

National Museum of Ireland

Access Policy 2011 – 2015

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National Museum of Ireland's Access Policy 2011 – 2015

1.0 Document Statement

1.1 The National Museum of Ireland collects, preserves and exhibits examples of Ireland's portable material heritage and natural history. As a cultural institution with a national remit, the National Museum of Ireland holds in trust, interprets and promotes the collections and aims to make them accessible, as far as is practicable, to a wide range of people in Ireland and beyond.

1.2 The National Museum of Ireland is located on four public sites, and the non-public site of the Collections Resource Centre at Swords, Co. Dublin. The four public sites are the Museum of Archaeology, Kildare Street; the Natural History Museum, Merrion Street; the Museum of Decorative Arts & History at Collins Barracks, Benburb Street (all in Dublin) and the Museum of Country Life at Turlough Park, Castlebar, Co. Mayo. The National Museum of Ireland (henceforth referred to as the 'Museum') is also present on the internet at www.museum.ie.

1.3 This document sets out the Museum's policy on access. The policy takes account of other Museum policies and procedures and seeks to complement and build on these.

1.4 An Access Implementation Plan will be developed in 2011. It will show how the Access Policy will be put into practice between 2011 and 2015. The actions outlined in the Implementation Plan are expected to affect the content of departmental business plans from 2012.

2.0 Introduction

2.1 The Access Policy sets out to improve access for everyone, including those accessing its services remotely and for staff working at the Museum.

2.2 The Museum defines access as that which enables as many people as possible to engage with and enjoy its services, programmes, buildings and sites regardless of their social, personal, cultural and educational backgrounds.

2.3 This Access Policy complements other Museum policy documents including the *Statement of Strategy 2008 – 2012*. In the latter document, the Museum aims to broaden its public base and recommends a strategy of improving access to its collections and services in order to address barriers that may make it difficult for some people to access the collections now and in the future.

2.4 There are constraints that the Museum must work within when planning physical adaptations to its listed buildings. Mindful of these constraints, the Museum is making ongoing physical improvements to its buildings and sites by implementing actions outlined in audits carried out in 2007. These actions are designed to provide greater physical access to Museum buildings and sites. Despite these ongoing improvements, there remain some major physical access issues such as the physical inaccessibility of the first floor at the Museum of Archaeology, and the first, second and balcony floors at the Museum of Natural History.

2.5 Notwithstanding the fact that the Museum has successfully attracted large numbers of domestic and international visitors over the years, with numbers reaching nearly one million in 2010, the Museum will endeavor to engage with a wider range of people, including those who feel excluded from using its services.

2.6 The Museum undertook a review of its services and facilities in 2009 and 2010 in order to understand the barriers which limit or prevent access. This review involved consultation with internal and external stakeholders and findings include the need to:

- Improve staff awareness of access issues;
- Improve Museum reception areas;
- Make greater use of information communication technology;
- Provide clearer directional information;
- Improve communication with and between stakeholders;
- Increase provision of learning opportunities for a wider range of people;
- Facilitate greater collaboration between Museum departments, particularly when planning exhibitions.

3.0 Aims of the Access Policy

3.1 To build an inclusive museum where everyone feels welcome and where people's needs, interests and expectations inform the services on offer. The Museum aims to be rigorous about gathering information about who its users are in order to facilitate their engagement with a museum that challenges and enlightens, and also stimulates responsiveness.

3.2 To adopt a holistic approach to improving all aspects of people's engagement with the Museum. This approach requires that all who work at the Museum play a role in making its services accessible to everyone. By doing this, the Museum will strive towards ensuring that access is embedded in its thinking and practice and is integral to its life and function.

3.3 To overcome and reduce as many barriers to access as is practicable and as resources allow over the next five years, so as to enable greater numbers of people to use its resources and services. These barriers can be physical, intellectual, sensory, cultural, geographical, financial and emotional (see Appendix).

3.4 To realise the Museum's policy objectives through a partnership approach which will involve working closely with relevant organisations, groups and individuals. This way of working will enable the Museum to pool resources and expertise with appropriate partners and, in so doing, to provide greater access to its services and programmes.

4.0 Scope of the Access Policy

4.1 To address access for current and potential users of the Museum's four sites, the Collections Resource Centre and the Museum's website.

4.2 To improve access for current and potential users, including those accessing the Museum's services remotely.

4.3 To improve access for Museum staff.

4.4 To focus on a range of barriers which prevent people from accessing the Museum's services and programmes.

4.5 To address accessibility in the following areas: buildings and facilities; collections; exhibitions; visitor services; communication; learning and outreach; use of technology; and staff training and awareness.

4.6 The Access Policy covers the period 2011 to 2015 inclusive. Review of the policy will be ongoing during this period.

5.0 Legislative and Policy Environment

5.1 In line with a worldwide change in attitude to disability in the past twenty years, there is a requirement under legislation and policy, at a national and international level, for state bodies to address access barriers for people with disabilities and to provide cultural access for everyone.

5.2 *Disability Act 2005*, Section 26, requires that public bodies ensure that their services are accessible for people with disabilities and that their public buildings and heritage sites are, as far as practicable, accessible to persons with disabilities so that they can visit them with ease and dignity. This section also requires that each public body have at least one access officer. Part 6 of the Act references universal design as the required basis for accessible design. Universal design is defined in the Act as referring to the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people, regardless of their age, size or disability.

5.3 Article 31 of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, ratified by Ireland in 1992, requires that state parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

5.4 *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2007*, which Ireland has signed up to but has yet to ratify, aims to ensure that persons with disabilities are recognised to have human rights on an equal basis with others.

