



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## Research and Information Service Briefing Note

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# Background briefing: museums provision in Northern Ireland

## Overview

There are 42 accredited museums in Northern Ireland<sup>1</sup>, including five national museums. Museums in Northern Ireland are supported by two key bodies: National Museums Northern Ireland provides five museums, and also has responsibility for W5; Northern Ireland Museums Council supports local museums by providing some funding, training, and research into the museums sector. In 2009/10, the CAL Committee conducted an inquiry into the development of a museums policy. Later in 2010, a draft policy was released by DCAL for consultation, and published in final form in March 2011. Also in 2011, the CAL Committee conducted a review into the impact and value of museums in Northern Ireland. This paper summarises the role of NMNI and NIMC, and briefly describes some aspects of the policy development process.

### 1 National Museums Northern Ireland

National Museums Northern Ireland (NMNI) was established under the Museums and Galleries (Northern Ireland) Order 1998. Its purpose is to 'care for and present inspirational collections that reflect the creativity, innovation, history, culture and people

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<sup>1</sup> Annexe 1 contains a list of the 42 accredited museums.

of Northern Ireland'.<sup>2</sup> NMNI has five sites at the Ulster Museum, Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, Ulster American Folk Park, the Armagh County Museum. It also has responsibility for W5.

### Budget<sup>3</sup>

	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
DCAL budget	17,690,221	20,451,069	19,878,460	19,318,000
Donations	8,892	12,956	1,340,048	-
Other sources	1,837,726	5,183,095	3,743,587	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>19,536,839</b>	<b>25,647,120</b>	<b>24,962,095</b>	<b>19,318,000</b>

In a written submission to the CAL Committee on 13 January 2011, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure indicated a proposed budget reduction for NMNI over the period 2011/12 to 2014/15 of 5.42%<sup>4</sup>, although when the accompanying departmental figures<sup>5</sup> are examined it is not clear how this figure is derived. In a written submission to the committee on 7 January 2011, NMNI stated<sup>6</sup>:

*The reduction in National Museums' budget will impact on the delivery of frontline services to the public and our ability to support the tourism industry... While acknowledging the difficult context of the budget the organisation is concerned about the impact reductions of this level will have on our ability as a group of National Museums to operate as a strategic partner in tourism and learning.*

Describing some of the specific impacts on the organisation of the proposed budget reduction, NMNI state that staffing levels would need to reduce by around 25%, and museum opening hours would reduce from six days a week to an average of five days a week.

## 2 Northern Ireland Museums Council

The Northern Ireland Museums Council (NIMC) is an Executive Non Departmental Public Body and also a registered Company Limited by Guarantee with charitable status in the Companies (NI) Order 1986.

<sup>2</sup> National Museums Northern Ireland <http://www.nmni.com/Home/About-Us> Accessed 17/05/2011

<sup>3</sup> Information provided by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, 10.9.10, and included in NI Assembly Research Paper NIAR 384-10 DCAL's Arms-Length Bodies: Accountability, Governance and Resources, 13.9.10.

<sup>4</sup> Letter to the CAL Committee from the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Nelson McCausland MLA, 7.1.11.

<sup>5</sup> Written submission from DCAL, *Draft Budget 2011-15: Spending and savings proposals within the department of culture, arts and leisure*, 30.12.10.

<sup>6</sup> Written submission to the CAL Committee from National Museums Northern Ireland, *Budget 2010*, 7.1.11.

Its mission is to ‘support local museums in Northern Ireland in maintaining and improving their standards of collections care and services to the public, and to promote a coherent framework of museum provision’.<sup>7</sup>

NIMC has four grant programmes: the ‘main grant programme’ (for funding all museum programmes, excluding capital schemes); ‘research grants’ (for museums to research and publish their collections in partnership with outside specialists); ‘travel and training’ (for enabling museum staff to undertake training); and ‘specimen purchase’ (to facilitate museum acquisitions).

