

Prepared for: National Museums NI

Evaluation of National Museums NI's work on the Troubles and Beyond

Prepared by Ruth Flood & David Thompson

Draft for internal use only

FINAL 4 June 2020

Contents

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
1.1 PROJECT BACKGROUND	3
1.2 METHOD	3
1.3 SUMMARY FINDINGS	4
1.4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	9
2. PROJECT BACKGROUND.....	13
2.1 NATIONAL MUSEUMS NI PROJECT ACTIVITY	13
2.2 NATIONAL MUSEUMS NI'S CORPORATE PLAN 2018-21.....	15
2.3 INITIAL THOUGHTS ON TAKING TROUBLES ACTIVITY FORWARD BEYOND 2020	16
2.4 EVALUATION OBJECTIVES	18
3. METHODOLOGY	19
4. DETAILED FINDINGS.....	21
4.1 ANALYSIS OF NATIONAL MUSEUMS NI'S EVALUATIONS AND COMMENTARY ON THE FOUR KEY EXHIBITIONS	21
4.2 FINDINGS FROM ENGAGEMENT WITH STAFF	30
4.3 FINDINGS FROM ENGAGEMENT WITH PROJECT GROUPS	38
4.4 FINDINGS FROM ENGAGEMENT WITH WIDER STAKEHOLDERS	48
5. SUMMARY OF KEY PROJECT FINDINGS	64
6. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS	73
7. APPENDICES.....	77
APPENDIX 1: STAKEHOLDER ORGANISATIONS ENGAGED	78
APPENDIX 2: SUMMARY OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUMS NI EVALUATION OF ART OF THE TROUBLES (2014).....	79
APPENDIX 3: SUMMARY OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUMS NI'S EVALUATION OF COLIN DAVIDSON, SILENT TESTIMONY (2016)	81
APPENDIX 4: SUMMARY OF NORTHERN IRELAND'S VOICES OF 68 EXHIBITION EVALUATION AT NATIONAL MUSEUMS NI (CHRIS REYNOLDS)	83
APPENDIX 5: SUMMARY OF NATIONAL MUSEUMS NI RESEARCH, EVALUATION & INSIGHTS: THE TROUBLES AND BEYOND.....	85

1. Executive Summary

1.1 Project background

In recent years National Museums NI have taken a much more proactive approach to engaging with difficult history with a view to addressing the legacy of the past. In partnership with academia, community representatives, stakeholders and others, National Museums NI have encouraged dialogue, built understanding and contributed to a new narrative. Taking a creative approach to dealing with the legacy of the past is a key corporate priority for National Museums NI, who consider it an area where they can make a unique contribution to the social peace process in 'post conflict' Northern Ireland. This is achieved through offering the public the opportunity to engage with contested history through the presentation of art, artefacts and multiple perspectives. In this context, National Museums NI tasked RFA with evaluating its work in this area to:

- Assess the achievements and impact to date of National Museums NI's work on the Troubles and Beyond
- Gather intelligence and feedback that will inform the development of National Museums NI's future work on the Troubles and Beyond

1.2 Method

RFA undertook the following approach:

- Review of existing evidence: identification and analysis of the key themes from the feedback already collected on the programme of work to date
- Engagement with staff: three face-to-face paired depth interviews with key staff to gather their views
- Engagement with project groups who have worked with National Museums NI: four focus group discussions, one with representatives from each of the following groups: National Museums NI Academic Advisory Group, Voices of 68, Healing through Remembering and WAVE
- Engagement with wider stakeholders: RFA conducted telephone interviews with a wider group of stakeholders to gather wider views and perspectives on the activities of National Museums NI. This included interviews with representatives from academia, community organisations, funders and other bodies with a similar objective to contribute to a 'social peace process'

Key questions were discussed with each of staff, project groups and wider stakeholders.

Three broad questions looked back:

- *With regard to National Museums NI's specific contributions to considering the legacy of the past, what has worked well?*
- *What has worked less well?*
- *In these pieces of work, what was the museum aiming to do? What has been the impact of that work?*

And three broad questions considered the present and future:

- *What is the role of the museum? (Including comment on its status and current context).*
- *What activity, in this space, should the museum consider going forward?*
- *What are the challenges for working in those ways?*

1.3 Summary findings

1. What has worked well?

National Museums NI is seen to have developed important partnerships with individuals and organisations

The wide range of connections that National Museums NI has made in relation to its work in this area are broadly perceived to be working well and are considered productive for both the stakeholders and the museum. Staff and stakeholders alike are keen for these connections to continue; however, there were also suggestions that the museums engagement could be broadened further still.

Overall there has been very positive engagement with the museum by the public

The Ulster Museum has collected visitor feedback on the exhibitions, both temporary and permanent, that has informed the development of the Troubles and Beyond programme. On the whole the material that we have reviewed about the exhibitions to date has been very positive with high percentages rating the exhibitions as good or very good (92% of visitors rated the Art of the Troubles as very good or fairly good. 91% rated Silent Testimony as very good). The visitor feedback also suggests high levels of visitor engagement with often very personal, meaningful and emotional comments being made. There was also very little criticism within the questionnaires. The one caveat that needs to be placed on all this, is that all the questionnaires have been completed by a self-selected sample; often when this is the case the data is not necessarily representative of all visitors. Nevertheless, feedback from across all the stakeholders that we spoke with has also been largely positive and supportive, whilst also making developmental suggestions.

Visitors have had a learning experience

Visitor responses demonstrate that people come to the museum and discover new information, or perhaps new perspectives. Across the evaluations there was evidence in the feedback of visitors engaging with content in fresh ways, often leading to a reflective response.

All stakeholder interviews/groups discussions likewise touched on similar themes around the art exhibitions providing an emotional learning experience at a relatable human level, and the exhibitions creating a polyphonic, accessible way in to learning about the Troubles.

In addition, visitors accept programming that challenges their thinking and stakeholders see this as a fundamental role of National Museums NI

The feedback, particularly from Voices of '68 evaluation, demonstrates that many visitors accept the museum has a role to offer new perspectives, challenge perceptions and invite visitors to re-examine previously held views. Within the evaluation findings there does not appear to be any expectation that the museum should only be offering traditional historical overviews. Stakeholders see challenging the audience as fundamental to the role of National Museums NI.

At each stage National Museums NI has been learning lessons and growing in confidence

It is clear that the work so far has prompted ongoing internal reflection about developing greater coherency in National Museum NI's role with regard to the social peace process, and greater clarity about the aims when commissioning / undertaking work. At each stage the museum team appear to have taken on board important lessons and grown in confidence.

Staff recognise the journey that the organisation has made. They see the changes as having been slow and measured, and in step with increasing levels of stakeholder engagement, as well as greater

understanding of the audience. There was also reflection on the opportunity for future programming to have greater clarity in its aims and objectives, and contribute to the aspirations of the New Decade, New Deal agreement.

2. What has worked less well?

In general stakeholders found it difficult to suggest areas that have not worked so well. Consideration of what was working less well was generally expressed as what could work better. The following section focuses on the key issues raised in relation to the current activity.

The narrative within the Troubles and Beyond gallery needs developing

A large number (three out of four focus groups and 6 stakeholders) of those engaged in the research suggested the need for a clearer narrative through the Troubles and Beyond Gallery. There was some feeling that the gallery was primarily for people who already had some understanding of the Troubles and that there was a need for a clearer story to be told, not in the sense that there was one way to view the Troubles, but that some visitors might have needed assistance with the wider story in which the artefacts sit. It was considered that the Gallery is perhaps difficult for tourists (and those with less knowledge around the broad events of the Troubles) to engage with and that they might benefit from “more of a steer” through the events of that time. A minority commented there was a need for a stronger contested narrative. A broader narrative, providing greater context for the artefacts, was deemed as being one way to support deeper engagement.

There are opportunities to develop Troubles related work with schools

The Voices of '68 exhibition and the associated schools' conference is considered to be well attended, but it is also oversubscribed with only 130 places each year. The current education officer is stretched between primary, secondary and tertiary levels. This creates pressure on time, and the Troubles-related workshop, developed primarily for GCSE level, now tends to be used more for international visitors, three or four times a year. A Voices of 68 pack has been created for schools' use, but there are no records of how widely, if at all, this is being used, and there were also some concerns about the exhibition itself. There was also comment that more support could be given to schools to support engagement with the Troubles and Beyond gallery.

3. What are the aims? What has been the impact?

There is a need to develop a more detailed evaluation framework

Having reviewed the internal evaluations, and completed discussions with staff, it is clear that National Museums NI's strategy (in terms of its broad approach) for its Troubles programming has evolved over time, with the aims of the last two exhibitions more defined than with the first two. A more comprehensive strategy (in terms of an integrated approach where the vision, mission and values of the organisation, its programming output with clearly defined outputs and outcomes, and means of assessment of these all interconnect) has not yet been developed. Further to this, stakeholders, while often positive about the work of the museum, have, on the whole, been unable to articulate National Museums NI's strategy.

4. What is the role and status of the museum?

National Museums NI is a well-respected and trusted institution

Over the course of all the interviews and focus groups, the significant role of National Museums NI and the Ulster Museum especially, in documenting the past, educating and assisting learning was acknowledged. The Ulster Museum is considered to have 'gravitas'; it is a well-known and recognisable historic building, a respected, largely trusted institution and, in the absence of a national gallery in Northern Ireland, some considered it as the most prestigious venue available to exhibit artwork. As National Museums NI, it was also noted as having considerable, though finite, financial resources, physical space over three sites, the resources to collect, as well as the ability to access international partnerships. Many of the interviewees also commented on the affection they, and sections of the public, have for the Ulster museum, often stemming from childhood. In summary, the view of National Museums NI is largely one of positivity and credibility.

Some stakeholders mentioned that the Ulster Museum is not necessarily seen as neutral by all communities in NI

Several comments were made across all groups (staff, focus groups and stakeholders) about whether the Ulster Museum in particular was perceived as 'British', or an 'imperial-style' museum, both in terms of its origins and history, as well as its collections. Many of the comments were posed as questions however, and not as deliberate statements assessing bias; those who raised concerns about the museum's acquisitions also commented that while reflection of the institution's own past was important, it was still making a contribution to societal engagement with the past. There was also some comment, however, on the Ulster Museum's site in an affluent part of Belfast and, being a prestigious institution, if there were barriers to visitors coming from other parts of the city, the north of Ireland generally and visitors from a 'working class' background, young people especially.

National Museums NI should play an important role in challenging visitors about the Troubles

Despite the challenges of appealing to all communities in Northern Ireland, the Ulster Museum was frequently perceived as a 'safe space'; a 'neutral' venue, inviting to all and a place for multi-perspectivity, in contrast to smaller, 'single identity' museums which might not always be perceived as 'neutral' due to a more focussed narrative. It is this overall reputation and status of the Ulster Museum that forms the basis for the broad perception among interviewees and focus groups that National Museums NI has and can make an important contribution to the peace process in its Troubles-related programming.

Interviewees in general, strongly expressed that the role of the museum was to challenge the audience to better understand the past, themselves and others, and to consider what this meant for the future. They saw the museum as offering a wider lens on the Troubles, and therefore the present, achieving this in part through the use of contested narratives. There was no expectation that an audience should be expected to agree with a different or opposing narrative, simply that an audience should be able to access it. Our review of the evaluation data collected through the museums own questionnaires showed that frequently visitors to each of the exhibitions were being challenged to reflect on their experience of the Troubles by learning about the experience of others.

5. What activity should be undertaken going forward?

This research is based on the perspectives of stakeholders. At times, they have commented on areas where the museum has already undertaken activity, of which they were unaware.

Visitors were positive about the Ulster Museum providing future activity in this space

In the feedback to Art of the Troubles, Silent Testimony and Troubles and Beyond, respondents were favourable to the Ulster Museum continuing to offer Troubles-related work and made a broad range of suggestions. Evaluation comments very often responded directly to the nature of the exhibition, for example, 38% of evaluations from Art of the Troubles asked for more artwork, 17% for other aspects of the arts; 37% of evaluations from Silent Testimony simply said the museum should keep doing what it was doing. Persistent themes across all three exhibitions included incorporating other media/introducing greater interaction and gathering more human/everyday stories.

Stakeholders were largely unaware of National Museums NI's evolving strategy, and suggested the organisation continue its work and develop its values and strategy to help focus its activity

There was general agreement among stakeholders that the museum should be creating activity to engage people and offer the opportunity to consider new information. More generally, there was a desire to see fresh approaches in content and presentation that help people connect to the past and understand its effects on the present and future.

While there were many and varied suggestions for what the museum could or should do next, there were also broad suggestions from a number of stakeholders that National Museums NI should develop a clear strategy around its values, expertise and resources in this area to help focus its work on the Troubles, as it cannot do everything. Stakeholders said that it should look carefully at the context it is working in, who it is working with and where it is best placed to make a contribution.

National Museums NI needs to ensure that Troubles related programming is accessible to tourists

There were varying opinions from stakeholders on the accessibility of the Troubles and Beyond gallery for people who knew little about the Troubles to begin with, tourists especially. There were recurring comments that tourists needed more explanation, and that it could be a more immersive experience, however, these perspectives were not unanimous, and not every group discussed tourism extensively.

Stakeholders provided a wide range of ideas to develop current and new content

In terms of building on the museum's previous work a range of suggestions were made:

- More facilitator-led engagement with Troubles and Beyond was suggested for general audiences but especially for schools.
- Storytelling was a theme running through many of the content-specific ideas and the interviews in general, particularly the stories and experiences of ordinary people.
- Peacebuilding, both throughout the Troubles as well as in the recent past, was a theme mentioned by stakeholders.
- A number of stakeholders mentioned the upcoming centenary of the formation of Northern Ireland. It was commented that partition and the 1920's might be a period that could be approached by the museum.
- Further arts based approaches were suggest by a minority, with Silent Testimony being suggested as a particular opportunity to develop international connections around.
- International approaches and comparison were mentioned by a number of stakeholders.

It was suggested that National Museums NI engage more widely with audiences and communities

While there was staff and stakeholder recognition of an increase in the museum's outreach to other communities, a strong theme was the possibility of broader engagement beyond the walls of the museum. Travelling exhibitions were suggested, taking the museum's collections out to communities,

and also engaging with communities in order to extend an invitation to engage with the work of the museum.

The description used to define the Ulster Museum as a ‘Troubles Museum’ is problematic

Interviewees expressed a wide range of opinions on the Ulster Museum being a ‘Troubles Museum’ or ‘Museum of the Troubles’ with discussion frequently focussing on the value of a separate entity. There were reservations concerning the Ulster Museum’s lack of physical space, and, if more space was given over to Troubles-related exhibits, would the balance with other aspects, such as natural history and art, be disrupted? Some interviewees suggested that a new site would be best; the Crumlin Road Jail was one suggestion; an interface site was another. Others expressed concerns that not enough time has passed to even consider the creation a Troubles museum and other stakeholders did not think a specific museum is required given the amount of work in this space already.

The definition in National Museum’s NI’s draft masterplan (“*the place that provides the most comprehensive and balanced orientation to our recent past and contemporary ‘post-conflict’ Northern Irish society*”), proved problematic on two accounts. Firstly, there was, on occasion, a perception of exclusivity in the language (“the most comprehensive”). Secondly, there was concern over the use of the word “balanced” in its approach.

National Museums NI needs to continue to work in partnership with communities and organisations but also with other museums

A theme from all the discussions was that whatever the museum goes on to do, it has to continue to work in partnership with others. A key partnership, mentioned specifically by some of the stakeholders, was the idea of working in a network of other Northern Ireland museums. The advantage of this concept was considered to be that museums could collaborate as well as develop ethical approaches to communicating contested narratives. A museum’s network could also look at the approaching anniversaries, but with a wider, collective lens. As ‘the national museum’, National Museums NI could perform a leadership role in setting up and facilitating the network of museums. Not every interviewee explicitly stated that National Museums NI had a role to be a leading organisation for other museums, but those who did felt strongly that playing a key role in developing an active forum for museums working with the legacy of the past and encouraging social cohesion, was critical. There was some expression that working with National Museums NI would be desirable for many smaller museums.

Various specific collaborative partnerships were suggested e.g. with community based organisations, Four Corners Festival, Festival of Ideas, links to academics and universities, theatres, local museums such as James Connolly Interpretive Centre and the Museum of Free Derry etc. Cross border links and international partnerships were also mentioned as means to offer new and creative ways of seeing the conflict in Northern Ireland.

6. What are the challenges going forward?

A range of future challenges were mentioned across the research: navigating sensitively the presentation of Troubles-related themes, National Museums NI deciding on a clear focus for its work, financial and physical space constraints, audience perceptions, the challenges of taking a co-creation approach / ensuring that visitors can engage at different levels with each exhibition.

