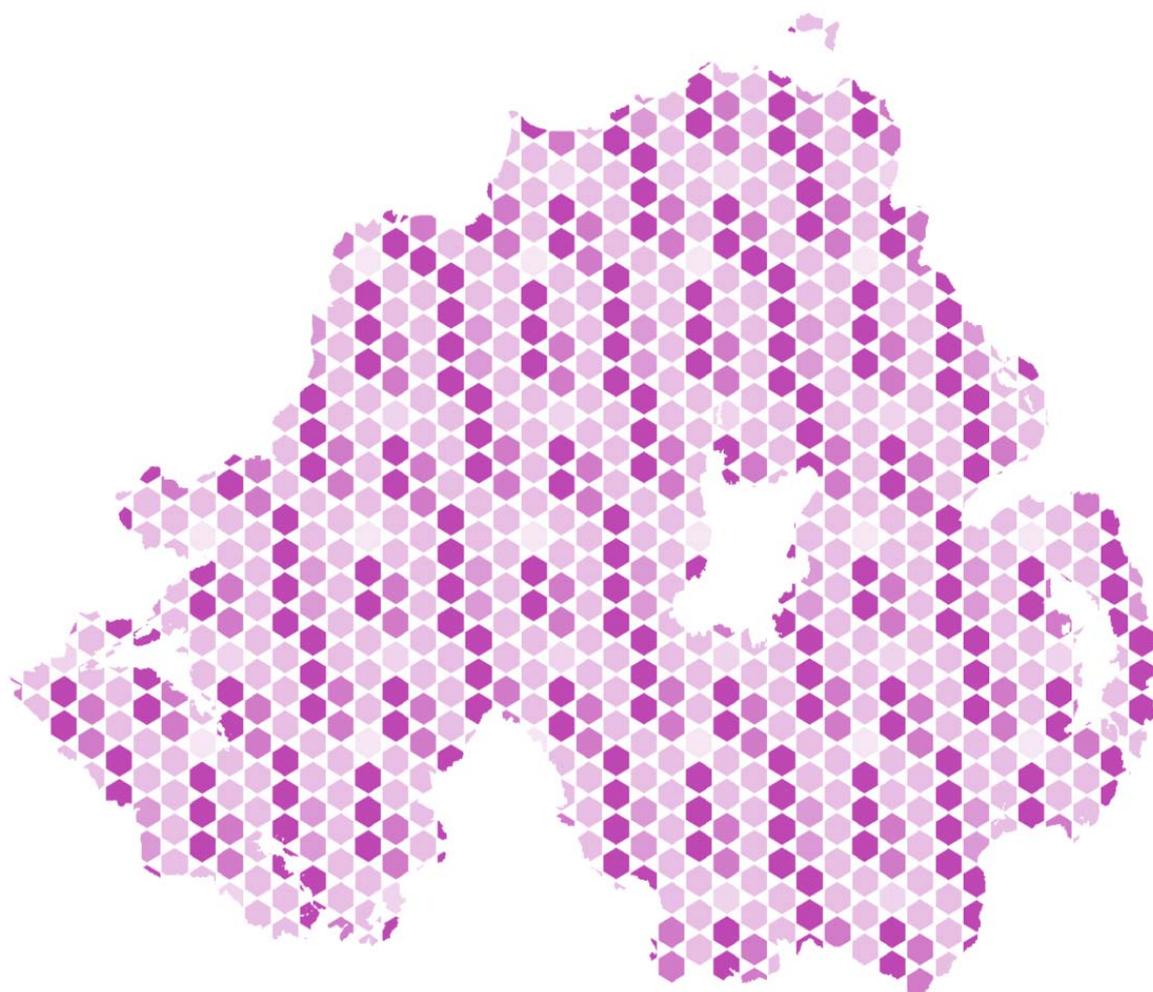


CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

An Interim Evaluation of the
Embedding of the Quality Indicators
in those Organisations Sponsored
by the Department of Culture, Arts
and Leisure (DCAL)
Report of an Inspection
in March-April 2010

eti

*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
Promoting Improvement*

Providing Inspection Services for

Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE

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In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75%-90%
A majority	-	50%-74%
A significant minority	-	30%-49%
A minority	-	10%-29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

