

Section 1: Draft Policy Vision

Q1. To what extent do you agree or disagree with our draft vision

“Accessible heritage: inspiring discovery, enhancing wellbeing and connecting communities”?

Response: Strongly Agree

Supplementary commentary (text box): Belfast City Council strongly supports the proposed vision, which reflects the broad and evolving role of museums as accessible, inclusive civic assets. The emphasis on wellbeing, connectivity and discovery aligns closely with our cultural strategy and the role of culture in supporting place-making, participation and civic pride.

We particularly welcome the recognition of museums as spaces that connect people to place and to one another, and believe this should be further strengthened through place-based storytelling and community engagement.

Section 2: Policy Aims – PEOPLE & COMMUNITIES

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the following aims are important areas of priority for the museum sector?

Q2. Supporting positive health and wellbeing through engagement

Strongly Agree

Commentary: The Council strongly supports the recognition of museums as contributors to wellbeing outcomes. We encourage continued investment in outreach, community programming and inclusive engagement, particularly for underrepresented groups and those experiencing barriers to cultural participation.

Q3. Inspiring creativity and lifelong learning

Strongly Agree

Commentary: Museums are key partners in lifelong learning and cultural education. We support stronger integration with schools, community learning and informal education settings, and highlight opportunities to align with skills development and creative learning pathways.

Q4. Supporting access to trusted information and resources

Strongly Agree

Commentary: Access to trusted, curated knowledge is fundamental to the role of museums. We would welcome further emphasis on digital access and innovation to ensure collections and knowledge are accessible to wider audiences.

Q5. Working innovatively to drive participation and engagement

Strongly Agree

Commentary: Innovation in audience engagement is critical. This includes digital storytelling, co-creation with communities, and new participatory models aligned with projects such as Belfast Stories.

Section 3: Policy Aims – PLACES

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the following aims are important areas of priority for the museum sector?

Q6. Providing safe, accessible and inclusive spaces

Strongly Agree

Commentary: Museums are vital civic spaces. Continued investment is required to ensure accessibility, sustainability and inclusion, particularly across smaller museums.

Q7. Preserving local histories including collections, traditional skills and crafts, and stories for people and communities

Strongly Agree

Commentary: Belfast City Council strongly supports this aim. Preservation must include both tangible collections and intangible heritage such as oral histories, traditions and lived experience.

We particularly emphasise the importance of connecting preservation with active interpretation and storytelling.

Q8. Celebrating and representing cultural diversity through collections, programming and storytelling

Strongly Agree

Commentary: Representation is central to building shared cultural understanding. Museums should reflect the diversity of contemporary society, through inclusive collecting, programming and interpretation.

Q9. Contributing to the public awareness of Northern Ireland's environmental challenges through sustainable operations, local actions and provision of information and resources.

Strongly Agree

Commentary: We support the principle and recognise the role museums can play in environmental education. However, delivery should be proportionate and supported by resourcing and guidance, particularly for smaller organisations.

Section 4: Policy Aims – PARTNERSHIPS

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the following aims are important areas of priority for the museum sector?

Q10. Demonstrating the value of the museum sector in meeting government outcomes

Strongly Agree

Commentary: We strongly support the need to better evidence and communicate the social and economic value of museums. This is critical for advocacy, investment and cross-government alignment.

Q11. Investing in a vibrant and connected accredited sector

Strongly Agree

Commentary: The accreditation system is an important mechanism for quality and sustainability. Continued investment is essential to support resilience across the sector.

Q12. Working with others to preserve, grow and celebrate local heritage, arts and culture

Strongly Agree

Commentary: Partnership working is essential. We emphasise the critical role of local government in facilitating place-based collaboration across culture, tourism and community sectors.

Q13. Working innovatively with others to support positive outcomes for people and communities.

Strongly Agree

Commentary: Innovation is best delivered through partnership. We support cross-sector approaches that bring together culture, tourism, regeneration and community development.

Q14. Accreditation remains the best assurance of quality standards and NI Museums Council should continue to apply the UK Accreditation Standard.

Strongly agree

Commentary:

Belfast City Council strongly agrees that accreditation remains a critical mechanism for maintaining quality, governance and public trust across the museums sector. The UK Accreditation Standard provides a robust and recognised framework that supports continuous improvement and ensures consistency across institutions of varying scale and capacity.

We support the continued role of NI Museums Council in administering the scheme and providing guidance and support to museums in achieving and maintaining accreditation.