1.4 Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

1. There is overall positivity about National Museum NI's activity in offering the public the opportunity to engage with the contested history of the Troubles through the presentation of art, artefacts and multiple perspectives. Overall there has been very positive engagement with the exhibitions by the public, and stakeholder feedback on the whole is positive. National Museums NI now has experience in creating exhibitions that through learning and challenge provide a space for reflection; this is evident from all four key exhibitions (Silent Testimony especially).
2. It is clear that National Museums NI has been on its own learning journey, becoming more comfortable and confident about playing a role in examining the legacy of the past from multiple perspectives. Its strategy in this area has also evolved. Interviewees in general recognised a developmental journey for National Museums NI and desire to see this trajectory continue.
3. Offering multiple perspectives on Troubles-related topics is a challenge in itself and may attract some 'push back' from sections of the museum's audience.
4. The Ulster Museum in particular, has in general a trusted and respected reputation and there is broad recognition that it can supply a multi-perspective narrative to what preceded, happened during and came after the period of conflict referred to as the Troubles. Some stakeholders questioned if the museum was perceived, by some people, as a 'British' institution, however, there is an acceptance that National Museums NI have a significant role to play in challenging audiences to think and reflect.
5. The current Troubles and Beyond gallery has many positive aspects, not least its more inclusive approach, focus on a social perspective and collection of artefacts, but there is broad agreement that the narrative within the exhibition needs to be improved. Stakeholders suggest it can be improved by providing greater context for the stories, making it more accessible to visitors who have little understanding of the Troubles. The addition of a broader narrative, providing greater context for the artefacts was noted as being one way to support further engagement by tourists from outside of Northern Ireland. There were also suggestions that more personal stories might be included.
6. It is evident that National Museums NI has developed partnerships widely over the past several years and these are acknowledged as having helped to produce a depth and quality of work. Partnerships have been wide and varied including relationships with individual artists and academics through to more formal working relationships with community-based organisations. Stakeholders suggested widening these partnership approaches to include Northern Ireland Museums, and/or perhaps even more extensive work to create a network of Northern Ireland museums that works collaboratively together.
7. A wide range of ideas were suggested for what National Museums NI might do in the future, however stakeholders suggest that the organisation first establishes a clarity around its role in this area, and associated values, which help to inform its future strategy, and therefore focus its activity.
8. The research suggests that there continues to be a desire for fresh, inclusive ways of looking at the conflict in Northern Ireland. Suggestions to develop current and future content have included: opportunities to develop the Voices of '68 work with schools, the suggestion of more facilitator-led

engagement with the exhibitions, including more of the stories and experiences of ordinary people during the Troubles, work on themes such as Peace Building and Partition, further arts based approaches and work to develop international comparisons.

9. The language used to describe the museum playing a nationally and internationally significant role as a Troubles Museum (“*the place that provides the most comprehensive and balanced orientation to our recent past and contemporary ‘post-conflict’ Northern Irish society*”) at times proved contentious. Stakeholders were informed that it was draft language, but it was sometimes perceived negatively, as National Museums NI desiring to dominate the space. It also raised queries about a “balanced approach”. Our research has shown, from the perspectives of various key stakeholders, they are comfortable with National Museums NI connecting organisations and collaborating with others in this space.
10. While it was not a central theme in this research, there were recurring questions and comments about the breadth of the museum’s audience not being inclusive enough of ‘working class’ and wider geographical audiences. The museum’s current draft masterplan recognises the lack of engagement with visitors classified in the C2DE socioeconomic bracket who currently comprise 17% of the museum’s annual visitors, despite 50% of households in Northern Ireland being classified as C2DE. Stakeholders also mentioned National Museums NI developing activities outside of the walls of their museums such as travelling exhibitions.

Recommendations

Local strategy

1. We recommend National Museums NI continues to develop its strategy in its Troubles programming, moving towards a more connected approach where vision, mission and values, programming decision-making process, programming choices with clearly defined outputs and outcomes, and means of assessment of these can be clearly articulated in a single framework. In turn, where appropriate, National Museums NI should give consideration to defining and communicating key elements of this to stakeholders.
2. Throughout this project stakeholders have demonstrated varying levels of awareness, and at times a lack of awareness, about aspects of National Museum’s NI programming, development, values and intentions. We recommend National Museums NI reviews the key messages it is seeking to communicate and its methods of communication to key stakeholders.
3. We recommend National Museums NI focus on the opportunity to lead and facilitate a network of museums, who can work together collaboratively to provide a multi-perspective view of the Troubles. A key contribution to the social peace process could be made by developing such a network for the purposes of discussion and development of an overarching approach across these museums and attractions. This would provide a coherence to learning about the Troubles for visitors, as well as support the sharing of good practice, and enabling innovation through the collaborative sharing of resources such as artefacts and exhibition space. Contacts in this network might also provide a sounding board for expression of National Museums NI’s internal development.

International strategy

1. There is an opportunity to further expand National Museum NI's approach to partnership working outside of Northern Ireland. Specifically, we recommend consideration is given to further developing international relationships, for example this could result in a co-created or co-curated exhibition that prompts reflection on the effects of conflict on human relationships in a similar manner to Silent Testimony or indeed any other manner of appropriate collaborative activity.

Content ideas

1. We recommend, that consideration is given to how the narrative of the current Troubles and Beyond exhibition can be developed through for example the addition of a broader narrative to provide greater context for the artefacts.
2. There have been many and varied suggestions of content for the museum going forward – all of these merit investigation by National Museums NI. We comment on three specifically: partition, work with schools and peace making:
 - We recommend National Museums NI give consideration to its contribution to the centenary of Northern Ireland / anniversary of Partition in 2021. While this undoubtedly was a divisive period of time, it was also a critical moment in British and Irish history that places the Troubles in context. If the museum is to offer leadership within the context of a social peace process, then we perceive it has to make a noticeable contribution in 2021. It is a topic that would allow a polyphonic approach; the museum might offer hidden or forgotten narratives from a century ago. It is also a topic that invites examination of the present and the future and might include further examination of identity (nationality in a globally connected age) following on from the current work of CultureLab. It might also be a topic for collaboration or coordination with other museums or key stakeholders. We understand work on this has already commenced as part of the 'Making the Future' programme, with a dedicated Partition exhibition planned for 2021.
 - Programming related to Partition might also offer a resource for schools, given that the Effects of Partition is a component of the curriculum at Key Stage 3. Our research has found there are limitations in the museum's connection to schools in the Troubles space; the Voices of '68 conference, while highly engaging in its delivery, can only cater for 130 pupils per year and there is little school engagement with the Troubles and Beyond workshop developed with Corrymeela. We recommend National Museums NI review its current links to education and facilitated provision in this space, including offering wider facilitated engagement with the Troubles and Beyond gallery.
 - We recommend National Museums NI consider the peace process and peace building for future programming. This is a broad theme that could span efforts for peace at both social and political levels before, during and after the Troubles as well as ask provocative questions about peace means currently, and for society in the future. We are also aware this is an area currently under discussion within the museum.

Engagement and partnerships

1. We recommend National Museums NI review its current engagement with community groups, particularly those with community influence, as part of the museum's wider audience development

strategy, so as the activity in this space reaches as wide an audience as possible. Inclusive, creative and engaging ideas, however, can only be sustained through active partnerships with others who can stimulate and challenge National Museums NI from across society generally, and specifically in the arts, community groups, other civic bodies and organisations seeking to develop the social peace process and engage with the legacy of the past. Community engagement may also help address any negative perceptions of the organisation.

2. We recommend that National Museums NI looks strategically at its current partnerships both in terms of who it is engaged with (and which voices are missing) and also the means of engagement, specifically where there is opportunity to have a broader discussion and an exchange of ideas not always centred on the work of the museum.

2. Project Background

2.1 National Museums NI Project Activity

In recent years National Museums NI have taken a much more proactive approach to engaging with difficult history with a view to addressing the legacy of the past. In partnership with academia, community representatives, stakeholders and others, National Museums NI have encouraged dialogue, built understanding and contributed to a new narrative. National Museums NI recognise that a creative approach to dealing with the legacy of the past is a key corporate priority, and an area in which they are building a national and international reputation. National Museums NI believes it can make a unique contribution to the social peace process in 'post conflict' Northern Ireland and offer a space for reflection and an opportunity for the public to examine contested history through critical narrative and interpretation, within which multiple perspectives intersect.

National Museums NI's current approach to Northern Ireland's recent past began in 2014 with the *Art of the Troubles* exhibition. The exhibition reflected a broad range of artists' perspectives on the Troubles and the manifestations and impact of violence and division in the community. Sensitivity to the very real impact of the Troubles and the position of victims were at the forefront when planning the exhibition. Ahead of the exhibition opening National Museums NI engaged with a range of victims' groups including WAVE, Healing through Remembering, the Victims and Survivors Unit and the Commission for Victims and Survivors.

This work continued with Silent Testimony, an exhibition of portrait paintings by Colin Davidson, which reveals the stories of eighteen people who are connected by their individual experiences of loss through the Troubles. The response to this exhibition was overwhelming due to its emotive, human impact. When first shown at the Ulster Museum in 2015 over 60,000 people visited the exhibition, and over 1,000 people provided in-depth responses.

In 2016 National Museums NI commenced the 'Collecting the Troubles and Beyond' project, supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. This project has focussed on contemporary collecting, from the 1960s to the present day, and an associated programme of activities relating to Northern Ireland's recent past. Informed and enabled by this activity, a new 'Troubles and Beyond' gallery opened at the Ulster Museum in March 2018, to coincide with the 20th anniversary of the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. A diverse range of groups representing different sectors of the community, ex-combatants and ex-service personnel were invited to contribute to discussions around contemporary collecting and to inform and oversee inclusivity. The collection brings together the wider social, economic, cultural, and political, influences that have shaped the Northern Ireland story.

The collection was developed within an ethical framework outlined by the Community Relations Council and the Museum Association's Code of Ethics for Museums, as well as shaped by the principles of ethical remembering as presented by The Junction. Ethical remembering concerns taking a critical approach of the events of the past, without celebration or condemnation. It encourages analysis of

- the personalities, characters and motives;
- the actions and policies;
- and the consequences and outcomes

It also involves flexibility and pluralism in narratives, and hospitality towards the 'other', similar to the four principles outlined by the CRC for examination of the Decade of Centenaries:

- Start from the historical facts.
- Recognise the implications and consequences of what happened.
- Understand that different perceptions and interpretations exist
- Show how events and activities can deepen understanding of the period.

Collecting the Troubles and Beyond was founded on six key principles, developed by the National Museums NI.

- To recognise key aspects of the Troubles period and chart their development and evolution
- To provide context to the Troubles period by examining wider social, economic, and cultural activity and their interplay with the Troubles
- To allow a range of interpretations of, and from, the period to be displayed
- To facilitate reflection on our historical understanding of the period, and commentary on the exhibition
- To engage with a wide range of communities and constituencies in Northern Ireland and beyond
- To incorporate information drawn from scholarship and apply best museological practice¹

As well as collections development and exhibitions, the Collecting the Troubles and Beyond project has involved a diverse programme of related events and activities, which aim to encourage dialogue and provide opportunities to explore particular themes in more depth. National Museums NI have hosted seminars and workshops looking at the interpretation of contested history more broadly in terms of difficult objects and diverse perspectives. National Museums NI also try to expand on objects or groups of objects in the exhibition through events, for instance in relation to LGBT+ history National Museums NI hosted the Outing the Past history festival two years running and celebrated 20 years of QueerSpace. A number of events have been held to promote community relations in partnership with other key stakeholders including Corrymeela, Healing Through Remembering and The Peace People.

In 2018 National Museums NI, having worked in partnership with Dr Chris Reynolds of Nottingham Trent University, opened the Voices of 68 exhibition. This project, exploring Northern Ireland's experience of 1968, involved producing filmed testimonies capturing the personal accounts of events which occurred in this pivotal year. Other elements of the project included a touring exhibition, which travelled to venues in the UK, Ireland and internationally, educational resources and workshops and a series of extended videos to allow visitors to further explore this seminal moment in Northern Ireland's recent history. The project has proven to be an interesting case study for the wider academic and museum communities, in terms of the agonistic approach to the past. This approach is applied more widely in the work of National Museums NI as it offers positive opportunities for further development.

National Museums NI's work on the Troubles and Beyond has made a significant contribution to audience development, including tourist audiences – in 2019 National Museums NI received an award for 'Outstanding Contribution to Tourism'. It has also embraced and championed diversity– in 2018 the Ulster Museum was recognised as 'Queer of the Year' due to the work to develop collections and interpretation to represent LGBT+ experiences.

Taken together, National Museums NI's work on the Troubles and Beyond engages audiences in a deep, meaningful interaction with a core strand of Northern Ireland's story. The gallery will continue to develop over time through audience involvement as new objects, stories and testimonials are put forward from local people and are represented in this evolving narrative.

¹ Collecting the Troubles and Beyond: Interpretive Plan

2.2 National Museums NI's Vision, Mission and Values

Our Vision:

Celebrate who we are: telling the stories of our past, challenging our present, shaping our future

Our Mission is to:

- Develop, manage and care for our collections to benefit current and future generations
- Make our collections accessible to the widest possible audiences
- Play a leading role in the economic and social wellbeing and future of this place
- Build an organisation where people feel valued.

Our Values:

At our core we believe in:

- **Striving for excellence** – being the best we can be in everything we do; delivering excellent customer service internally and externally; sharing our expertise
- **Being authentic** – being true to our collections; having integrity in everything we do; creating unique experiences
- **Working together** – promoting teamwork; building mutually beneficial partnerships; being receptive to others and their ideas
- **Showing respect** – valuing everyone; supporting diversity; respecting collections
- **Being courageous** – being ambitious in programming; embracing change; being brave and creative in the stories we tell; empowering our people

2.3 National Museums NI's Corporate Plan 2018-21

The corporate plan makes clear National Museums NI's general intent to play a role in addressing the legacy of the past through the organisation's brand promise, as well as reference to particular planned activities and enablers.

National Museums NI's brand promise:

We've been here for a while now. Keeping a watch. Looking at where things have gone. Seeing what's being done. Imagining what's yet to come. A hundred years is the blink of an eye. We're here for the long haul.

It's not the what. It's the why. Here are things that matter. The answers to questions. The space to think. Here is the end of prejudice and the start of the journey. Here is the wonder of knowledge. Here is the story of us.

We're here for those who want to know more. Here for those who want to look longer. Here to think harder. Here for debates, discussions and difficult decisions. Here to tell the world about who we are and what we've been through. Here for those who've always been with us. Here for those who don't know us at all. Here for different ways of seeing and new ways of being. Here because this place needs us. Here to celebrate the journey. Here to keep the flame alive.

Reference to Community Cohesion and Good Relations Programme:

In response to key indicators in the current Programme for Government NI (indicator 26 - increase respect for each other; indicator 31 - increase shared space; indicator 35 - increase reconciliation), National Museums aims to deliver a Community Cohesion and Good Relations Programme which will deliver engagement, discussion and exploration of sensitive and contemporary cultural issues within society to help increase reconciliation and understanding. The programme will take place both onsite and offsite to increase awareness of museums as shared places and safe spaces for engagement, reflection and fostering mutual respect.

Two key enablers are important to this:

1. Being visible and valued

We need to re-position ourselves in the hearts and minds of society. Our approach will be underpinned by implementing our brand strategy, ensuring we consistently deliver on our brand promise. We will also work to build our international reputation to be an influential and respected voice within our sector and society.

2. Being audience focused

We want to put audiences at the heart of what we do. We will seek to better understand the needs of both visitors and non-visitors so that we can develop our content to be more relevant, responsive and reflective of society. We will also use this intelligence to help us better target our communications and engagement and extend our current reach.

2.4 Initial thoughts on taking Troubles activity forward beyond 2020

Troubles and Beyond Gallery

This has been designed as a dynamic and evolving space, and continues to be refreshed and developed in terms of the content and the programming around it. Having developed a strong and substantial collection (recent acquisitions include the NI Prison Service Collection) there are now greater opportunities to extend the display space (linked to the Ulster Museum masterplan) and/or to develop further temporary/touring exhibitions.

Headley Fellowship

The Headley Fellowship with the Art Fund, made possible with the support of the Headley Trust, is designed to give curators the time and resources needed to focus on particular areas of the collection, developing their skills and expertise and communicating the outcomes across the sector. It encourages partnership and collaboration with the overall aim of developing and preserving specialist curatorial skills and expertise in museums. Karen Logan, Senior Curator of History, was awarded a fellowship focussing on the Contemporary and Community History Collections of the Ulster Museum. By helping communities to curate their own history, and repositioning collections within a community history framework, National Museums NI can make a valuable contribution to dealing with the legacy of the past. Karen's research also seeks to examine other international examples of curating difficult history and contribute to sectoral discourse on best practice, whilst also facilitating understanding of the experiences in Northern Ireland in a wider context. Outcomes will include the publication of a book outlining what has been achieved through the project and demonstrating the approach to dealing with difficult/contested history, as well as the co-production of a temporary community exhibition.

