



Northern Ireland
Assembly

**COMMITTEE FOR
CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE**

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)**

**Draft Museums Policy:
Ministerial Briefing**

17 February 2011

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Barry McElduff (Chairperson)
Mr Declan O'Loan (Deputy Chairperson)
Lord Browne
Mr Thomas Burns
Mr David Hilditch
Mr William Humphrey
Mr Kieran McCarthy
Mr David McClarty
Mr Ken Robinson
Mr Pat Sheehan

Witnesses:

Mr Nelson McCausland)	Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure
Mr Mick Cory)	Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure
Mr Stephen McGowan)	

The Chairperson (Mr McElduff):

I welcome the Minister and his officials to the meeting.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McCausland):

Good morning.

The Chairperson:

Good morning, Minister. I thank you and your colleagues for coming. I will hand over to you, Minister, to make an opening statement and, perhaps, introduce your colleagues from the Department.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak about the museums policy. I want to avail myself of the opportunity to brief the Committee on the final version. I am joined today by Mick Cory and Stephen McGowan.

I thank the Committee for its valuable input throughout the policy development process. This is the first museums policy for Northern Ireland. The partnership approach that has been key to its development has ensured that the policy will address the challenges facing our museums sector. I recognise the contributions of both National Museums and the Museums Council to the development of the policy. I understand that representatives of those bodies are present.

I know that members will share my view that museums can and should make a valuable contribution to the economic, social and cultural life of Northern Ireland. The Committee is currently undertaking an inquiry into the value and impact of museums, and members will see that that is now more prominently reflected in the final policy. Good museums make an important contribution to tourism in Northern Ireland. They can help to develop a strong creative sector, support education and learning, and help us to understand who we are and where we come from. The interests of Northern Ireland and the people whom we serve will be supported by fully harnessing the potential of the museums sector.

I have long regarded the development of a museums policy for Northern Ireland as absolutely essential. Longer-serving members of the Committee will remember that I personally proposed the need for such a policy back in 2008. We do not always move as quickly in Northern Ireland as we might, but we are now where we want to be. The policy was developed in response to the Committee's 2008 report into the development of a museums policy for Northern Ireland. An extensive public consultation took place, and my officials briefed the Committee on the issues raised three weeks ago. I have made the finalisation and publication of the policy a priority for

the Department, and I have set my officials challenging timescales. Officials have worked very closely with National Museums and the Museums Council to incorporate and reflect the insight gained from the public consultation and from the Committee. Both organisations have played an important part in finalising the document, and I am proud that I can now present the Committee with a final agreed policy.

The key aim of the policy is to enhance the impact and contribution of museums through the creation of a more co-ordinated and sustainable sector. The policy sets out guiding principles to help realise that vision: partnership, quality, professionalism, creativity, innovation, sustainability, and a commitment to a shared and a better future. Those principles underpin the policy.

The challenge for the museum sector is set out in four strategic priorities: developing audiences; education and learning; the development, care, management and use of collections; and infrastructure, investment and resources. Each priority has a series of goals, which provide a route map for the museums sector. I want to see our museums harness their strengths and diversity to support economic, social and cultural development in Northern Ireland and to help to create a shared and better future for all.

Given the Committee's expressed interest in cultural rights, I will highlight the policy approach to that important area. Culture and identity are important facets of life in Northern Ireland, and those are vital issues as we build a shared and better future. The policy recognises that cultural rights are an important area to explore, develop and reflect as Northern Ireland emerges from a period of conflict and social division.

The museums policy describes what our museums can and should deliver for the people of Northern Ireland. I want to turn words into actions — to shift the focus from aspiration to perspiration. The policy's strength is that it provides an agreed template to move forward. I will ensure that a partnership approach will continue. An implementation plan will now be developed with the museums sector, based on the goals and indicators of success outlined in that policy.