### Budget<sup>8</sup>

	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
DCAL budget	308,903	361,000	279,000
Donations	28,633	31,786	-
Other sources	25,139	12,219	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>362,675</b>	<b>405,005</b>	<b>279,000</b>

In a written submission to the CAL Committee on 13 January 2011 explaining the nature of budget reductions, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure did not refer to NIMC specifically<sup>9</sup>. However, in NIMC’s own submission, the organisation indicates a range of savings measures and states that,

*Even with these savings it is estimated that NIMC will need to reduce the level of the grant assistance provided to local museums by £10,000 (20%) in order to balance the 2011–12 budget.*

## 3 Development of a museums policy for Northern Ireland

A museums policy for Northern Ireland was launched by DCAL on 9 March 2011. Some key developments in this process were as follows:

### (a) CAL Committee inquiry

The CAL Committee conducted an inquiry into the development of a museums policy in 2008. The Committee concluded that a museums policy for Northern Ireland needed to be developed, found ‘overwhelming support’ from those who gave evidence to the inquiry for the creation of a museums policy, and also found consensus that without a policy in place, museums in Northern Ireland would miss opportunities to develop their potential to the maximum. Some of the key themes identified by the committee were as follows:

<sup>7</sup> Northern Ireland Museums Council ‘Aims and Objectives’ <http://www.nimc.co.uk/>

<sup>8</sup> Information provided by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, 10.9.10, and included in NI Assembly Research Paper NIAR 384-10 DCAL’s Arms-Length Bodies: Accountability, Governance and Resources, 13.9.10.

<sup>9</sup> Letter to the CAL Committee from the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Nelson McCausland MLA, 7.1.11.

- The need for greater integration between the local, council and national museums to create a cohesive museum sector;
- The potential to strengthen the museum sector as a whole and move it higher up government agendas;
- The need for a cross-departmental approach to museums, so that the links between museums and education, tourism and the creation of a shared future can be reinforced;
- The future of the Northern Ireland Museums Council under the Review of Public Administration, and the need for its functions to be carried out in future either by itself or a successor body;
- The need to draw on the expertise of the Northern Ireland Museums Council and National Museums Northern Ireland in taking forward the development of the policy in a timely manner.

#### **(b) DCAL draft policy**

DCAL produced a draft policy for consultation in July 2010<sup>10</sup>. This draft differed from the CAL Committee recommendations in a number of respects:

- The specific responsibilities and role of NMNI and NIMC were not specified;
- No clear links were specified with other government departments, and no responsibilities were described for DE, DETI and DEL;
- RPA was not referred to in the draft policy, in spite of concerns in the sector about how such reorganisation might impact on museums;
- An emphasis on cultural rights featured in the draft policy which was not present in the committee recommendations and which did not emerge during the Committee inquiry;
- The Committee report recommended that the themes of sporting and maritime heritage are particularly strong in Northern Ireland. However, no reference was made to such themes in the draft policy;
- The issue of expanding free access to museums was not addressed;
- Links with other museums policies were not made clear.

The consultation met with some agreement from the sector, particularly regarding the fact that a draft policy had been created, and also agreeing with the overall intentions of the work. Some of the concerns expressed by consultation respondents included the lack of specific roles and responsibilities assigned in implementing the policy, the absence of a specific action plan and framework for implementation, uncertainty over

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<sup>10</sup> Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. 24.7.10. 'Museums policy for Northern Ireland: Consultation document'.

monitoring and evaluating the policy, and the need for specific commitments from DCAL on resourcing. The greatest area of concern among many respondents was the section of the draft policy which focused on cultural rights.

### **(c) Final museums policy**

A final policy was launched by DCAL at the Ulster Museum on 9 March 2011<sup>11</sup>. Although the strategic priorities remained approximately the same, a section on cultural rights had been removed, with this subject dealt with more briefly and without reference to specific treaties or obligations. There was some restructuring of the introductory sections and the final section on 'Turning Words into Action'. A section on 'Values, Standards and Legislation' had also been removed, and references to the conservation work of museums, and the principle of 'adequate protection of our heritage', were also removed. The importance of museums engaging with communities is emphasised more strongly in the final policy, and mention was made for the first time of the voluntary and community sector, addressing some of the concerns raised in consultation responses. The roles of National Museums Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Museums Council are described in the final policy in contrast to the draft, and references to the challenges of funding museums in the future were introduced.

## **4 CAL Committee review**

In February and March 2011, the CAL Committee conducted a review into the value and impact of museums in Northern Ireland. This review found that:

*...the potential of the museum sector had been underestimated due to the lack of data to make the case. It found that research on the sector was out of date and was in urgent need of updating. The Committee agreed that the sector needed to establish a consistent methodology by which to measure and demonstrate the direct and indirect economic and social value of museums, and that partnership working across the museum sector and departments was essential to fully realise the wider economic and social impact and value of museums<sup>12</sup>.*

The committee report made 16 recommendations, covering issues such as greater recognition by the Executive of the museum and heritage sector, and the importance of improvements in research methods so there is a greater understanding of the economic and social impact of museums. It was recommended that the department contributes thinking and resources in support of greater research and understanding, and that DCAL identifies examples of good practice in measuring the economic and social impact of museums so that methods of assessment are improved.