Troubles Art

The Troubles Art collection has been developed extensively through the 'Collecting the Troubles and Beyond' project, and is now the single most significant collection of artwork dedicated to this theme.

Building on the success of the 2014 exhibition at the Ulster Museum, in 2019 the exhibition began to tour around Ulster venues for the 'Making the Future' project, a cross-border cultural heritage programme funded through the PEACE IV Programme, managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB). The touring exhibition comprises over 20 works, including paintings, drawings and photographs, from renowned artists such as Geordie Morrow, Rita Duffy and Joseph McWilliams. It explores a broad range of themes which are universal to conflict – such as suffering and loss, violence and destruction, imprisonment, sectarianism, traditions, territory, and life in the midst of turmoil. To date the exhibition has been shown in venues including Nerve Visual in Derry/Londonderry, Fermanagh County Museum and The Market House, Monaghan. It is currently in the Armagh County Museum. Troubles Art is also incorporated in the Troubles and Beyond gallery and a major Art of the Troubles exhibition is planned for 2024, ten years on from the original.

Silent Testimony

The artwork remains in the ownership of Colin Davidson but is offered on tour, to strategically important and appropriate venues, in partnership with National Museums NI. The exhibition first went on display at Ulster Museum in 2015 and has since toured to the Irish Cultural Centre in Paris in 2016 and Dublin Castle in 2017. The paintings were shown to mark 20 years since the Good Friday Agreement in 2018 at Nerve Visual in Derry and at the UN Headquarters in New York. It was last shown at The National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire in summer 2019. Working with Colin, National Museums NI are constantly exploring new touring opportunities. They are also looking to secure a permanent home and presence for the artwork as part of the Ulster Museum master planning process.

Ulster Museum Master Planning

The Ulster Museum is currently developing a new masterplan to renew the Museum in a way that prioritises interpretive agility, access to collections and contemporary relevance. The overall vision is to build the Ulster Museum as a leading cultural destination offering unique collections-based perspectives on local and global issues. The success criteria for the Museum's development includes building the Ulster Museum as a 'must see' destination that provides a unique orientation to history and culture, and establishing it as the 'Museum of the Troubles' based on its reputation for dealing with contested history, 'radical multi-perspectivity', and its unique collection of assets.

National Museums NI have defined five key audience priorities:

- Deepening relationships with citizens and communities; considering the audience less as passive visitors and more as citizens or participants who are offered more active engagement
- Creating social impact through collections engagement in key areas such as good relations / community cohesion; social inclusion; and promotion of environmental sustainability
- Enabling cultural participation for all, starting with new research to understand why people visit / don't visit
- Innovation and enterprise in audience planning and delivery aiming for immersive and engaging experiences, based on collaborative approach across the organisation.
- Maximising growth from tourism markets by improving the Museum's reputation as a 'must-see' destination, particularly for tourists seeking to more fully understand the Troubles

2.5 Evaluation Objectives

RF Associates was commissioned to create an evaluation of National Museums NI's work to date, to inform their approach and identify new opportunities as 'Collecting the Troubles and Beyond' draws to a close and new phases of work are developed. The evaluation addresses the following objectives:

- To assess the achievements and impact to date of National Museums NI's work on the Troubles and Beyond
- To gather intelligence and feedback that will inform the development of National Museums NI's future work on the Troubles and Beyond

3. Methodology

RFA agreed the following approach to the evaluation with National Museums NI, as being the best approach within the budget to gather and consolidate feedback on the activities to date:

1. **Review of existing evidence:** RFA have analysed and identified the key themes running across the feedback already collected on the programme of work to date, through National Museum NI questionnaires. This has included reviewing data from the Troubles and Beyond Gallery, Art of the Troubles, Silent Testimony and Voices of 68.
2. **Engagement with staff:** RFA conducted three face to face paired depth interviews with key staff to gather their views. This included interviews with the Chief Executive Officer, Director of Collections, Head of Curatorial, Head of Audience Development, Senior Curator of Art and Senior Curator of History.
3. **Engagement with project groups who have worked with National Museums NI:** RFA undertook four focus group discussions, one with representatives from each of the following groups: National Museums NI Academic Advisory Group, Voices of 68, Healing through Remembering and WAVE. Each focus group had 4 to 6 attendees.
4. **Engagement with wider stakeholders:** RFA conducted telephone interviews with a wider group of stakeholders to gather wider views and perspectives on the activities of National Museums NI. This included interviews with representatives from academia, community organisations, funders and other bodies with a similar objective to contribute to a 'social peace process'; a full list of the organisations engaged is included at appendix 1. Some stakeholders had partnered with National Museums NI on specific projects over an extended period of time, others had worked alongside National Museums NI only briefly, others were identified by National Museums NI as being important for achieving shared aspirations relating to the legacy of the past. Many were not in direct collaboration with the museum but work in similar fields and in many cases share a similar value base. Some of the stakeholders interviewed may well work more closely with the museum in the future. Given the wide range of perspectives from which the interviewees spoke, for the purposes of reporting, we divided the stakeholders into two sections, according to the information evidenced in the interviews. The first group consists of stakeholders who evidenced more knowledge of the museum's activity or had worked closely with the museum. The second group of stakeholders evidenced a more limited knowledge of the museum's activity and may not have worked as closely individually with the museum. It should not be inferred that we considered one group to be more important than the other, simply that the two groups spoke from differing knowledge bases. It should also be noted that in some cases other individuals from the organisations the interviewees represented, have been working closely with the museum.

Across engagement with staff, groups and wider stakeholders a framework of key questions was explored:

Area	Key questions used
What has worked well (in recent museum activity)	-How did they feel about [the activity]? What worked?
What has worked less well (in recent museum activity)	-What didn't work and why?

Aims and impact (of previous activity)	-Are NMNI making a contribution in this 'Troubles' space? If so how would you describe it? How does it benefit NI society?
Role and status	<p>-In one sentence, could you describe the role of the museum in contemporary society? The museum should... Or, the museum should be a...</p> <p>-What do you think would be the next most significant success for the museum in this area – what should it be aiming for?</p> <p>-To what extent do they think NMNI can provide a unique foundation for exploration and interpretation?</p>
Activity going forward	<p>-What would they like to see the NMNI doing in this space?</p> <p>-To what extent do you think the museum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - play a leading role locally, nationally and internationally, in collecting, curating and interpreting contested histories and dealing with the legacy of the past? - provide opportunities to hear alternative voices and perspectives to facilitate understanding and help contribute to the complex work of reconciliation? - challenge audiences and foster dialogue and debate? <p>-Are there others it needs to / should engage with?</p> <p>-If the museum is to play a nationally and internationally significant role as a Troubles Museum ("the place that provides the most comprehensive and balanced orientation to our recent past and contemporary 'post-conflict' Northern Irish society" - masterplan), what kind of exhibitions/events/activities would like to see it hosting? What do you think this means for what it should be doing?</p> <p>-Given the kind of role/activity you have outlined, what, in your opinion, should be the next steps for the Ulster Museum?</p>
Challenges	<p>-What might the challenges be with working in these ways?</p> <p>-Can / should NMNI be more courageous in this space? What might that look like?</p>

5. **Production of an internal facing final report:** Our report draws together the four strands of activity detailed above, assessing the impact and identifying recommendations for future developments, whilst taking account of National Museums NI's Corporate Plan. We also propose a suggested logic model to focus the programme around going forward.
6. **Production of an externally facing document:** On submission and agreement of an internally facing document RFA will agree the approach to an externally facing document, which they will then produce.

4. Detailed findings

4.1 Analysis of National Museums NI's evaluations and commentary on the four key exhibitions

The key documents sent to RFA by National Museums NI were:

- In house evaluation of *The Art of the Troubles* (2014)
- In house evaluation of *Colin Davidson, Silent Testimony* (2016)
- Chris Reynolds' explanation of and commentary on the feedback from *Voices of '68* (2018)
- In house evaluation of *The Troubles and Beyond* (statistics up to the end of 2019)

RFA were invited to analyse the visitor feedback from each of the four exhibitions, in order to meet the broader aims of the evaluation; to assess the achievements and impact to date of National Museums NI's work and to gather intelligence and feedback to inform future development.

It is important to note that in each case these surveys have been completed by a self-selecting sample. Visitors who feel strongly one way or another are most likely to fill out a self-completion questionnaire and visitors who do not care greatly one way or the other may not provide detailed feedback. This means only extreme views may be represented in the survey results; they might not report what most visitors believe.

The following themes emerged from a review across all the documents.

1. The Silent Testimony exhibition proved popular

The visitor numbers for Silent Testimony suggest that when the museum assembles a Troubles-related exhibition, visitors attend in numbers comparable to other exhibitions. In the seven months Silent Testimony was on display in 2015, it was visited by approximately 60 000 people.

It is difficult to say too much further about Troubles related exhibitions when we don't have visitor numbers for the other three exhibitions. While the questions on the visitor feedback forms did not ask for an assessment of, or comment on the venue, it could be inferred, particularly from the personal comments relating to the Silent Testimony exhibition, that visitors were at ease in the museum. The feedback for Art of the Troubles and Silent Testimony questionnaires shows that approximately half the visitors to these exhibitions spent between 30 minutes and an hour in the galleries.

Time spent in gallery	Art of the Troubles	Silent Testimony
Under 30 mins	22%	41.4%
30 mins – 1 hour	47%	51.4%
Over 1 hour	31%	5.3%
Blank	-	1.8%

2. There were varying levels of appeal across age bands

The data from the feedback questionnaires suggests there may have been different levels of appeal from the three exhibitions, across age bands. Silent Testimony appealed more to people aged 40 and above, with 65% of questionnaire respondents in this age bracket; 18.5% were aged 24 or below. The Art of the Troubles demonstrates more of a balance however, with 44% of questionnaire respondents aged 40 or above and 37% aged 24 or below. The latest exhibition, Troubles and Beyond, seems to have more

appeal to younger people; 36% of questionnaire respondents were aged 40 or over, while 45% were aged 24 or below.

Age bands of respondents	Art of the Troubles	Silent Testimony	Troubles and Beyond
Under 16	20%	6.3%	22%
16-24	17%	12.2%	23%
25-39	19%	12.2%	18%
40-59	27%	38.4%	20%
60+	17%	26.7%	16%
Blank	-	5.2%	-
Total number of respondents	741	995	606

3. Visitors rated the exhibitions as good

There has been a high rate of approval from the visitors who have completed feedback forms with 92% of visitors rating the Art of the Troubles as very good or fairly good; 91% rating Silent Testimony as very good. The Troubles and Beyond feedback form did not ask for an assessment of the exhibition, but a majority of respondents who had visited the previous Troubles gallery found the new gallery to be an improvement, often noting an improved layout, more physical artefacts and people's voices from a broad range of perspectives.

Rating	Art of the Troubles	Silent Testimony
Very good	72%	91.3%
Fairly good	20%	6.1%
Neutral	4%	0.9%
Poor	1%	0%
Very poor	2%	0.3%
Blank/don't know	1%	0.9%

The feedback from Voices of '68 was not quantified in this way as it was a smaller exhibition offering a different type of visitor experience, nevertheless, the level of engagement evidenced in the qualitative feedback demonstrates that visitors enjoyed the presentation, content and nature of the exhibition.

4. Feedback indicates high levels of visitor engagement

741 questionnaires were returned for the Art of the Troubles, 995 for Silent Testimony and 606 for Troubles and Beyond (up to the end of November 2019). While there is obviously variation across the length of responses, each feedback form asked open questions eliciting longer, and often personal comment. Visitors frequently gave meaningful responses, not just thoughts about presented information, but also with regard to their own reactions and emotional responses.

"[The Other Cheek by John Keane] just got me and made me cry." (Art of the Troubles)

"Woman Caught in Bomb Blast was particularly disturbing, yet informative of time." (Art of the Troubles)

"We were very moved. We were all young girls when the Troubles started and remember so many of the atrocities." (Silent Testimony)

"The portraits and stories opened my eyes to just how many people were affected by the

Troubles. I had chills and shed tears the entire time.” (Silent Testimony)

“I was familiar with the events...though, it "shocked" me to see objects, read memories. I know it has happened, but I came close to it today.” (Troubles and Beyond)

“The photographs shown on displays as a slideshow. It is just shocking to see amongst them so many examples of violence.” (Troubles and Beyond)

Visitors also gave suggestions for additions to a gallery or other media the museum might consider including for example the addition of community art, mural art, the music films of the day (e.g. Good Vibrations), more first-hand stories of those who experienced the troubles.

“Community art should be represented how art is helping to heal those affected - Mural art what affect is its imagery having on lives of people who live near them.” (Art of the Troubles)

“In terms of media, through music films such as Good Vibrations given glimpse of how music was used as a creative response as well.” (Silent Testimony)

“Would love to see more first hand stories from people who experienced the conflicts first hand.” (Troubles and Beyond)

In the feedback from Silent Testimony, 14% of visitors responding to the question ‘How else should the Museum be interpreting the Troubles?’ said that there was a need to consider the future, which sometimes included comments about leaving the past behind.

“I think this exhibition was worthwhile, but I think that constantly going over The Troubles leads to an insular worldview and lack of focus on the future.” (Silent Testimony)

One visitor summed up their perception of the wider experience of the exhibition:

“The number of people visiting it and stopping and commenting on texts and artefacts. Good to see this gallery triggering interest and dialogue.” (Troubles and Beyond)

5. Visitors said they had a learning experience

Visitor responses demonstrate that people come to the museum and discover new information, or perhaps new perspectives. Across the evaluations there was evidence in the feedback of visitors engaging with content in fresh ways, often leading to a reflective response.

“This gallery makes me very sad that this is what Northern Ireland used to be, I would never have guessed this happened growing up here.” (Troubles and Beyond)

“I never knew much about the Troubles and had no idea how severe the Troubles truly were.” (Art of the Troubles)

“Aged 52 I grew up seeing the troubles on the TV news. It seemed tragic yet remote from my life. The stories brought that time back in my memory making it seem much more real and horrific. I hadn’t remembered or realised how young many of the people killed were.” (Silent Testimony)

*“The impact of the Troubles in daily life and the systematic separation of one nation into enemies.”
(Art of the Troubles)*

Voices of '68 in particular seems to have offered visitors a new approach to engaging with what, for many, is a well-known period in Northern Ireland's history.

“You see it from both sides. Helps you understand that one side want change and the other side did not want to give it up. Understandable why it all happened.” (Voices of '68)

“They have changed my perspective as now I understand more of the backstory.” (Pupil response to Voices of '68)

6. Visitors see the museum as a space for reflection

The direct references to reflection, as well as the level of personal comment in the feedback, evidence how many people see the museum as a space for reflection. The Silent Testimony evaluation lists the effects on visitors as bringing back personal memories; creating an emotional response; considering a common sense of humanity; and an appreciation of Colin Davidson's work. Aspects of these themes (for 'Colin Davidson', read 'artists') can be found in the feedback for each of the other three exhibitions, especially the return of personal memories.

“I was a child in the 70s but I was amazed at how quickly the memories came back. I wasn't directly affected by the Troubles though I know people who died and I know the sounds of gunfire and bombs.” (Troubles and Beyond)

“I wasn't expecting it to be an exhibition of the Troubles and I'm surprised at how much it has brought back the horrors of that time.” (Silent Testimony)

“It affected me in a very general human morality respect, I remembered my grandparents and parents who have passed and the daily news of bereavement when we were young.” (Silent Testimony)

This is not to say visitors' thoughts remained in memory; there were many comments on what the experiences of the past meant for the present.

“Brings back raw memories and reinforces my total belief and commitment to peace and prosperity for all. No going back to the dark days.” (Troubles and Beyond)

“I find this very difficult to express. I feel ashamed that having lived through the Troubles (whose effects are very far from over) I don't recall the names of any of these people and not even of all the events.” (Silent Testimony)

“I grew up as a teenager here. It was all about liking the right bands and not doing homework. The rest all seemed normal. Yet it was clearly abnormal.” (Troubles and Beyond)

“It was a poignant reminder of the dreadful conflict and made me appreciate again what we have now.” (Art of the Troubles)

“Realising what I lived through. Hoping it never returns.” (Troubles and Beyond)

There were also young people commenting on what the experience of the Troubles meant for them.

“The Troubles - we as young people often dismiss the Troubles, so it is good to remember how it was important in our history and our present.” (Troubles and Beyond)

“It made me think as a 17 year old how lucky I am to be living in a more peaceful society. It also is unthinkable that these people went through such hard times.” (Silent Testimony)

“We never had something about the Troubles in school. So I just heard a little bit about the IRA and terrorism. But what is shown here shocked, surprised and made me feel that I want to know more about the Troubles.” (Silent Testimony)

Of 362 visitors who responded to the question ‘How did the gallery make you feel?’ when they visited the Troubles and Beyond gallery, 96% said it had an emotional impact on them. It is clear, whether a visitor had direct experience of the Troubles or not, the gallery prompted both a learning and emotional experience.