The issue of resourcing will need further consideration, in light of the very challenging

economic environment in which we all find ourselves, and you all know the implications of the spending review and draft Budget. The challenge facing all of us in government, and right across the museums sector, is to work more efficiently and cohesively to maximise existing resources. The museums policy for Northern Ireland highlights the sector's clear potential to contribute to key priorities across government. It provides a framework that will enable the museums sector in Northern Ireland to harness its resources and maximise its impact on society. Together, it is time for our museums to move forward into a new era, and, as such, I commend this policy to the Committee.

The Chairperson:

Thanks very much. I will come to members who have indicated that they want to ask questions in a moment. First, section 4 of the policy outlines the educational aspect of museums, but I do not think that it refers to the Department of Education or the Department for Employment and Learning. Can that be explained?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

This is a high-level policy document. As indicated in my introduction, implementation — as well as other matters, but implementation plans in particular — will have to be worked out over the next while. That will be done in consultation with others. The document refers to the main areas in which museums make an impact, which, obviously, include education and cultural tourism. However, the document was drafted at a high level; therefore, specific mention was not made, at this stage, of the mechanisms or operational ways of developing those linkages. That will happen, but it is the next stage in the process.

The Chairperson:

OK. Do you anticipate free admission to all our museums in future?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

I thought that that question may arise. We do not have access without charge to all of our museums: the Ulster American Folk Park and the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum charge. That area is being quite widely discussed in museums across the United Kingdom, and even further afield. I was at a sports “cabinet” meeting in Cardiff the other day. I took the opportunity

to visit the National Museum in Cardiff, where staff explained their perspective on admission charges. Museums journals regularly include articles on the issue. It is very much an operational issue for the trustees of National Museums. The arguments are being debated widely but, ultimately, it is a matter for them. I can see the arguments on both sides. It raises revenue, but it may have an impact on access. What is the level of impact? What is the difference of impact in charging for the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum but not for the Ulster Museum? It is a complex issue, and I am sure that it will be debated at some length in the future. However, it is an operational issue for the trustees.

Mr Stephen McGowan (Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure):

With regard to your first point, one of the key strengths of the policy is the key underlining principles, which face the policy and inform it throughout. One of those key underlining principles is partnership — not only partnership across the museum sector, but between museums, the voluntary sector, business and government. Section 2.6 states that:

“It is important that all Government Departments recognise and avail of the services and potential of the museum sector to support cross-cutting Government priorities.”

Moving forward, partnership is key in the education and learning section and in the developing audiences section.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

It was worded in that general way because it is a high-level document. We would be looking at links with education, social development, and so on.

Mr McCarthy:

Thank you, Minister, for your briefing. I was one of those who worked on the Committee’s 2008 report that you mentioned earlier; I am one of those who have been here since the beginning, and there are others. We are glad to be where we are today. All credit has to go to the Committee and others for getting us to where we are today. There is much more work to be done, and let us hope that we have got it right for providing the better and surer future that you spoke of and which we want to see.

The Chairperson:

Would you give any credit to the former Committee member before us?

Mr McCarthy:

I think that that is what he was trying to imply: we are all in it together, and we are making good progress. Part of the policy looks to strengthen museums as a key component of the tourism product of Northern Ireland, which you mentioned briefly. However, there is no mention of the Tourist Board or the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI), for instance, in the relevant section of the policy. Is there any reason for that? What steps will you take to rectify that and to get them more involved?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

The response to that is similar to that given to the previous question about education. There are references to partnerships with all Government Departments and public bodies that are potential stakeholders. It is essential that we have a good relationship with the Tourist Board and work closely with it in taking this forward. A large number of the people who go through the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum and the Ulster American Folk Park are tourists. We want to make sure that there is a good relationship and that the maximum number of tourists come to Northern Ireland. We need to have a good product to draw them here. The museums are a key element in that. When we get them here, we want to make sure that as many of them as possible go through the gates into the museums.

Mr McCarthy:

I have just returned from a three-day experience in Roma. The amount of people flocking to the museums there was unbelievable. Perhaps Northern Ireland will come up to that level in the not too distant future.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

That has to be our aspiration: to be world class.

