

Dec 2006



Alun Pugh AM
Minister for Culture, Welsh Language and Sport
Y Gweinidog dros Ddiwylliant, y Gymraeg a Chwaraeon

Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

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Our Ref/Ein cyf: SF/AP/137/05

Janet Davies AM
Chair – Audit Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay CF99 1NA

27 December 2005

Amwyl Janet

The Committee was last updated about the recommendations in the Audit Committee Report 'Collections Management at the National Museums and Galleries of Wales' at the end of 2004.

Good progress was noted on some of the recommendations. However, it was observed that progress on several of the recommendations was dependent on the publication of a consultative vision statement (subsequently published in Spring 2005).

Given the work still to be undertaken by the Museum on some of the recommendations, it was recommended that the Committee be updated on the Museums progress at the end of 2005. I am enclosing that update.

Yn Gywir
AP



Audit Committee Update

No.	Recommendation	Status	Target date
1	Approaches the development of a 'vision' with urgency so that its future context and general direction is defined and made clear without further delay. It should set time-related, measurable targets for the implementation of the vision, which should pay regard to all the recommendations in this report and be explicit in how the respective improvements will be achieved.	Vision Objectives have now been finalised. The objectives have been informed by the responses received during the Vision Consultation period and by internal consultation with staff members at all sites. These will be published in the form of a 'Vision Statement'. This will serve as a summary document for the Development Plan that will cover the period 2006-20016 and will also form the basis of the Operational Plan for 2006-07. These Objectives will be measurable against both quantitative and qualitative time-related targets.	March 2006
2	Sets realistic, achievable, time-related and measurable targets for improving the documentation of its collections and closely monitors their achievement	The Museum already has good paper records for its collections, and by the end of September 2005 had computerised over 46% of these records, which relate to the most valuable items. The Museum is now using its Visioning process to determine the strategic priorities between continuing to computerise all its paper records and the need to divert resources to enhancing its higher-level catalogue records and web databases and agree these targets with the Assembly Sponsor Division via its Corporate Planning process. The Museum is now conducting a review of collections, with the purpose of identifying appropriate levels for Inventory and Cataloguing. Curatorial departments have assessed the needs for documenting their collections further and assigned priority levels between Essential; Important; Useful; and not required, - a general collection level description being sufficient. The results of this review will inform the decision-making process.	March 2006
3	Immediately extends its spot checks, which are designed to test the condition and location of items within its collection, to include those objects held only on manual records. It should also review the level of resources allocated to verification with a view to introducing systematic verification procedures	Through its programme of computerising its paper records, the Museum already verifies 200,000 items a year. It also has a programme of spot-checking items recorded on its computerised database every year; it has now put in place systematic procedures to double this spot checking programme to include items for which only paper records exist. The process will be monitored by the Museum's internal auditors, currently PriceWaterhouseCoopers.	Ongoing

No	Recommendation	Status	Target date
4	Formulates an action plan with timescales and costings of how it will seek to address storage problems beyond the 15-20 years that the planned improved storage facilities might cater for	The Museum embarked in 2004/5 on a £5.2 million scheme to improve its storage facilities. The Visioning process will identify those areas where it wishes to develop its collections. Together, these two processes will enable the Museum to identify future needs at a strategic level, and in turn formulate action plans to address those needs.	April 2006
5	Completes, as a matter of urgency, its assessment of how best to use the funding committed by the Assembly, to lever in additional external funding, so as to improve the storage of its collections.	The assessment has been completed; the total cost of the project will be £5.2m spread over four financial years, and the Welsh Assembly Government has committed £3.5m to the scheme. The Museum's Council has agreed to underwrite the shortfall from the Museum's own resources to enable a prompt start to be made. Other external fund-raising will continue. Planning applications have been submitted for works at Nantgarw and Museum of Welsh Life. The package for Nantgarw is currently out to tender. Work at Welsh Slate Museum has been completed. A response to our Stage 1 HLF bid to support works at Museum of Welsh Life is anticipated in December 2005. Detailed collection movement schedules are currently being prepared to ensure the safe and timely transfer of collections from NMG to Nantgarw.	Discharged 07/05
6	Takes all necessary steps to ensure that standards of storage are satisfactory and that the health and safety of staff and visitors are never put at risk.	The Museum began implementing in April 2005 a performance indicator that will monitor continuously the standards of all its storage spaces. The results will be reviewed at the end of the year. The work indicated in 5 above confirms the Museum's commitment to addressing this storage issue. NMGW takes its responsibility for Health & Safety very seriously in line with its Health & Safety Policy Statement. It continually ensures that such issues are given the highest possible priority.	Ongoing
7	Develops contingency plans to tackle the conservation backlog should the Nantgarw project not proceed and be fully successful. And it should press ahead, as a matter of urgency, with its survey of the condition of objects within its collections to ensure that its remedial conservation efforts are targeted to best effect.	The storage/access project (5 above) is proceeding. Progress will be regularly reviewed and contingency plans have been developed to ensure that the project is not delayed by external factors. An Industrial Collections Conservator has been appointed with responsibility for the conservation of the collections at NWM Drefach, WSM Llanberis and Big Pit Blaenavon. All NMGW sites now have conservation cover. The Museum will survey systematically the condition of objects as part of the decanting	Discharged 07/05