Some of the respondents perceived there to be a need for this type of reflection; arguably they were content with coming away from an exhibition challenged, or at least with much to think about.

“It gave me the space to reflect on my own loss and impact of the Troubles by highlighting these stories of tremendous loss and dignity. It invites me to feel real emotion which has been suppressed.” (Silent Testimony)

“Shifted my focus, taught me. A child of the Troubles I, like everyone, had the view from my education and raising - how segregated and biased we all were.” (Troubles and Beyond)

“I think that the relationship between art and the Troubles is vital and I think it would be beneficial for more of the people of Northern Ireland and its leaders to see it.” (Art of the Troubles)

“I was very moved to see their faces and read their stories. I was sorry for my own bigotry in the past. I hope for a better future.” (Silent Testimony)

“Proud of the place I’m from, adamant that we will be better, excited to add to the future and happy that the museum offers such an overarching and dual dialogue of the past.” (Troubles and Beyond)

“I’ve lived here all my life and am convinced that we are all deeply affected by what happened and it is still hard to find common spaces to reflect in due to our voluntary apartheid and this provides a very profound one.” (Silent Testimony)

“The grief in the faces and the obvious effect of such horrifying deaths of loved ones was - is - very moving. It is good for us to remember what so many in our society have suffered.” (Silent Testimony)

7. Visitors are accepting of challenge

The feedback, particularly from Voices of '68, demonstrates that many respondents accept the museum has a role to offer new perspectives, challenge perceptions and invite visitors to re-examine previously

held views. There does not appear to be any expectation that the museum should only be offering traditional historical overviews.

“Was offended by a few pieces, but that’s what art is and if it doesn’t make you think, it hasn’t succeeded.” (Art of the Troubles)

“It is important to hear two sides and conflicting views within sides. It has made me want to read a bit more; It is very important. It is rare to hear a more balanced view. It challenges things I’ve been told.” (Voices of ’68)

“It has enabled me to commence a re-interpretation of my own views and analysis.” (Art of the Troubles)

“It has opened my eyes to other views.” (Voices of ’68)

8. Negative or critical comment was limited

Not every comment was positive; the exhibitions caused emotional and intellectual discomfort, however there was little criticism. When visitors to the Art of the Troubles were asked ‘How else do you think we should be interpreting the Troubles?’ no negative answers were recorded; the most negative responses were saved for the noise of an accordion which was part of one of the exhibits.

In the responses to Silent Testimony, it seems likely some visitors were uncertain of what was meant by ‘How do you think the Ulster Museum should be interpreting the Troubles?’ Responses suggest the question was read by some as how the Museum might give instruction.

“Please don’t interpret. We can do that for ourselves.” (Silent Testimony)

“Should the Museum be interpreting?” (Silent Testimony)

Only one comment suggested the Museum might not be the place for the exhibition, though no reason was offered.

“I don’t think the Museum can interpret the Troubles. They should continue to exhibit a range of art works, there is a case for an entirely separate place for such works to be shown.” (Silent Testimony)

Some responses to Silent Testimony expressed the view that there was too much focus on the Troubles, often accompanied by the suggestion that NI needs to move on. These responses were approximately 4%.

“The art is wonderful for all ages but we unfortunately have to move on.” (Silent Testimony)

“All exhibitions should be displayed on artistic merit rather than their content. Personally speaking, a move away from the Troubles will always be welcome.” (Silent Testimony)

Feedback from Troubles and Beyond recorded no outright negative comments regarding the content’s place in the museum. Respondents noted their sadness or discomfort.

“Uncomfortable - have I done nothing to change things?” (Troubles and Beyond)

Approximately 3% of respondents expressed anger or frustration, but these were not directed towards the exhibition.

*“Angry, disappointment in the way the Troubles ended with very little punishment to paramilitaries.”
(Troubles and Beyond)*

“Angry and frustrated that the new coalition and Brexit could cause a resurgence.” (Troubles and Beyond)

Voices of '68, arguably, sits apart from the other three exhibitions, as it offered detailed perspectives on one specific period. It received some criticism for its inclusion of contested narratives.

“Gregory Campbell equating his family being poor with the systematic oppression of Catholics was particularly offensive.” (Voices of '68)

“Honestly, I was deeply disturbed by the insensitivities of some of the speakers today.” (Voices of '68)

Dr Chris Reynolds' assessed this criticism:

“At the very least, even if some visitors found the juxtaposition of such divergent perspectives challenging, there was nevertheless a general recognition that this was a necessary and worthwhile step towards making progress on how to deal with the divisiveness of Northern Ireland's past.”

While one of the respondents noted:

“The exhibition at the Ulster Museum is unsettling - being confronted by some narratives about '68 that you believe are wrong. But that is the point and it is quite discomfoting. However, I think there will be quite a few people who will disregard the totality of the exhibition for this reason. That would be a shame. One has to be prepared to listen to other viewpoints. I think that the material should be the start of a critical debate as to what did happen. Museums can be great spaces for this type of learning.” (Voices of '68)

The nature and content of the four exhibitions should be taken into consideration, however. The Art of the Troubles and Silent testimony were largely reflective exhibitions, with space for the audience to interpret the artwork. Voices of '68 is more focussed, with obvious and deliberate clashes in perspectives, however, while there was violence during that period, it did not reach the same intensity until much later. The Troubles and Beyond is the only permanent gallery and is wide ranging in content, and while there are detailed aspects, it does not focus on one period.

9. Visitors were positive about the Ulster Museum providing future activity in this space

In the feedback to Art of the Troubles, Silent Testimony and Troubles and Beyond, respondents were favourable to the Ulster Museum continuing to offer Troubles-related work and made a broad range of suggestions. Evaluation comments very often responded directly to the nature of the exhibition, for example, 38% of evaluations from Art of the Troubles asked for more artwork, 17% for other aspects of the arts; 37% of evaluations from Silent Testimony simply said the museum should keep doing what it

was doing. Persistent themes across all three exhibitions included incorporating other media/introducing greater interaction and gathering more human/everyday stories.

Evaluations of Troubles and Beyond specifically asked for what should be added; this is a key focus for this evaluation as this is a permanent exhibition that can and will be substantially added to. While 31% of respondents didn't feel anything needed to be added, 20% asked for more personal/everyday stories, 19% suggested other artefacts, 13% asked for more background information and 10% suggested the enlargement of the gallery with some comments asking for more interactive content.

Of the 440 data responses we have seen, a small minority of 22 (5%) commented on finding the gallery hard to understand and asked for greater clarity in the form of a timeline or more background information.

"Perhaps further background information (e.g. a foreign tourist probably does not know what the Special Powers Act was)." (Troubles and Beyond)

"Basic history. It would help if you designed for people who didn't already know the story." (Troubles and Beyond)

"A clearer explanation over what caused the troubles and what the fights were about." (Troubles and Beyond)

"Yes - context. Events are without explanation. For example, protests against the 1984 Irish/British agreement with no explanation of what that was - many examples of this sort of thing throughout." (Troubles and Beyond)

"I would like to suggest to make it more simple for foreign visitors. It is rather complicated to understand clearly the history for example the names and terminology." (Troubles and Beyond)

"Timelines of Northern Ireland. To me from India, I want to know NI born, Troubles Why? What measures?" (Troubles and Beyond)

Of these 22 comments, 16 were from outside Northern Ireland demonstrating that some visitors, particularly those from outside of Northern Ireland, have found the gallery hard to understand and suggesting this might be worth exploring further.

10. There has been a steady development in the aims of the programming

The qualitative feedback for the first two exhibitions (Art of the Troubles and Silent Testimony) demonstrate the clearest outcome was a profound personal effect, to varying extents on visitors. They emotionally responded, reflected on what this response meant for them, and their thinking was challenged. It is also clear the curators knew there would be an effect as the evaluations asked personal questions in order to gauge the extent exhibitions' impact.

However, the aims of these exhibitions, as stated in their evaluations, did not fully explore the intended impact on the audience. These aims can be summarised in two groups. Firstly, there were aims not focussed on the audience:

- Collaborate with another partner (Wolverhampton Gallery, Colin Davidson, WAVE, community groups)
- Continue the museum's exploration of conflict, especially related to the Troubles

-Take a diverse and inclusive approach to the past

And aims directed towards the audience:

- See an artist's perspective on the Troubles
- Raise awareness (of an artistic response to the Troubles, or how people were affected by them)

There was no further discussion in the evaluations of why these aims had been chosen or considered important, nor was there any explicit discussion of how these experiences might inform the museum's role in contemporary Northern Irish society. It is clear from later documentation, however, that learning from these first two exhibitions informed a more focussed approach to later programming.

For Voices of '68, Dr Chris Reynolds recorded the process of assembling an agonistic exhibition (allowing a range of contributors to tell their, at times conflicting, stories) within which can be seen an "objective of enhancing the level of understanding and empathy". In his response to the exhibition, Dr Reynolds is precise in his language. The exhibition is a deliberate attempt to "*give back to the people who made and experienced history, through their own words, a central place*". It is "*a challenge to the ongoing perpetuation of the parallel, contested narratives that never come into contact with each other.*" There is also a specific purpose to an exhibition like Voices of '68; "*providing opportunities to hear other voices can ultimately contribute to the complex work of reconciliation.*"

The aims for Troubles and Beyond were more clearly developed and included:

- To allow a range of interpretations of, and from the period
- To facilitate reflection on our historical understanding of the period, and commentary on the exhibition

This fulfils the intentions expressed in the draft 'Masterplan' that states the museum is keen "to orientate strategic thinking around opportunities for creating social impact", clarified as "good relations / community cohesion; social inclusion; and promotion of environmental sustainability".

11. However, there remains a lack of coherency around evaluating exhibitions

The aims for the Troubles and Beyond gallery were not restated in the evaluation and there is no stated rationale for how the evaluation has been assembled to test against the aims / intended outcomes of the exhibition. The evaluation approach has an inherent weakness in that the participants are self-selected. Secondly, it asks for basic visitor details (age, country of origin, how often they visit) with space for open comment on such aspects as how people have been impacted by the gallery, how it makes them feel and what story they would like to share. There is an opportunity here to test, in much greater depth whether or not the aims of the gallery (diversity in interpretation, reflection and historical understanding) are being met.

4.2 Findings from engagement with staff

1. Context

The previous section has listed the key activity (Art of the Troubles, Silent Testimony, Voices of '68 and The Troubles and Beyond) and commented on the visitor feedback and assessments of these exhibitions. The purpose of this section is to more closely examine staff perceptions of these exhibitions and their contribution to and effect on National Museums NI's overall direction to date.

At the start of the interviews, each pair were asked to outline, from their own perspectives, National Museums NI's journey with regard to the Troubles-related exhibitions, from the opening of the first Troubles gallery after the Ulster Museum's refurbishment in 2009.

There was universal agreement between staff that the previous Troubles gallery was inadequate. Criticism included its lack of objects, it was text-heavy and that it took a journalistic approach, only commenting on key moments of the conflict, with no clear interpretive strategy. One staff member even expressed this to be a backward step in comparison to what had been present before the refurbishment.

While there was some immediate recognition that the Troubles gallery should be improved, other developments took place over the following three to five years. Firstly, there were various partnerships considered in order to assemble a Troubles art collection, providing the museum with an alternative entry point for public discussion of the Troubles.

"We needed to test what the appetite was from the public's point of view and also to see how they would respond... The whole wariness about putting objects in the Troubles gallery when we reopened was, they hadn't had enough time to think about it ... to really understand what the objects could mean to various sections of the community ... I think the executive team thought, art was an easier way to talk about the issues of the Troubles."

During this development, the artist Colin Davidson began discussion with both the museum and WAVE about how an exhibition of portraits might raise public awareness and consideration of victims and survivors.

A second development was the recognition that reinventing the Troubles gallery should not be the starting point. Rather, the decision was taken to review the content and approach taken in the Modern History gallery before moving on to the Troubles.

"We were redoing the history galleries... from 1500 up to 1968 and we had developed new approaches within that, in terms of a lot more collaboration with academics, a lot more engagement around how we would approach this, different sort of styles and interpretive techniques."

Staff noted the development of a closer relationship with academics from Queens University Belfast both before and since the opening of the new history gallery in 2014. Shortly after, applications were made through Heritage Lottery Fund for funding to develop the Troubles collection. Funding awarded not only allowed Karen Logan to become the project curator, but also provided an acquisitions budget and a budget for an associated activity plan. The collection developed steadily, as did community engagement, until the Troubles and Beyond Gallery opened in 2018.

"I think it was slightly below the radar, there was a lot of activity going on in terms of engaging with communities... trying to further develop our collections to better represent different experiences, building those relationships with key stakeholders and all of that then fed into the gallery that opened in 2018."

Two staff members referenced Voices of '68 as developing 'to the side' of other activity. The project came from an approach suggested by Dr Chris Reynolds at Nottingham Trent University and the proposed work was considered to fit well, connecting the main history gallery to the Troubles and Beyond.

A final aspect of this period of development was a change in leadership, with Kathryn Thomson joining as Chief Executive Officer at the start of 2016, which created an impact in itself. As one staff member commented,

"Your ability to actually deliver is directly related to the leadership within the organisation, the clarity of purpose and the kind of capacity [you have]."

National Museums NI subsequently underwent a review of vision, mission and values.

While there was no concrete, over-arching strategy structuring this period of activity, it is clear there was an intention to develop the museum's contribution to the Troubles space and to develop a wider role. It is this sense of direction and desire to be more intentional in the future that has led to this review being undertaken. In the words of the Chief Executive Officer,

"The whole purpose of the discussion is to be absolutely clear on what is our role and purpose. What is the role and purpose of museums in today's society, but what is our role and purpose as a group of museums in Northern Ireland? ... You need to know why you exist per se but you also need to know ... what you can add to the context within which you exist ... one of the big issues that our society deals with is the legacy of its past."

2. What has worked well?

Art of the Troubles was the first of the four exhibitions, opening in 2014. Staff commented that the general positive external reception (from press and visitors) brought confidence to National Museums NI, where it had been "shaky before". There was satisfaction that each piece could justify its existence in the exhibition and staff considered the feedback as proof the public understood that. Good relationships built up with artists in the development of the exhibition were also cited as a positive, as well as introducing a younger generation to a new way of looking at the Troubles.

"The success, I think as well, was people who at that time were under the age of thirty really had not had first-hand experience of the troubles and they were seeing imagery which wasn't always literal."

Similarly, Silent Testimony was considered to be a good example of how space could be created for reflection, allowing people to develop a different perspective and to challenge their own thinking through art. The insightful and positive comments from press and visitors on Silent Testimony and Art of the Troubles together encouraged the bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund, as it was then, for the Collecting the Troubles and Beyond project.

The Troubles and Beyond gallery opened in 2018, replacing the photographs and text of the previous exhibition with a range of stories, objects and perspectives bringing a breadth of narrative that included how conflict impacted society. Staff felt the public reception was warm, from local and international visitors alike. They also noted the lack of serious or heavy-handed criticism. Staff considered the overall success of the four exhibitions to have led to a growing sense of confidence, which in turn has led to National Museums NI both being noticed more (by local civic society and government), and a desire to make itself more noticeable, as it seeks to further contribute in the Troubles space.

"I think visibility was absolutely key because for so long, even if it wasn't necessarily true I think because it wasn't visible... the Ulster Museum either looked cowardly or very kind of staid... and I think [the activity] made people sit up and take notice."

"In terms of the success for all of this, was the recognition and support we have got for it ... we see ourselves as making an important contribution to a wider discussion around this and it's been really heartening the way that other museums have come to us and had that interest in what we have done, and we have started conversations nationally and internationally around that."

There was also agreement that the partnerships with other groups to assemble exhibitions has been positive, and there was now expertise and experience in co-curation and co-creation, which some staff felt provided a defence against any criticism.

3. What has worked less well?

Staff made references to relatively minor aspects of exhibitions where some aspect could have been added or improved; the inclusion of more references to ethnic groups in Troubles and Beyond, for example, or the inclusion of the video made up of interviews with the twenty artists who contributed to the Art of the Troubles. For the most part however, staff recognised that every exhibition had its own learning curve, and developed the organisation's capacity. There was some recognition that the aims of each round of activity were not always clear, but the emphasis was on trial and development.

"I just don't think we've always been very good at clearly defining the objective of what it is we are trying to do in a singular objective... but that's not a criticism of the past because up until this point we have been pushing this agenda and testing it and developing internal capacity."