Mr K Robinson:

Thank you, Minister, for coming this morning. As you say, the policy has been a long time in gestation. Three years on, here we are. You will recall that the Committee recommended that, in order to raise the profile of museums, there needed to be a greater cross-departmental approach.

Section 3.1 states that:

“the overarching context for this policy is the Northern Ireland Executive’s Programme for Government.”

Section 8.2 refers more generally to the contribution of museums to the broader policy agendas across government.

You know that any good battle plan never survives its first contact with the enemy; this document will probably prove to be the same. To date, what plans or efforts have been made to raise the profile of museums in that cross-departmental context? Can the Committee be provided with examples of how that will work? You stressed in your introduction that it is a high-level document, but we want product. We have been working at this for three years, and we cannot delay that product on the ground. Will you comment on that?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

We said that the policy will be put into reality in a partnership and cross-departmental way. That will require implementation plans. The Department, the Museums Council, National Museums, and so on, will have to sit down together to work out those implementation plans. There are obvious areas that need attention. People can see the gaps in the sector at the moment and those that were identified in the past. The next stage is to work down to that practical level, but that is the next stage — it is not something that we have done as yet. Do you want to come back on this point, Stephen?

Mr McGowan:

Thank you, Minister. In the past year or so, the Department has asserted its role across Departments to raise the relevance of the DCAL estate — for want of a better phrase — and how it can support other government priorities. Examples of that are our contributions to the Department for Social Development (DSD) neighbourhood renewal working group and the inter-departmental science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) working group. To build on my earlier response about the focus on partnership, it is essentially about highlighting to other Departments and stakeholders that museums, the arts, culture, the observatory, the planetarium and sport have a key role to play in addressing priorities relating to economic development and social inclusion. It is about raising awareness at departmental level that museums have a role to play in that too.

Mr K Robinson:

May I pursue that, Minister?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

I was going to ask Mick to come in, because he is the person responsible for implementation.

Mr Mick Cory (Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure):

Over the coming years, I will have responsibility for ensuring the implementation of the policy. It is important to try to give a bit of a framework around that implementation. In the policy document, we set out a very clear vision and aspiration, and identify key measures. However, we must also put in place targets that support that; identify clear roles and responsibilities for those who will have to help us take it forward; and establish the clear monitoring needed to ensure that we keep an eye on progress as we proceed.

The whole policy will, of course, be underpinned by resources. It is very clear that, because of the limited resource environments, we will have to use as much of the existing structures as effectively and efficiently as we can. We should not try to reinvent the wheel where that is not needed. We already have very good engagement with the museums sectors. There is very good engagement between National Museums and the Tourist Board, and the Northern Ireland Museums Council through its network. We should build on that engagement to ensure that the policy is implemented effectively.

Mr K Robinson:

Do you engage with the local museums? The Minister will recall that the Committee met at Mossley Mill a few weeks back. I declare an interest as a member of Newtownabbey Borough Council. You saw what we are trying to do with the local museum there. It would be awful if we were out on a limb, and not part and parcel of the overall policy that you are driving forward.

I have been sitting here, looking at the linen damask backdrops. Those have been damaged since we came back to the House in 1998. People are told, whether they are schoolchildren or slightly older, not to touch them with their fingers, but you can see what has happened. Who is responsible for conserving and fixing those? Is it the Assembly as a body, the Assembly

Commission, the Minister's Department, or some other agency that we have not yet discovered?

The Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure:

My understanding is that responsibility for the fabric of the Building lies with the Assembly Commission and the Department of Finance and Personnel.

Mr K Robinson:

And we will see joined-up government to address that?

The Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure:

I am sure that you will want to pass that message on.

Mr Cory:

You raise an important point about the conservation of our collections. Wherever they are looked after, and whoever owns them and looks after them for society, museums, and, in particular, the Northern Ireland Museums Council, can help to set standards and advise people on preservation for future generations.

The Chairperson:

Why has the word "conservation" been removed between the draft museums policy and the final policy? The word "conservation" has been replaced with the word "preservation", which arguably hints at a less active process. Is there any difference in your eyes?

