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The impact and value of museums: background information

This paper provides some preliminary information on the feasibility of assessing the value and impact of museums, in the light of a potential inquiry on this topic by the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure.

1 Previous CAL Committee inquiry

A previous museums inquiry in 2008 was conducted with the following terms of reference:

- 1 To consider the impact on museums in Northern Ireland resulting from a lack of a formal Departmental policy on museums over a number of years
- 2 To examine/consider the Departmental guidelines currently used in place of a formal policy
- 3 To examine levels of public and private sector investment in museums in Northern Ireland and to compare with other UK regions and the Republic of Ireland and to assess how the associated impacts on individuals, communities and the economy are measured and analysed

- 4 To draw on research and evidence on best practice on policy for museums which results in building a joined-up museum sector that will, over the long-term, deliver real benefit to individuals, communities and the economy and the associated outcomes
- 5 To seek input from the museums sector and stakeholders to establish views on a way forward for museums in Northern Ireland
- 6 To report to the Assembly making recommendations to the Department and/ or others.

Point three in these terms of reference describes an intention 'to assess how the associated impacts on individuals, communities and the economy are measured and analysed'.

Indeed, this issue was alluded to during the 2008 inquiry by the Northern Ireland Museums Council, and is subsequently referred to in the subsequent Committee report as follows:

'With no formal policy in place, Government have few reference points by which they can determine the value of their investment in museums or its impact on social, cultural or economic development. With no vision for the development of the sector, and no strategic framework through which the potential of the collective effort of the sector might be unlocked, are we not bereft of a route map?'¹

Throughout the inquiry, some discussion of this issue took place. For example, the Mid-Antrim Museums Service commented on the importance of understanding the social value of museums, and the role to be played by a policy in guiding such an understanding².

The Northern Ireland Museums Council commented on a number of occasions that it is important to understand whether museums are delivering the best value for money³.

However, throughout the inquiry, discussion of the need to assess the social and economic value of museums was limited, instead focusing more on the role of museums, their activities, and their need for resources, support and strategic direction.

¹ Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure. 2008. Report on the Committee's Inquiry into the Development of a Museums Policy for Northern Ireland: http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/culture/2007mandate/reports/report07_08_09r.htm Accessed 29.11.10: oral evidence provided by the Northern Ireland Museums Council, 16.10.08.

² Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure. 2008. Report on the Committee's Inquiry into the Development of a Museums Policy for Northern Ireland: http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/culture/2007mandate/reports/report07_08_09r.htm Accessed 29.11.10: oral evidence provided by the Mid-Antrim Museums Service, 25.9.10.

³ Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure. 2008. Report on the Committee's Inquiry into the Development of a Museums Policy for Northern Ireland: http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/culture/2007mandate/reports/report07_08_09r.htm Accessed 29.11.10: oral evidence provided by the Northern Ireland Museums Council, 29.5.08 and 16.9.10.

Indeed, in the recommendations which emerged from the inquiry, the issue of assessing the social and economic value and impact of museums is not explicitly referred to. Instead, the recommendations covered issues such as the need to produce a museums policy, accreditation, education, collections acquisition and management, RPA and local government, strategic leadership and management within the sector, partnership, and linkages with other government departments and policies.

2 Draft museums policy

In the draft policy produced by DCAL and opened for public consultation between July and September 2010⁴, references are made to the importance of assessing the value and impact of museums obliquely but not explicitly. For example, in 'Section 3: Values, Standards and Legislation', it states that,

'Museums should play a full part in contributing to the social, cultural and economic development of Northern Ireland, particularly as they are, in the main, sustained through the public purse.'

However, the significance of *measuring* or *understanding* the contribution of museums to social, cultural and economic development is not explicitly referred to. Similarly, within 'Section 5: Developing Audiences', the draft policy states that,

'While Northern Ireland's museums have intrinsic and significant 'economic value', their full potential in contributing to the development of tourism in Northern Ireland has yet to be fully unlocked.'

It could be argued that this economic value needs to be fully and continuously assessed so that a clear understanding is provided, in order for the appropriate strategies and funding to be deployed. Finally, in 'Section 8: Infrastructure, Investment and Resources', goal IIR6 states the intention to:

'...maintain up-to-date intelligence on the sector in support of the development of policy and strategy.'

It may be that the details of any intelligence gathering (such as the types of information to be gathered and the methodology) will emerge as part of the key actions that flow from the museums policy in due course. However, this is not explicitly stated in the draft policy.

⁴ Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. 24.7.10. 'Museums policy for Northern Ireland: Consultation document'.

3 Comparative work

The Communities and Culture Committee of the National Assembly for Wales is currently conducting an inquiry into the accessibility of the arts and cultural activities. As part of this inquiry, the committee will be examining the ‘impact of the Welsh Government’s investment in museums, libraries and archives in the context of providing access to cultural activities’⁵. Indeed, the Cymal document, *A Museums Strategy for Wales*, states an intention to ‘carry out a study to identify the economic impact of museums’⁶.