Another aspect considered to be working less well was a lack of publicly available record of what the museum had achieved. This is likely to be corrected in the future, however, as Karen Logan is currently writing a book on the museum's development, with stakeholders and the wider museum sector in mind.

4. What were the aims? What has been the impact?

Staff were asked what they considered the museum was hoping to achieve, and what contribution any of the aforementioned activity made to society. Some of these aspects have already been mentioned, such as the perception that people had come to an exhibition and had their thinking challenged. Staff largely continued to comment on how the exhibitions posed questions and suggested alternative ways for people to consider what had happened during the Troubles. Comments also referenced how the exhibitions created space not just to dwell on the past, but also to reflect on its meaning in the present.

[Art of the Troubles] "was jogging people's memories about particular things that had happened. Then they were having conversations about it. So in the feedback you would have got people

saying 'this was really good it made me realise we never want to go back here again' so they were recognising the fact that we had forgotten an awful lot of what happened to us."

[Colin Davidson had the] "idea of raising public consciousness to what it's like to live as a victim and survivor of the conflict now."

[Voices of 68 raised questions] "Like, was the violence and the troubles inevitable could it have gone another way, where were there missed opportunities?"

Staff commented on the impact on individuals, as well as a wider impact as the footfall for the new Troubles gallery has changed.

"Success is really what it means to people and the response we've got; the overall wider response from visitors and press and reviews we have had, but on a really individual level of walking around there with somebody with PTSD and what it means to him to have his story included... We still don't see it as a finished product, still we're adding to it, but people ...were saying it's a step forward in the right direction."

"I am seeing people going round [Troubles and Beyond] with kids because you never saw a child in the 2009 gallery once and you are going round with people bringing their families and having those conversations and international visitors; quite a different profile for that gallery."

Although staff were asked about the impact of the exhibitions on society generally, this question tended to lead to a reflection on the internal impact within National Museums NI, specifically the view that what has gone before has been capacity-building for what will come next. There was recognition that the changes had been necessarily slow and measured, and in step with increasing levels of stakeholder engagement, as well as greater understanding of the audience. There was also reflection on the need for future contributions to be clearer in their aims and objectives, particularly, some staff noted, with regard to the opportunities to contribute to society offered by the New Decade, New Deal agreement.

"I think because we haven't been clear ourselves about what we are doing is why we have struggled to articulate what we offer as an organisation."

"It's also fairly fresh but we do recognise the need specifically for the Troubles and Beyond agenda, peace and reconciliation agenda, that we just need to be a lot more coherent and clear about that."

5. What is the role and status of the museum?

At various points, not just in direct response to the role of the museum, all three staff paired-interviews commented on how National Museums NI can contribute to the development of Northern Irish society. This was expressed in a variety of terms. Some spoke directly about social cohesion and a social peace process; others spoke about reconciliation or about addressing the effects of the past on the present.

"I think where we need to get to is ... how do we build greater social cohesion? It's the social peace process, we have a political peace process ... but actually it's not going to resolve everything and there is a much broader social peace process that we need to be engaging in and in terms of building greater social cohesion."

As mentioned earlier, staff perceived one of the main ways to contribute to a social peace process was to challenge people's perceptions and opinions, fuelling public discourse through offering alternative perspectives or a broader range of views.

"The gallery needs to be able to challenge people's understanding... it needs them to be able to see that there is not a binary narrative but actually there are multiple narratives and multiple perspectives... we are trying to say this is a very complicated period of our history and people's lived experience is their reality and so their perspective will be based on what they have experienced ... the gallery needs to put a more colourful palette."

"I think we want to create understanding or at least facilitate understanding and dialogue, I think that's all we can really do. If people come in and maybe they leave with something that they hadn't thought about before..."

Some commented that the museum could provide a "moderated view" of what happened in Northern Ireland and how this affected life on a daily basis, as well as being "provocative" in asking questions about conflict and identity (in a manner similar to the current CultureLab exhibition).

All staff discussions were unanimous there was a broader role for the museum, than it was currently playing, with some going further to express, that in the current context, there were opportunities emerging that should be taken.

"We need to get back into the hearts and minds of the public that actually there's lots of other reasons why you come to the museum and one of them could be dealing with the past."

"The opportunity is there for us to grasp ... because if we maybe continue to miss those opportunities in ten years' time we will look back as a museum and say that was our time to play a really contemporary, relevant role and have a confident voice. I think if we continue to miss it, we will look back at this period with a lot of sadness of lost opportunity."

Staff were agreed the museum is uniquely placed to contribute to society in terms of its status; it is a respected, trusted institution (though there were some comments this was not universally so) and so can offer space to hold multiple identities. One staff member commented on how the museum's status had been important for showing Silent Testimony, reporting that Colin Davidson desired it to be offered in "a free venue; it should be in a public space, in a shared space."

"I would contend that in some ways, there are very few institutions that could have done what we have done, with all our faults and idiosyncrasies ... everything else is single identity ... those, I think are all very valid, but what we have tried to do is hold in this orbit simultaneously very, very different perspectives which are reflected through the diversity of the collection."

"I think that it really became obvious that we were the right place to tell this story or to tell people's stories ... we could be this centre of research because we have the objects, we have the stories, we have the images, we can do it in a way that hopefully engages everybody and doesn't alienate anyone."

Stemming from these aspects, was the sense that the museum was ready to extend its contribution to discussion about the legacy of the past.

"I think we need to put on a much higher platform and bring a lot more coherence and active dialogue around it and actually start developing the reputation for us as a place; Ulster Museum as a safe, trusted, engaging space to explore this."

6. What activity should be undertaken going forward?

Staff were asked what they would like to see the museum doing, going forward, as well as their thoughts on how the Ulster Museum might be a 'Museum of the Troubles'. The most obvious over-arching theme was that the work to date provides a base to work from, for example, collecting is an on-going activity, which may offer other 'spin-off' areas for development. Any improvements are likely to involve elements of collaboration, whether with individuals, communities or other museums.

"One of the things where we could actually extend the Troubles [exhibition] is finding ways of allowing more personal stories and reflections to be part of the experience and where you can actually deposit your own thoughts. These things are all possible, but they also require in a practical sense a larger budget to actually find design solutions to achieving that."

"Maybe kind of give a voice to people... whose voice maybe hasn't been heard and actually hear stories and experiences that are sometimes overshadowed by the very dominant narratives."

"I think definitely that we will want to work with other museums, particularly within Northern Ireland Museum of Free Derry would be an example. They have really important powerful material in their collections which is absolutely right that they have, but are there ways we can work with them for reciprocal loans for example?"

There was also recognition there was a need for the museum to engage beyond its walls. This might include further connection with schools or tourism for example. There was also some comment on how perceptions of the museum are not always positive.

"We need to do more in terms of outreach... making what we do visible outside of the museum ... we want the Ulster Museum to effectively be the museum of the Troubles, nothing is going to change that ...but to some people the Ulster Museum can appear to be a hostile building, it doesn't matter what we do, whenever we talk to people some people still see it like that and I think the onus is on us then, to go out and engage with people."

Although the idea of being a 'Museum of the Troubles' was defined in the draft masterplan as "the place that provides the most comprehensive and balanced orientation to our recent past and contemporary 'post-conflict' Northern Irish society", this language provoked varying responses across all the interviews, not just with staff. Interviewees interpreted how this would look in real terms in very different ways and were not always clear about its meaning. Staff responses included acknowledging the issue of how this would sit with the rest of the museum's responsibilities and collections, and how it would work with what is already in the building.

"This museum is not going to be rebranded the Troubles Museum, because we can't be, we have all the responsibility of all the other collections."

"I believe we could do a 'Museum of Troubles' within the Ulster Museum, but I'm not sure that you could rip it out and plonk it somewhere else because you would lack the context that it needs or the safe place to house it."

Staff were also asked to consider what the next steps for National Museums NI might be and where energy might be best spent. Collaboration was the central theme in staff responses, in terms of both audience communities as well as partnerships with other organisations or groups who might offer expertise, resources or input.

"Where we now need to develop our approach is collaboratively and holistically providing a bit of an audience platform to let them engage on the whole of what we are doing rather than in little parts."

"I guess we develop connections and networks and people like [Community Relations Council] were great with putting us in touch with people and villages networks and stuff; it's just branching out, you've got to start somewhere so we have sort of developed partnerships."

7. What are the challenges going forward?

Staff were asked to consider what the key challenges would be to working or contributing in the manner previously outlined. Aspects such as financial constraints and the space available in the Ulster Museum were mentioned, but staff largely focussed on the challenges that come with taking an approach that tries to challenge. There was a clear desire to ask engaging questions in exhibitions such as CultureLab², but there was also recognition that an approach like that opens the museum to criticism.

"You need to move into a position where you are actually exposed... you almost have to be prepared to accept that you are going to open yourself up to criticism."

There was also recognition that while there was a desire to engage with a broad range of communities, co-creation can be a more complex process to navigate; there are challenges in wider engagement.

"The key, I think, is finding platforms allowing a range of people to participate across the spectrum and I think that's part of the challenge."

Other challenges were considered to be trying to find ways for visitors to engage at different levels with each exhibition.

"At the moment everyone gets the same experience no matter what they want out of it, we sort of offer them the same level, but we need to start breaking that down into different layers."

One member of staff noted that there were always contentious areas waiting to be explored.

"I was actually posed the question, recently, do you buy artwork by Michael Stone?"

All of the suggested activity, as well as the challenges to working in this way, at least in part, rest on the views of the range of stakeholders working alongside National Museums NI, contributing to the social peace process. National Museums NI's director framed the direction of the subsequent interviews.

² CultureLab is a new exhibition at the Ulster Museum exploring cultural stereotypes, with the tagline: Don't Believe the Stereotype. The exhibition takes a playfully provocative approach, and includes the famous 'Differences' blackboard from the hit TV series Derry Girls. Culture Lab will run from 20 February 2020 to 31 October 2020.

"Another thing we would like you to test is what is the level of reputation and credibility? ...Whether people have got confidence in you to do this ...We feel the response to the gallery is allowing us to push a bit further ...what we need to understand is how fast and how much further we can push? Because... if we do this right, and we do this properly, then we should be able to push this quite far."

4.3 Findings from engagement with project groups

Four focus groups were held with groups National Museums NI identified as having had particular input into, and perspectives on, activity relating to the Troubles. All groups met at the Ulster Museum.

Group	Key activity with NMNI
Academic Advisory Group	Comprised of academics who advise the museum, most notably in development of the Troubles and Beyond exhibition.
Voices of '68	Comprised of two history teachers, one representative from Corrymeela and one member of museum's education staff. Group have worked together on Voices of 68 schools' conference. Troubles-related workshop also developed with Corrymeela.
WAVE	Comprised of two of WAVE's staff and two members who have both contributed to exhibitions. WAVE partnered with NMNI and Colin Davidson for the Silent Testimony exhibition with CD. Other collaborations include WAVE's provisions of NMNI staff training, along with other 'outreach' activity.
Healing Through Remembering	Comprised of members from a range of backgrounds. HTR have provided a 'critical friend' role to museum over the years, most specifically a focus group with Karen Logan last year. Both NMNI and HTR are members of the Sites of Conscience, a global human rights network.

1. What has worked well?

Each group commented most extensively, though not exclusively, on the exhibitions they had most engagement with.

Silent Testimony was commented on by two of the groups, focussing on how the portraits were the conduit by which people could emotionally engage with the trauma and suffering of the Troubles that still exists today. There was also recognition that while the exhibition was very much about the Troubles, it was about people's experiences on a human level, without blame or any kind of party politics. The exhibition was perceived to be a relatable experience not only for people with an understanding of the Troubles, but also visitors from beyond Northern Ireland. Participants also commented on the exhibition's positive reception when it travelled to other parts of the British Isles.

"The Colin Davison thing, which I think is the closest we have come to ... a decent kind of memorial or recognition of the victims and survivors, [they] have both been influential in giving the museum the courage and the scope to do more."

There was extensive comment about the Ulster Museum's yearly conference on Voices of '68, which offers approximately 130 school pupils the chance to see round the museum and hear from and engage with some of the key protagonists of the period. The strengths of the conference were perceived to be its format over the day, its placing of the Civil Rights movement in a wider, international context and the chance to engage with people with first-hand experience.

"My students have been able to sit and listen to some of the key players from the civil rights period ... this year particularly, the panel included people from the Unionist community who maybe had a

different perspective on the civil rights ...a number of my students came to me afterwards and said they found it quite compelling because they could sense the contention on the platform."

The other strengths of the project were considered to be the range of people and perspectives included; one participant noted the model could be used for other anniversaries.

Discussion on the Troubles and Beyond gallery tended to focus on its use of artefacts (not least in comparison to the gallery it replaced) which were perceived to have made it more interactive, and therefore more accessible to a broad range of visitors. It was also noted how it placed the Troubles in a context, and included other voices, such as LGBT.

"I think that's one of the real strengths of it, absolutely, is I think the presence of objects and photographs, just the whole collection of things, that people can come to that from regardless of what their background is, regardless of what their perspective is."

Participants also commented on how the gallery had been assembled drawing artefacts from a range of sources, including local communities.

"If somebody wants to contribute to it, you can feel a sense of pride in terms of you being able to contribute and to be part of what's going on. I think that's fantastic because that gives local people ownership... and a wee bit of pride that actually there is a place for their memorabilia, there's a place for their story."

In general, there was recognition that the museum provided a space that was accessible, polyphonic and set up to invite conversation.

"I think if you are bringing young people in here and asking them to go in and see Silent Testimony and to watch Hear My Voice, to visit the Troubles and Beyond, they are getting a very, very different take on a historical perspective here that takes the sectarianism and the politics out of it and I think that will get rid of that fear around having the Troubles conversations, which a lot of people are still afraid to do."

2. What has worked less well?

A key theme was the perceived lack of space in the museum and that, in the current Troubles gallery, some topics receive less attention (one participant suggested more inclusion of Section 75 groups) or been largely omitted (such as more references to deindustrialisation).

While there were positive comments for the Troubles and Beyond gallery, particularly its interactivity and openness to contribution, there was expression in three of the four focus groups that the overall narrative of the events of the Troubles was not clear enough. This led some to consider the gallery was primarily for people who already had some understanding of the Troubles.

[What's missing?] "Probably a narrative in some ways, sometimes, and I can't put my finger on any one thing and say this should have been said, but it's when you go through, you go through a timeline, it's what do you put in and what do you leave out?"

"It was more about people who had lived through the conflict than those who don't because I felt that for someone who doesn't have any knowledge about the conflict, that exhibit you have to fill in the gaps."

In a similar vein some others perceived it as being difficult for tourists who might benefit from "more of a steer" through what actually happened. One participant took a long view of the development of the current Troubles gallery.

"I think they began with a thing that said here's Bloody Sunday, here's Bloody Friday, here's Bono coming, here's Omagh, and it was these kind of big peak events which is not the way human beings engage with the conflict ... you deal with the everyday, but they have almost gone a bit too far, that if you go into that exhibition you are just bombarded with stuff and you get no idea of the kind of the changing nature of it."

Other minor elements of discussion included what was considered missing or could be added to the exhibition for example recreating the feel of the Troubles, particularly with sounds and certain visuals.

"I thought soundscape, you remember back to the troubles, all you heard was helicopters night and day all the way through, and I thought it would be nice to recreate that really recreate something in the ring of steel in Belfast City Centre."

Consideration was also given to the Voices of '68 exhibition and the associated schools' conference. It is considered to be well attended, but it is also oversubscribed with only 130 places each year. Discussion also included how the current education officer is stretched between primary, secondary and tertiary levels. This creates pressure on time, and the Troubles-related workshop, developed primarily for GCSE level, now tends to be used more for international visitors, three or four times a year.

A Voices of 68 pack has been created for schools' use, but there are no records of how widely, if at all, this is being used, and there were also some concerns about the exhibition itself. While it was considered to be of high quality in its content, it was perceived that it was sometimes overlooked as visitors made their way round the museum.

"You'll get one or two people who are engaged with the 68, but ...just where that is and because it's like a headphones thing you'll not see that many people engage with it."

3. What were the aims? What has been the impact?

Each focus group was asked what they considered the museum was hoping to achieve, and what contribution any of the aforementioned activity made to society. Some of these aspects have already been mentioned, such as emotional engagement with the experience of the Troubles, and particularly the trauma and suffering of people today. Adding to this, there was a strong theme that the museum is seeking to open up space for reflection and discussion, in comparison with the previous Troubles gallery which one participant described as "kind of closed down".

Participants frequently expressed this 'opening up' in broad ideas; the museum provides the possibility for the expansion of knowledge, which can lead to critical reflection, including holding new or an increased number of perspectives on an aspect of history. Participants considered this to be true of all four of the exhibitions listed, however it should be noted Art of the Troubles received less consideration in

the focus group discussions. The provision of alternative perspectives was considered a key area of impact for National Museums NI.