Mr Cory:

The principles of collections preservation, maintenance and care are very clearly set out in the profession. The document was drafted very closely with colleagues from the Northern Ireland Museums Council and National Museums. I cannot answer the specific question as to why that particular word was changed, but we can come back to you with an answer if you wish.

The Chairperson:

Yes, thank you.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

Mick makes a very important point. There was an extremely high level of co-operation with both National Museums and the Museums Council, which was representing the independent museums. That has very much been a feature of the process.

Mr McClarty:

I thank the Minister for his presentation. I am delighted that Mr McCarthy had such a wonderful three days in Rome, and I hope that he appreciates the fact that we kept this place going while he was away.

Mr McCarthy:

Absolutely. Did you notice that I was away?

Mr McClarty:

No. *[Laughter.]* Minister, you said that the proposed policy was first put forward in 2008 and that progress in Northern Ireland does not always move quickly. However, the Committee published its report on the need to develop a museums policy in December 2008, yet here we are in February 2011, two and a quarter years later. Can you offer any explanation for the delay?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

If the Committee had the time, I could produce a timeline for every stage of the process. There was a lot of engagement with National Museums and the independent museums throughout the process. It was an iterative process that went backwards and forward many times, because we wanted to get it absolutely right.

We also had various types of consultation processes that had to be taken forward. For example, the consultation draft was produced in June last year, and the consultation period commenced in June last year. There is a long list of stages in that consultation. The consultation process alone ran from June last year to September. Then, in light of that, we had to consider all of those representations going back to the two museums sectors — national and independent.

All of that complexity has contributed to the delay. However, I freely admit that I would have

liked to have seen the process move a lot quicker. We have been slower than we should have been. One of the things that I often say about government in Northern Ireland is that we operate in a ponderous way at times. We need to become much more efficient and slicker in the way that we do things. We cannot afford to be doing things in the way that they used to be done years ago.

Mr McClarty:

I declare an interest as a member of Coleraine Borough Council, which is home to the oldest known human settlement in Ireland, North and South.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

Two museums of an independent nature would have been lost to the people of Coleraine. Carrickfergus will be next.

The Chairperson:

We are not parochial here at all.

Mr O'Loan:

I regard the policy in front of us as a good first step. Coming from a situation in which we do not have a policy, we should recognise that having one is a good gain. Given that we came from a zero base, in formal policy terms perhaps it would have been better if there had been another stage in the process and a further revision of the policy had been possible in light of how people were reacting to what was presented. The policy could be bettered, and I would like to think that it will be improved in the not-too-distant future. I want to ask you about a few points on which the policy would stand criticism that might lead to improvement.

Museums are very important institutions that address who we are as people and what kind of society we live in. They do that based very much on artefacts, which are creations of the past, and by telling the story of the past and how we got to where we are now. In the society that we live in, which is very complex, divided and with a very difficult history, I think that a museums policy needs to be more open about that context and set it out more clearly than this policy does.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

I welcome the member's comments and his recognition of the important step of creating the first museums policy in Northern Ireland in decades. There may have been a museums policy in the distant past, but I am not aware of that. However, in recent years, there has been no policy. We now have one, and that is an important step forward.

I take on board his point that the policy could be improved. I always take the view that, this side of heaven, we do not get very much in the way of perfection and, therefore, there are always opportunities to improve things. There is an opportunity to improve the policy, and I am sure that some matters will be refined and adjusted in years to come. That is the nature of human life.

The member raised an interesting point. The key element is the section in the document about a shared and better future. As we said in regard to earlier comments, this is the high-level policy document, and there will then be the implementation of that policy. However, we have included in the document the core element of the commitment to a shared and better future and the recognition that museums can contribute in a real and meaningful way to that. We will then come to the next stage, which will be to look at the practical outworking of the policy. The document should not be seen as something that is going to be prescriptive of how people will do that. That comes at the next stage, in which we will look at implementation. How that is done in one museum may be different from the way that it is in another. Not all museums will do these things in exactly the same way. However, you are right to identify the important role of museums in addressing difficult issues. For example, a section in the Ulster Museum deals with the Troubles. That is an aspect of the museum that is already there.