In assessing the various features of the provision, Inspectors relate their evaluations to six descriptors as set out below:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

1.1 In its annual report to the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) Board in 2008 the Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) indicated that there were two recurring issues emerging from the recent inspection work:

- a. limited self-evaluation by the DCAL sponsored organisations ('organisations') to inform future educational provision; and
- b. an absence of a shared sense of connectedness among the organisations, and between the organisations and DCAL, with respect to their educational objectives.

1.2 Because of the rich range of expertise and provision across the organisations, they have a significant contribution to make to the fulfilment of the aim of the current Programme for Government, namely to build a 'peaceful, fair and prosperous society in Northern Ireland' and 'to grow a dynamic, innovative economy.' The report also indicated that, for their educational contribution to be fully maximised, the organisations and DCAL need to develop more rigorous internal quality assurance procedures to inform their strategic planning individually and collectively, and, where possible, to harmonise their efforts and expertise.

1.3 During the business year 2008-09, DCAL commissioned the Inspectorate to develop a Learning Strategy and to develop further, in consultation with the organisations, the quality indicators (QIs) used by the Inspectorate, leading to the development of guidance on their application and the sharing of best practice. The aim was for the organisations to use the ensuing strategy and QIs to review, develop and quality assure their educational provision.

1.4 A focus group with representatives from the organisations reached agreement on a Learning Strategy, which recognised the potential of the significant resource and specialist expertise among the organisations for supporting further life-long learning and education. The resulting Learning Strategy and the agreed QIs aims to underpin and to enhance DCAL's significant contribution to the Programme for Government. These tools can develop within the leadership of the organisations the capacity to demonstrate measurable added value, and to work in a more collective way through developing closer relationships with the formal and informal education sectors. The resources and expertise within the organisations can contribute to life-long learning and to the Northern Ireland (NI) curriculum for schools, and the youth sector curriculum, through their support for the development of a range of skills, competences and attributes. In particular the resources and expertise can contribute to the development of cultural awareness and of skills in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects and to the principles of a Shared Future.

1.5 The agreed set of quality indicators covers three main areas - the outcomes for learners, the quality of provision and the quality of strategic leadership and operational management. The QIs reflect, to a high degree, the quality indicators that the museums, libraries and archives sector have developed at national level, and which the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI)¹ and LibrariesNI (the libraries) had begun to consider following the Inspectorate's evaluations of aspects of their work. They also reflect some of the work begun by the NI Museums' Council (NIMC), which the Inspectorate had endorsed and encouraged in an earlier inspection exercise.

¹ PRONI is a fully integrated Division of DCAL.

1.6 The focus group recommended the appointment of a co-ordinator, from within the organisations, to take forward both the co-ordination and promotion of more collaborative working among the organisations, and to support the development of quality assurance procedures. The DCAL Board endorsed the Learning Strategy and the QIs as a means of recognising and strengthening the work of the organisations, and it accepted the proposal to appoint a learning co-ordinator to take the work forward.

1.7 In response to a request from DCAL, the Inspectorate appointed to each of the organisations or groups of cognate organisations, a link inspector with specialist knowledge of the area represented. During the business year 2009-10, the link inspectors worked with their respective organisations to evaluate the implementation of the recently issued safeguarding guidance from DCAL; to help them review and develop their quality assurance procedures; and to apply the quality indicators to their educational provision, with the aim of ultimately achieving the aims and objectives within the Learning Strategy.

1.8 This report provides a baseline evaluation of the extent to which DCAL and its sponsored organisations are working within the Learning Strategy, and of how the organisations have started to embed the agreed QIs into their quality assurance procedures.

