



Comptroller and Auditor General
Special Report

Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism

National Museum of Ireland

December 2007

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This report was prepared on the basis of information, documentation and explanations obtained from the public bodies referred to in the report. The draft report was sent to the National Museum of Ireland and the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism. Where appropriate, the comments received from the Museum and the Department were incorporated in the final version of the report.

Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General

National Museum of Ireland

I have, in accordance with the provisions of Section 9 of the Comptroller and Auditor General (Amendment) Act 1993, carried out an examination of the performance of the National Museum of Ireland.

I hereby submit my report on the above examination for presentation to Dáil Éireann pursuant to Section 11 of the said Act.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Purcell', with a stylized flourish at the end.

John Purcell
Comptroller and Auditor General

20 December 2007

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Summary of Findings

Summary of Findings

The National Museum of Ireland (NMI) manages Ireland's national collection of heritage objects. The NMI, which dates back to 1877, became a fully autonomous non-commercial semi-state body in 2005. It falls under the responsibility of the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism which has overall policy responsibility for the preservation of the nation's cultural heritage.

The examination set out to evaluate how well the NMI manages the national collections. In particular, it reviewed collection management practices, how the NMI makes these collections accessible to the public and researchers and how it manages its overall performance. In making this assessment it drew upon standards and guidelines set out in an accreditation scheme established by the Heritage Council which provides a framework for assessing acceptable levels of achievement in all areas associated with managing a successful and effective museum.

Collection Management

The NMI estimates that it has almost four million objects in its collections. However, the results of tests performed during the examination and the NMI's own attempts to trace objects in its Irish Folklife division suggest that there are significant shortcomings in its capacity to keep track of its collections. An important step in tracking artefacts would be to establish a comprehensive electronic record of all collection objects. Of the 911,000 objects which lend themselves to being recorded in detail, only 30% are electronically recorded at present. In addition to comprehensive recording, periodic physical verification of the location and condition of artefacts is essential in order to provide assurance on their existence and accessibility. The NMI does not perform any systematic inventory checks.

Problems associated with storage facilities at the NMI have been evident for a number of years. While improvements have been made, many artefacts continue to be stored in poor conditions in 11 of the 17 storage facilities of the NMI. The NMI needs to address storage facilities or the national collections will be at risk of damage and decay.

Shortcomings in the monitoring and control of temperature and humidity also expose the collections to damage. The NMI needs to install a system capable of both monitoring and controlling environmental conditions so as to maintain the collections at the optimum humidity and temperature levels.

Currently, conservation resources are largely focused on preparing objects for exhibitions. This comes at the expense of caring for the remainder of the collections. In addition, object conservation audits are not being performed. These should be a part of routine collection management operations, so that conservation work can be more efficiently targeted.

Overall, the NMI faces a considerable challenge in attempting to provide for the curation and preservation of all the material that comes into its ownership and care. A more discriminating approach may be necessary in order to ensure that the space available to the NMI is used to best effect.

This is particularly important in the light of a growing imbalance between the quantity of heritage material and the resources available to manage them. All archaeological material found during excavation is owned by the State and automatically comes under the care of the NMI. The growth in construction activity in recent years has caused particular problems for the NMI in relation to the adequacy of its storage space and the documentation of and access to excavated material. In

these circumstances, there needs to be clear policies on the acquisition and de-accessioning of all collection objects.

Display and Access

The NMI does not compare favourably with other museums in terms of opening hours. In order to enhance public access to its material the NMI needs to work towards increasing the amount of time its collections are available for public viewing.

Aside from physical access, there is also scope for greater use of information and communication technology in making the collections more accessible. Developing electronic access to collections and modernising the NMI website to cater for the provision of electronic data about collections could also enhance public access.

Outreach work is carried out on an ad hoc basis largely due to resourcing constraints. A more structured approach to the planning and resourcing of outreach activity would provide opportunities for targeted groups to become aware of and experience the NMI collections.

Like most museums, the major portion of collection objects cannot be put on public exhibition. However, those objects not on display can have research and educational uses. Access to the collections by researchers is complicated and highly labour intensive for the NMI. There is a need to streamline the arrangements for the provision of research access to make it more user friendly for researchers and more efficient for the NMI itself.

Managing the Museum

In the absence of a current statement of strategy for the NMI, there is a risk that development and change will be unfocused and day-to-day business will be unconnected to an organisation vision and mission. The NMI needs to formulate a strategy to link its higher-level goals with business procedures in order to enable it to plan and function in a co-ordinated manner.

It also needs to evolve a better set of indicators to measure its performance in key areas. With the exception of attendance figures, the NMI does not compile indicators of performance for its main activities.

In relation to corporate governance, there is no formal risk management system. While there are procedures to address public safety, there is no comprehensive disaster plan for the collections. The NMI needs to install a modern risk management system and complete a comprehensive disaster plan.

It also needs to take all reasonable steps to ensure that the expert knowledge and experience of its specialist staff is retained. In this connection, the NMI should institute arrangements to document museum-wide specialist knowledge of curatorial staff, so that vital knowledge is retained to its benefit.

Overall, in order to ensure that the additional funding being made available under the National Development Plan 2007-2013 is applied to optimal effect, the NMI needs to finalise a strategy statement and develop comprehensive acquisition, de-accessioning and exhibitions policies.

National Museum of Ireland

1 Introduction

1.1 The National Museum of Ireland (NMI) which was originally established under the Dublin Science and Art Museum Act 1877, manages Ireland's national collection of heritage objects. Its mission is to

- preserve and make accessible the portable, material heritage and natural history specimens of Ireland
- display and communicate to the people of Ireland and to visitors an understanding and interpretation of that heritage and to act as a major educational resource
- deepen cultural ties within Ireland and expand links with other countries by opening a window on Ireland's broader material heritage.

1.2 The legal framework within which the NMI operates is set out at Appendix A.

Structure and Resourcing

1.3 The National Cultural Institutions Act 1997 established the NMI as a non-commercial semi-state body. Following an interim transition period the NMI became fully autonomous in 2005.

1.4 The Director reports to the Board of the NMI. The NMI's activities are arranged under three areas of responsibility - collections, administration and services. Each is headed by a senior manager who reports to the Director.

1.5 The NMI has four museum buildings, three in Dublin and one in Mayo. Figure 1.1 details the collections held at each location. Each division is headed by a Keeper who reports to the Head of Collections.

Figure 1.1 Organisation and Location of the NMI

Collection	Division	Location
Archaeology and History	Irish Antiquities	Kildare Street, Dublin
Decorative Arts and History	Art and Industrial	Collins Barracks, Dublin
Natural History	Natural History	Merrion Street, Dublin ¹
Country Life	Irish Folklife	Turlough Park, Castlebar, Co Mayo

1.6 The NMI has storage facilities at each of these locations and also at Beggars Bush and Inchicore (Dublin), Daingean, Co. Offaly and Lanesborough, Co. Longford.

1.7 All archaeological material found during excavation is owned by the State and automatically comes under the care of the NMI which has a consultative role in all licensed excavations.

1.8 The NMI had a total of 207 staff at December 2007.² Since the mid-1990s it has been in an expansionary phase with additional capacity being provided through the development of new facilities at Collins Barracks and Turlough Park. It has also established a number of new

¹ The Natural History Museum at Merrion Street is currently closed to the public due to a stairway collapse in July 2007.

² The management structure and staff numbers are detailed at Appendix B.

departments – registration, conservation, education and marketing. Two new positions of Head of Collections and Head of Administration were established in 2002 to help co-ordinate the NMI's collections and administration activities.

Relationship with Government Departments and State Bodies

1.9 The NMI falls under the responsibility of the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism (the Department), which has overall policy responsibility for the preservation of the nation's cultural heritage, including supporting all the national cultural institutions.³ In this regard, the Department has two primary policy objectives

- supporting scholarly activity and safeguarding collection objects for future generations
- making the collections accessible to current and future generations.

1.10 The Heritage Service of the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government oversees the operation of the National Monuments Acts 1930-2004. In addition, the NMI has certain statutory functions relating to archaeological objects under this legislation which are vested in the Director.

1.11 The Heritage Council is a statutory body whose functions include developing policies to protect, preserve and enhance national heritage, including object collections. While there is no direct operational link between it and the NMI, it provides policy advice and support to museums and has developed an accreditation scheme for all museums in Ireland.

Funding

1.12 The NMI is financed by an annual grant from the Department and through revenues generated from museum shops and restaurants. In 2007, it received €19.2 million from the Department of which €13.5 million was for current purposes with the balance being available for capital purposes. Approximately 55% of its current expenditure is applied on staff costs.

