



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Research and Library Service Briefing Note

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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 2008².

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 England³ and CyMAL⁴ 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 2003⁵. 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.