2. THE CURRENT WORK OF THE SPONSORED ORGANISATIONS IN LIFE-LONG LEARNING

2.1 The organisations are diverse in, for example, their size, governance arrangements, 'customers', and funding arrangements; some have a reputable international research objective and work in partnership with higher education; others have a commercial dimension; some serve the needs of more than one government department; some work with specific age groups and others serve the whole population. Some are geographically distributed; others are based on one site; some have a front-line service; others are charged with promoting, for example, the arts or sport through the administration of government grants. All, however, have a significant contribution to make to formal and informal learning and the customers of each are arguably learners.

2.2 In response to a growing demand for their services, and in an effort to demonstrate their effectiveness, the organisations have been placing an increasing emphasis on life-long learning, widening access and increasing participation, in particular for those groups and individuals, who would not historically have accessed their services. The libraries, for example, have increasingly become involved in providing more than information or reading materials; they support classes in the use of information and communication technology (ICT); they organise events to encourage people to access information, to pursue their own research or to celebrate local cultural events. Similarly, the museums, W5 and the planetarium have made their resources and expertise accessible to an increasingly wider range of people, including those in the formal education sector, through structured and unstructured visits. The language organisations have developed radio programmes, programmes for schools and adult learners, and, in some instances, programmes and materials for teachers.

2.3 A minority of the organisations have been working towards building the capacity of those who teach, in the use of the materials and the services they provide. PRONI and the museums have worked together in providing tailor-made resources for teachers in schools while the Creative Learning Centres, under the auspices of Northern Ireland (NI) Screen, and W5 have provided courses for teachers themselves. W5 has also provided placements for student teachers.

2.4 There are programmes which support other aspects of life-long learning. Several organisations, for example, offer a cross-community element to their work; there is a range of events for community groups or for those interested in developing aspects of their culture in workshops or summer schemes; and there are programmes which aim to engage disaffected young people both within the formal and informal education sectors. Several organisations have used the opportunities of reorganisation to re-assess their services. Through an increase in their outreach work, they have developed new partnerships and created new synergies which provide greater access to resources, to the benefit of a range of learners. For example, during the recent period of closure for refurbishment, the Ulster Museum took a strategic decision to invest in developing an outreach programme in order to retain existing participants and to increase access by those historically viewed as non-users. The outreach programme has proved successful in enabling National Museums Northern Ireland (NMNI) to develop further existing links and to establish new, productive working relationships with a range of external agencies such as marginalised young people, libraries and youth and community groups.

3. BASELINE POSITION: THE USE OF THE QIS WITHIN AND ACROSS THE ORGANISATIONS

3.1 The organisations are at different stages in their understanding of how they might implement and make use of the Learning Strategy and the QIs. All have some difficulty with articulating in measurable terms the value they add to the experiences and achievements of learners. There is general agreement that they make an important contribution to the education of those who use their facilities and expertise, and that the development and implementation of the Learning Strategy and the QIs are an opportunity to strengthen the corporate identity of the organisations themselves.

3.2 In a majority of the organisations there has been a good level of feedback and discussion around the QIs. At a strategic level the leadership and management of these organisations have demonstrated commitment to the embedding of QIs. They are aware that they have only started the process, that through experience they will refine the self-evaluative process, and that they need to ensure ownership of the process by staff at middle management levels.

3.3 A number of good practice developments have occurred. A minority of the organisations, for example, have appointed a key member of staff to be responsible for taking forward the embedding of QIs across the organisation. The role will include the review and evaluation of the current arrangements for quality assurance and improvement, identifying and planning relevant staff development opportunities, and the liaising with key stakeholders in the further development of the quality assurance of the provision. In a few instances the learning policy is informed by a quality standards framework which is specific to the area of expertise of the organisation. The museums sector has, for example, undertaken significant work to implement the quality framework 'Inspiring Learning For All', which is currently used across the United Kingdom by many organisations within the museums, libraries and archives sector. This framework provides sector specific indicators many of which complement and support the indicators of the Inspectorate framework. The senior staff with responsibility for the Ulster Museum's education provision are currently planning future developments to embed the DCAL quality indicators and the 'Inspiring Learning For All' framework. It is not intended that the QIs replace such a framework; rather that they support the organisation in quality assuring its provision and in assessing the progress in learning for users.

