

1. Vision

The vision for this strategy is to take the first steps in creating a long-term, quality, online presence for the National Museum of Ireland¹ Collections that shares our collections information and knowledge and encourages greater access, awareness and use of the national collections.

2. Purpose

The museum has a public service remit to care for the national collections and to provide access to the collections it holds in trust for the nation. Most large museums can only show a very small portion of its collections at any one time and currently approximately 1% of the total collection is on public display with 99% in storage. The ultimate aim of the NMI in relation to online collections is to make our collections, knowledge and information accessible to the public online. With an estimated four million artefacts and specimens in the museum collections, this work will be a continuing core element of the work of the museum.

In the short term, this strategy will guide the National Museum's 'online collections' work for the period from 2015 to 2017. In this time we will

- Present a variety of online collections experiences underpinned by an online searchable database on museum.ie
- Engage with existing National Museum audiences to take their needs and preferences into account in the development and delivery of online services and strive to reach new audiences
- Support online collections work through more coordinated, effective and efficient work processes within the museum.

3. Developing an Online Collection Strategy: NMI Context & Challenges

Online collections to date in NMI

Images and information relating to the NMI collections have been available online for many years, on the National Museum website, museum.ie, and on third party websites. More recently museum collections data has been shared on a variety of platforms, blogs, mobile apps and social media sites, both officially by a designated Social Media & Digital Marketing Officer (since 2014) and unofficially by other members of staff across the museum.

The museum's collections data has also been published online on third party searchable databases since about 1999 when the museum contributed to the Global Egyptian Museum project². Following this initial project the museum contributed to the Virtual Museum³ (2003), the Gothic Ivories Project⁴ (2008-2015), Heritage Maps (2010 -2013), Dublin Archaeology GIS project (2011), the Irish Archives Resource (2013), Inspiring Ireland (2014) and a British Museum Egyptology project (2014).

Alongside the museum's contributions to third party databases, the museum published its first searchable database on museum.ie in 2008. This is a sample of approximately 600 objects and images from across the four Collections Divisions⁵. Around the same time the NMI developed a number of online initiatives looking at individual objects in depth (for example, the Cross of Cong, the Documentation Discoveries articles) or at groups of objects (for example, ten objects from the 2011 Treasury Exhibition). The number of objects online is a tiny proportion of the volume of artefacts and specimens in the museum collections. Many of these initiatives are labour intensive and customised for different purposes. What is being planned is a common standard underpinning

¹ Hereafter 'NMI'

² <http://www.globalegyptianmuseum.org/>

³ <http://www.askaboutireland.ie/reading-room/arts-literature/the-virtual-museum>

⁴ <http://www.gothicivories.courtauld.ac.uk/>

⁵ <http://www.museum.ie/en/list/artefacts.aspx>

all online collections projects, that will operate as a matter of routine as part of NMI's cataloguing processes.

Development of an Online Database Prototype 2014

In 2012 the museum undertook to participate in an EU funded project to develop the software capability to export in excess of 25,000 digital images and associated collections data to the Europeana portal and to an online searchable database on museum.ie. A prototype system and interface was developed and tested toward the end of 2014 but due to competing NMI priorities, insufficient resources, the need to improve data quality and for further software development, a decision was taken in December 2014 to withdraw from the project. The challenge remains of developing an effective system to integrate the data from three existing collections management databases and make them available on a user-friendly interface on museum.ie. This system will be developed based on the 2014 prototype.

Collections Inventory & Digitisation

The major focus within the museum in the area of collections management in recent years has been on the necessary and slow work of developing an inventory of the estimated 4 million artefacts and specimens in the collections. The museum started to computerise its collections records in 1995 and while substantial progress has been made toward completing an inventory for many of the collections, inventory work will be ongoing for some years to come. It is this inventory that forms the foundation for the more in-depth object cataloguing that will be needed as the foundation for making the collections available online for the public. Alongside this is the need to undertake programmes of work to digitise photographic images and archival documents as a first step towards making these available digitally online. All this will take time and resources to achieve. Digitisation of the paper-based historical collections was undertaken between 2013 and 2015 and indicates the scale of effort and resources involved.

