sections 2, 3 and 8. **However, no specific structures or governance arrangements are described.** |
| 4 | Strategic body in place, whether Northern Ireland Museums Council (NIMC) or successor body, to co-ordinate development of museums on geographical and thematic lines | **Goal IIR1 states the intention 'to strengthen the governance, management and leadership across the museums sector'. However, no specific body is mentioned in the policy.** |
| 5 | Museums should be able to tell the stories of their communities in an independent manner, albeit within the context of the Programme for Government commitment to the Shared Future agenda | This point is addressed in 3.5, 8.2 and 9.2. There is an emphasis in the draft policy on museums meeting the cultural rights of citizens, particularly within the context of four human rights conventions listed in Appendix 1. |
| 6 | Policy should raise profile of museums within government and place them in a cross-departmental context | 3.1 states that the 'overarching context' for this policy is the Executive's Programme for Government, and 8.2 refers more generally to the contribution of museums to the 'broader policy agendas across Government'. **No further reference is made specifically to cross-departmental contexts.** |
| 7 | Strengthen links between museums and education at a departmental level – involving DCAL, DE and DEL | Section 6 deals with 'Education and Learning', stating that museums should be 'excellent centres of learning'. Goal EL4 states an intention to 'enhance museums' engagement with the formal education sector', but the main emphasis would appear to be on museums themselves developing better educational programmes and facilities. **Links with DE and DEL are not referred to.** |
| 8 | Links between museums and tourism should be strengthened and taken forward at a departmental level – links between DCAL and DETI important | Goal DA4 identifies the need to 'strengthen museums as a key component of the tourism product of Northern Ireland'. **However, no explicit links with DETI are referred to.** |

| 9 | Policy should address how museums can contribute to Shared Future agenda, in consultation with OFMDFM | Policy states in 3.3 that museums 'have a critical contribution in creating a shared and better future in Northern Ireland', though no further details are given. The draft CSI document refers in section 6.6 to the aim of ensuring that 'museums are seen as safe places for everyone to explore and participate in diverse types of community activity'. |
|---|---|---|
| 10 | Address how current functions of NIMC will be carried out after RPA comes into effect. Non-national museums rely on NIMC for support and guidance | **NIMC is not referred to in the draft policy, and nor is RPA.** |
| 11 | NIMC should continue in its present form until museums policy is implemented; urge Minister to note strong support for NIMC | **As above – no reference to NIMC.** |
| 12 | Include a strategy for the accreditation scheme under RPA | Accreditation is described in 3.4, and identified as a specific goal in IIR2, 'to consolidate the Museum Accreditation Scheme as the sector standard and as the gateway to public funding'. No reference is made to RPA. |
| 13 | Consider appropriate level of museums provision across post-RPA council areas; ensure greater equality in museums provision across the different council areas | A number of general references to the relevance and importance of museums to local interests and agenda are made (such as 2.3 and 8.2), and goal IIR5 states an intention to 'ensure that local museums…have adequate and effective guidance and support'. **However, the issue of balance of provision across council areas is not addressed.** |
| 14 | Provide local councils with guidance on how to develop the museum sector in their area | **This is not referred to in the draft policy.** |
| 15 | Set out strong vision of museums in our society; must be clear about what museums do and for whom, including both the needs of their local communities and the needs of tourists | Draft policy as a whole attempts to do this, particularly in section 2 and the associated Ministerial Statement. |
| 16 | Address the issue of staff training/development, including curatorial skills | Section 7 refers to the care of collections, but staff training is not mentioned here. 2.3 refers to staff having 'the necessary skills and access to training in order to provide high quality visitor experiences', and goal EL7 aims to 'strengthen continuous professional development of staff'. |
| 17 | Address the issue of access to museums and whether there is a case for extending free access to more museums | **Free access is not referred to**, though 2.3 refers in general terms to the importance of museums being considered 'welcoming' and 'safe'. Section 5 states that 'museums should strive to ensure universal access to their buildings and their collections and their |

| | | services'. |
|---|---|---|
| 18 | Address how museums can contribute to education and lifelong learning | All of section 6 is dedicated to 'Education and Learning', with seven goals setting out improvements to museums education services and the encouragement of greater links between museums and the formal education sector. |
| 19 | Address the issue of acquiring and managing collections | Section 7 is dedicated to 'Collections development', and covers such aspects as the care and management of artefacts, and the development of collections. |
| 20 | Accreditation should be addressed | Accreditation is directly addressed in section 8, and goal IIR2, which refers to consolidating the 'Museum Accreditation Scheme as the sector standard'. |
| 21 | Policy should address how the military and maritime museum sectors can be developed | **Specific themes and periods of heritage are not addressed, so military and maritime are not referred to specifically.** |
| 22 | Policy should address which themes are not currently being covered by museums and how these themes can be developed; sporting history is noted in particular | **Sporting history is not referred to.** However, the principle of identifying in general what aspects of heritage are not presented and undertaking 'gap' filling is addressed in section 7.3. |
| 23 | Issue of increasing private sector investment in museums should be addressed | Section 8.1 specifically states that 'museums increasingly need to look at the sustainable use of resources and their capacity to develop streams of self-generated income'. |
| 24 | Museums policy development should be taken forward by a panel of key stakeholders, including NIMC, National Museums Northern Ireland (NMNI), and a range of departments | **It is not clear whether key stakeholders, or either of the national bodies, played a primary role in the policy-making process.** |
| 25 | Policy itself should be drawn up by NIMC, drawing on the expertise of its board members, and by NMNI | **It is not clear whether either NIMC or NMNI played a role in writing the draft policy.** |
| 26 | Consultation should take place with all stakeholders, the Arts Council and Sport NI, and those in education, tourism and community regeneration | **It is not clear which bodies took part in the consultation.** |
| 27 | Process of policy-making should include examination of museums policies in other countries | **It is not clear which other policies or strategies were consulted.** |
| 28 | First draft of museums policy should be produced within six months | The committee's report was released on 11 December 2008, and the draft policy was released for consultation on 24 July 2010. |