1.13 The Heritage Fund Act 2001 established a fund with resources not exceeding €2.7 million. The fund was to be utilised for the acquisition of heritage objects above a valuation of €17,435 that were considered outstanding examples of their type and pre-eminent in their class. The NMI made one acquisition under the Fund - the Stanley Collection (Patrick Pearse papers) for €3.5 million in June 2007.

1.14 There are plans to increase the resourcing of the NMI in coming years. The NMI will benefit under the Cultural Sub-Programme of the National Development Plan 2007-2013 (NDP) in two areas

- the NMI's NDP allocation under the NMI's Capital Spending Programmes administered through the Vote of the Office of Public Works (OPW)⁴ for major building programmes comprises €70 million for the development of the Central Block and the Asgard Pavilion at Collins Barracks and €15 million for the development of the Natural History Museum

³ The other national cultural institutions are the National Library of Ireland, the National Gallery of Ireland, the Chester Beatty Library, the Irish Museum of Modern Art, the National Concert Hall, the National Archives of Ireland and the Crawford Art Gallery, Cork.

⁴ The OPW has a role in relation to the maintenance, repair and improvement of NMI premises under Section 70 of the National Cultural Institutions Act 1997.

- the General Capital Works administered through the Department has a provision of €26 million to be allocated to the NMI over the period of the NDP. The proposed annual allocations are set out in Appendix C.

1.15 The NMI may also benefit from a general allocation of €21 million for all the national cultural institutions (for purposes such as digitisation and outreach – see Chapter 4) and from an allocation of €30 million for a proposed shared off-site storage facility for all the collecting national cultural institutions.

Examination Objectives and Scope

1.16 The examination set out to evaluate the management of the State's archaeological, historical, decorative arts, natural history and country life collections by the NMI. In particular, it reviewed collection management practices, how the NMI makes its collections accessible to the public and researchers and how it manages its overall performance.

1.17 The analysis draws upon the standards and guidelines set out in the Heritage Council's accreditation scheme which provides a framework for assessing acceptable levels of achievement in all areas associated with managing a successful and effective museum.

Examination Methodology

1.18 Staff of the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General carried out the examination. Evidence was gathered in the course of

- visits to all of the divisions and storage facilities of the NMI to examine display and storage spaces and information management systems
- interviews with the relevant curatorial staff and senior management in the NMI and senior management in the Cultural Institutions Unit of the Department
- reviewing documentation held by the NMI.

Questionnaires were issued to NMI senior management concerning various aspects of collection management and accessibility.

1.19 The Wales Audit Office which published a similar report on the National Museum and Gallery of Wales in April 2004 was also consulted in planning the examination.

1.20 The examination did not extend to collections held by local authority, private or voluntary museums.

Structure of the Report

1.21 The report findings are set out in the following four chapters. Chapter 2 addresses collection management. Chapter 3 examines how the NMI acquires and disposes of objects and how it manages excavated archaeological material and the implication of the growth in its collections. Chapter 4 considers how the NMI makes the collections accessible to the public and researchers and Chapter 5 reviews its overall management.

2 Safeguarding the Collections

2.1 The NMI operates through four divisions. It is estimated that the total number of objects in its collections is approaching four million when excavated archaeological material, insects and stamps are taken into account. Active management is necessary in order to maintain their scientific, educational and cultural value. This chapter addresses the management of the collections in terms of recording, storage and conservation. The four main collections are outlined in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1 Collections of the National Museum of Ireland

Decorative Arts and History – Collins Barracks

Since 1997 Collins Barracks has accommodated the Art and Industrial division which manages the national collections of Irish, European and Oriental decorative arts (metalwork, ceramics, glass, furniture, coins, arms, armour and textiles) as well as collections reflecting the economic, social, industrial, political and military history of Ireland. The site contains permanent exhibitions devoted to subjects such as Irish silver, textiles, the military history of Ireland, the 1916 Easter Rising and the works of the Irish designer, Eileen Gray.

Archaeology and History – Kildare Street

The NMI's premises at Kildare Street, opened in 1890, houses the Irish Antiquities division. Its collections have accumulated over 200 years and include those of the Royal Irish Academy and the Royal Dublin Society. Although primarily devoted to Irish antiquities, it also contains collections of classical and Egyptian material. It contains displays of Bronze Age gold ornaments, Early Christian artefacts such as the Ardagh Chalice and the Tara Brooch, finds from excavations at Viking and Medieval Dublin as well as exhibitions of Egyptian and Roman antiquities.

Natural History – Merrion Street

The Natural History Museum opened in 1857 to house the Royal Dublin Society's zoology and geology collections, which today exceed 1.5 million specimens. Some 10,000 of these are displayed in galleries devoted to Irish fauna and mammals of the world.

Country Life – Turlough Park, Castlebar, Co. Mayo

Opened in 2001, this is a purpose-built museum in which the Country Life collections (numbering some 50,000 objects) are housed, representing Irish traditional life up to a generation or so ago. It is part of the Irish Folklife division created in 1974. Some of the collections are stored at Daingean, Co. Offaly.

All of the locations have programmes of temporary exhibitions, lecture series and events.

2.2 While potentially all the collections are exhibitable, it is highly unlikely that a large proportion of the national collections will ever be placed on public display. However, objects not intended for exhibition fulfil a range of other valuable functions as they are available for research and education or may be loaned out to local or international museums.

Documenting the Collections

2.3 Adequate documentation is essential to record the movement and location of objects and to allow information to be associated with objects. It is also essential to document ownership and title, record the number of objects in individual collections, track temporary absences and record final disposal of objects from the collections.

2.4 The NMI records two levels of identification associated with an object. Firstly, a basic description is recorded in a register for the major portion of the collections. However, many of these records which date back to the 18th and 19th centuries do not assist in locating the objects listed or in establishing whether they are still in the custody of the NMI. A second level of identification is a detailed electronic record. A number of different electronic databases were developed on an ad-hoc basis over the years. The current intention of the NMI is to have an inventory level record for each object or related group of objects on a new centralised computer database known as ADLIB. This database is currently only in use in the Art and Industrial and the Irish Folklife divisions.

2.5 Although there are an estimated 3.8 million objects, only around 911,000 lend themselves to detailed recording.⁵ The proportion of recordable objects which have been so recorded is set out in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2 Extent of Electronic Recording at April 2007

	Number	Percentage
Records on ADLIB	115,000	13%
Records on Irish Antiquities and Natural History databases ^a	161,750	17%
Total records recorded electronically	276,750	30%

^a It is planned to incorporate the Irish Antiquities and Natural History databases into ADLIB.

2.6 In 2001, the Internal Audit Unit of the Department carried out a study which included a review of recording practices at the NMI. Their report noted that the situation was highly unsatisfactory and recommended that a project should be undertaken to document all of the NMI's collections within a five-year timescale.

2.7 The management response to this study was limited. The NMI drafted a Global Inventory Strategy in 2003⁶ proposing a project to document all collections within a five-year timescale. While the plan was completed in 2003, the work was never completed and this was primarily attributed to the Registrar's position being vacant for over three years and the need to give time to the movement of various collections within the NMI. The project had been estimated to cost €7.5 million.

2.8 The NMI informed the examination team that its registration department is working to address the backlog in recording. Firstly, it aims to have the NMI's registers scanned and thereafter to outsource data entry based on these registers. It is planned to complete this phase of the inventory project by the end of 2008. When a record exists for every object, it will then attempt to match that record to the current location of the related object. However, no timeframe has been agreed for the completion of this work. In view of the volume of objects involved, it is likely to take a considerable time. In the meantime, to avoid a larger backlog developing, current acquisitions are being recorded electronically.

Inventory Management

2.9 Periodic physical verification of the location and condition of objects is essential in order to ensure the continued existence and accessibility of an object. The NMI does not perform any

⁵ This is largely because some objects are part of a class or collection and are not individually recorded.

⁶ The NMI's management committee last discussed the Global Inventory Strategy in December 2003.

systematic inventory checks. The examination found that the completeness and accuracy of recording and the traceability of objects needs to be tackled by the NMI.

2.10 During the examination, two types of test were conducted to evaluate the recording and location of objects. Firstly, the examination team attempted to locate 59 objects from a random sample of records in each division.⁷ While 68% of the objects were located, 19% of objects could not be found and a further 13% had been recorded incorrectly, as they were either not found at the recorded location or the objects located did not match the recorded description.

2.11 A second test was carried out which aimed to trace 49 objects on display and in storage areas back to the recording system in each division. Only objects with a registration number were selected. Of the sample selected, it was found that 27% of objects were not recorded and a further 22% were not recorded correctly as information on the location or description of the object was incorrect.