Staff and Financial Resources

In order to deliver on a strategy for online collections, staff and financial resources will need to be allocated to achieve the outputs in the period to 2017 and beyond. The biggest resource requirement will be the time and work inputs of experienced, skilled and knowledgeable staff from across the museum, particularly in the curatorial, registration, photography, ICT and education departments, but also from other departments. This presents a particular challenge in the post-recession context, which saw a 40% reduction in staff resources in the museum and a reduction in yearly budget from €19 million in 2008 to €11.4 million in 2015, with the need to balance the requirements of this work with the realities of staffing shortages.

4. Developing an Online Collection Strategy: External Context & Challenges

Online collections of other cultural organisations

There has been a virtual explosion of images and information made available online by museums and other cultural bodies in the past ten years. In the UK, where improved documentation of museum collections became a focus of national strategy and funding for museums, following the UK Audit Commission 1991 report, 'The Road to Wigan Pier?'⁶, putting collections information online has been a natural progression from the availability of enhanced collections data in a digital format.

For many national and other museums in Europe and further abroad who have been able to allocate resources to putting significant quantities of collections information online, the discussion about online collections has moved on to questions about the quality of the data, the ease of sharing or re-

⁶ Audit Commission, 1991. The Road to Wigan Pier? Managing Local Authority Museums and Art Galleries, HMSO

using the data and the re-packaging of the data into audience-centred storylines with an emphasis on deeper communication rather than information provision.

While this presents a challenge to the NMI to 'catch up' there is also an opportunity to learn from the experience of other organisations. The Collections Trust, the UK professional association for collections management, makes a number of recommendations when putting collections online. These include starting with user needs, starting small and taking small steps⁷.

Audience / Public Expectations

Museum audiences and potential audiences are increasingly using digital resources as a normal part of daily life, sometimes as the first choice in accessing information. There is a general expectation of the 21st century museum that the public will be able to access collections information in this way. National Museums of Scotland, for example, launched their online collection in 2011 and to date have 30,000 records on their website⁸. Building on decades of work on collections documentation, a dedicated collections information team works to yearly targets of 5,000 to 10,000 new records per year prioritizing records with good quality images. This represents a challenge for the National Museum because, at present, very little of our collections content is available digitally. The museum has fallen behind in terms of online collections vis à vis other cultural institutions in Ireland and abroad and needs to reposition itself to meet public expectations and to create the conditions where the public searching for unique artefacts and specimens in the National Museum collections will be able to easily find good quality images and information on museum.ie, and on the websites of partner organisations, rather than lesser quality images and information on unofficial 3rd party sites.

As little audience research has been undertaken to date by the National Museum to know about our existing online audiences or potential new ones, the museum also faces the challenge to know its audiences better. This strategy commits to taking the first steps towards consultation and collaboration with members of the public, in line with the Government's key principles for eGovernment⁹.

We also have the opportunity to learn from research into online audiences undertaken in the UK and further afield. Of particular relevance is the 'Let's Get Real' series of research projects. This is research undertaken by UK based company Culture24¹⁰, a partner of our parent department, the Department of Arts, Heritage & the Gaeltacht. Research such as this can assist us to make choices in what information we collect about web behaviours, how we will analyse the data and how we will use the data to feed in to the online service we provide.

5. Development of this Strategy

In 2014 museum management decided to prioritise resources for online collections work. An Online Collections Project Manager was appointed in late 2014 and, recognizing the cross-departmental nature of the work, an Online Collections Advisory Group was established with representation from each of the collecting Divisions and from the Registration, Photography, IT and Education & Outreach Departments.

