



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

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**COMMITTEE FOR  
CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE**

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**OFFICIAL REPORT  
(Hansard)**

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**Review of the Value and Impact of  
Museums in Northern Ireland**

10 February 2011

**NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY**

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**Review of the Value and Impact of Museums in Northern Ireland**

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**Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Mr Barry McElduff (Chairperson)  
Mr Declan O'Loan (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr David Hilditch  
Mr William Humphrey  
Mr Kieran McCarthy  
Mr Ken Robinson  
Mr Pat Sheehan

**Witnesses:**

Mr Paddy Gilmore        )  
Dr Jim McGreevy        )       National Museums Northern Ireland  
Mrs Gillian McLean     )

**The Chairperson (Mr McElduff):**

Good afternoon, Paddy, Gillian and Jim. Thank you for coming along. I will hand over to you straight away, Paddy. Perhaps you will introduce the team.

**Mr Paddy Gilmore (National Museums Northern Ireland):**

Absolutely. Thank you very much indeed, Chairperson. I am Paddy Gilmore, the director of learning and partnership with National Museums. Dr Jim McGreevy is the director of collections and interpretation, and Mrs Gillian McLean is the director of marketing, communications and

trading.

We had the benefit of listening to the other presentations, but we have the disbenefit, if that is the correct term, of having a lot of the questions deflected to us. I hope that my two colleagues will be able to answer those along with me. We have very much looked at this, if you forgive us, through the prism of National Museums. Therefore, ours is probably more case study orientated than some of the previous presentations. It is pretty obvious by now that no single model exists across the sector, but there are numerous studies. As we have also established from this morning's presentations, there seem to be difficulties with those studies. That said, National Museums very much recognises the imperative to demonstrate impact and value in the current economic climate, and we do that in a number of ways. I suggest at the outset, however, that if we do develop a model, rather than that simply looking at the economic and social benefits, we might also include, if at all possible, the cultural benefits of museum activities.

As I said, we use a lot of approaches and a range of methods when consulting users, gathering and analysing data and evaluating outcomes. The methods range from the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) key performance indicators (KPIs), which Alastair mentioned this morning, to more specific internal methods. Within the DCAL KPIs that you are all familiar with are visitor numbers, and the out-of-state figures, for instance, are a key part of that. As was mentioned previously, up to November 2011, 28% of museum visitors, approximately 200,000 people, were from out of state. Last year, it was 32% of our visitors.

We undertake post-project evaluations of the money we spend. In fact, there is an intrinsic economic value built into that, because we are required by DCAL and the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) to carry out an economic appraisal for anything above £200,000. We obviously undertake a formative and a summative evaluation. We have market research programmes, and we are very central to the DCAL quality indicators. That is a methodology which has inbuilt value for money. We had a recent inspection that looked at the education work we do within the quality indicators, and it confirmed that we are within the strategic remit and are delivering on the strategic elements of the DCAL agenda.

The quality indicators, which have been brought together for use by a range of arm's-length

bodies, are quite a generic system. It is not the case that we have any problem with that, but we will mention ‘Inspiring Learning for All’, which was referred to earlier. We commend that the Committee investigate that model further. ‘Inspiring Learning for All’ has been developed specifically for the museum sector. It is based on core museological principles and has been tested and developed within museums. In fact, those core principles are intrinsically built into the draft museum policy for Northern Ireland. It is a comprehensive framework that:

“supports you to review and improve performance”.

Mention has also been made of the generic social outcomes, which are another derivative of that particular model. Again, I think that they are very important, and something that the Committee may wish to look at. The generic social outcomes that are currently in the framework look at stronger and safer communities, strengthening public life, and health and well-being. Those are being developed further, and my understanding is that they can be developed to reflect the specific, local policy initiatives of the areas in which they are being put to use.

In relation to economic impact, our summary looks at one model, which is that of the Association of Independent Museums. We drew that model out because it has developed an economic toolkit — I think that someone referred to it earlier — which assesses the range of museums at different levels and across different regions. There is a flexibility that may be of use.