"You get lots of public history in Northern Ireland on the streets and almost none of it, unless it's funded by the CRC, is multi-vocal; it's all part of a single identity."

One focus group considered Silent Testimony especially, to have a more universal impact.

"That picture, that portrait, is a voice for thousands of people, hundreds of people, not even just here maybe to do with our Troubles or our conflict, there could be people living here now that have come through the Syrian conflict, Bosnia, and they could go in and they could just read that there and just relate."

Overall, there was a sense across all focus groups that National Museums NI very clearly desired to help people engage not just with the conflict in Ireland over centuries, but also its forms and impact today. One participant noted information about the Red Hand of Ulster in one of the galleries; an explanation is present, visitors can engage with it or not, believe the story or not:

"I said you can do that with a red hand; you can do that with the conflict. I think they are on that journey. I think they have come quite far... I think they have had people realise it's something that we need to talk about and deal with... they have a role in doing that and they have really kind of stepped up to it."

One focus group commented with depth on what success for the museum might look like. Success, they maintained, had to go further than footfall, it was also considered to be about offering ideas to a broad range of people, creating a safe space for people to be curious.

Groups were also asked about their input into the process of development. There was some variation on the amount of influence each group perceived it had, however, there was agreement that each group was, at very least, listened to by National Museums NI. At least two of the groups expressed shared values with the museum that led to productive working relationships, culminating in exhibitions that are engaging.

"If there was a kind of wider objective that we would have shared. I think... we create an exhibition or help to create an exhibition which anybody can come along to and get something from and not feel they are being told what to think. And we kept returning to the same concepts; critical, multi-vocal, getting first person on everyday experiences."

The subsequent benefits of each group's relationship with National Museums NI were considered to be having an end product in keeping with the group's aims, for example, a history conference that gave insight into a curriculum area, an exhibition that students could be brought to, highlighting the cost of the Troubles to people today, or, in more general terms, wider expression of division in society that can inform processes of healing.

4. What is the role and status of the museum?

In keeping with the museum's perceived aims of creating engagement with and space for reflection on the past and its effects on the present, the focus groups commented on various aspects of its role, starting with encouraging curiosity that invites deeper understanding of a topic, depending on the

individual. There was consideration given to the idea that local visitors should feel a sense of connection, but at the same time have their thinking challenged, particularly against a backdrop that some perceived to be resistant to challenge.

"The role of the museum is around being an anchor to the country that you are in and having roots through all the different decades and about chronicling what is going on here, architecturally, historically, through art, through everything."

"It's an important role, we live in a society that's shaped by very simplistic narratives and we elect political representatives that by and large push these narratives, so it is a big thing to have this space which is maybe just quietly not going along with those narratives or questioning them and I would see that as something that has an important social benefit."

The benefits of offering a challenge were considered to be that people would have an improved understanding of the place where they lived. Groups felt this was a key role for the museum, not just for current audiences, but for generations to come. One group in particular felt this was a critical role for all cultural institutions, not just the museum.

"Even moving forward like in years to come when we are all gone, it's important that there is going to be something here to explain the madness that was here for all those years. Even as far as transgenerational trauma ... is concerned, in years to come people might want to research and see why my mummy was like that, why my daddy was like that, what made them be like that?"

"There needs to be an effort a society wide effort to deal with the past then the major cultural institutions are schools, universities, colleges, museums and archives should be leading the way because they are the custodians of the material evidence of the conflict and they are the repositories for expertise for interpreting it."

One group in particular emphasised that dealing with the past was a role for everyone and that self-reflection was critical. This group considered a key role for the museum was to examine its own history and place.

"It should be self-critical of its own place in British history, particularly these sorts of museums who have gone around the empire collecting bits and pieces ...it is now the job of this sort of museum to critically analyse its place in this space."

While the Ulster Museum is the national museum, which brings certain advantages, some members of this focus group noted that the museum's origins, history and status carry disadvantages in that it can be perceived as being a Protestant/Unionist institution.

"Being in this institution with all its imperialist practices that create what is a British style museum, still gives it a problem that I don't think they can actually address easily, but I think given all of that it does a reasonable job."

This particular focus group also noted that an enormous benefit of the Ulster Museum is that it is free and therefore accessible to everyone. Further, one participant also commented on the "affection" they perceived many people to hold for the museum.

Other groups considered a major advantage of the museum's status is that it is more often perceived as a non-threatening space that can house collections and exhibitions that include multiple perspectives.

"As far as I know this is the only museum which has put together a gallery which is multi vocal and represents different sides to a conflict in a deeply divided society. There is one beginning in Lebanon, there is none in Israel, Palestine, there is none in any of the former Yugoslav Republics, there's none in Cyprus, none in Sri Lanka; they can't do it."

Two groups in particular, felt strongly that the museum's inclusivity was a key strength when seen in the context of many other 'single identity' exhibitions, as it provides an "all-encompassing view" that prompts broader remembrance. Some saw this as a unique attribute.

"This idea of making it personal, personal over politics, it's so important. And having a well-lit room where people can go and interact and there is good stuff as well as the bad stuff that's really representative of the good and bad in Northern Ireland. I think if it's going to be like you say if it's going to be represented anywhere it has to be in the National Museum in Northern Ireland."

5. What activity should be undertaken going forward?

Each group was asked what they would like to see the museum doing in the future, as well as their thoughts on how the Ulster Museum might be a 'Museum of the Troubles', with a definition provided from the draft masterplan.

Current content

In terms of building on what is already existent in the museum, two focus groups commented extensively on the need for more facilitated engagement with Troubles and Beyond, especially with schools. One group considered this to be a specific role, while the other considered this could be managed by staff already working in the museum. Both agreed that experiential learning should be at the heart of any approach, and that any individual leading sessions should be a competent facilitator with inter-personal skills capable of assisting groups to navigate contentious and sensitive topics, as well as having a thorough knowledge of modern history. Ultimately, the aim for facilitated sessions should be for perspectives to be challenged, simply by the presence of alternatives.

"I would like to see an interface between what's behind the glass and what the kids are learning and I think the only way to do that is with experiential learning... for the kids to make the connection 'that could be my mum or that was my mum or my granny or my uncle' because as they come in now, a lot of them are like 'sure this doesn't affect me'. Talking about transgenerational trauma, it does. ...At least if [the museum] are going to involve this, to have people who are experts at teaching and have experience to be able to influence how it's taught."

New content

The focus groups also listed a number of aspects that could be added to the exhibition space. These included more explicit first-hand perspectives on the Troubles, Silent Testimony to be permanent and other aspects of the Troubles researched in the same manner as Voices of 68.

"I think their [Troubles and Beyond] exhibition could have gone a lot further in having explicit perspectives ... like maybe interviews with combatants, firemen, whatever, all sorts of people and getting the very human story and I feel that the gallery really doesn't do that."

"I would very much like to see us moving the format forward and investigating other periods of the Troubles, because it's a format that works well and having the protagonists within it adds a real life to it, and then also then it's enriched by what we have in the galleries."

In addition to aspects of the Troubles, two of the focus groups noted there was still space for information and reflection on the end of the 'decade of centenaries', specifically partition, but also including the first years of the new northern Irish state in the nineteen twenties. Approaches to this period in time could be used to prompt greater reflection on the Troubles.

"Out there, there isn't a lot of commemoration in relation to the Troubles in the twenties, hardly any, so you have more open space to play with. The narrative isn't so pinned down and policed so you could actually start being critical, looking critically at what was happening in the nineteen twenties and you would have more space to create a critical narrative which you could then pick up and say maybe we should approach questions around the Troubles in that same perspective."

While the Consequences of Partition is the title of a unit in the key stage three history curriculum, one group expressed the view that delivering this part of the syllabus can be an uncomfortable experience for many teachers, and so any offering from the museum in this space might encourage teachers to engage with it more.

Another aspect that could be added to the existing exhibitions is the approach to peace, as well as what has happened since. Specifically, the suggestions included the societal changes over the course of the Troubles (such as the Fair Employment Agency and the Equalities Commission), the Good Friday Agreement (and subsequent agreements) and reflection on what peace actually looks like. One participant considered how the museum, and specifically the current Troubles exhibition, looks at peace building in itself.

"I think it could be more about the truth and reconciliation processes that we've been through because there's not a lot in there about post-Good Friday Agreement or how we are actually trying to deal with life after the agreement, because things just didn't stop there."

"How do you make sure that the message is 'this is what happened, here is the greyness and the muckiness, and here is where we are that we need to cherish and nurture'? They don't do that at the minute with it. It just says, 'look how awful it was, let's not go back,' which is too simple a form of peace building."

Northern Ireland, in its international context was commented on by two of the focus groups who considered examination of other ethnic conflicts could create discussion on universal aspects of how conflict affects human relationships. Comparison with Lebanon, Cyprus and Bosnia were cited as examples or relevant similar conflicts.

Wider engagement

While there was recognition of a perceived increase in the museum's outreach to other communities, a strong theme, commented on by all four focus groups, was the possibility of broader engagement beyond the walls of the museum. Travelling exhibitions were suggested, taking the museum's collections out to communities, and also engaging with communities in order to extend an invitation to engage with the work of the museum. One group suggested that a template for this kind of initiative already existed in Ireland during the 1916 centenary celebrations where they considered the involvement of arts groups to have been critical.

"I am a big fan of documentary theatre and also site-specific theatre, this is a funny kind of site because it's not really historic but the kind of stuff that the theatre group Anu for example has done with the National Museum down South."

There was recognition that setting up a travelling exhibition is time and finance consuming, however, but the group also suggested wider audience might be better created by inviting community groups for select tours to see something that appeals directly to their interest. Groups also suggested programming could be "nimble" if the other National Museum sites were used. There was also comment that further engagement with community groups might also make the museum more accessible and open up new possibilities for exhibition.

Tourism

There were varying opinions in the focus groups on the accessibility of the Troubles and Beyond gallery for people who knew little about the Troubles to begin with, tourists especially. There were recurring comments that tourists needed more explanation, and that it could be a more immersive experience, however, these perspectives were not unanimous, and not every group discussed tourism extensively. Other comment on tourism included comparison to the depth of other museums in post conflict societies and also a perception that the National Museum sites are not as integral a part of the 'tourist trail' as other centres.

"You can get that kind of gut churning moment in a museum. You can get that kind of 'oh my God', you can be close to tears in a museum, you could be made to laugh in a museum. It's supposed to be so immersive and I think that at times the Troubles gallery just doesn't go far enough."

"I know when friends of ours are coming over to Northern Ireland... they will say 'oh we've a black taxi tour booked for this date and we're going to see Crumlin Road Jail' so they have all this itinerary mapped out and the museum doesn't factor. Whilst I would see the museum as a historical context of telling a story in a neutral way, it's not getting into that tourist market as much as I think it should be."

Museum of the Troubles

Each group was also asked to comment on the idea of the museum being a 'Museum of the Troubles', as defined in the draft masterplan as being *"the place that provides the most comprehensive and balanced orientation to our recent past and contemporary 'post-conflict' Northern Irish society."*

Groups perceived the concept in various ways and so their responses were diverse, often with comments or questions that sought clarification on what this would mean in practice. One group interpreted the idea to mean the museum's activity would continue on much the same trajectory as it had begun, consequently their responses focussed on the space required. There was agreement that the Ulster Museum was not the best site in which to expand as it would require the removal of a number of other exhibitions, which might then 'unbalance' the museum.

This group considered the best way to offer a broader experience of the Troubles was to consider other sites, and perhaps a significant site. Crumlin Road Jail was suggested; a second group suggested a museum straddling a peaceline, possibly with entrances on either side. Some of this group, however, expressed a perceived lack of ambition from the museum to expand in this manner.

"Did the Ulster Museum ever look to see if it could get a space especially to [build a Troubles Museum]? On Cupar Way there is a large area there which could, if you built a building there, you could actually take a third of the Cupar Way wall down quite safely."

"I am afraid that the lack of interest the museum has shown is leaving it open to private initiatives to fill the vacuum. There is an argument that we need a museum of the Troubles, but there is no hope of... this institution filling that vacuum and it's going to be the private sector that's going to step in and you are going to have a big paying institution by the Titanic."

This was not a unanimous opinion in the group, however, with others questioning the concept of a Troubles museum itself and considering if there was enough distance from the conflict for this to happen. There was support both for National Museums NI to be part of any initiative in that direction now and also some expression that National Museums NI did have the capacity to provide a central contribution in the Troubles space, not least to develop the origins of the conflict from a broad range of perspectives, in a more detailed manner.

"If it is a new build ... then working now we are not going to see it for another five potentially to ten years ... so the answer here, is the Ulster Museum, if it is interested, needs to be involved in engaging and asking the questions and being a leader."

"If the Ulster Museum did it right then we don't need a Troubles museum... I think we need the Ulster Museum to be a go to place that covers the whole thing, that deals with the difficulties of it but that then can also signpost you out."

A third group, while affirming the museum's multi-perspective approach, heard an element of dominance in the concept of a 'Museum of the Troubles', and also questioned the idea of 'balance'.

"Part of me, I don't know, it depends what way you want to read that. Part of me reads that as two fingers up to some of the wee independent museums, the Free Derrys, the Republican Museum....so it would be an interesting way to position yourself as a public museum, that word 'balance' in particular; how balanced can a state institution be?"

The group preferred the idea of 'multi-perspectivity', adding that no one would ever seek to portray what happened at Auschwitz in a 'balanced' way.

Partnership

A theme from all the focus groups, inherent in all of the ideas for going forward included, is that whatever the museum goes on to do has to be in partnership with other communities, institutions and leaders across society.

"I would summarise [going forward] in the word power-sharing... this is not up to the Ulster Museum ...to solve the problem, it's a collective... it needs to be a society wide effort and what has happened is that we have had power sharing institutions up on the hill at Stormont, but there hasn't been a parallel engagement in civic society in dealing with the past and that's what's being put off and put off and put off. One of the reasons it's being put off is because of failure of leadership in the cultural institutions. I think you can point the finger at the universities and the schools and the museums and the archives and the libraries and the cultural institutions, that haven't worked together collaboratively to promote this, and I think that's what needs to be done. Acknowledgement is where it needs to begin, and self-examination and self-reflection;

acknowledgement that we have not done as well as we might have done and a kind of a determination to work together for the common good."

6. What are the challenges going forward?

The focus groups spent the majority of time on the museum's activity, role and future planning. There was little in-depth comment on what the challenges to continued work or future work might be. While some challenges were considered, there was also recognition, both explicitly stated as well as inferred, that the development of the museum's activity over the last several years had met little serious challenge or outright criticism. Two focus groups commented specifically on possible political pressure to tackle contentious topics in a particular manner, and that the museum, should, to some degree at least, expect this.

"Part of the problem of being a public institution is... you have to look over your shoulder, politicians award funding, so how far can you go before you have got people on your back for what you are doing?"

4.4 Findings from engagement with wider stakeholders

As noted in the methodology given the wide range of perspectives from which the interviewees spoke, for the purposes of reporting, we have subdivided the stakeholders into two sections, according to the information evidenced in the interviews. The first group consists of stakeholders who evidenced more knowledge of the museum's activity or had worked closely with the museum. The second group of stakeholders evidenced a more limited knowledge of the museum's activity and may not have worked as closely individually with the museum. It should not be inferred that we considered one group to be more important than the other, simply that the two groups spoke from differing knowledge bases. It should also be noted that in some cases other individuals from the organisations the interviewees represented, have been working closely with the museum.

The wider stakeholders were subdivided so that the perspectives offered might be more easily processed and considered by National Museums NI staff, as opposed to offering an immediate review of all sixteen stakeholders together. We do not consider one group to be more important than the other, although the interviews in group one were much longer, on average. (This shouldn't be a surprise as group one knew the museum's work best and therefore could answer more questions in greater depth). Group two, while having less detailed knowledge of the museum's work, have specialist knowledge of their fields and we consider their perspectives and opinions to be of equal value to the museum. Summary findings are presented for each group, however the Summary of key project findings (section 5) collates both findings from both groups.

Organisations in Group 1	Organisations in Group 2
Bloody Sunday Trust	British Council
Colin Davidson	Corrymeela Community
Conflict Textiles	Community Relations Council
Kabosh Theatre Company	Department for Communities
National Lottery Heritage Fund	George Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice, Queens University Belfast
Special EU Programmes Body	Queens University Belfast
Towards Understanding and Healing	Queer Space
University of Ulster	Tourism NI

1. Group 1 - What has worked well?

Stakeholders commented to some degree on the three most recent Troubles-related exhibitions but most extensively on Troubles and Beyond.

Two of the interviewees specifically noted the setting for Silent Testimony; the gallery, the lighting and the ambience created. One considered there to be *"an outpouring of feeling; people were prompted to respond in so many different positive ways"* while the other assessed it as *"an incredible piece of work"* and went on to note the momentum it achieved for the museum to continue to work in that space.