3.4 In a few organisations there has already been, or there are plans for, continuing professional development for key education staff to discuss the rationale for self-evaluation and to enable them to engage in a process which will inform development planning for learning within the organisation. The staff of NMNI, for example, participated in an initial staff development session which included a workshop for key education staff across the organisation. It covered the rationale for self-evaluation, what needs to be in place to enable staff to engage in meaningful self-evaluation, and the advantages of self-evaluation in informing organisation development planning and in providing clearly identified attainable priorities for development for staff at all levels.

3.5 Those organisations which have been part of the inspection process have a better understanding of the relevance of the QIs to their work as they have experienced an external evaluation process which applies the indicators to the leadership and management, the quality of provision and, to the quality of the outcomes for life-long learners. Each of the organisations which has been inspected has faced a similar finding, namely the need to monitor and assess more systematically the quality of its provision and, in particular, the quality of the outcomes for learners. These organisations have started to formalise and to align their quality assurance procedures with the QIs in order to measure in a more focused way the extent to which the learners' engagement with the organisations increases their knowledge, skills and enjoyment.

3.6 A number of circumstances have constrained the progress of the embedding of the quality indicators. Firstly, in 2009 DCAL issued a comprehensive set of guidance to support organisations in improving their child protection arrangements following a critical Inspectorate inspection. The guidance is in line with the new safeguarding legislation and is designed to ensure best practice across the organisations and internally within DCAL. This was a priority development for DCAL and its sponsored organisations and they gave the implementation of the guidance a significant and appropriate emphasis.

3.7 Secondly, for many of the organisations the process of self-evaluation is new. They need to develop both a deeper understanding of the Learning Strategy and the QIs, and also of the requisite processes and strategies to begin to embed self-evaluation across their respective organisations. The process will inevitably take time: it needs to be embraced as an integral part of continuous improvement and development across the whole organisation. The organisations need to see quality assurance as bringing benefits to their work, and especially in helping them to articulate better the benefits accruing from the provision they make for the communities of participants whom they serve.

3.8 Thirdly, the process in some organisations is more difficult than others. The arts, sports and museums councils, and the languages organisations, for example, play a significant role in funding and co-ordinating the work of a large number of other semi-autonomous organisations to provide programmes on their behalf, but they are at one step removed from the participants. These organisations need to develop rigorous and systematic quality systems that are integral to their funding contracts and provide, if necessary, a basis on which to challenge the historical allocation of grants. It is critical that all the organisations are clear about the expected outcomes and standards for life-long learners, and that the monitoring and evaluation of such outcomes is an integral part of any reporting.

3.9 All of the organisations have their own business objectives which derive from the corporate business plan of their parent department. It is these targets and the associated accountability procedures that drive much of their work. The targets are almost exclusively quantitative with a minimal focus on the quality of the outcomes for participants and learners.

Most of the governance and accountability arrangements between DCAL and their sponsored organisations focus on these quantitative targets and the auditing of funds. Until there is a better alignment with the quality of provision, strategic leadership and operational management and quality outcomes for learners, they will not be given the priority that they need within the organisations.

4. PROGRESS MADE

4.1 Increasingly a significant minority of organisations are linking their work more explicitly to the formal curriculum for schools. In the best practice, there is prior consultation with practitioners and the educational programmes are designed to support and to broaden the curriculum for the learners. The programmes allow for the development of skills associated with the current NIC including problem-solving and team-building. The interactive ways of learning contribute significantly to the learners' understanding and enjoyment. These organisations create appropriate learning resources to accompany exhibitions or as part of their education programme, and resources for use in schools to enhance aspects of the curriculum. In a few instances the resources support effectively work across the curriculum.

4.2 In their engagement with a widening group of learners using a variety of suitable approaches, the implicit, and often highly beneficial, links with literacy, numeracy and ICT need to be built into individual organisation and partnership programmes through the development of a learning strategy which clearly signposts the contribution to these aspects of life-long learning.