The three key elements that it looks at are the number of visitors the museum attracts, the significance of tourism to the local economy and the number of paid employees. If we put our figures into that, the number of visitors the museum attracts is 1 million over a year. We are in four of the top 10 visitor attractions. On the significance of tourism to the local economy, the draft tourism strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020 talks about 4.5 million visitors coming to Northern Ireland and £1 billion in earnings from tourism by 2020. On the number of paid employees, we have 432 employees. Using that model, National Museums contends that we make a significant impact on the local economy. The estimated value, using that model, in the UK is £610 million to £900 million, which underscores the point that there is no science in economic evaluations, certainly from my point of view.

The Committee might want to look at what we do in respect of generating revenue. Gillian’s

directorates has a very strong commercial focus. Last year, 23% of our income — £2.33 million — was self-generated. This year, we are on target to make £2.7 million of self-generated income. Paul mentioned the Ulster Museum. I should draw your attention to the fact that we have spent £17.8 million on the Ulster Museum, but that money was drawn from 15 different sources, and a third of that income — around £6 million — was independently fund-raised. We have a range of fund-raising initiatives. For instance, we have a Big Lottery Fund grant of £1 million, and we are seeking additional EU funds over the next year or so.

I will turn to tourism. It was great to hear that Gareth stood over that figure of £4.2 million, because we quoted it as well. The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has said that, for every £1 million it spends in a region, tourism revenues worth £4.2 million are brought into the local economy. HLF's generous grant of £4.7 million to the Ulster Museum would be worth £19.7 million to the local economy over 10 years. In fact, the total figure of £17.8 million would be worth £74 million or £75 million over 10 years. Heritage is a major motivation behind the tourism experience. We are very much tied into developing the tourism experience as part of the overall proposition.

I mentioned that we had 200,000 out-of-state visitors across our sites. It is also important to note that, as Mr O'Loan mentioned, the quality of the infrastructure is hugely important. The fact that we won the Art Fund prize for the best permanent exhibition in the UK and are consistently in the top visitor attractions makes the point that we have a quality product that is a core element of the tourism proposition. At the Ulster American Folk Park this year, 22% of our visitors come from the Republic and 11% come from North America. We are developing further products across the sites that are designed to attract more people from the business tourism sector.

HLF's research showed that there is a positive disproportionate effect in areas where there is a regeneration requirement. Over the past while, National Museums has invested £28.5 million in projects of what we contend to be national or international significance. All of those are designed to broaden the appeal of the sites and, critically, to attract more tourists. In fact, it could be argued that the content and the subject matter of our museums has a very direct connection with the global diaspora, the Titanic programme across NI sites being a particular example of that.

Members mentioned the importance of the role of cultural ambassador, as we have called it. We work very closely with government to promote and present a positive image of Northern Ireland, to create a resonance with the global diaspora and to demonstrate the richness of our heritage. Members will be aware of some examples of that in the work that we did with the Smithsonian Folklife Festival and the Rediscover Northern Ireland initiative right up until last September, when we were present at the 'Experience Northern Ireland: Titanic and more' exhibition in New York. We also have a key role to play in the Northern Ireland message abroad through Jim's department, which organises loans to major venues around the world. One example of that is our Turner painting, which has travelled to the Prado, the Met in New York and the Tate.

We are very focused on making sure that the money we spend is reflective of Government economic policy. We are very aware of the significance of the knowledge economy for the future growth and prosperity of Northern Ireland. We are developing learning programmes that support the STEM agenda. We are also developing programmes that stimulate an interest in entrepreneurship and build on the historic local examples of people such as Harry Ferguson, John Crossley and Rex McCandless.

I will turn to the issue of social impact. Our social impact is measured, in our terms, and it is about extending engagement and building audiences. We have a very strong C2DE audience profile across the group. In the Ulster Museum specifically, that has changed from 23%, prior to the museum work, to 46% of the audience coming from those groups. We work with schools to provide a learning experience that complements and enhances teaching in the classroom. We help to improve educational attainment levels. Our programmes are about stimulating learning and firing the natural curiosity of children. We provide a learning experience for all our visitors through imaginative programming and exhibitions that meet the needs of a wide variety of learners with different learning styles. I would point, for example, to the new discovery areas in the Ulster Museum, which provide a hands-on environment that leads to family interaction and dwell times that are beyond those normally found in museums and galleries anywhere else.