2.12 The registration department in Turlough Park conducted an audit in 2006 to test the ADLIB system selecting objects registered during the period 1930 to 2006. If an ADLIB record existed for a register entry, then it was ascertained how comprehensive that record was. Of the 204 register entries chosen, only 154 were recorded on ADLIB. Of those recorded, 99 were found to be in their recorded location and a further 33 were located at the time of the audit, although not at their recorded location.

Storage

2.13 Good quality storage facilities, with appropriate environmental conditions and sufficient space are essential to protect the condition of the collections. Where the quality of storage is inadequate this can cause the deterioration of objects, diminish the effect of expensive conservation work and limit access to the collections.

2.14 Problems associated with storage in the NMI have been identified for a number of years. The Report of the Board of Visitors⁸ in 1987 noted that

- parts of the national collection had been damaged due to the lack of proper conservation and storage conditions
- inadequate storage space had meant that areas were dangerously cramped
- many objects had been left in the open, unprotected from damp and dust.

2.15 Unsatisfactory storage conditions were also noted by me⁹ in a report on the Collins Barracks development project in 1997.

2.16 There are currently eight main storage locations used by the NMI. On-site inspections revealed a great disparity in the quality of the different stores. Problems encountered were overcrowding, dirt, dampness and leaks. There was also a general lack of environmental controls throughout.

⁷ The sample selected included registered objects recorded on ADLIB, other databases or in an original register.

⁸ The Board of Visitors was a statutory body, appointed under the Dublin Science and Art Museum Act 1877, which reported on the condition, management and requirements of the NMI and advised on its administration. The Board was disbanded in 2004.

⁹ Comptroller and Auditor General's Report No. 11 - The National Museum at Collins Barracks.

2.17 During the examination a number of tests were conducted in order to establish the quality of storage facilities at these locations. The tests used were informed by the Heritage Council's accreditation standards. The following categories of storage conditions were used in assessing the NMI locations.

Very Good	Objects are stable and risk to the collections is low
Good	Objects are stable but are exposed to a greater level of risk
Poor	Objects are stable but are exposed to a high level of risk
Very Poor	Risk is high and objects are not stable ¹⁰

2.18 Figure 2.3 classifies the facilities in the locations used by the NMI to store its collections. In general, areas categorised as 'Very Good' and 'Good' are those which have been provided since 1997.

Figure 2.3 Classification of Quality of Storage Space

Storage Area	Very Good	Good	Poor	Very Poor
Art and Industrial Division				
Block 14	✓			
East Block, Floor 1		✓		
East Block, Floor 2		✓		
East Block, Floor 3		✓		
North Block, Floor 2			✓	
The Armoury			✓	
Inchicore				✓
Irish Antiquities Division				
Outside Crypt			✓	
Main Crypt			✓	
Inner Crypt			✓	
Lanesborough			✓	
Natural History Division				
Room 3.2			✓	
Room 2.1			✓	
Beggars Bush Room 0.7			✓	
Irish Folklife Division				
Turlough Park, Block A		✓		
Turlough Park, Block B		✓		
General Storage				
Daingean ^a			✓	

a It is acknowledged that, taken on a room-by-room basis, certain parts of the Daingean facility could be rated as 'Good'.

2.19 In 1990 the Accounting Officer of the Department of the Taoiseach assured my predecessor¹¹ that no museum objects were stored outdoors. The examination found that while the NMI has made considerable improvements to its storage facilities, a number of objects were still being stored outdoors at its Daingean facility.

¹⁰ Artefacts have been and continue to be exposed to fluctuations in temperature and relative humidity.

¹¹ Annual Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General and Appropriation Accounts, 1990.

2.20 The Department has proposed the building of a new storage facility on a greenfield site to cater for all of the national cultural institutions. Under the NDP 2007-2013 it has earmarked €30 million for such a facility. It is of the view that shared storage would provide economies of scale and standardisation in respect of environmental monitoring, security and other requirements. The Department also maintains that it is not feasible to provide a specialised storage facility for each national cultural institution in high cost city centre locations and that the diverse requirements of all involved could be met within a centralised facility. However, a detailed proposal has yet to be formulated by the Department.

2.21 The Department has indicated that before starting discussions on any possible design specifications or locations it would first attempt to secure a consensus among all the national cultural institutions in regard to the project.

2.22 The NMI has informed me that it does not agree with the central storage concept as it considers that it would not adequately meet the specific requirements of its collections. It argues that a remote storage location could inhibit access to those parts of the collections stored in such a facility. In 2003 it submitted a proposal to the Department for a development at Transport Square in Collins Barracks and the provision of additional storage at the Turlough Park site. It maintains that this offers advantages including close proximity to curatorial staff and the prospect of increased public access to the collections.

2.23 Following discussions the NMI has undertaken to submit a proposal to the Department and the OPW regarding its long-term, inert deep storage requirements at an off-site facility and accessible storage at Transport Square, Collins Barracks. Funding for the latter would fall outside of the current NDP and accommodation would be required elsewhere in the interim period.

Conservation

2.24 The NMI established a department with responsibility for the conservation and care of the collections in 1997 and it is based at Collins Barracks. It also has a conservation laboratory in Turlough Park with an on-site conservator. The primary objective of the conservation department is to stabilise the condition of the collections. Prior to its establishment, a substantial proportion of the reserve collections¹² had deteriorated to such an extent that many researchers were refused access to parts of the collections.

2.25 The conservation department engages in preventative conservation to minimise deterioration of museum objects and specimens. It also performs remedial conservation to treat objects or specimens in order to bring them to a more acceptable condition or state, stabilise them or enhance some aspects of their cultural or scientific value.

2.26 The NMI estimates that 85% of overall conservation department input goes to preparing objects for public display. Conservation work for exhibition purposes which became necessary, in the context of the new museums at Collins Barracks and Turlough Park, resulted in limited time being available for any preventative conservation. While there are a number of projects ongoing to upgrade the collections, the NMI acknowledges that there are important archaeological objects that have not been conserved. Currently, the conservation department does not engage in any object condition audits.

2.27 The NMI informed the examination team that there is a relatively high level of staff turnover in the conservation department which in its view is partly due to an inappropriate grade

¹² A reserve collection is that part of a museum's collection not on public display.

structure, particularly the classification of conservators as technical assistants. The NMI considers that this grading does not reflect the level of expertise and experience required to perform the job.

Environmental Monitoring and Control

2.28 With the exception of environmental control systems covering certain public galleries and storage facilities at Turlough Park and Collins Barracks, the conservation department has limited capacity to correct any changes in temperature or relative humidity in a particular store. This is because the systems it uses are mainly designed for monitoring and do not permit it to control the environment. These systems operate by analysing overall trends to identify deviations from desired conditions. Where these are identified it introduces measures, such as de-humidifiers, to correct specific problems. In a museum context, the greatest risk of deterioration comes from rapid fluctuation in humidity and temperature rather than their absolute levels. Overall, the NMI is satisfied that most objects are relatively stable as long as the relative humidity levels do not go below 30% or above 70%. Problems which have been identified include

- difficulties with the maintenance of the environmental monitoring equipment (this has led to incomplete readings)
- very low relative humidity levels in Kildare Street
- problems with the humidity control systems in the exhibition area in Collins Barracks
- fluctuating relative humidity and temperature levels in Turlough Park
- a lack of any humidity control in the agricultural shed in Daingean.

2.29 In the course of the examination we sought to take a set of readings from the environmental monitoring system for facilities where such systems existed. In five of the 14 areas selected for review, readings were not available. This suggests that the NMI is not in a position to comprehensively monitor its environment.

2.30 A study conducted in 2006 by the staff at the Beggars Bush storage facility¹³ concluded that in a poorly sealed building, manual control of temperature aimed at reducing fluctuations in humidity was ineffective. In Beggars Bush the output from antiquated heating systems cannot respond efficiently to changes in the external climate. For example, summer relative humidity regularly reached values of 70% and temperature reached a maximum of 22°C. In winter periods, whilst the building is heated, relative humidity dropped to around 35% and temperatures fell to around 13°C. An extremely low temperature of 8°C has been experienced during periods when the heating system failed. Fluctuations of this sort can damage objects.

2.31 In Inchicore where the environment is not monitored in any meaningful way and Daingean where an environmental monitoring system has only recently been installed, there are problems with leaks and a lack of heating in many areas.

