

Delivering the Museums Strategy for Wales



Photograph courtesy of Cardiff University

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March 2012

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Executive Summary

This report looks at the work that has been done to implement the Museum Strategy for Wales since it was published by CyMAL in 2010. The brief for the consultancy element of this project, managed by the Federation of Museums and Galleries in Wales (FMAGW) and funded by CyMAL and FMAGW, was to drive the strategy forward. The focus was primarily on areas led by individual museums. The consultancy project also focused on areas led by key partners: FMAGW, CyMAL and Amgueddfa Cymru (AC-NMW) and on establishing new partnerships within and beyond Wales. This project ran from October 2011 to March 2012.

In addition to this, all partners involved with strategy delivery have undertaken work outside of the consultancy. The first part of this report therefore focuses on what the consultancy project has delivered, while the second looks at what has been achieved by key partners in strategy delivery. Part three focuses on recommendations for the future of strategy implementation, based on findings from the consultancy project and other partnership working, towards strategy delivery. The consultancy work has now been funded by CyMAL to continue from May to December 2012 and these recommendations will inform its continuation.

Part 1 Consultancy Project Methodology

The approach taken to the brief of driving forward the museum strategy was to maximise contact with staff and volunteers from individual museums or museum services across Wales. The aim was to provide a range of meaningful opportunities for them to feedback on how they are already meeting strategy actions and what additional support they require to enable them to do so.

Online surveys (and telephone interviews) were designed to assess museums' confidence in terms of policy and practice, gauge the level of projects taking place and establish areas where further assistance was required. These also asked museums about areas in which they were prepared to share learning and about awareness of and participation in national initiatives. Meetings provided museum staff with an opportunity to discuss the strategy in more depth and to offer examples of work they are undertaking to meet the strategy or areas in which they require support.

The information gathered using this methodology has been used to provide the information and analysis for this report. Particular examples are anecdotal and come from evidence gathered in meetings or via surveys and interviews.

The brief also included the need to raise the profile of the strategy beyond the borders of Wales, develop partnerships and to explore ways in which to share good practice already happening in museums in Wales. Creation of an online resource for museums to use was also something that needed to be explored, along with funding opportunities.

Engaging with Museums

Through means of regional meetings, an online survey, telephone survey and significant email correspondence, the views of 65 accredited museums have fed into this report, together with views of 15 other organisations (some of which are working towards accreditation) The fact that non-accredited museums are engaging with the strategy is seen as a positive sign. It is hoped that some of these non-accredited museums will be encouraged to seek accreditation as a result.

Training Needs Analysis

Assessing training needs was a key part of engaging with museums in the consultancy project. This was vital to ensure that the strategy delivers practical benefits to individual museums as well as ensuring individual strategy actions are delivered effectively at a local level. The top three training needs identified were:

- Development and management
- Collections Care
- Policy and Planning

In terms of methods, **advice and guidance** was rated as most useful and the traditional method of **training course/workshop** is still very popular. A lot of people also thought that **online resources** were a useful option, in particular for sharing policies, plans and case studies of projects.

Building Partnerships and Identifying Funding Opportunities

The consultancy project has built on existing partnerships around strategy delivery across Wales, looking for new ways in which these partnerships can deliver strategy actions and further the aim to improve services in relation to the three guiding principles of:

- Museums for Everyone
- A Collection for the Nation
- Working Effectively

In addition partnerships were strengthened or established with organisations beyond Wales. Advocacy was another key factor in this element of the project. Opportunities were also sought to raise additional income for the sector from external sources. As a result an application has been submitted to MA's Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund.

Online Resources

A key part of the brief was to look at options for providing a low cost online resource for museums and to find out what documents museums had to share and what areas they needed support in. The FMAGW website (<http://www.welshmuseumsfederation.org>) was assessed to see whether it could support this kind of resource.

Key findings:

- There is lots of work already happening around strategy delivery in museums across Wales and a considerable amount of enthusiasm for the benefits of engaging with the strategy.
- E-mail is the preferred method of communication for most people and online resources as well as traditional training methods would be welcomed.
- <http://www.welshmuseumsfederation.org/> figured highly as an accessible avenue of communication for work on the strategy, but people need directing to it.
- Individuals from museums found it really useful to meet each other and have an opportunity to network and to share information, experiences and time to discuss the strategy.
- Being able to access resources such as case studies and model documents online in addition to more traditional training methods was something museums would welcome.

Key outcomes:

- A detailed picture of the views, successes and needs of 80 museums and other organisations across Wales has emerged.
- Training Needs Analysis is feeding into CyMAL's training programme for 2012/13.
- Session on strategy delivery accepted at Museums Association Conference 2012.
- Funding bid for £100,000 to work on natural science collections across Wales submitted to MA's Esmée Fairbairn Collection Fund.
 - An online resource is planned for <http://www.welshmuseumsfederation.org/> linking to case studies and model documents for museums to download.