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<sup>11</sup> Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. *Northern Ireland Museums Policy*, 9.3.11.

<sup>12</sup> Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure. *Committee review into value and impact of museums in Northern Ireland*, 23.3.11.

## 5 Similar bodies in other jurisdictions

There are a number of differences between the nature of government oversight of museums in Northern Ireland and elsewhere in the UK and Ireland. Firstly, in most other jurisdictions museums are overseen by the same department that also deals with wider heritage issues (including access to, and protection of, ancient monuments, listed buildings and conservation areas, and the provision of information about the historic environment). In Northern Ireland, these issues are split between DCAL (for museums) and DoE (for the historic environment). Secondly, the relationship between museums bodies and their overseeing department varies across the UK and Ireland, with some taking a form anomalous to arms-length bodies (such as Executive NGPBs), but others being agencies or public corporations. England is the only jurisdiction not to have a specific body overseeing the work of its national museums.

In terms of the bodies and departments responsible directly for museums provision, the following are approximately analogous:

### **(a) Republic of Ireland**

As of 1 May 2011, heritage functions in the Republic of Ireland have transferred to the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. Responsibilities for museums are divided between two key bodies:

#### *Heritage Council*

The Heritage Council seeks to 'protect and enhance the richness, quality and diversity' of Irish national heritage, and to increase awareness of heritage and highlight 'its importance to public policy and everyday life'. The Heritage Council includes museums within its remit, and supports the Museum Standards Programme for Ireland, which aims to raise standards of care across Irish museums and galleries.

#### *National Museum of Ireland*

The National Museum of Ireland describes its purpose as to 'collect, preserve, promote and exhibit all examples of Ireland's portable material heritage and natural history'.<sup>13</sup> It is 'an autonomous semi-state institution'<sup>14</sup> and receives funding from the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.<sup>15</sup> The museum has four sites: Archaeology, Decorative Arts and History, and Natural History (in Dublin), and Country Life (in Turlough Park, County Mayo).

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<sup>13</sup> National Museum of Ireland 'About Us' <http://www.museum.ie/en/about-us.aspx> accessed 19/05/2011.

<sup>14</sup> National Museum of Ireland 'Statement of Strategy' <http://www.museum.ie/en/list/statement-of-strategy.aspx> accessed 19/05/2011.

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.arts-sport-tourism.gov.ie/culture/national\\_cultural\\_institutions.html](http://www.arts-sport-tourism.gov.ie/culture/national_cultural_institutions.html) accessed 19/05/2011.

## **(b) Scotland**

In Scotland, museums functions are overseen by the Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs.

### *Museums Galleries Scotland*

Museums Galleries Scotland (MGS) is the membership body for museums and galleries in Scotland. It offers a number of grant schemes for full members.<sup>16</sup> It also offers advice, guidance and support for its members. It also works with members to achieve ‘a shared vision: A welcoming museums and galleries sector that opens doors and celebrates collections, inspiring creativity, learning and enjoyment for all’.<sup>17</sup> MGS has recently acted as the lead partner in ALMA-UK (Archives, Libraries and Museums UK), which conducted a project analysing economic impact methodologies for archives, libraries and museums. This project includes representation from NIMC, and a report deriving from the first phase was published in February 2011<sup>18</sup>. Pilot studies will make up phase two of the project in various parts of the UK, including Northern Ireland.

### *National Museums Scotland*

National Museums Scotland describes its mission as ‘to preserve, interpret and make accessible for all, the past and present of Scotland, other nations and cultures, and the natural world’.<sup>19</sup> Their collection is displayed across five museum sites in Scotland: the National Museum of Scotland and National War Museum, in Edinburgh, the National Museum of Flight, in East Lothian, the National Museum of Costume in Dumfries and the National Museum of Rural Life in East Kilbride.<sup>20</sup>

## **(c) England**

In England, the UK government’s Department for Culture, Media and Sport oversees museums functions.

### *Museums, Libraries and Archives Council*

There is no direct equivalent to National Museums Northern Ireland for England. However, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) exists to promote ‘best practice in museums, libraries and archives, to inspire innovative, integrated and sustainable services for all’.<sup>21</sup> The MLA provides grants to ‘sponsored bodies who promote different aspects of the work of museums, libraries and archives or within the remit of national programmes’.<sup>22</sup> As a result of the spending review in 2010, the UK

<sup>16</sup> See Museum Galleries Scotland website for details on grants and funding for museums. Available at <http://www.museumgalleriesScotland.org.uk/how-we-help-members/grants/our-grant-schemes/> accessed 19.5.11.