4.3 The greater access to information and to materials is also well supported through the use of ICT. The enhanced development of websites and the programme of digitalisation in several organisations are at an advanced stage, while others plan to develop this area of their provision. For example, PRONI has provided access to a wider range of sources prior to entry, including the very good website, and the increased efficiency in accessing records afforded by the development of the electronic catalogue for Northern Ireland project (eCATNI). The ability to access information, records and archives more easily is improving the services to, and the research skills of, the life-long learners. For the organisations themselves, there remains the challenge of recording effectively how the provision benefits the learning of the wide variety of users.

4.4 All of the organisations seek information and feedback from user groups, whether for leisure or for educational purposes. Those organisations which deal directly with the public collate admission or user data and use questionnaires, evaluation sheets or exit interviews to increase their knowledge of the profile of users, and to inform strategic planning. The analysis of the data is used to inform future work, or to modify exhibitions and displays. The use of focus groups is underdeveloped to obtain detailed evaluative feedback regarding educational outcomes. In a few instances there is not enough analysis of the data collected and it does not inform the work of the organisation sufficiently. The main focus of quality assurance continues to be on the numbers of users rather than on the quality of the outcomes for users. There is no explicit link to the educational outcomes for the learners.

4.5 Most of the organisations have developed partnerships with other organisations, either within their own field of interest or beyond, as a means of developing their work or their education programme. W5 has, for example, used its educational partnerships effectively to develop a variety of age-appropriate programmes for a range of learners, from children of nursery age to those training to be teachers. In the case of the Creative Learning Centres, regular meetings and an exchange of ideas with one another, allows for the dissemination of good practice and avoids duplication of effort to the benefit not only of the learners but of those who deliver the programmes.

5. THE WAY AHEAD

5.1 There has been discussion in a limited number of organisations around the DCAL Learning Strategy and how their strategic plan might be more overtly linked to the outcomes for life-long learning. Most of the organisations need to develop their own learning policy which is informed and supported by the DCAL Learning Strategy. There is also the need to ensure that within DCAL, and across the organisations, there is adequate staff development in the implications and implementation of such a policy, and how it can be supported by the quality indicators. It is, therefore, vital that the learning co-ordinator be appointed as soon as possible to take this important work forward.

5.2 The relevance of the Learning Strategy and the embedding of the QIs need to be reflected in the core business targets set for the sponsored organisations. There is currently a dissonance between the Learning Strategy and the use of the QIs to inform and guide the governance of the different organisations and the business objectives as set out by DCAL. The accountability meetings with DCAL need to reflect an appropriate balance between quantitative and qualitative data in order to reflect the importance of the Learning Strategy and to record the progress being made and any gaps in provision or in support.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 The understanding of the relevance of the Learning Strategy and the associated quality indicators remains uneven both within DCAL and across the sponsored organisations. There is a variation in the extent to which the organisations have embedded the quality indicators into their practice, ranging from inadequate to good, with the majority having made a satisfactory start. The majority of the organisations have begun to consider them as part of a more focused quality assurance process. A few of the organisations need to give the use of the QIs, and the development of their learning policy, more serious consideration.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 As DCAL and the sponsored organisations continue to work towards implementing the Learning Strategy, and to embedding the quality indicators in their planning and in their work, they need to:

- give an appropriate priority to the education and learning agenda at strategic and operational levels both within DCAL and in the sponsored organisations in order to reflect more clearly DCAL's Learning Strategy;
- provide staff development for middle management, both within DCAL and in the organisations, to position them better to monitor and develop their work;
- support more consistent levels of service to users and learners, and the measurement of the outcomes for life-long learners, through the dissemination of good practice; and
- focus operational planning more explicitly on progressing the development of the knowledge, understanding and skills of the widening range of life-long learners.

THE ORGANISATIONS WHICH WERE EVALUATED

Armagh Observatory
Armagh Planetarium
Arts Council NI
Foras na Gaeilge
LibrariesNI
National Museums Northern Ireland
Northern Ireland Screen
Northern Ireland Museums Council
Public Record Office of Northern Ireland*
SportNI
Ulster-Scots Agency
W5

* PRONI is a Division within DCAL.

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