Views of the Department

2.32 In regard to the shortcomings in inventory management and documentation, the Department is of the view that the funding for general capital works over the period of the NDP 2007-2013 should allow the NMI to implement measures to address the issues that were highlighted. This will require the NMI to decide on the inventory system it requires, draw up a programme for its implementation and prioritise its projects taking into account the annual funding allocations.

¹³ Viscardi, Sigwart & Monaghan (2006), *'Climate Control in an Uncontrollable Building'*

2.33 While the Department fully accepts that storage facilities for the NMI need to be improved, it considers that the new facilities provided since 2000, including the Museum of Country Life, the Military History Galleries, the Visible Storage facility and the refurbished Riding School at Collins Barracks, have eased the storage situation somewhat through the provision of additional exhibition spaces.

Conclusions

2.34 The NMI does not have a comprehensive centralised record of its collections. In addition, there is an unknown quantity of material not recorded. The absence of a central record of objects poses a significant risk to the collections. The examination test results and the NMI's own sampling at Turlough Park suggest that there is a significant deficiency in the NMI's capacity to trace its collections.

The NMI needs to establish a plan to address its incomplete collection records. This should contain a statement of the current documentation situation, an estimate of object numbers or records to be processed, a statement of retrospective documentation to be performed and the timescale and resources needed to update the collection records.

2.35 The examination found that while improvements have been made to gallery spaces, ten of the 17 storage facilities of the NMI were poor and one was very poor. Only six facilities were considered to have good or very good storage.

Since significant parts of the NMI's collections are stored in poor conditions, the NMI needs to develop an adequate storage system either alone or as part of the Department's proposed central unit in order to address the exposure of the national collections to damage and decay.

2.36 The NMI's conservation resources are focused on preparing objects for exhibitions. This operates at the expense of caring for the remainder of the collections.

The NMI needs to strike an appropriate balance between conservation work performed on objects for public exhibition and that to be performed on the majority of the objects in its collections.

2.37 Object conservation audits are not being performed.

Object conservation audits should be a part of routine collection management operations, so that conservation work can be more efficiently targeted.

2.38 Shortcomings in the monitoring and control of environmental conditions expose the collections to possible damage from inappropriate temperatures and humidity conditions.

The NMI should install a system capable of monitoring and controlling environmental conditions in order to maintain the collections at the optimum humidity and temperature levels.

3 Acquisitions and Disposals

3.1 The NMI over its 150-year history has accumulated collections which it is obliged to preserve and care for. Only a limited sample of its collections can be made available to the public at any one time. Because a museum's capacity to conserve and manage material is limited there is an inevitable need to strike a balance between the cost of storage and conservation and the value of an object offered to or acquired by it. Accordingly, one would expect the NMI to have

- acquisition policies that guide its staff in the acceptance or purchase of objects
- provision for a formal cost/value analysis before acquisition of an object
- procedures to ensure that the ownership of acquired property legally transfers to the NMI¹⁴
- survey procedures to guide disposal of surplus objects.

3.2 This chapter examines each of these in turn. It then goes on to consider how material from archaeological excavation is handled.

Acquisitions Policy

3.3 The NMI has been working for a number of years on formulating written acquisition policies for its four divisions and an overall policy is currently at draft stage. Until these are completed there will be a lack of guidance to curators on the considerations they should take into account in acquiring or accepting objects into the collection.

Evaluation of Acquisitions

3.4 In the course of interviews with curatorial staff and from a sample of object acquisition files examined, the examination team found little evidence that the condition of objects was taken into account when considering acquisitions. The team was also informed that formal object condition assessments were not performed when considering acquisitions (see 2.26 also). The Director of the NMI has informed me that it is current practice that the condition of an object be taken into account. The exception to this is archaeological material which the NMI is obliged to take by statute. In the case of archaeological material the NMI's written guidelines to excavators oblige the excavator to conserve objects that are uncovered. It is also an explicit condition of the excavation licence that the excavator make adequate provision for the conservation of finds.

3.5 There is no formal mechanism for evaluating the potential cost of caring for acquired material. In this respect, condition reports would be useful in that they would provide an assessment of the causes of any existing damage to objects and estimate whether or not objects are at risk of accelerated deterioration. They would also provide a useful means of identifying the likely costs (e.g. storage, display and conservation) that would have to be incurred over the expected life of an individual object. Additionally, by recording the condition of an object at a specific point in time, they would allow the NMI to measure the rate of deterioration of the object which can help to gauge the effectiveness of storage and preventative conservation methods.

3.6 An acquisition policy, incorporating a cost/value analysis, would allow the NMI to set guidelines to inform curatorial decisions. In the absence of guidelines, objects may be acquired

¹⁴ In the case of archaeological material found in Ireland, this does not arise as the National Monuments (Amendment) Act 1994 makes the NMI the legal owner of all such material.

without reference to their potential use (e.g. for exhibition, research purposes or as part of a handling collection¹⁵) or the NMI's ability to curate them.

3.7 Unless a conscious effort is made to set limits to the growth of the collections, there is a likelihood that they will continue to expand without regard for the NMI's financial capacity to conserve them.

Ownership

3.8 For the proper accession of objects into the NMI's collections, there needs to be clear evidence that legal title has transferred to the NMI. The Office of the Attorney General issued advice on a Transfer of Title Form in April 2005. The NMI returned a draft of this form to the Attorney General in April 2007 for review. The NMI has informed me that the Office of the Attorney General has now approved a draft which will be applied across the NMI from January 2008. In the meantime, efforts are made by some curatorial staff to obtain evidence of transfer of title. Any lack of clarity surrounding the title of objects in the collections could potentially expose the NMI to legal challenge or cause difficulties if these objects are later selected for disposal.

Disposal and De-accessioning

3.9 The NMI does not have a disposal policy. However, it has informed the examination team that it intends to incorporate such a policy into the acquisition policy now being formulated. Discussions are taking place about the possible form or content of the policy.

3.10 De-accessioning¹⁶ of surplus material is necessary to combat any growing imbalance between the quantity of material being amassed and the available resources to manage it effectively. Legal advice obtained from the Office of the Attorney General suggests that in order to manage and control the collections, the NMI is not constrained as regards disposal. The two primary factors that should prompt the question of whether to de-accession objects are poor documentation¹⁷ and decay. A lack of adequate documentation can diminish an observer's understanding of the scientific, artistic or historical importance of an object. In addition, a sizeable proportion of museum collections are subject to decay over time. At some point during the life of an object, the question of whether it continues to fulfil its role as an historical item can arise.

3.11 Like many European museums, the NMI has subscribed to a traditional presumption against disposal of objects. This practice however, is coming under increasing scrutiny as museums struggle to reconcile rapidly expanding collections with their available resources. Many national museums are now actively pursuing de-accessioning and disposal processes.

3.12 The NMI maintains that the current practice of not disposing of objects was also influenced by the fact that

- many of its holdings were specific donations
- all archaeological objects are to a certain extent unique and there was a belief that each one must be retained for research purposes.

¹⁵ A selection of original and replica objects which are used by museums to allow the public hands-on access to museum objects.

¹⁶ De-accessioning is the formal removal of an accessioned object from the permanent collections. Disposal relates to its physical removal. An object could be de-accessioned, but not disposed of, e.g. it could still form part of the NMI's handling collection which usually consists of original objects and some replicas.

¹⁷ Cooke (2003), *The Containment of Heritage: Setting Limits to the Growth of Heritage in Ireland: Studies in Public Policy*, The Policy Institute, Trinity College.

Archaeological Excavations

3.13 As the National Monuments (Amendment) Act 1994 makes the State the legal owner of all archaeological material found in Ireland, the NMI is the ultimate repository of artefacts excavated or found in the country.

3.14 The growth in construction activity in recent years has resulted in an increase in the number of archaeological objects being found. This has created a significant accommodation problem for the NMI. There was a fourfold increase in the number of excavation licences issued by the National Monuments Service (part of the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government) between 1995 and 2005. The current estimate of excavated material falling within the remit of the NMI is 1.5 million objects.¹⁸

3.15 The NMI has an important supervisory role in the excavation process. Along with providing advice about the licensing of excavations, the NMI may also conduct inspections of both excavation sites and the premises in which objects are stored. However, due to the escalating demands on its resources, such inspections are conducted on an infrequent basis and often only when it suspects something is amiss.

3.16 In order to properly manage the accessioning and storage of archaeological material, it would be expected that the NMI should have arrangements in place for

- accepting excavated material
- documenting and storing the material
- reviewing potential disposal.