<sup>17</sup> Museums Galleries Scotland: ‘What We Do’ <http://www.museumgalleriesScotland.org.uk/what-we-do/> accessed 19.5.11.

<sup>18</sup> ALMA UK. 2011. *Economic Impact Toolkits for Archives, Libraries and Museums: Final Report*. ERS Research and Consultancy.

<sup>19</sup> National Museums Scotland. ‘About us’: [http://www.nms.ac.uk/about\\_us/about\\_us.aspx](http://www.nms.ac.uk/about_us/about_us.aspx) accessed 17.5.11.

<sup>20</sup> National Museums Scotland. ‘What we do’: [http://www.nms.ac.uk/about\\_us/what\\_we\\_do.aspx](http://www.nms.ac.uk/about_us/what_we_do.aspx) accessed 17.5.11.

<sup>21</sup> Museums Libraries and Archives ‘About Us’ <http://www.mla.gov.uk/about> accessed 19.5.11.

<sup>22</sup> Museums Libraries and Archives ‘Grants and Funding’ <http://www.mla.gov.uk/what/support/grants> accessed 19.5.11.

government announced that the MLA would be disbanded, with its responsibilities transferred to Arts Council England from January 2012.

#### **(d) Wales**

In Wales, museums are overseen by the Minister for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage. Two bodies are of particular importance in this respect:

##### *Amgueddfa Cymru*

Amgueddfa Cymru, or National Museum Wales, is an Assembly Government Sponsored Body dedicated to preserving, presenting and promoting the culture of Wales. It is almost entirely dependent on funding from the Welsh Assembly Government.<sup>23</sup> Its vision is to develop its 'family of world-class national museums to inspire learning and connect people with the past, present and future'.<sup>24</sup>

##### *CyMAL: Museums, Archives and Libraries Wales*

CyMAL is similar in some ways to the Northern Ireland Museums Council, in that it provides advice and support to local museums, archives and libraries in Wales, and is the Sponsorship Division for the National Library of Wales and Amgueddfa Cymru. It also administers grant schemes for museums, archives and libraries, provides advice on other sources of funding, and published research into the museums sector.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> National Museum Wales 'Vision Map 2009-2012'

[http://www.museumwales.ac.uk/media/9/7/1/3/vision\\_map\\_resources.en.pdf](http://www.museumwales.ac.uk/media/9/7/1/3/vision_map_resources.en.pdf) accessed 19.5.11.

<sup>24</sup> National Museum Wales 'Vision Map' <http://www.museumwales.ac.uk/en/2399/> accessed 19.5.11.

<sup>25</sup> CyMAL: Museums Archives and Libraries Wales

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/cultureandsport/museumsarchiveslibraries/cymal/?lang=en> accessed 19.5.11.



**Annexe 1: List of Accredited Museums in Northern Ireland<sup>26</sup>**

Andrew Jackson/ US Rangers Centre  
Address House  
Argory, The  
Armagh County Museum  
Armagh Public Library  
Ballycastle Museum  
Ballymena Museum  
Ballymoney Museum  
Barn Museum  
Carrickfergus Museum  
Castle Ward  
Coleraine Museum  
Craigavon Museum Services  
Down County Museum  
Downpatrick And County Down Railway  
F.E. Mc William Gallery and Studio  
Fermanagh County Museum  
Flame: The Gasworks Museum Of Ireland  
Florence Court  
Harbour Museum  
Hezlett House  
Irish Linen Centre And Lisburn Museum  
Larne Museum  
Limavady Museum  
Mount Stewart  
Museum of the Royal Irish Regiment  
Newry And Mourne Museum  
North Down Museum  
Police Museum  
Queen's University Belfast, The Naughton Gallery At Queen's  
Railway Preservation Society Of Ireland  
Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers Museum  
Royal Irish Fusiliers Museum  
Royal Ulster Rifles Museum  
Sentry Hill  
Somme Heritage Centre  
Springhill  
Strabane District Museum  
Tower Museum  
Ulster American Folk Park  
Ulster Folk And Transport Museum  
Ulster Museum

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<sup>26</sup> List obtained from the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, England, which administers the Accreditation Scheme for museums in the UK: [http://www.mla.gov.uk/what/raising\\_standards/accreditation](http://www.mla.gov.uk/what/raising_standards/accreditation) Accessed 27.5.11.