We have a key role to play in civic engagement. Paul mentioned some of the work that we have done in the past. We willingly engage with challenging social and political issues, and our

exhibitions have included 'Icons of Identity', 'Conflict' and the current Troubles exhibition. Critically, we are involved in partnerships and engagement with our local communities, such as the local Polish and Romanian communities. There are other ethnic minority and community partnerships that we could point to. In summary, it is our contention that National Museums play an important and often innovative role in promoting tourism, extending learning and educational opportunities, supporting people in communities in achieving their aspirations, building social cohesion, fostering civic engagement and pride, and stimulating creativity and imagination through engagement with our collections. We are very pleased to be here today, and we welcome the opportunity to discuss any models that could be applied across the sector consistently. We will take part in that debate if the opportunity arises.

**The Chairperson:**

Do you work collaboratively with the Museums Council in assessing the social and economic impact and value of museums? You refer to the contribution that museums make to the STEM agenda: are you actively measuring the value and impact of that?

**Mr Gilmore:**

First, the STEM agenda is new for us, but we contribute to STEM learning across our sites. We are conscious of the recent draft report on STEM subjects, which states that museums have an important role to play in stimulating curiosity and firing enthusiasm, and so on. We have not reached the stage of measuring that yet, because we are developing the programme. However, our sites offer huge opportunities to develop that form of learning and a new strand of science education. This is in its early stages, but we are aware of it and will measure in due course.

**Dr Jim McGreevy (National Museums Northern Ireland):**

I will make a general comment on a specific issue. On several occasions this morning, colleagues from DCAL, and the Deputy Chairperson, referred to coherence across the sector. That is something that needs to be looked at more closely and worked on. Colleagues from DCAL have referred to the emerging museums policy; and partnerships that cut across a wide range of museums activities and opportunities for co-operation and collaboration are a key pillar within that policy. Those partnerships could be between National Museums and the Museums Council, and between National Museums and the museums that the Museums Council represents.

**Mr Humphrey:**

Thank you for your presentation. The point has been made that Northern Ireland has a reputation and a problem with its perception nationally and internationally. One way that that could be addressed is through the development of our museums. I declare an interest as a member of Belfast City Council.

I have a particular interest in the diaspora as a way of reaching out to people and encouraging them to come to Northern Ireland. Therefore, I welcome the figures that you give about 22% of the Ulster-Scots community coming from the Republic and 11% from North America. By North America, I mean the United States and Canada, because we need to remember Canada at all stages because of the huge Ulster population there.

I reinforce the point that Declan made earlier: the need for joined-up collaboration and partnership across the tourism and hospitality sector is absolute, given that it is such a large and growing part of our economy. I think it is the largest industry in the Northern Ireland economy at this stage. Fifty per cent of tourists are cultural tourists and will come for specific reasons. Your attractions are, therefore, a key factor; the displays and exhibitions are hugely important.

To use the Ulster Museum at Stranmillis as an example; how have you worked with the NITB, the Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau and Belfast parks, because Botanic Gardens are beside the museum, DCAL, DETI, and so on? Have you been able to work collaboratively on that particular site as regards tourism?

**Mr Gilmore:**

I will make a general point. You mentioned Belfast City Council; and at this point in time, we are discussing the overall development of Botanic Gardens with the council. As you know, when the Ulster Museum was being developed, part of the issue was that it was sitting in the corner and people could not really see it. So, there has been much better integration with Botanic Gardens, which has worked to our advantage. It has also worked to the advantage of Belfast City Council and Belfast Festival, as the museum recently hosted an event that was a sell-out.



At the moment, I am in discussion with Belfast City Council about how we might use the tropical ravine to extend our education service. There is a nature discovery area overlooking the tropical ravine in Botanic Gardens, and it has been a long-time wish that we could extend our education provision to the tropical ravine. That work is in progress, subject to a funding application in which we are a partner.

