



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## Research and Library Service Briefing Note

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# DCAL's Arms-Length Bodies

## 1 Defining an Arms-Length Body

This paper provides brief information on the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure's Arms-Length Bodies (ALBs), and provides some comparison with similar bodies elsewhere in the UK.

An Arms-Length Body can be broadly defined as one which has a role in the process of government but is not a government Department, or part of one, and which accordingly operates to a greater or lesser extent at arm's length from Ministers.

One such category of Arms-Length Body is an Executive Non-Governmental Public Body (NGPBs – sometimes referred to as a 'quango', a quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisation), though there are various other arrangements by which non-governmental bodies may be attached to, or sponsored by, a government department. These different categories are set out below:

**TABLE 1: CATEGORIES OF ARMS-LENGTH BODY IN NORTHERN IRELAND**

Executive Non-Governmental Public Bodies	Set up by Ministers to carry out administrative, regulatory and commercial functions. They are legally incorporated with their own legal identity, employ their own staff and are allocated their own budgets.
Executive Agencies	Operate within a government department but are separate management units.
Companies Limited by Guarantee	These are private companies limited by guarantee. They are required to comply with both the companies legislation and the <i>Government Financial Reporting Manual</i> .
North-South Implementation Bodies	These are analogous to Executive NGPBs in Northern Ireland and Semi-State Bodies in the Republic of Ireland, and have sponsor departments in each government. A Financial Memorandum is put in place between the sponsor departments and the body.

## 2 DCAL's Arms-Length Bodies

The following table summarises the Arms-Length Bodies overseen by DCAL, and indicates in each case which category they belong to:

**TABLE 2: ARMS-LENGTH BODIES OVERSEEN BY DCAL**

Body	Executive Non-Governmental Public Body	North/South Implementation Body	Companies Limited by Guarantee	Charity
Arts Council of Northern Ireland	✓			
Libraries NI	✓			
National Museums and Galleries of Northern Ireland	✓			✓
Northern Ireland Museums Council	✓		✓	✓
Sport Northern Ireland	✓			
Waterways Ireland		✓		
The Language Body – Foras na Gaeilge and Ulster Scots Agency		✓		
Armagh Observatory and Armagh Planetarium			✓	✓
Northern Ireland Screen			✓	

This table shows that some bodies have multiple categories. For example, the Armagh Observatory and Planetarium is both a company limited by guarantee and a charity. This means that as a charity, they are required to register with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland, and comply with the *Charities Statement of Recommended Practice*. They are also required to comply with companies legislation. DCAL's policy is that the Accounts and Reports of each company ALB should be laid or deposited at the Assembly before being filed with Companies Registry.

The Northern Ireland Museums Council is the only body which falls into three categories, being an Executive NGPB, a company limited by guarantee and a charity. This means that as an Executive NGPB, the Minister is ultimately answerable for the

performance of the body and for their continued existence, and they must also comply with companies and charity legislation.

It should be noted that this list does not include bodies which are themselves funded by Executive NGPBs, such as funding provided by Arts Council NI or Sport Northern Ireland. Neither does it include bodies which are considered 'core funded', such as the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland.

The Fisheries Conservancy Board for Northern Ireland was previously an Arms-Length Body, but has recently been wound up, its functions now being absorbed directly within DCAL.

DCAL does not currently have any Executive Agencies.

### 3 Comparisons

The table in **Annex 1** presents a comparison of culture, arts and leisure-related bodies across the UK and Republic of Ireland. It should be noted that not all of the bodies overseen by Westminster, Wales, Scotland or the Republic of Ireland are necessarily Executive NGPBs – some have the status of agencies, public corporations or other bodies.

Similarly, some Northern Ireland bodies are included here which are not ALBs (such as PLACE and the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland), though their comparable bodies do have this status in Westminster, Wales, Scotland or the Republic of Ireland.

### 4 Anomalies

A number of ALBs within the UK Department for Culture, Media and Sport have no devolved equivalents, such as the National Lottery, Ofcom, Gambling Commission, Horserace Betting Levy Board, Olympic Delivery Authority, Public Lending Right and UK Anti-Doping.

There are a number of differences in the distribution of ALBs in Northern Ireland compared with elsewhere. For example, bodies concerned with heritage issues are not dealt with by DCAL (with the exception of museums), but by DoE. This is in contrast to UK, Scottish and Welsh government departments. Similarly, tourism is not dealt with directly by DCAL, but by DETI – this is in contrast to UK, Scottish, Welsh and Republic of Ireland departments. Finally, waterways and fishing are dealt with by environment departments and agencies within the UK, Scottish, and Welsh governments, as opposed to departments with a culture, arts and leisure remit.