No	Recommendation	Status	Target date
8	<p>Undertakes an especially rigorous impact assessment at the point of acquisition and monitors collection growth to inform its planning for future storage and conservation needs.</p>	<p>The Museum already had process which required an impact assessment to be carried out for major collections, including storage and curation/conservation requirements. It has now extended this process to every acquisition or group of acquisitions.</p>	<p>Discharged 07/05</p>
9	<p>Seeks the views of visitors in a systematic way concerning the best ways of displaying items so as to improve visitor experience.</p>	<p>NMGW undertakes an annual programme of visitor research. The wide-ranging consultation on the Vision (see 1) included questions on displaying collections and improving the visitor experience. The responses to these questions are feeding into NMGW's corporate planning. Visitor, non-visitor and staff consultation is currently underway on the suggested visual representation of the Vision's aims and objectives (corporate and site-specific branding). The most recent Focus Group Satisfaction Report for the period October-December 2004 was produced by Cardiff Arts Marketing and considered by NMGW's Visitor Experience Working Group, established in June 2004 and tasked with considering how best to take forward all aspects of such audience research.</p>	<p>Discharged 07/05</p>
10	<p>Continues to explore ways to extend the loans programme, including extending the Partnership Programme in the interests of improving access to the collections throughout Wales.</p>	<p>NMGW will continue to develop its programme of extending and promoting access to the collections through loans and partnerships with museums, galleries and other venues throughout Wales and beyond. This will range from maintaining and improving the present range of direct loans noted in the report, through to extending initiatives such as 'Cyfoeth Cymru Gyfan - Sharing Treasures'. An announcement was made in December 2004 about five Visual Arts venues which were introduced to complement the five mixed discipline venues which initiated the scheme in 2002. This pilot project was enabled by three-year funding from the Esme Fairbairn Foundation. Ten projects will happen over three years at Bodelwyddan Castle, Ruthin Craft Centre, Oriel Mostyn Llandudno, Oriel Davies Newtown and Glyn Vivian Gallery Swansea. Other methods being used to promote awareness of our loans include a new website page which enables users and enquirers to identify localities where NMGW loans are available.</p>	<p>Discharged 07/05</p>

No	Recommendation	Status	Target date
11	Evaluates the use of its marketing budget to assure itself that best value for money is being achieved.	NMGW established an Evaluation Task Force in 2005 to audit existing evaluation practices and suggest suitable evaluation techniques to be adopted. Amongst other intended outcomes, this will help ensure greater value for money is secured from the organisation's marketing spend. An Audience Development Action Plan was produced and approved by Trustees in October 2005. The Museum is currently reviewing the best deployment of its marketing team, and is also undertaking qualitative visitor research at the National Waterfront Museum, and at the National Museum Cardiff, the latter to inform the planning of the 'Origins' exhibition planned for 2007.	Ongoing
12	Develops and implements a clear plan for income generation which includes areas for growth and the action needed to maximise those opportunities.	The Enterprises Action Plan mentioned in the Audit Committee recommendations has been subject to extensive review. The new CEO has ratified this detailed list of potential actions into a more succinct 5 year strategy plan. This has been reviewed and agreed with the Enterprises Board, and these longer-term strategies are being pursued. This plan will be next reviewed in February 2006.	Discharged 12/05
13	Monitor visitor numbers at the Museum of Welsh Life to assure itself that the introduction of car parking charges is not detrimental to the success of free visitor entry.	NMGW already monitors visitor numbers on a daily basis. This has confirmed that the visitor numbers to MWL have not been adversely affected by the introduction of car park charges. During the period April to August 2004, there were 402,032 visitors to the Museum of Welsh Life, compared with 392,689 in the same period in 2003, when no charge was made for car parking. NMGW will continue this monitoring process.	Discharged 07/05



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Date 8th March 2006
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Dear Chair,

UPDATE ON PROGRESS MADE BY THE NATIONAL MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES OF WALES IN IMPLEMENTING THE AUDIT COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATIONS

On 24 January, the Clerk wrote to me enclosing an update from the Minister for Culture, Welsh Language and Sport on the progress made in implementing the Audit Committee's recommendations in its report *Collections Management at the National Museums and Galleries of Wales*, requesting my advice.

You may recall that the Audit Committee considered the Welsh Assembly Government's response to its recommendations at its meeting on 2 December 2004. The Committee noted that the Government's response to a number of its recommendations were dependent on the development of the a 'vision' for the National Museum and Galleries for Wales and consequently the response was not specific on how these recommendations would be addressed. You subsequently wrote to the Minister requesting a progress report by the end of 2005, by when the National Museum and Galleries of Wales planned to publish its vision statement and to have carried out the further work needed to determine how the Committee's recommendations would be implemented.

The Minister's letter sets out the further progress made in implementing the Committee's recommendations as at December 2005. Although good progress has been made on a number of recommendations, the Museum's 'vision statement' is now due to be published this month. Consequently work to address some of the Committee's recommendations (such as recommendation 2 on improving the documentation of the Museum's collections) is ongoing, some with a target date of this month or next.

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Date: 8th March 2006

I propose that the Wales Audit Office follow-up the Minister's letter, once the Museum has had an opportunity to implement its vision statement and to complete the further work needed to determine exactly how it will address some of the Committee's recommendations. I will also use this opportunity to update the Committee on the progress made by the Museum in tackling some of the significant backlogs in the Museum's work, as set out in my predecessor's report.

Yours sincerely,



Jeremy Colman
Auditor General for Wales