The UK Department for Culture, Media and Sport conducts research on a continuous basis as part of its Culture and Sport Evidence Programme (CASE). The programme has recently published a report called *Understanding the Value of Engagement in Culture and Sport*, which focuses on the recent history of attempts to derive economic values for cultural engagement and an analysis of subjective well-being⁷. It also aims to establish methodologies for the economic assessment of culture, including museums, in a fashion which produces statistically significant data which may be compared with, for example, health and employment. There would be merit in consulting further with the CASE team.

In 2008, the Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure commissioned Price Waterhouse Coopers, in collaboration with the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, to examine a model for understanding the social and economic value of public libraries, museums, arts and sport in Northern Ireland⁸. This established the following key figures⁹:

- The economic value of the museums sector in Northern Ireland was £17.3 million in 2000/01; this equates to 0.1% GDP.
- Total expenditure of the sector is around £16.2 million of which 85% or almost £15 million is spent in Northern Ireland.
- The sector employs directly around 650 people in Northern Ireland or 540 full time equivalents, which after applying a multiplier, increases to almost 600 jobs.

⁵ National Assembly for Wales website. ‘Communities and Culture Committee: Inquiry into the accessibility of arts and cultural activities in Wales’: <http://bit.ly/gAps97> Accessed 26.11.10.

⁶ Cymal: Museums, Libraries and Archives Wales. *A Museums Strategy for Wales*. Welsh Assembly Government: p46.

⁷ Department for Culture, Media and Sport. 2010. *Understanding the Value of Engagement in Culture and Sport*. Culture and Sport Evidence Programme.

⁸ DCAL, NISRA & PriceWaterhouseCoopers. 2008. *Social and Economic Value of Public Libraries, Museums, Arts and Sport in Northern Ireland Phase I: Designing a Model*.

⁹ DCAL, NISRA & PriceWaterhouseCoopers. 2008. *Social and Economic Value of Public Libraries, Museums, Arts and Sport in Northern Ireland Phase I: Designing a Model*: pvii.

Two key recommendations were made by the report, as follows¹⁰:

- The last significant research regarding the economic benefits of museums in Northern Ireland was conducted in 2003. This research infrastructure is dated and the sector would benefit greatly from guidance from DCAL regarding a more frequent evaluation framework.
- Little research has been undertaken regarding the social benefits of museums in Northern Ireland, despite the importance of the sector nationally and internationally, evidenced throughout. Unlike the sports and arts sectors, museums benefit from having a clear 'customer base', and the impact of the sector should be easier to facilitate. Although the literature base illustrates that wider studies tend to place more emphasis on the economic rather than the social benefits of the sector, an effective social evaluation tool could be developed and rolled out on a consistent basis across Northern Ireland's museums sector.

A number of potential social benefits are highlighted in the Price Waterhouse Coopers report, including those associated with tourism, education, health, regeneration, and social inclusion. However, in spite of these recommendations, it is not clear to what extent information about the economic and social value of museums is collected and analysed on a 'consistent basis' by DCAL, the key museum bodies in Northern Ireland, or the museums themselves. Although the Continuous Household Survey exercise provided some information on how individuals experience museums in Northern Ireland¹¹, more in-depth qualitative assessments, explanations of the deeper social role of museums, and analysis of their economic contribution, appear not to be available.

4 Potential new terms of reference

Given the potential usefulness and importance of assessing the social and economic value of museums, and also the apparent lack of ongoing information gathering at present, there may be merit in establishing a committee inquiry which addresses the following issues (see overleaf):

¹⁰ DCAL, NISRA & PriceWaterhouseCoopers. 2008. *Social and Economic Value of Public Libraries, Museums, Arts and Sport in Northern Ireland Phase I: Designing a Model*: pviii.

¹¹ Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. 2010. *Experience of Museums in Northern Ireland: Findings from the Continuous Household Survey 2008/09*.

Inquiry into the value and impact of museums

- 1 To investigate what work is currently being conducted to monitor the social and economic value of museums in Northern Ireland
- 2 To assess what level of understanding exists within DCAL and the key museums bodies about the methods of measuring value and impact on a consistent, ongoing basis
- 3 To investigate how information about the social and economic impact of museums could be used to assess value for money across government
- 4 To seek areas of good practice within the museums sector *outside* of Northern Ireland, such as those followed by Cymal, the Heritage Council in Ireland and elsewhere, and make recommendations about how improvements could be made to the understanding of the social and economic value of museums *within* Northern Ireland.

5 Consultees

Given the timescale for the inquiry, and the relatively technical nature of the topic, it is suggested that a focused list of consultees be considered. This could include:

Contact	Relevance
DCAL staff	Update on current research into social and economic value of museums; examine relationship between the value of museums and the museums policy.
National Museums Northern Ireland	Gauge level of engagement with this kind of work, and assess potential level of resources required to monitor on an ongoing basis.
Northern Ireland Museums Council	As above.
Cymal: Museums, Libraries and Archives Wales Welsh Assembly Government Rhodfa Padarn Aberystwyth Ceredigion SY23 3UR Wales	Discover areas of good practice which may be transferable to Northern Ireland. Examine the relationship between impact monitoring and policy-making/funding.
Heritage Council Ireland Church Lane Kilkenny Ireland	As above.
Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, England Grosvenor House 14 Bennetts Hill Birmingham B2 5RS	As above.