The multi-perspectivity of Voices of 68 was also considered to be a new approach for the museum, including the further engagement of academics. There were also perceptions this approach influenced Troubles and Beyond.

"It's that diversity that is within the content, it's that plurality so that you have got a lot of different voices being expressed ... it's what I would describe, and others would describe, in academic terms as an agonistic environment."

There was some comment from stakeholders that the new Troubles gallery was an enormous improvement on what had been there previously, particularly the move away from key moments and journalistic images, to the inclusion of the impact of the Troubles on 'ordinary' life.

"That image of somebody burned out and saving a TV just shows that no matter how different you are, or how many political differences there are, everybody thinks the same way about the things they would lift and save and then showing a normality in an environment of abnormality is really quite, well, it's provocative, but it's really enlightening and particularly for the younger generation. Again, they are such visual learners nowadays because of social media and so... drawing artefacts from iconic photographs is such a compelling thing to do; when I had read that story about the television, I thought, that's just brilliant."

This approach was considered to increase the possibility of discussion of the conflict stakeholders believed was sometimes avoided. The artefacts were thought to offer a challenge to look at the stories of the past in interesting and different ways. Some interviewees explicitly expressed that the composition of the gallery made it more inclusive, with some considering the nature of the museum's engagement with communities to assemble the collection to have had a very "powerful", positive effect on individuals.

"I could see there was more buy in and that it was covering a bigger base of issues around the conflict. I think there was a genuine attempt to engage with sections of society that previously hadn't been engaged with."

One stakeholder particularly commented extensively on how the museum has been gradually increasing its reach over time referencing the donations from community groups to the museum's collection as evidence of these relationships. Their assessment was that these developing relationships has not only provided groups with a connection to the museum, but in turn has shaped its work.

"There has been a big change in personnel in the museum and also a change I suppose in their focus and they have got all their new strategic plans and stuff around it that look very much more about how they can be more outward focussed and engaging with the community, and that itself has started to inform what it is that they are going to do."

Other comments on positive aspects of the museum's work included the development of drama around various periods and themes, with the creation of scripts which allowed performances to be transferred to other venues. This stakeholder considered these to have been engaging for audiences, who "don't expect living history" and the humanisation of the past.

2. Group 1 – What has worked less well?

It is notable that from the stakeholders who had worked closely with the museum or were most familiar with its work in this area, there was very little negative or critical comment on the museum's activity so far. Expression of what was working less well was generally expressed as what could work better, which is included in the section on future activity. Two interviewees specifically commented on the nature of Troubles and Beyond. One stating that while they were "pleasantly surprised" by the overall approach in

the gallery, more could have been done to provoke conversation from what was on display. Another considered a clear contested narrative to be absent.

"If anything can be enhanced, it's the notion that we have a contested narrative in this place. Often, museums attempting to portray the conflict do it on the basis of the religious issues, and sometimes the roles of government, the roles of churches; states can be excluded."

3. Group 1 – What were the aims? What has been the impact?

Each focus group was asked what they considered the museum was hoping to achieve, and what contribution any of the aforementioned activity made to society. The stakeholders' perspectives generally support the model that:

- the museum offers space for stories of the Troubles to be shared and heard;
- these may offer new perspectives and information to the hearers;
- this creates the opportunity for people to reflect on their own stories and thinking.

"I think on that the fact that a leading cultural institution is taking a lead and to be seen to be taking a lead in demystifying it and 'demythifying' the past as well, because not only do you see your story you actually see your story in a different light and so it's not about just going in and seeing your story and seeing yourself reflected there, it's how that relates to something else and actually you may learn something about that as well."

Stakeholders often referenced the difficulties of working in this area, not least because so many organisations were considered to "shy away from it". There was some expression of the museum's creative use of space and a wide range of positive comments about the museum was taking on more responsibility to allow people to explore the recent past and develop their thoughts about it. One stakeholder commented that the museum is providing a forum "for those internal debates to take place," or, in the words of another interviewee, "They're giving an audience space." Some interviewees also provided examples of the kinds of discussion the museum's work has stimulated.

"The stories are told by ordinary people who have experienced the troubles... The other thing I find... from this exhibition, is the fact that it's allowed to do other activities around the exhibition like bringing people, having workshops... The world beyond is very important because it's not only the Troubles, it's not only in Northern Ireland, it's beyond what happened here, how what happened here has an impact in other countries. Why is it that so many other people from other countries like Catalonia or the Basque country come and try to learn from the way Northern Ireland faces the conflict?"

"I think that's at the heart of really what's happening now, is that people can go to the museum and see their stories and it's making that really intimate personal connection in a way which the objects in the past didn't really; you were being told why they were important as opposed to actually seeing that personal connection with it... The number of people who stand around talking to people that they haven't met... they don't even come with... [and say] 'so that reminds me of this or that reminds me of that.'"

One interviewee spoke about the wider importance of offering people the chance to talk about the conflict in Northern Ireland, not only as a means of processing what happened, but also as a possible means of defusing possible future conflict.

"The value of the National Museums is that it creates that space to be able to have a difficult conversation because of the context in which it has been placed... If you don't have a vehicle and a platform to have those discussions, then really you are storing up a reiteration of the conflict for the next generation, it may be bubbling below the surface but it will come back again, so I think that's one value."

Stakeholders largely offered a balanced perspective on the museum's development, recognising that change is always a slow process in an organisation the size of National Museums NI. Stakeholders were largely agreed there was much greater articulation of purpose and greater quality of work. Some linked CultureLab to this wider development.

"Something quite profound happens when you do those sorts of things [like CultureLab], so in terms of that objective or aim; I think the museum is really hitting on it now."

4. Group 1 – What is the role and status of the museum?

When stakeholders were asked to state the role of the museum in contemporary Northern Irish society, they returned to the themes of offering new perspectives and information to the audiences to create the opportunity for people to reflect on their own stories and thinking.

Stakeholders in this group agreed that museums are repositories for artefacts and information, not least to keep a record of the past for future generations. But stakeholders in this group also commented, to varying extents, that the role of the museum is also to challenge people's thinking. This challenge is not for its own sake, but challenge that disrupts what people think they know so they have a better understanding not just of the past, but also the shape of the present.

"It's not all about necessarily safety, but it's also about challenge... to get people to move on, to get people thinking and to think differently and that by sort of looking at the past in a more honest way, and therefore in a more truthful way, we can actually get to a better understanding of why the past has an importance for us today and tomorrow."

Some considered the role of challenge in the context of Northern Ireland, and that it should include examination of how history is recorded as well as legacy and justice issues. Some expression was given to how the responsibility for this extends beyond museums.

"A normalised museum that covered ancient Egypt, ancient Greece, the natural sciences in the way that you get when you go to the British Museum in London; it's all fine and well, but we are different, and we are different for a reason and that has to be captured in our museum beyond just exhibitions."

"I think in civic space we can tell a very different story than the stories that are told at a community level. So, you go round your east and west Belfasts and you will see community memory everywhere. In civic space it's a very different responsibility, so I think the likes of the Ulster Museum, Belfast City Hall, the regional museums, the libraries, all have a responsibility to get us to think about who we are as citizens in different ways."

Comments about what 'success' might be for a museum, in this area, related not only to the audience's development of an understanding of the complexity of the past, but that there is also challenge about what this asks of the audience as citizens of the present and the future.

While the museum's role of challenging its audience was universally agreed, there was also expression from one of the interviewees about the limits of its role. The interviewee reiterated that the museum was best placed to create thinking space, but not "preaching" or "overly educating" and also recognising how the it can assist healing, without assuming a healing role.

"The museum does not have the role of perpetuating healing in this place and I don't think it should have. There are many more bodies that can do that, but what it can be is a conduit for that."

To a lesser degree, stakeholders also commented on a social role for the museum, a meeting place for people, as well as its role to tell a historical and cultural story for tourists through a wider lens than a single identity museum or a black taxi tour.

Unlike the focus groups, most stakeholders in this group did not comment extensively on the status of the museum. One interviewee, however, considered the Ulster Museum to be the best art gallery available in the north of Ireland.

"[The museum] has the status of almost being a national gallery for NI; a unique and quite extensive collection of its own, of very significant national and international works of art and so there was a gravitas being afforded to the exhibition Silent Testimony purely by the fact that the museum were wanting to show it."

Other stakeholders recognised aspects of that 'gravitas', with varying degrees of recognition of how the museum's status as a national museum can provide a context that encompasses other stories, becoming part of a larger resource for understanding. The status of a national museum also affords it a leading role in the wider practice and development of museums, especially those working in aspects of contested history. One interviewee considered the museum to be a "conduit through which they bring all the other stakeholders together", while another commented specifically on how the museum might lead; advocating for statutory support, helping the development of ethical approaches to contested narrative and offering advice and support to smaller museums. The interviewee also thought that, as a museums' network develops, different museums might then offer each other time and space as a resource for travelling exhibitions.

Despite the prestige of being a 'national museum', one interviewee asked if this actually led to unintended bias, or the perception of bias. The interviewee was not making the accusation of bias, simply asking if that was how the museum might be perceived by some. Another stakeholder also commented on this theme with their perception of the museum perhaps being seen as British.

"For some reason, I think of [the museum] maybe as British... It's the Ulster Museum, yet when I have been in it, I don't think it's very British."

Similarly, given its geographical location, it was queried if most people visiting were "middle class", and if the programming was "possibly on the posher end of the spectrum?", though this interviewee affirmed the Ulster Museum as a "neutral space", in that it was an acceptable place for all groups to come to.

5. Group 1 – What activity should be undertaken going forward?

Each stakeholder was asked what they would like to see the museum doing in the future, as well as their thoughts on how the Ulster Museum might be a 'Museum of the Troubles', with a definition provided from the draft masterplan. The responses from this group of individual stakeholders covered a wide range of ideas and approaches, but could be considered in three broad areas; general approach, content-specific ideas and wider development through engagement and partnership.

General approach

There was agreement among stakeholders that the museum should be creating activity to engage people and offer the opportunity to consider new information, often through the medium of storytelling. While there were many and varied suggestions for what the museum could or should do next, there was broad agreement between the interviewees that National Museums NI was on the right trajectory. None of the suggestions or ideas that follow prompt a markedly different approach to what the museum has already been doing.

"From a political point of view, at the highest levels, it's virtually impossible to come up with any sort of resource or any sort of comment on our recent past which brings everybody on board. It's contentious, it's fraught with danger, but it doesn't mean we shouldn't talk about it. It actually is very much the things we should be talking about. I don't have a very specific answer to the question [what the museum should do next], what I would be saying is that the museum should be continuing to have the courage it has had... [in showing past galleries] It shouldn't be saying 'we've done that, we've commented on our recent past.' I think the museum has a role now, and has almost carved out that role itself, that it should still be a place of inspiration and debate on our society and to do that through art and artefact exhibition, I'd say it should continue to ... think as creatively as it has been."

Two interviewees did not make specific suggestions but instead proposed there was greater importance in the museum looking strategically at the kind of values that underpin its work, with multi-perspectivity at its core. Once there is a sense of strategic direction, then content can be created from a variety of possibilities, not least the museum's own collections, where there may be artefacts of interest, but the 'right' moment hasn't yet come for these to be exhibited.

"The museum has got to be brave and say look we are actually going to look at over the next ten, twenty, thirty years, we're going to look at all different aspects of what went on, but we are going to look at it in a much broader way ... The balance needs to come in through all the other voices that are there [sometimes] the ordinary voice, the people that went through the Troubles and weren't involved at all, their voice is marginalised... It's not just the voices of the activists, it's the voice of general people as well, so I think you need to construct a framework within which all of this sits."

Content

Storytelling was a theme running through many of the content-specific ideas and the interviews in general, particularly the stories and experiences of ordinary people. Acknowledging the benefits of sharing narratives, stakeholders suggested the addition of further stories in the museum's work.

"I think it's people's stories... it's the story of everyday life during the Troubles ... it's about these multiple narratives, it's recognising there are so many narratives through that whole period ... what was the role of the churches throughout all of this period? What was happening to young people through all of this period? What was the women's story through all of that? The more one can explore those different strands, I actually think the richer it can become."

Peacebuilding, both throughout the Troubles as well as in the recent past, was a theme mentioned by a couple of the stakeholders. One felt little of that story had been told and considered the very nature of the topic might lend itself to activity beyond an exhibition, for example making it accessible for cross community groups to be able to engage with it as part of a programme. Other suggestions on this theme included looking at ways people had tried to process and interpret the conflict over the course of the Troubles, such as early manuscripts of key books, for example Seamus Heaney's 'North', or other plays about the Troubles, long since performed.

Only one interviewee mentioned the end of the decade of centenaries at any length, commenting that partition might be approached by the museum. Their perception was there was an advantage in the kind of space the Ulster Museum could provide which would allow for debate, discussion and challenge.

Similarly, only one interviewee mentioned the permanent housing of Silent Testimony and felt there was a desire from across society to see it on display at the Ulster Museum.

Partnership

Stakeholders offered a variety of ways National Museums NI might encourage wider development through engagement and partnership. While there was not as much specific discussion of the future development of Troubles and Beyond as there had been in the focus groups, there were inferences that the museum's work to date provides a platform to work with others. This might involve work through other venues.

"How do we move beyond this [exhibition]? What could the museum be doing? I have a sense of the museum being a wee bit like the Arts Council, it's Belfast-centric ... it could be popping up in Derry, in Londonderry, in Omagh, in Portstewart, in south Derry, at the Heaney Homeplace with something."

A key partnership, mentioned specifically by three of the interviewees, was with other museums, given that, from the perception of one interviewee *"they're all in the same business; the business of telling stories."* Greater collaboration possibly expressed as a network of museums was considered; museums would not only cooperate on engagement with legacy issues but also encourage and advise on conflict and legacy programmes. A museum's network could also look at the approaching anniversaries, but with a wider, collective lens. One interviewee considered how there was some expectation of leadership from other museums.

"I know [National Museums NI] are doing this, working with those other smaller institutions so that the space is negotiated and it's not felt that they're standing on toes, but there's an understanding because actually there's a quid pro quo for [smaller institutions] to be engaged with the [Ulster] museum as well, in terms of how they can benefit from the museum's expertise, but also the people attending might go to their sites."

Stakeholders offered other ideas for partnership, but one interviewee affirmed the idea that partnership does not always have to be directed towards collaboration. Partnership, they considered, can also be about listening to others about what stories need to be told. In their experience, conversation between cultural and community partners can often raise certain issues or ideas, until *"sometimes you realise, everybody is having the same conversation"*, which, in time, may become pieces of work. The next stage, from this interviewee's perspective, is to consider how best to challenge an audience, so that whatever activity is created, it is not a passive experience for them. The decision to develop work within an area is

then made based on a clear understanding of the organisation's aims and objectives, organisational capacity and also personal interest from the organisation's personnel. They asserted there had to be some "fluidity", a "not so rigid" methodology, giving space for the idea that when something is of interest to the curator, if there are partnerships with others, it might well be because there's a wider conversation taking place. Partnerships create spaces for honest conversations about what narratives are missing and how a new audience can be engaged so that the museum isn't "*preaching to the converted*".

Adding to this idea of partnership without agreed collaboration, one stakeholder proposed a seminar for various groups and individuals contributing to projects related to conflict and peacebuilding. The meeting would create a space for each group to showcase what they have done, or are working on, as well as discuss creative ideas where future collaboration might be possible. They considered that there was a lot of work being done, but this wasn't always widely known.

Various specific collaborative partnerships were suggested e.g. with community-based organisations, Four Corners Festival, Festival of Ideas, links to academics and universities, theatres, local museums such as James Connolly Interpretive Centre and the Museum of Free Derry, with added commentary on who else might be added to that space. Cross border links and international partnerships were also mentioned as means to offer new and creative ways of seeing the conflict in Northern Ireland.

"I do think that the way they are working is stretching already into a direction, so the fact that we are already thinking of other events that will take place in 2021 that are related to international recognition of conflict. Then we'll put the situation of Northern Ireland in the light of [conflict in other countries] ... International expertise is also always very welcome because it brings fresh air and it brings ideas and it also brings commentary."

Stakeholders were asked to comment on the museum playing a nationally and internationally significant role as a Troubles Museum, defined in the draft masterplan as being "*the place that provides the most comprehensive and balanced orientation to our recent past and contemporary 'post-conflict' Northern Irish society.*"

This aspect was less thoroughly addressed by this group of stakeholders owing to time constraints; because of this group's greater interaction with the museum, there was more to discuss in the earlier stages of the interview). As with the focus groups, there were some misgivings about the language used. Concerns were raised over the need to have one, ownership and, again, the expressed idea of 'balance'. One interviewee considered 'balance' wasn't the primary concern, activity that provoked an audience was of greater importance. They commented that the museum might allow space for other groups "to be the provocation"; ultimately engagement was key as "*people aren't going to the museum to see what they already know.*"

More positively, however, while stakeholders had reservations about the concept of a 'Museum of the Troubles', they clearly saw a key role for the museum in that space.

