Learning Strategy

Policy No: NMI-STR-ACC-001	Version No: 2020-04-09-v4-FINAL
Date Approved: 16 April 2020	Approved By: Board
Number of Pages: 5	Signature:
Review Period: 5 Years	Division Responsible: Education & Outreach
Implementation Date: 16-4-2020	Review Date: 21-6-2023

NMI Learning Strategy

The National Museum of Ireland (NMI) has produced a **Learning Policy** that recognises learning as an organisation-wide principle that is fundamental to our role and purpose.

This Strategy document outlines the actions that NMI will take to implement that policy and deliver on broader aims for the period 2019-2022 in line with the NMI *Strategic Plan 2019-2022 Building Capacity, Driving Change*.

1 Strategic Approach

In a world that is rapidly changing and becoming more complex, museums are arguably more important than ever in society as social, cultural and political spaces. Museums are cultural spaces where individuals, groups and communities can come together and explore what they have in common and acknowledge and understand their differences, and in the process develop greater empathy for what others think and feel.

Using the collections and exhibitions as inspiration, we want to create innovative opportunities for intergenerational and intercultural dialogue and establish platforms for people to exchange their stories and perspectives, reflecting on who they are and the world in which they live. By engaging people in critical dialogue about the past, present and future, and by addressing key societal and global issues such as climate change and the rise of disinformation, the Museum remains relevant and in touch with people's interests and concerns.

2 Policy Aims 2019-2022

1. Improve our knowledge of who our audiences are, both existing and potential
2. Improve our communication with the public
3. Develop programmes that meet the diverse learning needs of a wide range of people including those with additional needs
4. Create a range of learning spaces to reflect the different ways in which people engage with the Museum
5. Embed research, evaluation and reflective practice into our learning programmes
6. Augment and care for the Handling Collections and maximise the potential of this invaluable resource
7. Develop sustainable relationships with communities

3 Context

Public engagement with the National Museum of Ireland's collections and exhibitions happens in a broad range of ways. There were 1.4 million visits to the four Museums in 2019. Of these visits the majority were made as self-guided visits as individuals or in groups to the temporary and long term exhibitions. About 12% of this total participated in learning programmes or used education resources such as guided tours, workshops and self-guided resources in 2019. In addition, there are online and in-gallery resources in a variety of media.

3.1   Education Department

This department has primary responsibility for developing learning programmes and services for diverse audiences. The Department has a distinct body of expertise to enable them to take this lead role. They develop specialised programmes and services for and with schools and teachers, families, adults and communities which are delivered on site in our four Museums in Dublin and Mayo and in community settings. Learning programmes are participant-centred and characterised by their breadth and depth and inspired by the Museum's collections and exhibitions. Programmes include tours, workshops, conferences and lectures, performances, special long-term projects and community exhibitions. Educational resources support individuals and communities to self-direct and make choices about what they want to experience in the galleries. Staff develop interpretative tools and techniques to stimulate people's engagement with the collections and exhibitions and create opportunities for people to reflect on and respond to what they see in the galleries, or online or in an outreach setting. The Education team collaborates with colleagues in all NMI departments, working across a broad spectrum of areas to meet the Museum's strategic aims and objectives. They also collaborate with colleagues in the design, development and evaluation of exhibitions.

As key audience advocates, the Education Team aims to create the right conditions to ensure that the learning experience is meaningful, accessible, inclusive and relevant. They collaborate with many individuals and organisations across a range of education, youth, health, environmental, scientific, arts and cultural heritage sectors including local authorities. Working in partnership with other organisations and agencies also helps reach new audiences. They communicate with our audiences through different platforms and media using a variety of communication tools.

Consultation with our audiences is critical. Education staff explore models of cultural participation when collaborating with communities enabling both the Museum and communities exchange ideas and construct knowledge and content together as equal partners.

Evaluation is embedded in departmental practice and through audience research they increase understanding and knowledge of who our audiences are.