If we are going to build a shared future, we need to remember that where we are today is the outworking of many hundreds and thousands of years of history. How museums tell the story of human history in Ulster over the years will contribute to a better understanding of who we are, and the way forward. We have recognised the role of museums in that field. The area is covered. Implementation will be looked at, and I wish that process well.

Mr O'Loan:

I take the point that this is a high-level document out of which must follow more directly

actionable statements. Nonetheless, when I read the document, I find a certain blandness to it. I do not see enough phrases such as that museums help us to see the complexities and contradictions of our history. The document refers to sharing and debating histories. That is exactly the sort of phrase that I want to see, but I do not see enough of that or see that adequately carried through.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

All that I can do is repeat the point that I have made on a number of occasions. This is the policy document; the implementation comes next. The absolutely important thing was to have in the document an acknowledgement and recognition of the fact that museums help us look at and explore the complexities and contradictions of our history and help us address, challenge, explore and perhaps explode some of the myths. There is an opportunity to do that, and that is in there for the first time. That is important.

I take issue with the member's use of the word "bland". However, what one person finds bland, somebody else may find interesting.

Mr O'Loan:

I will elaborate on the point slightly, without asking the Minister to come back on it further: the "Turning words into action" section sets out the tests of what we would like to see having been achieved; those will measure whether we have a good museums sector. I do not see those good words about exploring our complexities and contradictions emerging to the degree that I think they usefully could. That is a fundamental test as to how good our museums are. However, Minister, you answered my question, and I am prepared to accept that that is what you have to say on the matter.

The cultural rights section, which was in the consultation document, was one about which quite a number of people in the museums sector had some concerns. I also had concerns as to where that would go. It was obviously seen as a difficult area. The outcome makes some reference to the difficulties around cultural rights. There has really been no attempt to take it further than that, which I think was probably quite wise. I certainly would have been concerned if there had been a simplistic, overly directional approach taken to that issue. I welcome that that

has been avoided. What was your thinking on the change from what went out to consultation to what has been finalised?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

The most important thing is that the document contains an acknowledgement of the concept of cultural rights. In the course of meeting various groups and individuals over the process of developing the policy, one thing that was acknowledged by several of them was that this was an area that had not really been considered at all up until now. It has not really been on the radar or on the agenda in Northern Ireland. We have now put that on the agenda, which I feel is an important, significant and positive step. That has now started the debate in Northern Ireland about cultural rights, because if we are to have that shared and better future, the rights of all of our different cultural communities need to be recognised and respected.

People need to feel that the basic cultural rights that are starting to be recognised across the world are being respected by government, by others, and that they have a place. That is not just happening in Northern Ireland; that is happening across the world. In a sense, it is about communities feeling that they have a place at the table, that their traditions are respected, that their culture is respected and reflected within museums. That is at the core of cultural rights, and I think that we should get that debate started.

I pick up on the earlier point the member made about blandness as opposed to clear actions. I wanted to make sure that we get cultural rights on the agenda. It is on the agenda now, and it is up to museums and others to work through how to implement that, but it is a core and essential element towards the shared future agenda.

Mr O’Loan:

Yes. I share a lot of the ground that the Minister stands on there. In the past, many of us felt that our museums sector did not always reflect the full complexities of this society. To express that in the terms of cultural rights has a place, but working out the detail of that presents difficulties.

The Chairperson:

Can we move on to William Humphrey?

Mr O’Loan:

Yes. I will leave it there.

Mr Humphrey:

Thank you, Chairperson. In the context of taking things forward, rather than dwelling on the past, even though we are discussing museums, I congratulate the Minister, his officials and my colleagues, as a new member of this Committee, for their work and forbearance in the presentation and production of this policy. Taking into account what Mr Robinson and Mr McClarty have said, part of my constituency is Shankill, which as the Minister will know, is the original part of Belfast.

In that context, I am pleased that we are here to discuss museums.

