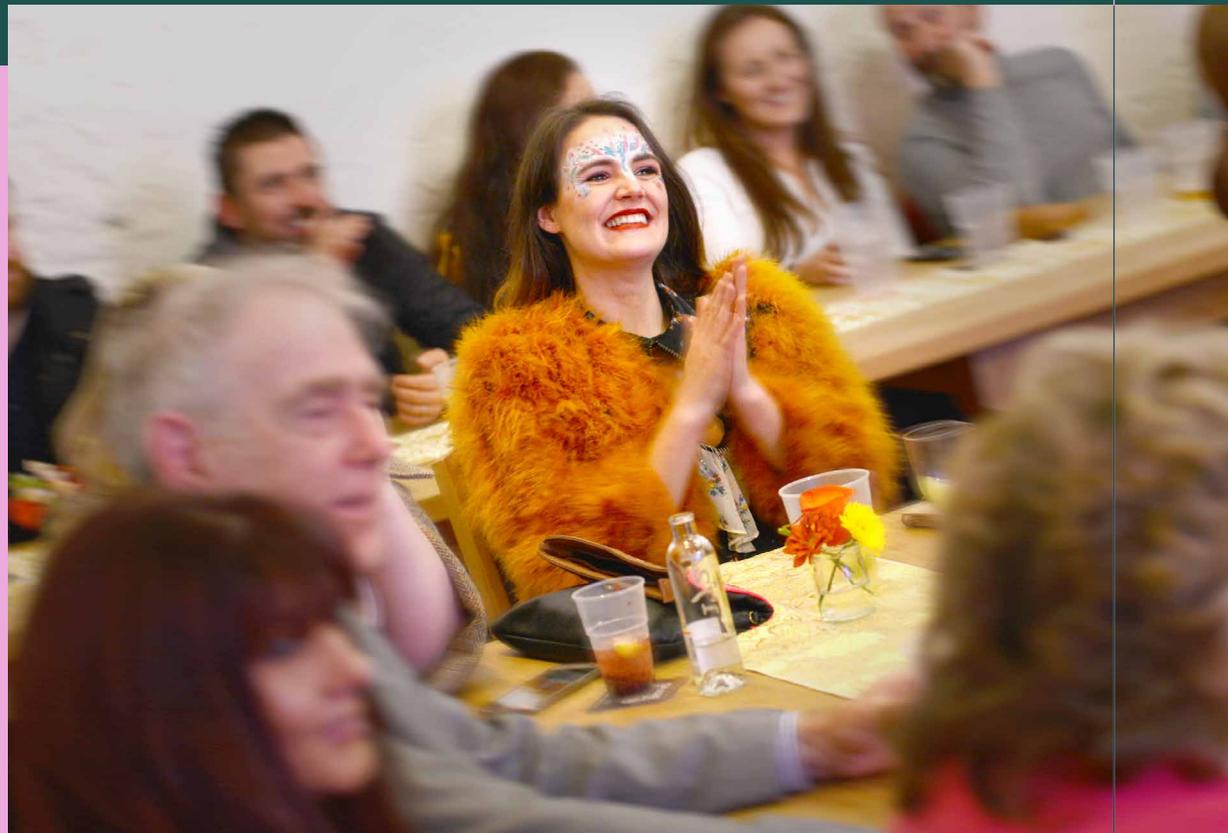


A manifesto for museums in Northern Ireland



There are over 40 museums across Northern Ireland of different types, size and focus – including national, independent, local council, university and regimental museums. They have diverse collections covering social history, art, natural history and archaeology and the one thing they have in common is that they work with local people to enhance health and wellbeing, create a sense of place and belonging and provide space to address contemporary issues such as climate change and the legacy of empire and slavery.



Museums reflect the stories, achievements and ambitions of everyone across Northern Ireland, and make it a better place to live, work and visit. In addition to their significant social and cultural role, they also directly benefit our economy, particularly through tourism, employment and skills.

Museums in Northern Ireland are focal points for local people. They provide a sense of place; raise awareness of crucial topics such as the climate crisis, diversity and equality; and provide services for local people – especially during the pandemic.

However over the past two years museums have faced serious challenges and many have been closed or forced to operate at much-reduced capacity. Brexit adds additional uncertainty to the operating environment.

Northern Ireland museums are already delivering positive outcomes across the Programme for Government and are well-placed to help society recover from the impact of Covid-19. Our museums can:

- support everyone to reach their potential and enjoy healthy and active lives.
- raise public awareness and action on the climate emergency and support people to live and work sustainably
- support children and young people have the best start in life through providing learning opportunities for all
- contribute to the rebuilding tourism and the visitor economy to encourage domestic and international tourism
- help Improve wellbeing, participation and community cohesion and support the creation of an equal and inclusive society where everyone is valued and treated with respect
- encourage and promote reconciliation, tolerance and meaningful dialogue between those of different national and cultural identities with a view to promoting parity of esteem, mutual respect, understanding and cooperation.

The Museums Association’s Museums Change Lives campaign demonstrates clearly how museums contribute towards meeting all of these priorities: Museums Change Lives Northern Ireland.

What next for museums in Northern Ireland?

As we rebuild our society museums will have a unique role, including:

- growing civic pride in place and environment
- regenerating the local and national economy
- developing participatory learning experiences and resources
- fostering physical and mental health and wellbeing
- tackling poverty and creating opportunities for those most at risk of socio-economic exclusion
- encouraging green tourism and ‘staycations’ by ensuring local areas have a varied offer to attract domestic tourists
- promoting learning about the climate crisis, diversity, equality and anti-racism

Key issues for the next administration

Museums in Northern Ireland are committed to delivering the best service for local people, in order to do so they must be on a sound footing to deliver this work. With investment and support from the Assembly, museums in Northern Ireland can support recovery and wellbeing and provide space and inspiration for learning, creativity and enjoyment.

There are several practical steps that can be taken by the new administration including the creation of a new museum policy which could:

- set a strategic direction for museums in Northern Ireland
- distribute strategic investment in museum provision across Northern Ireland
- support greater collaboration across types of museums and maximise the collective public value of museums
- support the Northern Ireland Museums Council as a development body that works with sector partners to support museums of all types.





Investment in the following areas would support museums to deliver for everyone:

- Digital infrastructure, capacity and skills development. Coordinated investment in digital infrastructure and skills will enable museums to create a sustainable hybrid model of real and online events, programming and engagement for the future.
- Developing a skilled and diverse workforce which ensures that local museums in Northern Ireland truly reflect and represent everyone.
- Ensuring that local museums can work with and welcome local people as thriving civic spaces where everyone can contribute to the understanding of museum collections, stories and ideas.
- Support culture-led tourism and economic initiatives such as festivals. These events are vital in attracting visitors to museums and supporting domestic tourism.
- Attracting other government and philanthropic investment in museums by working with governments, agencies and donors to identify projects that will promote socially purposeful investment.