⁷ In an article titled 'What do people want from online collections?', the Collections Trust recommends the UK Government Design Principles, a set of 10 simple Digital Design Principles, published by the UK Government <http://www.collectionstrust.org.uk/digital/online-audience>

⁸ <http://www.nms.ac.uk/explore/search-our-collections/>

⁹ eGovernment 2012-2015

¹⁰ Culture24 is an independent non-profit company which supports the cultural sector to reach and connect with audiences. It has been leading a series of collaborative action research projects since 2010.

<http://weareculture24.org.uk/projects/action-research/>

This strategy was developed by the Advisory Group between February and August 2015, in a consultative process with wider stakeholders, and written and coordinated by the Project Manager. It is a strategy for the period from 2015 to 2017 and represents the beginning of a process of making NMI collections available online, which will be an on-going permanent feature of the work of the museum. As such, it focusses on the goals and strategies needed to get started, to set realistic goals and foster a sense of common purpose, to put structures in place that will define and resource the work, to establish effective and efficient processes that will support cross departmental work and to establish work practices that will support the ongoing operational work that will be required to put the NMI collections online in the coming years.

6. Definition of 'Online Collections'

This Strategy covers all images and information that relate to the NMI collections that are proposed to be put online on any platform. Online platform includes museum.ie, any third party website, app, blog or social media posts by NMI staff. 'Images' includes photographs and digital images but also moving images, graphics, 3D images etc. 'NMI Collections' includes registered artefacts, sound recordings, archival and library holdings.

7. Goals & Strategies

1. Raise the national and international profile of the museum for the 21st century and make NMI more relevant in the 'online world' by establishing an online collections profile that is recognised for quality

Strategies

1.1 Develop the potential of the museum as a learning organisation by sharing our collections, knowledge and information with the public in Ireland and abroad

1.2 In the short to medium term, prioritise putting collections online on a free, user-friendly, image-led searchable database on museum.ie by channelling staff and financial resources toward the online database which underpins other online activities

1.3 Promote the new online searchable database, newly published content and specific initiatives, starting in its centenary year with collections relating to the 1916 Easter Rising

2. Engage existing audiences and grow new audiences with collections data that is accessible, relevant and interesting to users. Improve data, systems and user interfaces through ongoing user evaluation

Strategies

2.1 Conduct front-end evaluation¹¹ to get user input to test navigation, content, functionality, relevance and accessibility of content and repeat user evaluation at stages throughout the online project

2.2 Develop a system to customise a user feedback facility directly from the online collections pages on museum.ie.

2.3 Develop systems to track & analyse use of the searchable database and other online outputs and use the information to make improvements

¹¹ Front-end evaluation is undertaken at the beginning of a project in order to get input from potential audiences about their expectations and preferences.

2.4 Adopt learning from relevant user research related to online collections undertaken by museums and cultural organisations in Ireland and abroad

3. Build quality assurance by setting and implementing standards for content; strengthening the functionality of internal systems and adopting the software systems that best meet NMI's current requirements

Strategies

3.1 Develop standards and procedures for generating collections data, images and audio recordings for online use; identify what personnel will develop and validate online access content

3.2 Assess and make changes in the three collections management systems to enable identification and selection of records and images that meet an online access standard

3.3 Develop the software to create an online searchable database to specifications based on stakeholder requirements

3.4 Define the work processes for selecting images and for scheduling the publication of collections subsets from the Intermediary Integrated Database to the searchable database

3.5 Review, evaluate and plan for improvements to the software systems in year 2 and 3 of this strategy

4. Provide authoritative contextual information for the searchable database and provide a number of alternative points to access and search for records and images

Strategies

4.1 Provide an explanatory 'About Us' page that introduces the searchable database, explains what information is currently available, what is planned and how to search

4.2 Provide explanatory page(s) on exhibitions, collection subsets, events and topics related to content on the searchable database eg. World War 1. Provide a two way link to the searchable database

4.3 Develop various options for searching content for example a specific period or collection such as 'Viking' or 'Eileen Gray'; by keyword across all fields; by advanced search