I wanted to talk about museums in the context of tourism because we have had recent presentations on tourism from National Museums and the Museums Council. We had a very good session last week with the National Museums team. Tourism is the fastest-growing sector of our economy in Northern Ireland. I declare an interest as a member of Belfast City Council and a board member of the Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau. The story that we have to tell here, our history and the unique diversity of our culture means that we have a great product. We have not marketed it particularly well, and we do not have the infrastructure to support it yet, but we have made great progress. The way forward is in partnership: the Department working with DETI; its arm’s-length body, the Tourist Board; councils; and Tourism Ireland to market it nationally and internationally.

I recently chaired a meeting on an integrated tourism strategy that is being brought forward for Belfast. It is important, in respect of economies of scale, to reduce wastage, which Mick talked about, and to deliver a quality product at the right price. Will the Minister give us some more meat on the bones of that? Can he tell us how he sees it working out in his Department and how he sees the museums working in the overall context of tourism and cultural tourism in particular? I reserve the right, Chairperson, to come back on another point, if that is OK.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

Much as it may disappoint us, people do not normally come to Northern Ireland for the tropical sunshine; they come for the experience. That cultural tourism is very much to the fore. We have a rich cultural mix in Northern Ireland. Our cultural diversity is one of our strengths and part of our wealth. We can appeal to markets around the world in a way that perhaps other places cannot. Museums and cultural institutions generally have an important role to play in creating a product that is of sufficient magnitude to draw people here and to make sure that they have a good experience when they are here so that they will return. The bigger the experience here for them, and the greater the opportunities, the more spend there will be when they are here. Co-operation with DETI and the Tourist Board and marketing internationally with Tourism Ireland are all absolutely key.

I will give you a simple example. I am sure that, in due course, David Hilditch will probably get around to mentioning Carrickfergus, so I will get in before him. It sits on the ancestral home of President Andrew Jackson, who is in the top league of American Presidents. He was really the founder of the Democratic Party.

Mr K Robinson:

The Cherokee have a different view of Andrew Jackson.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

We will leave aside the complexities and contradictions for a moment. The fact is that, in America, he is the President whom people talk about. The fact that he did not like bankers and fought with them has a particular resonance at present.

Mr McClarty:

Resurrect him.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

Here we are, sitting on something of tremendous wealth. How can we make the most of that and ensure that people are aware of it when they come to Northern Ireland? How can we make as much of it as we can to draw people to it? Andrew Jackson's homestead in Nashville, the

Hermitage, is one of the biggest tourist attractions in America. How do we make sure that we link with that? How do we get the connections? It is not just local connections between tourism and museums that are important; international connections between museums here and museums abroad are also important. I visited a museum in Raleigh in North Carolina, and I was interested to see that a section is being worked on that focuses on the whole story of the Scotch-Irish in that part of North Carolina. Those connections could be made with institutions here. We cannot afford to miss those opportunities, so the partnership aspect is hugely important.

Mr Humphrey:

That is a good lead-in to my next question. I understand that 50% of tourists who travel the world are cultural tourists. We have a growing market in Northern Ireland, particularly in Belfast, as a result of the cruise ships that come here. The vast bulk of those are from the United States but many are from Canada, which is another diaspora that we need to reach out to. I mentioned earlier the diversity of this place with the Irish-Catholic tradition, the Gaelic tradition, the Ulster-Scots tradition, the Orange tradition and the new communities that are now established in Northern Ireland. There is a huge diaspora for us to reach out to and to exploit — exploit in a positive sense — on an ongoing basis.

Before you came to the meeting, Mr Robinson made reference to the ‘Born Fighting’ programme, which was recently screened by Ulster Television. Genealogy, history and Ulster Scots in particular have a certain resonance now. You mentioned the Andrew Jackson Centre in Nashville, and, of course, Nashville is a sister city of Belfast. I had the great pleasure last year of launching the story of Ulster in Tennessee with Andrew Jackson’s great-great-great-great-grandson. So many people from here have made a contribution to the new world. The formation of Nashborough, which became Nashville, was essentially shaped by Ulster Scots. So, there is an exhibition at the Hermitage that is funded by Belfast City Council and Tourism Ireland and produced by the Ulster-Scots Community Network.