5.5 *National Cultural Institutions Act 1997*, is the legal framework under which the Museum operates and functions.

5.6 *Building Regulations Act 2000*, including Part M 2000 and 2010 and Part B 2006, sets out the statutory minimum design feature requirements in making provision for access to and egress from the built environment. The recently revised Part M 2010 draws attention to the obligation on public bodies under the Disability Act 2005 to make their public buildings comply with Part M 2000 by 2015 and to comply with any revisions or amendments to Part M not later than ten years after the commencement of the amendment.

5.7 *Health, Safety and Welfare at Work Act 2005* aims to ensure that workplaces meet the health, safety and welfare needs of all members of a workforce, including people with disabilities.

5.8 *The Fire Services Act 1981* places an obligation on Management, in the event of a fire, to ensure the safe evacuation of all occupants from a building.

5.9 *National Archives Act 1986* is the legal framework under which the Museum's archives are curated and held.

5.10 *Official Languages Act 2003* is the first piece of legislation to provide a statutory framework for the delivery of services through the Irish language.

6.0 The Policy-Making Process

6.1 The Access Committee engaged in a wide a range of consultative dialogue with Museum staff, current and potential Museum audiences, local community groups, disability organisations and other cultural institutions when developing this policy. The Committee listened to, studied and discussed people's thoughts and ideas through a range of means and methodologies including:

- Literature review of audits carried out in previous years;
- Desk-based research into access policies and strategies developed by other cultural institutions nationally and internationally;
- Consultation with Museum staff;
- Engagement with Access Consultants to independently review Museum services and sites;
- Focus groups convened in 2010 and held in each of the four sites involving users and non-users of Museum services and programmes;
- Focus groups convened in 2011 and held in each of the four sites comprising young people only;
- One-to-one meetings with various individuals and groups working in the areas of access and disability;
- Visits to other museums including the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and the National Gallery of Ireland;
- Participation in the National Disability Authority's access-based seminars and workshops;
- Communication with national organisations such as the National Disability Authority, Irish Wheelchair Association, National Council for the Blind and the Irish Deaf Society.

7.0 Policy Statements

7.1 The following statements express the Museum's commitment to the aims and principles of the Access Policy. The Implementation Plan will outline strategies and actions to realise these statements.

7.2 Buildings and Facilities

7.2.1 To provide the greatest degree of access possible to the Museum's buildings and facilities for the widest range of people.

7.3 Collections

7.3.1 To make the collections as accessible as is practicable to as many people as possible.

7.4 Exhibitions

7.4.1 To ensure that exhibitions are accessible and audience-centred, where the needs, interests, expectations and motivations of audiences inform the planning, design and evaluation stages of an exhibition.

7.5 Visitor Services

7.5.1 To provide a welcoming and caring service and environment for all.

7.5.2 To shape the Museum's services based on findings from formal and informal research. This will assist the Museum in catering for people's diverse needs, including the needs of those who feel excluded from using its services.

7.6 Communication

7.6.1 The Museum will provide information and publicity about its services through appropriate means.

7.6.2 In all its communications, the Museum will ensure that the language and means of communication used is appropriate to everyone.

7.7 Learning and Outreach

7.7.1 The Museum will provide accessible programmes and services, both within the Museums and in the wider community, which are informed by people's different backgrounds, learning styles, interests, abilities and experiences.

7.8 Use of Technology

7.8.1 The Museum will optimise the potential of information communication technologies to enhance access to its collections and services.

7.9 Staff Awareness and Training

7.9.1 The Museum will ensure that its staff are fully aware of the importance of universal access and have a full understanding of issues around accessibility through staff awareness and training programmes.

8.0 Reviewing the Policy

8.1 A working group will be established to monitor, review and evaluate the Access Policy and Access Implementation Plan between 2011 and 2015.

Appendix - Types of Access and Examples of Barriers to Access

Types of Access

Physical access allows people, including those with disabilities, mobility difficulties and those caring for young children, to enjoy and appreciate Museum buildings, sites, services and programmes.

Intellectual access enables everyone to engage with Museum services and programmes in a way that takes account of their learning needs and styles, and different levels of education.

Sensory access allows audiences, including those with visual and hearing impairments, to enjoy the programmes and services on offer through a range of multi-sensory experiences.

Cultural access recognises the diverse cultural backgrounds of people, taking account of the needs of those whose first language is not English or Irish, or whose background knowledge of Irish history and culture is limited.

Geographical access recognises, among other factors, the location of the Museum including the availability of public transport.

Financial access enables people to visit the Museum regardless of their financial means. Entrance to the Museum is currently free of charge.

Emotional access ensures that everyone who visits the Museum feels equally welcome.

Examples of Barriers to Access

- Hallways and doorways that are too narrow for a person using a wheelchair or buggy;
- Counters that are too high for a person of short stature;
- Poor lighting for people with low vision;
- Doorknobs that are difficult for people with arthritis to grasp;
- Absence of lifts to upper galleries and floors;
- Parking spaces that are too narrow for a driver who uses a wheelchair;
- A strong emphasis on overly academic language-based information to the exclusion of other means of communicating with audiences;
- Exhibition text panels that presume a knowledge of Irish history and culture;
- Learning programmes that are not age appropriate and do not cater for a variety of learning styles;
- A lack of alternative formats available such as large print, Braille or audio;
- An absence of induction loop systems in the galleries, reception desks or cafés;
- Overly expensive merchandise and food on sale in museum shops and cafés;
- Inadequate public transport.