**Mrs Gillian McLean (National Museums Northern Ireland):**

We work closely with the NITB and Tourism Ireland to develop the tourism offering, and we include our sites in that. We have been working closely with the Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau to secure the Ulster Museum and the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum specifically on itineraries for cruise ships over the next 12 to 18 months. We are trying to work with the NITB and the regional tourism partnerships on the issue that the east of Ireland is underdeveloped for tour operations. Ultimately, that impacts on tour operators' itineraries to the Belfast-based sites. In 2010, we hosted the NITB meet-the-buyer workshop at the Ulster Museum. As a direct result of that, between May and October, over 1,000 visitors, specifically from one travel organisation, visited the Ulster Museum.

**Mr K Robinson:**

You might want to ponder my question before Declan poses his multifaceted one. Although I have been to W5 for children's parties, I do not know a great deal about that facility or grasped what it is all about. It seems to have a significant pull for visitors. Will you explain why they go there, what is provided there and why it has grown to be so popular?

**Mr Gilmore:**

I am pleased to say that, in a general sense, the thought behind W5 originated at the Ulster Museum, where Sally Montgomery was head of education previously. The sciences collection at the Ulster Museum is based on natural science, and the idea was that another facility was needed for what might be called the hard sciences. W5, which stands for who, what, where, when and why, looks specifically at the hard sciences. It is very popular, and the STEM agenda is central to what is done there; W5 is totally focused on that. Because of that and because it is the only science centre in Northern Ireland, W5 gets strong visitor numbers.

**Mr K Robinson:**

Are the visitors from the school age group?

**Mr Gilmore:**

There are strong numbers from schools, but it also provides a family learning experience. Those who visit W5 form a good part of NMNI's overall numbers. Our submission was about museums, and, as you know, W5 is part of the overall group.

**Mr O'Loan:**

Do you feel that your contribution to, and impact on, tourism is recognised adequately in policy and resources?

**Mrs McLean:**

It is obvious that we would appreciate greater investment in our sites. The Ulster Museum project has shown what a relatively modest level of capital investment has contributed to the overall Northern Ireland tourism economy. Specifically, 25% of the visitors to the Ulster Museum are out-of-state visitors. In the current financial year, up to the end of November, there have been over 110,000 out-of-state visitors to the Ulster Museum. As you are aware, we had submitted bids for the next CSR period for capital investment in the Ulster American Folk Park and the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum with the aim of developing sites of excellence to improve the local, national and international perception of Northern Ireland.

**Mr O'Loan:**

I was going to come to that, so I will follow up on it now. Does the failure of those two projects damage you strategically?

**Mrs McLean;**

It will limit our ability to support Tourism Ireland and NITB's drive to increase tourism to Northern Ireland.

As you are aware, the visitor centre at the Ulster American Folk Park was built in the 1970s to accommodate 30,000 visitors. There were 135,000 visitors to that site alone up to the end of

January. Obviously, with the 2013 City of Culture, there was an opportunity for us to work more in partnership with those in Derry/Londonderry to support their general tourism offering. The Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, which houses the Titanic collections, also requires significant investment in a visitor centre to support the visitor offering in Northern Ireland.

**Mr O'Loan:**

What sums of money were involved in those?

**Mrs McLean:**

The Ulster American Folk Park bid was £15 million, which involved — I am not quite sure of the split — approximately £8 million for the visitor centre and remaining balance for the continued development of the new world site.

**Mr O'Loan:**

Tourism Ireland promotes the island as a unit. Where does National Museums Northern Ireland fit in with the whole museums sector on the island? Do you think in those terms? What level of co-operation do you have with other major institutions so that there is a package presentation?

**Mr Gilmore:**

In a general sense, our co-operation with museums across Northern Ireland is really good on a number of levels. However, for tourism, it is slightly different. Although we co-operate on collections, loans, research, learning, and so on, it is fair to say that it is probably not packaged in the same sort of way. So, we probably have more to do there.

**Mrs McLean:**

Tourism Ireland tends to focus on specific projects. For example, in this financial year, one of its key projects is Titanic, and National Museums is a key contributor to that and to the development of Titanic Quarter and the SS Nomadic. We work in partnership with relevant bodies on specific projects where tourism partners are being built in.

**The Chairperson:**

I thank Paddy, Dr Jim, and Gillian for coming along.