Q15. NI Museums Council should encourage greater numbers of museums to pursue accreditation.

Strongly agree

Commentary:

The Council supports efforts to increase participation in accreditation, recognising that it strengthens the overall resilience and credibility of the sector.

However, this ambition should be accompanied by:

- appropriate financial and advisory support, particularly for smaller and independent museums,
- capacity-building initiatives to support organisations through the accreditation process,
- and recognition of the varying starting points and resource constraints across the sector.

Encouraging wider participation must be matched by practical support to ensure accessibility and equity.

Q16. NI Museums Council should deliver further small grant schemes for accredited museums.

Strongly agree

Commentary:

Small grant schemes represent a highly effective mechanism to enable museums to deliver programmes, maintain collections and undertake essential improvements.

Belfast City Council strongly supports the continuation and expansion of such schemes, noting that:

- relatively modest levels of funding can deliver significant impact,
- these schemes support innovation, programming and community engagement,
- and they are particularly valuable in supporting local authority and independent museums facing resource constraints.

Q17. Pilot a small grant programme to support connections between museums, schools and young people.

Strongly agree

Commentary:

The Council strongly supports this proposal and emphasises the importance of strengthening links between museums and young people.

We recommend that this programme:

- supports both in-person and outreach activity,
- aligns with curriculum delivery and informal education pathways,
- prioritises access for schools and communities facing barriers to participation,
- and encourages partnership working between museums, schools and youth organisations.

This will be essential in nurturing the next generation of audiences and ensuring long-term sustainability of the sector.

Q17. Programme to support care of significant collections.

Strongly agree

Commentary:

Belfast City Council strongly supports this proposal, recognising that many museums care for collections of national, regional and local significance.

We emphasise:

- the need for specialist expertise and investment in collections care,
- the importance of ensuring long-term preservation alongside public accessibility,
- and the value of expert-led decision-making in determining eligibility and prioritisation.

This programme will be particularly important for smaller institutions with limited access to specialist resources.

Q18. Assessment of capital needs across HCC sectors

Strongly agree

Commentary:

Belfast City Council strongly supports the need for a comprehensive assessment of capital requirements across the Heritage, Culture and Creativity (HCC) sectors.

We recommend that this assessment:

- considers both **immediate maintenance needs and long-term strategic investment**,
- aligns with wider **place-based regeneration and cultural infrastructure planning**,
- and ensures that capital investment supports **accessibility, sustainability and digital capability**.

There is a significant opportunity to align capital investment with wider civic priorities, including regeneration, tourism development and the delivery of major cultural infrastructure such as Belfast Stories.

Q19 Research programme on social and economic value of museums

Strongly agree

Commentary:

The Council strongly supports the implementation of a coordinated research programme to better evidence the social and economic impact of museums.

Such research should:

- capture the **full value of museums**, including wellbeing, education, tourism and community cohesion,
- support stronger alignment with **Programme for Government outcomes**,
- and provide a shared evidence base for **advocacy, investment and cross-sector collaboration**.

We would welcome opportunities to collaborate on this work, building on existing local and regional data.

Q20 Assessment of skills requirements across museums

Strongly agree

Commentary:

We fully support the development of a sector-wide skills assessment, recognising that workforce capacity is critical to future sustainability.

This should include:

- **digital skills and innovation capacity**,
- **collections care and conservation expertise**,
- **community engagement and participatory practice**,
- and leadership, governance and organisational resilience.

A coordinated skills strategy will ensure that the sector is equipped to respond to changing audience expectations and technological developments.

Q21. Development of networks to catalyse innovation and partnerships

Strongly agree

Commentary:

The Council strongly endorses the development of new and strengthened networks across HCC sectors.

We particularly emphasise:

- the role of **cross-sector collaboration** (culture, tourism, regeneration, education),
- the importance of **place-based networks** that reflect local contexts,
- and the need to support **innovation through collaboration**, particularly in programming and audience engagement.

Local government has a key role to play in convening and supporting these networks at city and neighbourhood level.

Q22. Supporting sectors to adapt to funding environment and diversify income

Agree

Commentary:

Belfast City Council agrees that supporting the sector to diversify income streams is important, particularly given ongoing constraints on public funding.

However, we emphasise that:

- public investment remains **foundational to the sustainability of the sector**,
- not all organisations have equal capacity to generate commercial income,
- and support is required to build capability in areas such as fundraising, partnerships and income diversification.