3.2   Curatorial Departments

The Education team collaborates with colleagues in all NMI departments, working across a broad spectrum of areas to meet the Museum's strategic aims and objectives in relation to public engagement. In particular the Education Department works closely with the four curatorial departments and other collections and learning departments in the design, development and evaluation of exhibitions and associated programming. The Curatorial teams also communicate with a range of academic publics through presentations and events.

4   Delivering on Policy Aims

4.1   Improve our knowledge of who our audiences are, both existing and potential

In order for us to achieve this aim we need to:

1. Maximise the potential of the new Booking System and other tools to gather data about our audiences while adhering to GDPR guidelines.
2. Implement recommendations outlined in the recent audience research into schools.

3. Work with other departments in further audience research initiatives and collaborate on recommendations when appropriate.
4. Share findings with all relevant partners.
5. Continue to work with colleagues across Museum Departments to build on our existing body research on an ongoing basis.

4.2   Improve our communication with the public

In order for us to achieve this aim we need to:

1. Ensure there are skilled staff with a broad knowledge base to respond to the range of complex queries that are received from the public and Museum staff on a daily basis.
2. Ensure there is adequate staff provision to deal with the growing volume of enquiries.
3. Maximise the new booking system, currently in development, so that we can improve efficiencies around our booking processes.
4. Work with colleagues from other Museum departments to explore social media and other platforms to communicate with a wider audience.
5. Create dynamic content for the Museum website.

4.3   Develop programmes that engage, inspire and meet the diverse learning needs of a wide range of people including those with additional needs

In order for us to achieve this aim we need to:

1. Build on and create panels of freelance guides across our four Museum sites and the Collections Resource Centre who are skilled and knowledgeable and who reflect the diversity of our existing and potential audiences.
2. Provide ongoing training and professional development for these guides so that their skills and expertise can enable them deliver tours to a diverse range of people including those with additional needs.
3. Work in partnership with our colleagues and with other organisations to research new ways of creatively engaging people with our collections through the panel of guides.
4. Continuously evaluate this service and use the findings to shape and influence evolving practice.

4.4   Create the right conditions for learning to ensure that the learning experience is meaningful, accessible, inclusive and relevant.

In order for us to achieve this aim we need to:

1. Review existing and potential learning spaces across our four Museum sites and the Collections Resource Centre in consultation with our colleagues and with the public, including artists, designers and architects. This includes Museum grounds where there is huge potential to create communal spaces. This review will highlight spaces we need to refurbish and others we need to build, reflecting the goals of the redevelopment of the Museum of Natural History and the wider Master Plan.
2. Apply high production values when developing any learning spaces.

4.5   Embed research, evaluation and reflective practice into our learning programmes and disseminate findings

In order for us to achieve this aim we need to:

1. Undertake research and evaluation as a key strand of our work giving it parity with programme delivery.
2. Build on and apply appropriate research methodologies and evaluation frameworks to learning programmes.
3. Identify key research projects.
4. Document the work and share with relevant partners.
5. Disseminate research and evaluation findings broadly.
6. Work in partnership with relevant third level institutions and other agencies with a research remit.

4.6   Augment and care for the Handling Collections and maximise the potential of this invaluable resource

In order for us to achieve this aim we need to:

1. Realise the aims and objectives as outlined in the current Handling Collections Policy which include augmenting this resource and using it more extensively in our programmes and in the galleries. We also want to research new ways of using this handling material with diverse audiences and build more handling collections into the galleries.

4.7   Develop sustainable relationships with communities

In order for us to achieve this aim we need to:

1. Develop a strategy in community engagement so that we can adopt a more cohesive and sustainable approach to how we engage with communities.
2. Empower and enable communities to increase their access to the Museum's collections using digital tools.
3. Extend our reach to communities throughout the country to help us deliver on our national remit.
4. Make communities central to decision-making processes.
5. Explore networking opportunities that bring us in closer contact with diverse communities.
6. Increase our expertise when working with diverse communities.