Acceptance of Material

3.17 When archaeological objects are submitted to the NMI, they are accompanied by a list setting out the contents. (A separate report on the findings relating to the objects is submitted to the Irish Antiquities division). The submission of objects can take several years to complete. As a result a substantial but unquantified number of finds from archaeological excavations are currently held in hundreds of locations throughout the country. The Director has informed me that the reason for this is that it can take years for the excavators to complete post-excavation studies of objects and that there is no advantage in handing over to the NMI objects that are still being actively worked upon by excavators.

3.18 Heretofore, excavation material accepted by the NMI was stored in the North Block of Collins Barracks. However, this facility is now full and the NMI is actively discouraging archaeologists from depositing material.

Documenting and Storing Excavated Material

3.19 Registration entails the excavator identifying and numbering each object or related group of objects using a unique number with a prefix allocated by the NMI. These are recorded on local site registers. At this point only 8% of excavated material, covering five major Dublin excavation sites, is entered into a central database. The Director has informed me that it would be beyond the capacity of the NMI to enter all excavated finds on a central database. He also informed me that the NMI has designed a new database which will be issued to excavators from the start of 2008.

¹⁸ This is the NMI's best estimate of excavated material in storage, both in the possession of the NMI and in the care of licensed archaeologists.

The NMI has had discussions with the National Monuments Service to ensure that excavators use this system in future.

3.20 Ready access to the NMI's collection of excavated material is necessary to facilitate scientific study and research. A major drawback is that while material is stored in Collins Barracks, the associated list of finds and the context in which they were found is held on record in Kildare Street. The poor, cramped conditions in the North Block of Collins Barracks also make access difficult.

Curation and Disposal of Excavated Material

3.21 The rate of growth of excavated material has outstripped the NMI's capacity to curate and conserve this material. Unlike normal acquisitions, the increase in this collection is not driven by the NMI's overall needs but by the pace of development and the requirements of archaeology. In addition, the policy underlying Irish legislation is that all archaeological objects from excavations pass into State ownership. This has the merit of avoiding the emergence of a secondary market for objects not accessioned as well as preventing items from being recycled with the attendant risk that they would pollute the archaeological record at some future time. Nonetheless, there is a practical need to ensure that the rate at which material is collected is kept in balance with resources available to curate them.

3.22 I have explored with the NMI whether a more rigorous approach to defining the terms and conditions under which material is retained within the national collections could be formulated including

- the devising of new sampling techniques with the goal of reducing the quantity of material to be retained from each excavation
- the review of existing objects with a view to de-accessioning poorly curated and archived material.

3.23 The Director informed me that the introduction of sampling is not appropriate in the Irish legislative framework for excavated material and would introduce a subjective approach to the retention of this archaeological material.

Conclusions

3.24 The NMI does not have a formal collections management policy in place.

The NMI needs to introduce a comprehensive collections management process encompassing

- an acquisition policy to apply across all divisions
- a cost/value analysis governing acceptance of objects into the collections
- the establishment of legal title to all acquisitions
- standard disposal and de-accessioning policies across all divisions
- management of archaeological excavations
- criteria for acceptance of material from archaeological excavations.

3.25 The absence of a collections management policy has contributed to ever expanding collections, poor documentation and the retention of objects that may no longer have any meaningful historical value.

An active de-accessioning policy could assist in combating the growing imbalance between the quantity of heritage material and the available resources. That policy would need to address the circumstances in which objects can be disposed of and outline appropriate disposal methods. Full records of de-accessioning and/or disposal should be kept. Such a policy should be carefully monitored so that potentially valuable objects are not disposed of inadvertently.

3.26 Such a de-accessioning policy needs to be considered because the rate of growth of excavated material has outstripped the NMI's capacity to curate it.

In the case of excavated material the NMI needs to explore whether the fact that ownership of excavated material rests with the State should preclude it from

- reducing the volume of material retained through sampling
- disposing of poorly archived and curated material.

It is acknowledged that any move to do so would need to be accompanied by a process to prevent recycling of the material in question.

3.27 Overall, the NMI faces considerable challenges in attempting to provide for the curation and preservation of the material that comes into its ownership and care. While storage problems cannot be solved at the expense of excluding items of national heritage from the collections, a more discriminating approach may be necessary in order to ensure that the space available to the NMI is used in a way that preserves the collections.

4 Accessing the Collections

4.1 The national collections support an understanding of Ireland's heritage and culture and are intended to be a source of learning and enjoyment. Access is provided through facilitating visitors, the provision of educational and research services and loaning objects to other museums, both in Ireland and internationally. Outreach activities assist those who would not normally have an opportunity to have access to the collections. Increasingly, museums are looking to develop accessibility through the internet.

4.2 With the exception of a small charge for some guided tours, admission to the NMI's sites is free. Public attendance at the four sites from 2002 to 2006 is set out in Figure 4.1. These figures are not independently audited.

Figure 4.1 Attendance Figures 2002-2006

Museum	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Kildare Street	255,345	N/A ^a	126,931 ^b	297,511	366,625
Collins Barracks	178,635	136,868	116,345	179,713	246,420
Merrion Street	108,070	118,705	124,185	135,885	148,887
Turlough Park	131,001	112,720	98,546	106,028	101,351
Total	673,051	368,293	466,007	719,137	863,283

Source: National Museum of Ireland, April 2007.

Notes:

- a No figures are available for Kildare Street due to building works at the point of entry during 2003.
- b Only five months figures available due to building work.

4.3 The two main audiences for the NMI's collections are the general public and researchers. Accessibility can be promoted by making people aware of the collections and facilitating physical and electronic access. This chapter examines the performance of the NMI in promoting awareness and providing access.

Awareness and Access

4.4 A fundamental prerequisite to making the collections accessible is to make the general public aware of their existence and of where and when they can be viewed. The NMI's marketing department produces an annual plan and is responsible for the dissemination of information relating to the NMI. Its core objectives are to

- maximise awareness of and access to the collections and public programmes of the NMI
- promote a cohesive and quality museum brand across all four divisions
- source sponsorship for programmes and exhibitions
- use market research findings to generate broader awareness of the NMI
- implement a comprehensive marketing strategy for key events
- generate revenue from catering, retail and corporate services.

4.5 Around 10% of the NMI's staff are engaged in marketing including retail staff at each museum site. In practice, marketing activities are primarily focused on exhibitions. Up to 2007 the marketing department did not complete an analysis of audiences in a systematic way and is only now developing a structured approach to measuring its effectiveness. As part of this, the NMI has engaged a consultant to carry out three benchmark visitor surveys of its four sites over a twelve-month period. The first two of these surveys were taken in July and October 2007. The Director has informed me that it is intended to continue carrying out quarterly market research at the NMI in the future.

Opening Hours

4.6 The NMI opens for 38 hours per week. The museums at each site are open from 10am to 5pm from Tuesday to Saturday and from 2pm to 5pm on Sunday.¹⁹ They are closed all day on Mondays. Opening hours are low by comparison with other cultural institutions. The sample of opening hours for other Irish and international museums at Appendix D indicates that Irish museums open for an average of 47.5 hours per week and international museums open on average for 52.8 hours per week.

4.7 The Director has pointed out that extending the NMI's opening hours is constrained by its staffing arrangements. In circumstances where attendants work a five-day week it would not be an option to introduce a seven-day week at current staffing levels. Consequently, the NMI can only address extended opening hours if it secures additional staffing resources which would allow it to introduce a revised rota system to cover any additional hours of service.

Exhibitions

4.8 Exhibitions are the most immediately visible component of the NMI's operations. The NMI mounts both permanent and temporary exhibitions. Its plans included provision for 25 exhibitions in 2007, which is typical of the level of activity in recent years. The NMI plans to expand exhibition capacity by creating permanent exhibitions in the Central Block at Collins Barracks on the history of Ireland and ethnography.

4.9 Since the implementation of measures under an exhibition policy introduced in 1997 covering the permanent exhibitions of the NMI, there has been no further policy development in the area of exhibitions. At this point, there is a need to formulate a policy covering all exhibitions which should include a planned programme for changing exhibitions and their contents.

Extent of Public Display

4.10 The NMI faces a challenge when choosing material for public display. The two main problems are that it is operating under space constraints and not all collection objects are exhibitable. The NMI estimates that the proportion of exhibitable collection objects on public display is 3.5%, as outlined in Figure 4.2.

¹⁹ Exhibitions displayed in the Riding School (Collins Barracks) are open late on Thursday nights.