So many of the people who come here do so because of their roots and because of genealogy. According to VisitBritain, 21% of people who travel the world do so because of music. Northern Ireland, particularly Belfast, has a hugely vibrant music scene and music history. For example, Ruby Murray — you and Mr Robinson will remember her; I have heard about her — Van

Morrison and Gary Moore, who tragically died recently, are examples of people who have contributed to the great tapestry of music in Belfast. Those are great positive ways that we can sell Northern Ireland as a place to visit. That will help to deal with our reputation and the problem of how we are perceived nationally and internationally, to build goodwill and to deliver an economic effect. Can you expand on that, Minister?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

We are moving slightly to one side here, but it is an important area. What sells Northern Ireland to visitors is its uniqueness and the things that are special to it. The more that we can celebrate those and enable people to experience them when they come here, and the more that we can use them to form linkages abroad, the better it is for Northern Ireland economically. As you said, cultural tourism is a key element of that. So, there is a great responsibility on all sectors of government here; it is not solely down to one Department. DCAL has a role to play, DETI has a role to play and DSD has a role to play, because some of the issues are about urban regeneration and so on. There are huge opportunities to sell Northern Ireland around the world. I have used the phrase “global Ulster” a couple of times recently, because Ulster has exported people around the world. There are millions of people in America from an Irish-American background, and there are millions in America from a Scotch-Irish-American background. Let us appeal to all those markets to bring people here.

Mr Hilditch:

I declare an interest as chairman of the Carrickfergus Borough Council museum committee, which is part of the mid-Antrim museum group. Wearing that hat, I am very pleased to welcome the document before us today, which takes into account the key aims, components and principles of establishing a museums policy. Having done that, we are now looking to move forward, and Mick touched on the future programme and how it all turns into hard work. We want to look forward with that sort of positive enthusiasm, particularly on the issue of targets. A lot of folk who are working on the ground will be interested to see how we move forward and how those targets will be formulated. As the Minister said, this is the first document, so it is a difficult one to set out. How will it all come together? Are we too early for timelines? What way will we take it forward?

Mr Cory:

The Department will work with all the key stakeholders to determine the appropriate strategies, key actions and resources and how we can organise ourselves to deliver on those. It is important that we begin to work immediately on the action plan to make this thing happen.

The policy sets out very high-level goals. We need to look at the actions behind that and the measures that we will use and then discuss with the various sectors the targets that are appropriate, given the available resources. In as far as it is practical, affordable and efficient, we will work through existing structural arrangements, including National Museums and the Museums Council, corporate strategies and business plans. Subsequently, we will use the existing quarterly accountability meetings to try to monitor that work. We will also look annually at the annual reports and accounts. DCAL will be responsible for monitoring that overall. No doubt, the Committee will have an interest in how we do that going forward.

Page 19 of the policy shows the five key areas for action, and it is clear on how we take those forward and on what we need to do. That will not be done in a prescriptive way; it will be done in partnership with the various sectors, which is a guiding principle of the policy.

Mr Hilditch:

Will the voluntary sector play a part?

Mr Cory:

The voluntary sector plays a crucial part in the whole of the museums landscape. That is recognised not only at National Museums level but at Museums Council level. For example, Wendy Osborne of Volunteer Now sits on the board of trustees for National Museums. They are in there and are part of the picture.

Mr Hilditch:

Andrew Jackson's birthday is being celebrated in Carrick on 15 March. There are events on all day, and the Committee is very welcome to attend.

The Chairperson:

It is written into the record now.

Mr K Robinson:

I will make one observation, before it gets lost. We are looking at the dry bones of the policy and the steps that will be taken. It is vital that we keep that spark of inspiration going. A visit to a museum can inspire youngsters for the rest of their life or link a person back many generations to a descendent. We must always keep that in mind.