

Museums Association Languages Policy

Background

Since 2013, the MA has had a Nations policy in place to ensure it fulfils its remit as a UK body across each of the four nations of the UK, which acknowledges and recognises the national differences in context, history, legislation, policy, practice, approach and culture. This policy is regularly reviewed by the Nations standing committee of the Board.

Though the MA operates its day to day activities through the medium of English, there are instances when the body has supported other languages at its events, as well as the translation of some of its key policy documents into other languages. Within the UK, this has included the translation of both Museums Change Lives and the Code of Ethics into Welsh with the support of MALD (the Welsh Government's sponsorship division for Museums, Archives and Libraries) and the use of British Sign Language, Welsh and other languages at events and conference.

The aim of the policy is to provide guidance for the MA in the use of languages other than English at its events, and in relation to any of the body's policy documents.

Languages of the UK

Whilst English is an official language in all four nations of the UK, and is therefore the main working language of the MA, the body is respectful of the fact that its membership also speaks a number of different languages that are both indigenous to the British Isles as well as others.

In Wales, the Welsh Language Act 1993 requires English and Welsh to be treated equally throughout the public sector. This was further enforced through the passing of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011.

In Scotland, the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 gave the Scottish Gaelic language its first statutory basis; and the Western Isles region of Scotland has a policy to promote the language.

In Northern Ireland, the use of Irish and Ulster-Scots is promoted in order to safeguard them. The Irish Language Strategy 2015-35 and Ulster-Scots Language, Heritage and Culture Strategy for 2015-35 set out how the Executive will enhance and protect the development of the Irish language and Ulster-Scots culture, heritage and language. The St Andrews Agreement (October 2006) committed the UK Government to work with the incoming Executive at the time to protect and enhance the development of the Irish and Ulster-Scots languages. This commitment was consequently included in amendments to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

The UK government has ratified the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. The Charter is not legally enforceable, but requires states to adopt appropriate legal provision for the use of regional and minority languages and the UK government has committed itself to the recognition of certain regional languages and the promotion of certain linguistic traditions. The UK government has also recognised British Sign Language as a language in its own right of the United Kingdom.

Beyond the UK

The MA has an international membership, and is multi-lingual in this respect.

Museums Change Lives is of international interest, and representatives from the MA frequently speak at international events and conferences about the body's work in this area.

The MA also often invites international speakers to speak at its conference and events, with many choosing to present in a language other than English via translation.

To ensure that the MA continues to respect the different languages spoken by its membership, the body will:

- Review with the Nations Committee, membership representatives and Government representatives which key policy documents and campaigns will be translated into a language other than English when they are being produced and/ or developed.
- Ensure that any translation is verified by a museum sector professional with links to the Museums Association.
- Encourage anyone wishing to translate any of the MA's documents to seek permission prior to doing so.
- Review with each Conference Panel, along with the Nations Committee, the translation needs at each conference, paying particular attention to the policy context within the nation that the Annual Conference is taking place. This relates to promotion, visibility of the language and the ability to deliver sessions/ keynote speeches in any language other than English.
- Review with Membership representatives along with the Nations Committee the translation needs at members meetings or events within any of the four nations of the UK. This includes the promotion of these events, and invitations to key stakeholders.
- Ensure that all staff, Board members and MA reps develop and understanding of the Nations policy, which includes the Languages policy, as part of their induction.