
MUSEUMS
TASKFORCE
STATEMENT
ON FUNDING,
NORTHERN IRELAND

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Museums are popular public institutions that deliver a range of important public benefits.

They preserve, protect and promote the public's collective memory, knowledge and history. They engage and work in partnership with the public to share stories and preserve and present collections, bringing important cultural, educational, social and scientific ideas to life. They play an important role in enhancing health and wellbeing; creating better places to live, work and visit; and inspiring new ideas, debate and reflection.

Museums have received significant public funding from national and local government and this investment is paying dividends. Museums are working in partnership with local authorities and government to contribute across a range of public policy areas across the UK from culture, science, education and tourism to immigration, hate-crime reduction, international trade and diplomacy, anti-poverty initiatives and health and social services.

There are different business models in the sector, however the majority of museums are supported by a mix of investment that includes public funding, lottery funding, private funding, donations and earned income.

Museums have taken serious steps to raise additional income and reduce costs and have deployed a variety of means to become more sustainable, from the creative use of building spaces to crowdsourcing and working in partnership. All museums face the same issues of high fixed overheads inherent in what makes them unique - caring for collections and buildings and ensuring public access. In order for museums to do this they need long-term strategic investment and consistent levels of funding.

Many local authorities continue to invest and work in partnership with other museums in their area. However, future pressures on public finances, such as Brexit, loss of EU funding and NI Assembly issues may mean that some authorities may have to reduce their support. In some cases this may lead to the closure of museums, non-replacement of staff or a reduction in opening hours, programming and public access. Reductions in public finances could leave local authorities less able to fund non-statutory services such as museums.

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Recommendations:

- Local authorities in Northern Ireland should invest in their museums to ensure a broader access to services across all areas, bearing in mind the prevailing sector standards of the Code of Ethics and Accreditation, the NI Museums Policy and NI Programme for Government.
- Government should support and make the case for national and local funding for museums. Support for national and local funding for museums should be consolidated by the NI Assembly and local councils across Northern Ireland.
- Museum functions are strengthened where there is a collective strategic approach including central and local government and a broad range of strategic bodies.
- Lottery funding should be used strategically and directed towards making the most of the museums and galleries that we already have, including gallery refurbishments, and should include investment and staff costs for key posts in areas such as learning, engagement and programming.
- Many local museums are housed in historic buildings that are expensive to maintain and in need of investment. Government should work with other funders to create a capital fund for refurbishment and repair. The NI Assembly and local authorities together with other funders should look to create funding opportunities for museums operating in historic buildings.
- Local authorities should allow the museums that they fund to operate freely in order that they can innovate and secure new sources of income while maintaining and developing their role as public institutions. This should include the ability to: access reserves; opt out of central procurement; and have control over websites and communications.
- Government and strategic agencies should target cross-departmental funds to support partnership working at a local and national level on specific programmes encouraging working with communities and diversifying and broadening audiences.
- Government and strategic agencies should articulate and support the case for cultural learning and learning outside the classroom with specific programmes that encourage museum and school partnerships.
- It is demonstrably difficult for museums outside of London to encourage philanthropy. Government and strategic agencies should develop a case for cultural giving that works at a regional level.

**MUSEUMS
ASSOCIATION**

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