

The Welsh Assembly Government's Response to the National Assembly for Wales Audit Committee Report on Collections Management at the National Museums & Galleries of Wales (2) 06-04

1. Approaches the development of a 'vision' with urgency so that its future context and general direction is defined and made clear without further delay. It should set time-related, measurable targets for the implementation of the 'vision' which should pay regard to all the recommendations in this report and be explicit in how the respective improvements will be achieved.

Accepted. The National Museums & Galleries of Wales (NMGW) is already well-advanced in the development of its vision and will publish a consultative vision statement in January 2005. Implementation will take place from April 2005 onwards and objectives and time-related measurable targets will be included in the Corporate Plans for 2005/6-8/9 and annual Operational Plans.

2. Sets realistic, achievable, time-related and measurable targets for improving the documentation of its collections and closely monitors their achievement.

Accepted. The Museum already has good paper records for its collections and by the end of March 2005 will have computerised the 40 per cent of records which relate to the most valuable items. This compares extremely favourably with peer institutions. The Museum will use its Visioning process to determine the strategic priorities between continuing to computerise all its paper records and the need to divert resources to enhancing its higher-level catalogue records and web databases and agree these targets with the Assembly Sponsor Division via its Corporate Planning process.

3. Immediately extends its spot checks, which are designed to test the condition and location of items within its collection, to include those objects held only on manual records. It should also review the level of resources allocated to verification with a view to introducing systematic verification procedures.

Accepted. Through its programme of computerising its paper records, the Museum already verifies 200,000 items a year. It also has a programme of spot-checking items recorded on its computerised database every year; it has now committed to double this spot checking programme to include items for which only paper records exist and this will be put in place by 1 April 2005. The process will be monitored by the Museum's internal auditors, currently PriceWaterhouseCoopers, and reported to the Museum's Audit Committee.

4. Formulates an action plan with timescales and costings of how it will seek to address storage problems beyond the 15-20 years that the planned improved storage facilities might cater for.

Accepted. The Museum will this calendar year embark on a £5.2 million scheme to improve its storage facilities. The Visioning process will identify those areas where it wishes to develop its collections. Together, these two processes will enable the Museum to identify future needs at a strategic level, and in turn formulate action plans to address those needs. These plans will be in place by 1 April 2006.

5. Completes, as a matter of urgency, its assessment of how best to use the funding committed by the Assembly, to lever in additional external funding, so as to improve the storage of its collections.

Accepted. The assessment has been completed; the total cost of the project will be £5.2m spread over four financial years. The Welsh Assembly Government has already committed £3.5m to the scheme and NMGW will be seeking £1m from the Heritage Lottery Fund specifically for those elements of the project at the Museum of Welsh Life which have the greatest visitor access potential. It is hoped that the bid will be submitted in the current financial year. The Museum's Council has agreed to underwrite the shortfall from the Museum's own resources to enable a prompt start to be made. Other external fund-raising will continue.

6. Takes all necessary steps to ensure that standards of storage are satisfactory and that the health and safety of staff and visitors are never put at risk.

Accepted. The Museum is currently implementing a performance indicator that will monitor continuously the standards of all its storage spaces. The work indicated in 5 above confirms the Museum's commitment to addressing this storage issue. NMGW takes its responsibility for Health & Safety very seriously in line with its Health & Safety Policy Statement. It continually ensures that such issues are given the highest possible priority.

7. Develops contingency plans to tackle the conservation backlog should the Nantgarw project not proceed and be fully successful. And it should press ahead, as a matter of urgency, with its survey of the condition of objects within its collections to ensure that its remedial conservation efforts are targeted to best effect.

Accepted. NMGW is confident that the storage/access project will proceed this year. Progress will be regularly reviewed and contingency plans will be developed in parallel with this process to ensure that the project is not delayed by external factors. The Museum will survey systematically the condition of objects as part of the decanting process associated with this project and progress will be regularly monitored by the project team. NMGW has already completed condition surveys of several collections and by the end of 2004/5 will have in place a timed plan for completing this work.

8. Undertakes an especially rigorous impact assessment at the point of acquisition and monitors collection growth to inform its planning for future storage and conservation needs.

Accepted. The Museum already has a process which requires an impact assessment to be carried out for major collections, including storage and curation/conservation requirements. It will now extend this process to every acquisition or group of acquisitions and have in place a system to do this by January 2005.

9. Seeks the views of visitors in a systematic way concerning the best way of displaying items so as to improve visitor experience.

Accepted. NMGW undertakes an annual programme of visitor research and will shortly be embarking on a series of focus groups to ascertain visitor engagement with the collections. NMGW established a Visitor Experience Group in June 2004 which will meet quarterly and is tasked with considering how best to take forward all aspects of such audience research.

10. Continues to explore ways to extend the loans programme, including extending the Partnership Programme in the interests of improving access to the collections throughout Wales.

Accepted. NMGW will continue to develop its programme of extending and promoting access to the collections through loans and partnerships with museums, galleries and other venues throughout Wales and beyond. This will range from maintaining and improving the present range of direct loans noted in the report, through to extending initiatives such as 'Cyfoeth Cymru Gyfan - Sharing Treasures'. An announcement will be made in the autumn about five venues with a visual arts focus, which will be introduced to complement the five mixed discipline venues which initiated the scheme in 2002.

11. Evaluates the use of its marketing budget to assure itself that best value for money is being achieved.

Accepted. The Museum is already in the process of reviewing its marketing strategy as part of the Visioning process. Allied to this is the branding exercise which is examining the Museum's corporate and site identities. The Museum will utilise its Internal Auditors to conduct a value for money audit on its marketing strategy to help inform the final direction any new strategy should take.

12. Develops and implements a clear plan for income generation which includes areas for growth and the action needed to maximise those opportunities.

Accepted. The Museum's Trading Company, specifically set up to drive forward commercial opportunities, completed its first year of operation in March 2004. Having completed that first year the

Trading Company is now developing a detailed Action Plan to progress the company further, with the plan being discussed at the company's Board meeting on 23 September 2004. The Action Plan will review and recommend areas for growth, and will ensure that income generation opportunities are fully exploited.

13. Monitors visitor numbers at the Museum of Welsh Life to assure itself that the introduction of these car parking charges is not detrimental to the success of free visitor entry.

Accepted: NMGW already monitors visitor numbers on a daily basis. This has confirmed that the visitor numbers to MWL have not been adversely affected by the introduction of car park charges. During the period April to August 2004, there were 402,032 visitors to the Museum of Welsh Life, compared with 392,689 in the same period in 2003, when no charge was made for car parking.