Figure 4.2 Proportion of Exhibitable Collections on Display

	Art and Industrial	Irish Antiquities	Irish Folklife	Natural History	Total
Exhibitable Objects	125,000	150,000	30,000	600,000	905,000 ^a
Objects on display	16,400 ^b	3,500	1,400	10,000	31,300
Proportion on Exhibition	13%	2.3%	4.6%	1.6%	3.5%

Notes:

- a These figures do not include the estimated number of stamps, excavation material and insects, as these objects are mainly for reference purposes.
- b This includes 12,500 objects in the 'What's in Store' exhibition at Collins Barracks.

Digitisation

4.11 The NMI aims to have a selection of digital images of objects on its website²⁰ to satisfy general public interest. The proportion of each collection suitable for digitisation varies. This type of record will not only act as a public access point, but also will be a testimony to the condition of objects at a given time. Limited databases of photographs exist (slides, negatives, prints etc.) but have not been linked to the collections databases. This would be necessary to relate the digital image to the underlying object. The NMI intends to start the digitisation of material in the Easter Week collection soon.

4.12 The NMI's website came into operation in 2003. It contains general descriptions of the collections at the four divisions and information on educational and outreach services and current and forthcoming events. No objects can be viewed on the site, nor is a search facility available. There are no links to associated or relevant organisations. The NMI is working with consultants to develop a new website. The Director has informed me that the content will be finalised and the website launched in early 2008.

4.13 There is considerable scope for enhancing access to the collections through electronic media. Technological developments could also facilitate access to those classes of objects that can be left in their natural habitats or locations. Such developments should be accompanied by the establishment of targets for the number of objects to be displayed and described on its website, along the lines of the National Museum of Liverpool or the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. In addition, in the longer term, the NMI should examine the incorporation of interactive discussion forums into the website so as to facilitate discussion and greater knowledge and understanding of our national heritage.

Research Facilities

4.14 Access to the collections for research is by appointment only. Most of the NMI's locations have some facilities for researchers, but these are somewhat limited in nature. Gaining access can be a cumbersome process. Firstly, researchers visit the NMI and review the records of material held, which can be problematical due to documentation deficiencies. From these records, they must make a selection of material they wish to examine. Staff of the NMI then endeavour to find that material. Finally, they return to the NMI and conduct the research.

²⁰ www.museum.ie

4.15 The NMI does not have a specific policy in relation to research access. The unique resources of the NMI should be available to outside scholars and other members of the public to engage in research. It is important that the NMI, as a leading national cultural institution, develops its research facilities while at the same time protecting its collections and records. A research access policy should set out acceptable credentials for handling documents and objects and an accepted protocol for research.

4.16 The NMI does not systematically gather feedback from researchers on the level and quality of services offered to them and does not maintain standardised data on the number and type of research requests made, nor does it record staff time.²¹

Education and Outreach

4.17 The provision of educational and outreach services is an excellent way of making the collections accessible to a wider audience. Until recently the NMI's educational programmes have been designed in an informal and unstructured manner, or as a result of specific requests from individual user groups. However, the Board of the NMI approved an education and outreach policy in May 2007. This policy aims to promote the NMI as a centre for life-long learning, offer quality experiences to new and existing audiences, ensure that education and outreach services are accessible to all and that the NMI has the capacity to evaluate these services.

4.18 In recent years, greater emphasis has been put on the NMI's educational responsibility within the community. It now considers the educational implications of exhibitions at the design stage. For instance, the military history exhibition was designed in line with the secondary school curriculum. In terms of practical educational outputs the NMI provides guided tours, public lectures, weekend events, workshops and demonstrations, education resource rooms, an information and resource service, drop-in activities, special events and educational exhibitions.

4.19 An external evaluation of educational services provided by the NMI was carried out in 2005. The evaluation concluded that the benefits and learning outcomes are significant, and that the NMI needs to develop these further. The evaluation contained a range of recommendations that included specific measures to widen access. In particular, it identified benefits for children which included opportunities for imagination, creativity and entertainment, understanding of heritage, history and the natural world and skill development. A strong theme was the desire for greater learning resources. More tours were seen as a major requirement, particularly themed ones and topic trails.

4.20 The NMI's outreach activity aims to bring an awareness of the collections to individuals and groups who would not normally have access to them, such as disadvantaged communities or prisoners. The NMI has aspirations to reach a wider and more varied audience. Outreach activities generally consist of a presentation and a handling collection.

Loans Programme

4.21 In May 2007 the NMI had 972 objects loaned out within Ireland. There were an additional 95 objects on loan outside Ireland. The Minister may designate museums to retain archaeological objects for safekeeping. Designation of museums fundamentally depends on local museums

²¹ The Irish Antiquities division maintains a register of researchers.

having permanent premises of a high standard and suitably qualified personnel to carry out the curation functions. So far, only ten local museums²² have been designated.

4.22 A policy relating to the loaning of objects has been in place in the NMI since 2005, and this complies with the Heritage Council guidelines. On foot of this the NMI operates long-term loans with other museums, mainly Irish designated county museums or other national museums. The policy of the NMI is to display high value objects which tend to be popular with visitors as part of the national collections and in the context of its overall exhibition programme. It considers that this affords an opportunity for more people to view the objects.

4.23 The registration department of the NMI has responsibility for administering loans. Curatorial and conservation department staff also provide input. However, although there are files on all loans which list the objects loaned, there is no loans register and the NMI acknowledges that the procedures set out in its 2005 loans policy have not been fully complied with. Objects which are loaned out are not universally photographed. The NMI informed the examination team that it would photograph all future loan objects as a matter of course.

4.24 The loaning out of objects is a well-recognised method of making collections more accessible and the NMI should adopt a more active approach to this.

²² Cavan, Clare, Cork, Donegal, Kerry, Limerick City, Louth, Monaghan, Tipperary South and Waterford City. Carlow and Mayo museums are not yet designated, but according to the NMI have 'designated curators'. All twelve museum curators have this status, which in effect means that they are designated persons under the National Monuments (Amendment) Act 1994.

Conclusions

4.25 The NMI does not compare favourably with other museums in terms of opening hours.

In order to enhance public access to its material the NMI needs to work towards increasing its opening hours. A first step in this direction would be to agree staffing arrangements which would allow it to modernise the current staff rota system.

4.26 Exhibitions are a key means of making collections accessible. In order to manage this effectively and underpin planning, investment appraisal and evaluation, an exhibitions policy is necessary.

Taking account of the scale of allocation of NDP funding for Phase II of the Collins Barracks site and the development plans for the Merrion Street site, it would be opportune to formulate such a policy so as to inform and provide guidance for these capital developments.

4.27 There is scope for greater use of information and communication technology in making the collections accessible and presenting the meaning of the heritage objects displayed.

The NMI should develop electronic access to its collections and modernise its website to cater for the provision of electronic data about those collections.

4.28 Access to the collections by researchers was found to be complicated for the researcher and highly labour intensive for the NMI.

The NMI needs to streamline the arrangements for the provision of research access to make it more user friendly for researchers and more economical and efficient for itself.

4.29 Outreach work is carried out on an ad hoc basis largely due to resourcing constraints.

In order to bring the NMI's collections to targeted populations there is a need for a more structured approach to the planning and resourcing of outreach activity. The planned new website should enhance outreach and education activities.

5 Managing the Museum

5.1 This chapter examines the management of the NMI including its process for developing strategy, its arrangements for performance evaluation, its organisational structures and its risk and disaster management.

Standards and Accreditation

5.2 The Museum Standards Programme for Ireland, issued by the Heritage Council, sets out the key elements of a comprehensive system for the management of museums. Figure 5.1 lists these standards and sets out the NMI's performance in relation to them.²³

Figure 5.1 Best Practice Standards – Key Elements

Area of Administration	Elements which should be in place	Museum Performance		
		Full	Partial	None
Constitution and Policies	Mission Statement	✓		
	Collections Policy		✓	
	Disposal Policy			✓
	Loans Policy	✓		
Museum Management	Strategic Plan and Annual Implementation Plan			✓
	Financial Plan/Procedures and Estimates	✓		
	Audited Accounts/Certified Statement of Accounts	✓		
Caring for the Collections	Evidence of monitoring and controlling the museum environment		✓	
	Disaster Plan and Disaster Response Procedures		✓	
	Care of Collections Strategy		✓	
Documenting the Collections	Entry and Exit Records System	✓		
	Object Location and Movement Controls		✓	
	Accession Register (and secure copy)	✓		
	Index of Donors		✓	
	Documentation Backlog Plan			✓
	Loan Agreements and Records		✓	
	Catalogue		✓	
Exhibitions	Exhibition Policy and Exhibition Budget			✓
	Consistent approach to labelling			✓
	Maintenance Schedule			✓
	Visitor Survey and Evaluation of Exhibitions		✓	
Education	Education Policy	✓		
	Outline of Education Programmes	✓		
Visitor Care and Access	Clear External Signage and Visitor Statistics	✓		

²³ The standards do not include access or research policies but do require museums to have building ownership details/lease agreements and a written agreement if collections are owned or managed by two organisations. This however, is not applicable to the NMI.