Part2 Partner Activities

CyMAL, FMAGW and AC-NMW have all undertaken work on strategy delivery independently of the consultancy project and other bodies have also contributed. This section of the report looks at what has been achieved against each strategy area.

Key achievements

- Publication of an advocacy strategy and toolkit by FMAGW.
- Acceptance of a session at MA conference 2012, to be chaired by FMAGW, about partnerships in relation to strategy delivery.
- FMAGW organised a conference on Museums and Communities which took place in Cardiff in March 2012. AC-NMW is using the strategy to inform large areas of its development work under the three guiding principles.
- AC-NMW has produced web based information on sustainability.
- AC-NMW Collection Management training programme for the sector, started in September 2011.
- The new Sharing Treasures Scheme was launched in November 2011 in a partnership of CyMAL, AC-NMW and HLF.
- CyMAL has provided training on many key areas identified in the strategy and are working on resources for some where necessary, including access, volunteers, significance of collections and content needed in a collections management plan.
- CyMAL has supported the Conserving Local Communities Heritage (CLOCH) project and the first four Trainees were recruited in January 2012.

- The CyMAL grant scheme is invaluable in providing the funds for individual museums/partners and partnerships to carry out projects fulfilling the actions in the strategy.

The range of partnerships shows the commitment of the museum sector in Wales, and all partner organisations, towards achieving strategy aims and implementing actions.

Key recommendations:

- Continue to publicise and promote the strategy across the museum sector in Wales and beyond.
- Develop a 'buddying' scheme to enable museums to work in an informal but focused way with peers on key areas of common interest.
- Build on relationships with those museums who have engaged with this project through ongoing, relevant, communications via Museums Current awareness and <http://www.welshmuseumsfederation.org>
- Identify strategy elements that require funding and identify further funding sources for partnership projects within the museum community.
- Expand partnership working and advocacy within and beyond Wales.
- Ensure that <http://www.welshmuseumsfederation.org> is a constantly updated vehicle for promoting the work museums are doing.
- Assess online resource to establish whether investment in a document management system is worthwhile.

Conclusion:

Having a national museum strategy puts Wales in a strong position. It means the sector is united and has a clear voice. The consultancy project has shown that museums are already engaging with the strategy and using it to inform their work. It has undoubtedly facilitated partnerships within and beyond Wales as it provides such a focused, easily articulated framework with which to engage. In terms of partnerships within museums in Wales, it makes these easier to establish as there is already a commitment within the sector to the key strategy principles.

The regional meetings enabling discussions on the strategy were ideal opportunities to showcase the enthusiasm, resourcefulness and creativity of the museum sector in Wales. Despite a gloomy economic climate, museums are keen to meet together, to share experiences and learn new ways of carrying out projects. They are clear that the strategy informs their work and committed to using it to make their museums more accessible and exciting to their visitors.

The online survey provided a snapshot of where museums are in terms of strategy delivery and where they need additional support. Not surprisingly this picture is varied, but it is clear that every museum has something to contribute in terms of its own policy and practice and that every museum has something to learn, whatever its size and structure and however it is governed.

There are a number of challenges facing museums at the moment, including reduced staffing and core funding and even threats of partial or full closure. The delivery project highlighted areas of concern and of need, as well as focusing on the many successes to be celebrated. Museums are aware that participation in the strategy demonstrates their value and accountability. The co-ordinated approach to the issues facing the sector means museums in Wales are not facing these challenges alone.

The fact that bodies from across Wales have joined forces to create and implement a museums strategy, demonstrates a commitment to working in partnership. It also gives the sector a lot more manoeuvrability to respond to challenges and adds weight politically. It means that when opportunities arise for funding, it is easy to identify and establish the right partnerships. It means that communication across the sector can be well-directed and can happen quickly. When there are discussions about issues affecting museums more widely, it is possible to comment with some authority on the position of the sector as a whole in Wales.

The strategy creates a firm foundation for museums to build on for the future. It isn't static, but is evolving and responding to changes in the political and economic landscape. Equally museums can use it to respond to their own and their community's needs too.

For the people who live in and visit Wales, there is a truly strategic approach to caring for and sharing the heritage of the nation. In a time when resources are increasingly under pressure, museums can show that they are using them wisely and for demonstrable public outcomes.

The full report is available in English on the FMAGW website:
http://welshmuseumsfederation.org/index.php?page=test&hl=en_US

A brief summary of this report for CyMAL is available (in English and Welsh) on their website:
<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/cultureandsport/museumsarchiveslibraries/cymal/museums/strategy/>