4.4 Develop an interface in the Irish language and assess if interfaces could be provided in other languages

5. Undertake a project to determine, test and quantify the work and processes needed to put collections online in a searchable database

Strategies

5.1 Create a sample of approximately 200 records (with images) from across the collections, to an online access standard in line with an agreed template

5.2 Test the online software and content standards with the sample generated and with users, improve and retest

5.3 Quantify the resources (staff, budget, time) needed to generate and publish future online content

6. Develop a structured approach to putting our collections online that aligns resources towards agreed objectives

Strategies

6.1 Use this strategy to guide online collections work; use the structure of project management methodologies to plan and manage projects; coordinate through the Online Collections Project Manager advised by the Advisory Group

6.2 Commit to providing staff and financial resources on a project by project basis for projects that are agreed and defined

6.3 Commence a review of this strategy in mid 2017

7. Strengthen internal staff capability by providing clarity about roles and responsibilities within online projects; effective communication; necessary staff training and guidelines

Strategies

7.1 Provide clarity about expectations and roles within online collections projects

7.2 Establish effective communication structures to consult with stakeholders and to inform all staff of progress and developments

7.3 Provide a continuing programme of staff training in work processes needed to fulfill this strategy

8. Put collections content online in a structured publication programme commencing in 2016

Strategies

8.1 Contribute to the museum's 1916 Commemorations project by placing collections related to the 1916 Easter Rising and the early 20th century steps towards Irish independence on the searchable database throughout 2016

8.2 Develop criteria for selecting further collection subsets to be published; include representation from across all NMI collections

8.3 Generate new images and data for online use by developing programmes of cataloguing and digitisation, with a specific need for new photography, for the period from 2016 - 2017 onwards

8.4 Use findings from the Test project to set realistic targets for content production (images and data)

9. Guide website developments in relation to other online projects; encourage use of collections content on social media and on third party sites consistent with museum values

Strategies

9.1 Aim to put collection content on the searchable database before or in tandem with providing content for other online initiatives, third party websites or social media

9.2 Continue to put content online on museum.ie in the following formats; exhibition-related web pages, objects in focus, online exhibitions, online learning resources

9.3 Make online access standard collections information and images as widely available as possible on social media and on third party sites while balancing the workloads and values of NMI

9.4 Guide the museum's social media policy and provide guidelines for collections information & images to be published online by museum staff

10. In the medium to long term, investigate the feasibility of providing additional levels of access to collections

Strategies

10.1 Investigate the feasibility, in terms of scope, time and resources (budget, staff and technical capability) of creating GIS-based¹² access to the Irish Archaeology collections and other collections, where relevant

10.2 Assess the feasibility of providing external researchers a fuller level of access to collections content

10.3 Advocate for & support the development of a system to provide access to high resolution images for the purpose of selling images

10.4 Research what is needed to develop the technical capability to provide 'Open Data'¹³

8. Projects and work outside the scope of this strategy

This document attempts to set out what can be achieved or considered in the term of this strategy, that is, by the end of 2017. It does not attempt to encompass a digital asset management system, a digital preservation programme or a records management system. Neither does it attempt to encompass a system for managing user generated content, a task which may need to be addressed in the future.

¹² A geographic information system (GIS) is a computer system for capturing, storing, analysing and displaying spatial or geographical data.

¹³ Open data is data that is available in machine-readable formats that can be freely used, re-used and redistributed subject only to the requirement to attribute and to re share

Appendix 1. Policy & Strategic Context

Policy & Strategic Context - Government

This strategy document supports the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's eGovernment and ICT strategies¹⁴ by setting out how we will make collections information available to the public online, how we will consult with the public and how we will encourage and respond to feedback.