5.3 The NMI acknowledges that it is short of reaching the Heritage Council's minimum standards of the accreditation scheme.²⁴ The crucial issues still outstanding are the completion of a museum-wide disaster plan and policies to govern documentation and the acquisition or disposal of artefacts.

Strategic Planning

5.4 It is essential that a leading national cultural institution such as the NMI should have a clear vision of its purpose and intent and mechanisms for evaluating its effectiveness. A mission statement and strategic plan are central to achieving such a vision. The NMI does not have a current strategic plan.²⁵ However it does have a mission statement and in pursuit of that mission, the Board of the NMI has agreed the high-level goals set out in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2 High Level Goals

Area	Goal
Collections Management	Develop and put in place the necessary policies and arrangements for the ongoing care and management of the Museum's collections.
Access	Improve access to the Museum and its collections. Promote the Museum's services to the public through improved facilities, exhibitions, publications and education programmes.
Customer Service	Deliver a high quality customer service to all users of the Museum.
Education	Expand the range of learning opportunities for audiences of all ages and abilities.
Management and Development	Manage the organisational change resulting from the establishment of the National Museum of Ireland as an independent statutory body under the National Cultural Institutions Act 1997, including the development of appropriate human and financial resource strategies.
Capital Development	Provide the highest possible standard of public facilities, access for all visitors and accommodation for staff and the collections.

5.5 In early 2006, the Director established a small internal group to oversee the further development of the strategy. However, the process has not been actively pursued and the group has not met since 2006. Day-to-day operational issues have taken priority. The NMI has made a commitment under the latest national partnership agreement 'Towards 2016' to produce a strategy by the end of 2007. The Director has assured me that management at the NMI, with the advice and facilitation of the Institute of Public Administration, is currently working towards finalising a statement of strategy which will cover the period 2008-2012.

5.6 The absence of an organisational strategy could adversely affect the NMI's performance in managing the national collections.

²⁴ The NMI has proposed its Museum of Country Life to participate in the Heritage Council's standards programme for 2008.

²⁵ The NMI last had a strategic plan covering the period 2000-2005.

Business Planning

5.7 All divisions and departments in the NMI produce annual business plans. An evaluation of the business plans indicated they are largely modified versions of previous year's plans. The Director has stated that in the context of the NMI, where most of its aims are long-term or cyclical, this continuity is understandable. However, in the absence of an overall strategy, there is no demonstrable linkage between divisional business plans and the strategic direction of the NMI.

5.8 The NMI has established working groups to advance issues such as developing a collections policy and a disaster plan. To date, these have not been completed.

Project Management

5.9 Project management will assume greater importance in future years. In the next three to five years the NMI is set to undertake significant capital developments funded by the NDP. A designated project manager or project team would need to be in place to plan and implement a capital programme on the scale envisaged. The Director has informed me that the Board of the NMI approved the recruitment of a professional project manager in March 2007 but this recruitment is on hold pending the formal approval of the details of the projects by the Department.

Performance Evaluation

5.10 Except for the evaluation of the NMI's education and marketing departments, there is no structured approach to the evaluation of effectiveness in the NMI. From the viewpoint of ongoing performance monitoring, the principal indicator used by the NMI is visitor numbers.

5.11 Visitor numbers alone would be a crude measure of how effectively the NMI makes its collections accessible to the public. Both the NMI and the Department agree that while visitor numbers are an important indicator of access by the community and are enhanced by temporary exhibitions, they must be viewed in conjunction with lectures, outreach, education programmes, research and the protection of the collections.

Structural Issues

5.12 The NMI has complicated divisional and locational reporting structures. At divisional level, there is significant fragmentation of reporting structures and roles. The Keepers, who report to the Head of Collections, are responsible for curatorial staff only. Apart from Turlough Park, there are no conservators working directly in the individual divisions – they are largely based in the conservation department in Collins Barracks.²⁶ Documentation staff report to the registration department, while attendants report to the Head of Facilities and shop staff report to the marketing department. This militates against coherent control and management, since Keepers must deal with several managers and departments in order to manage their own areas of responsibility.

²⁶ Since January 2007, a dedicated conservator has been assigned to the Natural History collections at Merrion Street and Beggars Bush.

Knowledge Management

5.13 Because of the specialist information and knowledge that goes with the management of heritage items, years of expert knowledge and experience may be lost in the event of internal staff moves or departures from the NMI. Many curators have knowledge about the location and condition of the collections that is not being captured in a structured way. Some measures are being considered to counter this, including a proposed research policy which aims to disseminate this type of knowledge. In addition, some curators now record many of their lectures. However, agreed procedures have not been established to ensure that specialist knowledge is recorded and secured.

5.14 The Director has informed me that the primary vehicle for continuity in the NMI is the significant knowledge bank represented by publications and unpublished reports and other collection records.

Corporate Governance

5.15 The NMI does not operate a formal risk management system, under which risks are identified, prioritised and actions taken to avoid or mitigate them. The NMI contends that risk is dealt with through its routine management processes. The Director has informed me that the NMI has recently engaged consultants to advise on the development of a risk management strategy and system. This is expected to be in place by the end of March 2008.

5.16 In 2006 the Board of the NMI established an audit committee and an internal audit function.

Disaster Management

5.17 While the NMI has procedures in place to address public safety including evacuation of the public in the case of emergencies, it does not have a museum-wide disaster plan for its collections. This would be important in the case of fire or flood threats. In its business plan for 2000, the conservation department had an objective to start developing such a plan. This has not been achieved to date. Such a disaster plan is a crucial component of good collections management. A risk assessment should be performed before developing the plan.

5.18 Disaster management should extend to procedures for identifying, photographing and salvaging (where possible) valuable collection objects. It should also identify alternative accommodation in advance. A nominated disaster team should be ready to respond promptly to possible disasters. The Director informed me that the current focus of a disaster planning sub-committee chaired by the Head of the Conservation Department is to draw up disaster response procedures for the individual sites of the NMI.

Security Arrangements

5.19 Overall security is the responsibility of the Head of Facilities. At operational levels, different security arrangements apply in different NMI locations. Senior attendants are responsible for security at individual locations. External contractors provide security services at the Collins Barracks and Turlough Park locations (working with NMI security staff). Camera surveillance and alarm systems operate in all locations. The NMI is currently conducting a full audit of its security requirements for the next 20 years.

Customer Service

5.20 Although a Customer Service Charter has been in place since 2003 and is displayed on the NMI's website, the objectives do not facilitate measurement and evaluation. Comment cards, exit surveys and focus groups have been used in a limited way but overall no concerted effort has been made to introduce deeper coordinated assessment of customer satisfaction.

5.21 Limited research has been performed in relation to visitor needs and no research is conducted on people who do not visit the NMI's public sites. Heretofore, there has been little significant information available regarding the type of visitors to NMI facilities apart from a review of the education department. This is being addressed by the benchmark visitor surveys outlined at paragraph 4.5.

Views of the Department

5.22 The Accounting Officer informed me that implementation of Government policy, within the framework of budgetary constraint, is always a matter of balancing competing demands by the most effective means possible. In an environment where many of the national cultural institutions inhabit prestigious buildings that have high maintenance and development costs, achieving an acceptable balance is particularly challenging.

5.23 A number of major developments in the NMI have received significant funding since 2000. These include the NMI's Museum of Country Life at Turlough Park (2001), the conservation laboratory (2002), the visible storage facility (2004), the provision of temporary exhibition galleries in the refurbished Riding School (2005) and the Military History exhibition and galleries. This latter development alone involved an overall cost of over €3 million and was opened to the public in 2006. The current challenges must be viewed in the context of public investment in these institutions over the first seven decades since the formation of the State which was limited by higher social and economic priorities.

5.24 The Department considers that the provision of this funding has not only improved the facilities available to the NMI to carry out its functions, but has led to a significant increase in visitors to the NMI.

5.25 While the capital allocations in respect of the NMI for the years 2002 to 2006 amounted to €2.6 million, securing substantial funding in the Culture Sub-programme of the NDP 2007-2013 is a significant development.

5.26 However the Accounting Officer noted that the funding provided in the NDP in 2007 and subsequent years for General Capital Works in the NMI administered through the Department's Vote is in lieu of the annual capital funding provided previously and is indicative only, given that a less favourable economic climate could result in a reduced allocation. Provisionally, this funding amounts to €26.3 million over the term of the NDP.

Conclusions

5.27 The lack of a current statement of strategy for the NMI is a serious weakness giving rise to a risk that development and change will be unfocused and day-to-day business will be unconnected to an organisation vision and mission. This is unacceptable in an important national cultural institution like the NMI.

The NMI needs to formulate a strategy to link its higher-level goals with business procedures in order to enable it to plan and function in a co-ordinated manner. The NMI has assured me that the development of a statement of strategy covering the period 2008-2012 is being progressed.

5.28 The NMI does not have an effective system of indicators to measure its performance in key areas. Apart from the measurement of attendance figures, the NMI does not compile other relevant performance indicators.

The NMI should introduce measurable performance indicators to cover the following areas

- the number and type of exhibitions and qualitative evaluation of visitors' experience and satisfaction levels
- the proportion of the collections capable of being accessed physically and electronically
- the number of visits to the NMI's re-developed website, together with user feedback
- the level of research requests facilitated, coupled with user feedback on the quality of the service provided
- quantitative and qualitative indicators relating to on and off-site education and outreach services
- the number of object conservation audits undertaken annually
- the setting of realisable targets in relation to the reduction of the documentation backlog.

5.29 Responsibility for the management of the NMI is divided between local Keepers who manage curatorial staff and museum-wide divisions who manage other services.

The NMI should review its structure to see if it is the most efficient arrangement for the multi-location organisation that it has evolved into.

5.30 The NMI needs to take all reasonable steps to ensure that the expert knowledge and experience of its specialist staff is retained.

The NMI should institute arrangements whereby the specialist knowledge of curatorial staff is documented and passed on so that vital knowledge is retained for its benefit.

5.31 The absence of a formal risk management system and a comprehensive disaster plan is a serious concern given the NMI's responsibility for the national collections.

The NMI should install a modern risk management system and a comprehensive disaster plan. The Director of the NMI has assured me that planning in these areas is in hand.

Appendices

Appendix A Legal Framework

The NMI was established under the Dublin Science and Art Museum Act 1877. The legal framework in which the NMI operates, particularly in areas of acquisition and disposal of artefacts and the supervision of archaeological excavations is set out in three further Acts

- the National Monuments Acts 1930–2004
- the National Cultural Institutions Act 1997
- the Heritage Fund Act 2001.

National Monuments Acts 1930-2004

The National Monuments Acts provide that all archaeological finds shall be passed to the NMI. All material found during excavation is owned by the State and automatically comes under the care of the NMI which has a consultative role in all licensed excavations.

National Cultural Institutions Act 1997

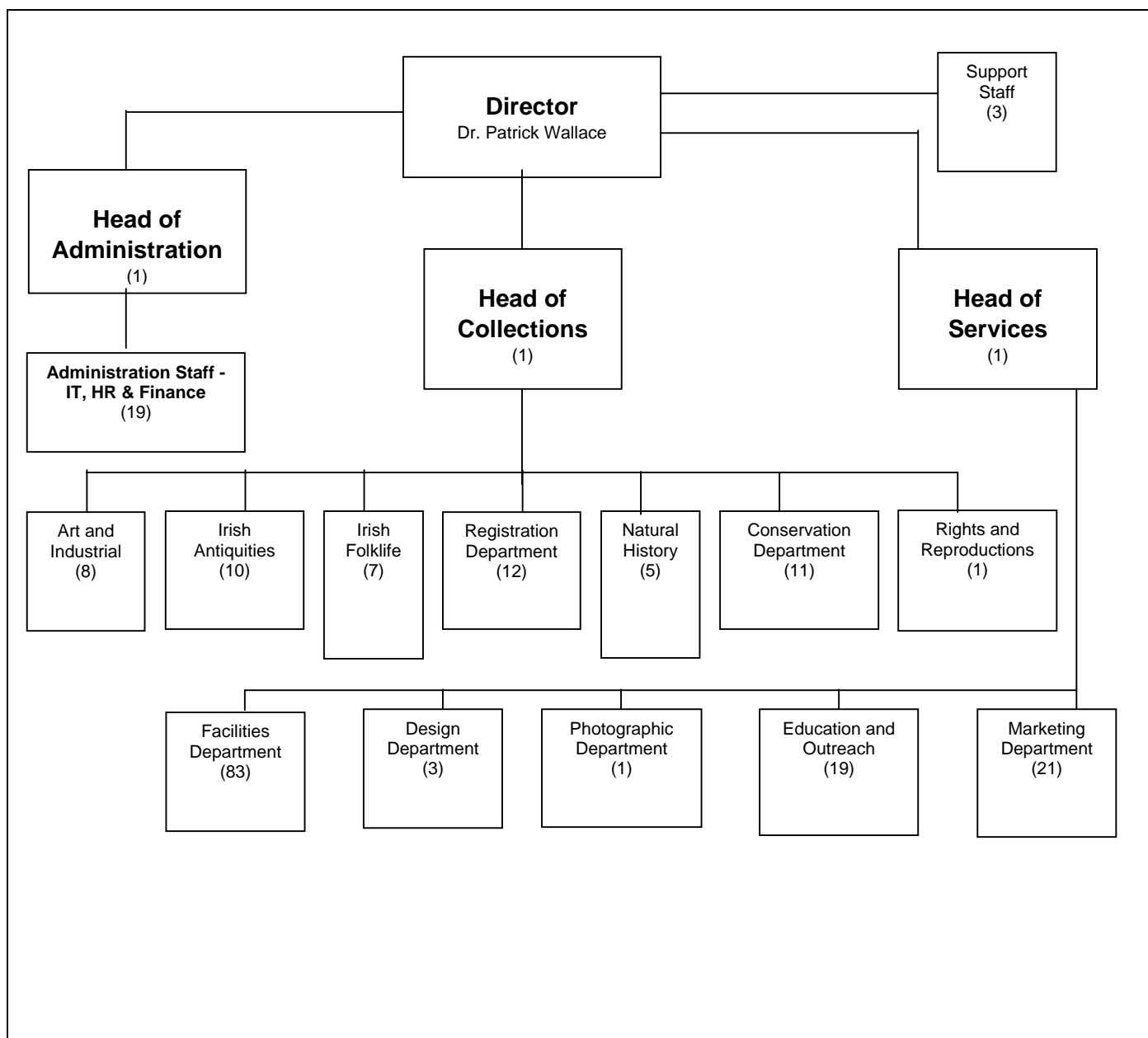
The National Cultural Institutions Act 1997 established the NMI as a non-commercial semi-state body. A board of management governs the NMI and the principal functions of the Board are given legal definition in the Act.

Heritage Fund Act 2001

The Heritage Fund Act 2001 established a fund with an overall limit of €2.7 million over a five-year period (2001-2005) which provided for the acquisition of heritage objects above a valuation of €17,435 that were considered outstanding examples of their type and pre-eminent in their class so that the Irish people could enjoy, appreciate and value these artefacts.

Appendix B Organisation Chart of National Museum of Ireland as at December 2007

The Director reports to the Board of the NMI. The NMI's activities are arranged under three areas of responsibility - collections, administration and services. Each is headed by a senior manager who reports to the Director.



Appendix C Capital Allocations

The total ongoing day-to-day capital allocation for the NMI in respect of the 2007-2013 period covered by the National Development Plan is approximately €26 million. The allocation of this on a yearly basis is outlined in Figure C.1.

Figure C.1 Capital Allocations for the period 2007-2013

Year	Amount
	€million
2007	6.00
2008	3.45
2009	1.00
2010	3.82
2011	4.02
2012	4.02
2013	4.02
Total	26.33

Appendix D Comparative Opening Hours

The following represents the weekly opening hours for a selection of Irish and international museums.

Museum	Weekly hours
Irish Museums	
Chester Beatty	41
Irish Museum of Modern Art	43
National Library	53
Waterford Museum of Treasures	63
National Print Museum	35
Cork City Gaol	52.5
The Hunt Museum	45
Average – Irish Museums	47.5
International Museums	
Scotland	49
Wales	42
New Zealand	59
Victoria, Australia	49
British Museum	57
Northern Ireland	42
Victoria and Albert	58.5
Guggenheim, Bilbao	60
The State Hermitage, St. Petersburg	44
Denmark	42
Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, Rome	66
Pergamon Museum, Berlin	52
Smithsonian Museums, Washington DC	52.5
The Louvre, Paris	78
Natural History Museum, Netherlands	41
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York	53.5
Average – International Museums	52.8
National Museum of Ireland	38