Policy & Strategic Context - NMI

This strategy document supports NMI's Access Policy and mission statement which express the objective of making the collections accessible to the public as well as the following goals, strategies and *draft* actions¹⁵ of the NMI Statement of Strategy 2014-2017:-

GOAL 1: Establish the National Museum at the forefront of Ireland's cultural life

Objectives

- 1.1 Communicate and promote the role of the Museum and its collections
- 1.2 Raise the national and international profile of the Museum

Actions

- 1.1.1 Engage with new and traditional media to communicate the role and work of NMI
- 1.1.2 Develop pro-active networks with key partners across all sectors of society to enhance understanding of, and engagement with, the work of the National Museum

GOAL 2: Develop, protect and make accessible the national collections and ensure their future survival

Objectives

- 2.3 Enrich and generate new knowledge of the collections through research and publication
- 2.6 Continue to develop the potential of the Museum as a learning organisation
- 2.8 Develop the Museum's 1916 commemorations project and play a leading role in the Decade of Centenaries

Actions

- 2.3.3 Make collections and information about them available online
- 2.3.4 Make collections and information about them available through publications and on other platforms as appropriate
- 2.6.2 Provide rich and audience-centred digital learning content for distribution through multiple digital platforms
- 2.8.1 Develop a series of galleries dedicated to the history of Ireland 1600-1916 with related learning programmes and online resources

GOAL 3: Develop a sense of common purpose and foster an organisational culture that is motivating and inclusive

Objectives

- 3.5 Develop further the Museum's team and cross-departmental working culture

Actions

- 3.5.1 Continue to develop and apply project management capabilities within the Museum

GOAL 4: Embrace change and devise a model for the Museum appropriate to the conditions and challenges of the early 21st century

Objectives

- 4.1 Define the role of the National Museum in the 21st century

¹⁴ eGovernment 2012-2015 & Public Service ICT Strategy, 2015 (hyperlinks on next page)

¹⁵ NMI Strategic Plan 2014 – 2017 - Draft Implementation Plan revised 06 Aug 2014, pp1 – 21 (latest version)

4.7 Develop and implement a digital strategy for all aspects of the Museum's activities

Actions

4.1.2 Research, as necessary, trends across the museum and wider cultural sector and apply to the Museum's practices and policies

4.3.2 Develop and implement clear and effective processes, procedures and systems

4.7.1 Develop and implement a digital strategy for all the Museum's activities

Appendix 2. Relevant Documents & Websites

National Museum of Ireland - Internal Policies & Strategies

- Telling the Story of Ireland: Strategic Plan 2014-2017. Approved by the Board 1 May 2014
- Access Policy 2011 – 2015. Approved by the Board 26 May 2011

Government Strategies

- Supporting Public Service Reform - eGovernment 2012-2015. Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. April 2012. per.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/eGovernment-2012-2015.pdf
- Public Service ICT Strategy. Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. 2015. <http://ictstrategy.per.gov.ie/#sthash.kErnhfkE.dpuf>

Internal Situational Analysis Reports prepared by D Power in late 2014 & early 2015

- Assess preparedness of Adlib, the IAD Access databases and the photographic archive held in Portfolio in terms of content to provide support to online developments. January 2015.
- Identify Collections & Learning staff input required to prepare content in the Adlib, the IAD Access databases and the photographic archive, to support online developments. January 2015.
- Determine ICT input needed to support online developments. March 2015
- Online Collections in the National Museum of Ireland: Strategic Context. March 2015.
- Clarify commitments to existing online collections projects, 1. April 2015.
- Clarify commitments to existing online collections projects, 2. Working groups. April 2015.
- Clarify commitments to existing online collections projects, 3. Historical Collection Digitisation. March 2015.
- Clarify commitments to existing online collections projects, 4. AthenaPlus. March 2015.
- National Museum Collections Images & Information currently online. April 2015.
- Proposals for Online Collections Projects (not binding commitments). April 2015.

Other Relevant Reports

Eneclann Ltd, March 2002, National Museum of Ireland Archives Report.

Other Relevant Organisations / Websites

- The Collections Trust <http://www.collectionstrust.org.uk/>
- Culture24 <http://weareculture24.org.uk/>