"If you tried to curate something as the official sort of collection, I would say there would be probably quite a lot of resistance to that... there should be no one party in ownership of that. But should the museum develop what it's doing to have a Troubles museum? One hundred per cent, because whether we like it or not when people come off the cruise ships and all of the bus loads coming up from Dublin from the cruise ships that have landed there, they are coming to Northern Ireland because of our history."

"I don't think we need, in Northern Ireland, a Troubles Museum, I think we just need the Ulster Museum to build on what it's currently doing... having a singular Troubles museum would not be the answer... because it doesn't allow it necessarily to be as evolving and keep changing in the way that the Ulster Museum is currently trying to do."

6. Group 1 – What are the challenges going forward?

Stakeholders suggested a wide variety of challenges National Museums NI might face as it continues to develop its work in a Troubles space.

The most common aspect of challenge interviewees talked about was resistance to accepting there are contested narratives. One interviewee referred to it as “a warts and all” approach, which isn’t accepted by everyone. They went on to cite the example of the sit-in at the Museum of Free Derry³ when relatives of two of the victims of Bloody Sunday protested at the inclusion of the names of British soldiers who also lost their lives in the conflict at that time. They commented that it must have been a very challenging time for staff, with tension in the local community, but they were also adamant the role of the museum shouldn’t change.

"The principle of that was, this is a museum, the museum cannot cherry pick, they cannot decide to take somebody's name out ... That's an example of the museum saying, 'this is the role of this museum.'"

Interviewees also commented on the challenge of sharing Troubles stories with a positive end point. Understanding, while intended, may not always be promoted. There is also a challenge when others may have the expectation of ‘balance’ in the storytelling.

"We're in our third decade of peace building, how do you continue to tell that story and for it to continue to be relevant and to continue to challenge?"

"It shouldn't be about one for one, and that's the challenge that you have if you want to do something, you run the risk that it becomes politically loaded again when it shouldn't be. And that is the challenge of it being post-conflict, but not quite society."

"It would be courageous to say everything doesn't have an opposite and an equal or not everything has an opposite or an equal, and it's a difficult thing to do but that's where the courage would come."

Two of the stakeholders noted the challenge of the perceptions around the museum itself, suggesting that some do not see the museum as neutral, rather as British / with strong links to the UK.

"I think when you go in, the links to UK-based museums, I can pick up on that very strongly, but less so with links to museums in the south; it's little things like that [that might stop people from going]."

³ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-foyle-west-41158833>

Other stakeholders commented on physical challenges, as space in the Ulster Museum is limited, and financial challenges as budgets have been cut year on year. Nevertheless, there was recognition the museum has been innovative with its resources.

"I think if you reflect back on what they have done over the last five or six years, they've been able to keep innovating... [mention of CultureLab]."

Looking at approaching sensitive topics and contested narratives, another stakeholder considered the need for the museum to recognise its context, its own sense of the landscape, its strengths and abilities, its partners, its experience and its own vision, mission and values. After all those aspects are in play, there also has to be a recognition of the museum's capacity and limitations; choices have to be made.

"Certain compromises are made that ... mean that you're also going to compromise on your access or your impact. You can't fight every battle; you have to choose."

Only one interviewee explicitly mentioned was the possibility of political pressure, although they conceded that that had changed slowly over recent years.

Some of the interviewees also commented on the courage the museum has shown, citing creativity, innovation, and invitation (particularly to new voices and narratives) as examples of this. One interviewee noted courage can be displayed in the face of telling a part of the story sections of the audience might not want to hear and cited the example of the Imperial War Museum coming to terms with telling a story with a contested narrative. Finally, one interviewee considered there is courage in leading.

"I think it's based just on the basic principles of what they do and be leaders, but there will always be criticism and there will always be people who will say it's not the role of the museum to do this that or t'other. But I think it's having that degree of confidence which allows them to go and explore the space that hopefully they will continue to explore. Even take a lead."

7. Group 2 - What has worked well?

Overall, the stakeholders in this group were very positive about the museum's work; few interviewees made any criticism. They commented with greatest depth on Troubles and Beyond, and more generally on the museum's development across the Troubles space. Silent Testimony received some direct praise for creating a space for reflection.

"What they have done so far, I think, has been incredible even in the last couple of years, so they are on a good journey. I think they have demonstrated they can work on the boundaries here, there is a degree of confidence, and they have challenged the boundaries."

"Work like Colin Davidson's is phenomenal in terms of how that gets us talking about our past and the legacy of the conflict."

Some stakeholders commented on the improvement over the old gallery, with Troubles and Beyond now considered much more engaging, painting a fuller picture and directly "tackling some of the issues". While wider engagement in its development and its general inclusivity were noted, one interviewee commented they had picked up on some criticism; "some people felt the narrative wasn't quite the narrative that they would have expected." Where some felt 'left out', however, others felt included, specifically that the gallery went deeper than Protestant and Catholic and beyond listing key events to present multiple and conflicting narratives. One interviewee asserted the new gallery had been well placed in the context of the museum.

"I liked the social history of it, the on the ground story-telling from particular people and the way it has been linked in with the Ulster Museum's use of history, all the way down to prehistoric times... There's a real sense of how it fits within the context of the larger story of the province and Ulster and Ireland and Britain."

There was also comment that as the museum has increasingly engaged with the Troubles, presenting different perspectives, there has been an increased understanding of the audience as an active participant and that the museum has gradually become an increasing presence in this space.

"Like a benign creep, that there has been an engagement on [the museum's] part and that I probably am more aware of a more permanent presence... [they have] exhibitions that address the recent past, than a clear beginning and end."

8. Group 2 - What has worked less well?

Interviewees found it generally hard to comment on what has worked less well about National Museums NI work in this area.

One, referring to the Troubles and Beyond gallery, commented that there was "probably a sense of shared space, rather than dialogue between stories." Four stakeholders perceived a need for a clearer story to be told, not in the sense that there was one way to view the Troubles, but that visitors might have needed assistance with the wider story in which the artefacts sit. Another stakeholder also felt perspectives needed developing.

"It was a lot of general artefacts from the Troubles... with multiple perspectives but maybe not a narrative leading us through that experience ... There are two major narratives of Irish history"

being told on this island and think we need to respect both of them if we're going to have a shared future."

9. Group 2 – What were the aims? What has been the impact?

Each focus group was asked what they considered the museum was hoping to achieve, and what contribution any of the aforementioned activity made to society. The strongest theme from this group of stakeholders is that the museum's most recent work is wider and much more inclusive, therefore it invites people into an experience, especially if their own story is represented in some way.

"When I think of the Ulster Museum doing its best work, I think of it as a neutral space where people coming from different communities and different backgrounds feel like my story can be told here."

One interviewee viewed this sense of inclusion to be critically important to a social peace process (and was impressed by the museum's use of that phrase).

"I think what the museum has done through those exhibitions has given some tangible material representation of that, people coming in off the street, like myself, can then immediately relate to and I think that's really important so that people can see the peace process isn't just something that happens up at Stormont, it's happening all around us, in the objects that we use, in the people that we meet and I think that's critical, really, for building peace."

Stemming from this inclusive approach, stakeholders perceived that while the museum documents history or communicates contested narratives, ultimately opportunities have been created for people to reflect and possibly to understand more fully.

"You trust museums, you trust organisations like the Ulster Museum, so there is reflection on what's there. You might not agree with everything, but it's a place for reflection."

Going further, two interviewees considered that reflection might then stimulate discussion about the topic being presented; one cited the recent CultureLab exhibition, the other the Poppies: Weeping Window installation in 2017.

[It] "enables a wider cross section of people to go in and look at that and think about questions of identity and look at how some of these stereotypes are there; it's a conversation starter."

"People came to have a look at [the poppies], but also it was kind of fairly open, it invited discussion and debate and disagreement as well."

10. Group 2 – What is the role and status of the museum?

The stakeholders in this group frequently mentioned archiving and education as a key role, both for local and international visitors, before returning to reflection and then building on what that might lead to. Three of the interviewees commented on how a museum needed to reflect its geographic, historical and cultural context; as one interviewee expressed it, *"organically linked to the community in which it sits."* Stakeholders also noted the need for a museum's activity to be enjoyable, imaginative and thought-provoking in its engagement; challenging its audience and offering the possibility of transformation, were also considered to be key roles.

"Inviting them to reflect on their preconceptions and challenging their preconceptions, opening them out to the possibility that there are other voices and there are other world views, there are other ways of doing things."

"Challenging the audience is an aspect of the role... because we are called to step outside our own experience, to be curious about experiences beyond our own. The challenge can be enjoyable or uncomfortable, but it should always be welcoming and always try to sustain our curiosity."

In the context of a national museum in a capital city, one interviewee commented on how the role of the museum should also be to tell the story to visitors to Northern Ireland.

"The museum, I think, has a key role in presenting the story of Northern Ireland... visitors coming to Northern Ireland really want to get under the skin of it, so museums have a key role there because they have the collections, the history, the curatorial ability to be able to present the story of Northern Ireland in a really meaningful way."

Two stakeholders made specific comment on the museum's status. Both considered the Ulster Museum to have considerable standing, specifically in the trust afforded to it as an institution as well as the resources at its disposal.

"There is a unique ability here that will not be easily replicated... the access to the collections... they are not absolutely unique in that... that's one core asset that they have, the other one is the intellectual capital and skill set to be able to do this well, and I think the third really important one here is that as a national museum they have the standing and the recognition and the credibility."

11. Group 2 – What activity should be undertaken going forward?

Each stakeholder was asked what they would like to see the museum doing in the future. The responses from this group of individual stakeholders covered a wide range of ideas and approaches that largely fall into two broad, overlapping categories; continuing and wider engagement with communities and audiences, and development of and fresh approaches to content.

Wider engagement

A small number of stakeholders commented on the need for the museum to continue to engage with a wide range of community groups, not least to ensure that a variety of voices were heard. Some interviewees commented this was simply a matter of the museum continuing what it has been doing.

"I think they have got an opportunity through permanent galleries, exhibitions and maybe events to try and continue to mediate and express those multiple and maybe conflicting narratives points of view, the complexity of those narratives and they have a valuable role."

One interviewee repeated comments reported to them about developing the narrative in Troubles and Beyond. The same interviewee also commented on the need to be looking at what the legacies of the past mean in the present. This might include considering the *"reflection of past legacies through the lens of the contemporary diversity in NI"* and if exhibits might also include how people, who have relatively recently arrived in Northern Ireland, have seen the conflict play out in society.

Stakeholders commented not just on wider engagement with community groups, but also how the museum might engage with a wider audience. One interviewee noted that museums and exhibitions, by

their nature, tend to be inside. This can restrict the audience, however, as not everyone visits a museum. Consideration of other sites, on a permanent or temporary basis, can provide new opportunities for engagement.

"Those kind of walk through on the site experiences, I think ... can be so much more powerful than going into quite a grand building and see things in cabinets."

There was also comment on how footfall across a variety of museum sites (not just National Museums NI) might also be developed with clearer signposting of audiences.

Content

Stakeholders made some specific comment in regard to the current Troubles gallery. Two interviewees noted the need for a clear timeline through the gallery, with one suggesting that either as part of the current exhibition, or as an extension, following the life or lives of particular people would place some of the artefacts and events in greater context.

"In the folk museums, you can follow the life of a particular family ... To be able to follow a particular figure through the Ulster Museum's exhibition ... that might be an interesting story to be told and why they became radicalised and what were the effects of that trajectory... If you could get four stories, starting with someone who was not radicalised and ended up radicalised... somebody who found themselves starting from one extreme but was turned towards a more moderate or more reconciling path, that would be interesting."

The same interviewee also commented on the possibility of having staff members, or access to people from outside the museum, who could use the Troubles gallery to "curate conversation" and facilitate groups to engage with the themes of the exhibition. Similarly, other stakeholders commented on various ways to engage with the legacy of the past. One considered continued use of the arts to be important and perceived that further activity similar to Silent Testimony, offered an alternative approach to engaging with the Troubles, which might also develop international connections.

"It needs to be looking at different ways of talking about the past; the safe space of the museum can enable some of those difficult conversations that can't happen in politics or other spaces; the arts is where that happens."

International approaches and comparison were mentioned by three other stakeholders. One asserted Northern Ireland was "too self-focussed" and there was agreement that an international dimension to future content might explore comparison with other global conflicts and the responses to them, prompting discussion of learning from other places. Individual stakeholders commented on the possibility for exploration of the European context to the Irish peace process or US assistance; one interviewee considered the museum to be well placed to develop international connections.

"The co-creation... could be interesting. It might be not so much what's already out there, but let's choose another country or region and work with them to co-create something."

Deeper understanding of the Troubles was a theme picked up in relation to tourism. One interviewee considered there to be a gap in the current market for a broader story, that isn't told from one community perspective. In their assessment, the Ulster Museum could be a key part of telling that story with tourism taking a larger part of their activity.

"People want to get out there and see ... and understand Belfast ... they want to uncover it where it happened ... however there has always been this unanswered question about where they can get it, rather than just getting a one sided version of the story ... they want to hear some of this from the horse's mouth ... but where do you get that broader story? ... Museums are often really, really critical ... they have the ability to speak the unspeakable or tell those stories that others may find a little bit more difficult. I think there is definitely some sort of gap in the market for what we know is a big story of Belfast and Northern Ireland."

More generally, there was a widespread desire simply to see fresh approaches in content and presentation that help people connect to the past and understand its effects on the present and future. There was some expression that the museum staff were open to conversations and collaboration. One interviewee commented that whatever content the museum wished to explore should be in the light of New Decade New Approach with regard to its broad direction for economic benefits, social inclusion and cultural identities. They recommended that while the draft Programme for Government remains in place, the Executive will put forward a new direction which the museum might respond to.

Museum of the Troubles

Depending on the length of the interviews as well as the depth with which interviewees were able to comment on the museum's role and activity, some of the stakeholders were asked to comment on the museum playing a nationally and internationally significant role as a Troubles Museum, defined in the draft masterplan as being *"the place that provides the most comprehensive and balanced orientation to our recent past and contemporary 'post-conflict' Northern Irish society."* From this group of eight stakeholders, three weren't asked specifically owing to the constraints of time, two had no opinions on the question and another interviewee did not perceive an immediate need as they felt the current flow and direction of work was enough.

Of the remaining two interviewees, one, while not advocating for a 'Troubles museum' specifically, asserted there needed to be more available to help tourists understand and engage with the conflict. The other considered the existence of the Titanic museum proved there was scope for a specialised museum. They perceived the Troubles to be too large a topic to be adequately covered in the Ulster Museum, which they considered to have a specific role. They were also uncertain about what the purpose of a Troubles Museum would be, specifically if this was for the understanding of visitors or a space for education and reflection for residents of Northern Ireland. While they concluded there was a need, they also recognised some of the challenges.

"I think there is scope for a second museum ... that is for the Northern Irish public ... I think there will be a challenge in moving away from a non-offensive, neutral space where everybody can find their voice represented, to something a little more honest about 'here are the dominant narratives and how do we make sense of what is troubling and conflicted in that? How do we move from a conflicted history to a shared future?"

12. Group 2 – What are the challenges going forward?

Stakeholders suggested a variety of challenges National Museums NI might face as it continues to develop its work in this area. While there might be a desire for freshness, one interviewee noted that can be difficult in such a small geographical area as Northern Ireland.

When interviewees recognised the breadth of opportunities for the museum, some also commented on the need for these to be filtered and the museum to focus on where it's best placed; planning and strategy were also recognised as challenges.

"The virtue of a particular exhibition or particular phase of an exhibition ... It's a recognition that you can't do everything ... You shouldn't lose the ability to focus."

One interviewee commented on the need for the museum to also be aware of the narratives that needed challenged.

"The curators of a museum need to have a pretty good sense of where the default narrative is that needs to be challenged ... It needs to know the collective, default narrative that one assumes, and then respectively push that in ways that get us back to a better, well rounded understanding. That probably includes getting voices amplified that have been silenced somewhat."

Some responses related to how challenging the audience and 'pushing' back on default narratives can be met with resistance.

"Generally speaking, we don't want our preconceptions challenged, it makes us feel uncomfortable, anxious, insecure, destabilised... but nevertheless that's what [the museum] should be doing."

But there was also agreement that even in the midst of sensitive issues and contested narratives there can still be thoughtful, creative ways to help people engage.

"Maybe there are different ways of interpreting and discussing and looking back and looking forward... Work like the Derry Girls thing, is popular culture, but it is getting people into the museum and they are talking about bigger issues."

This particular interviewee also suggested that while the decade of centenaries was "universal", looking at specific anniversaries from across the Troubles, could be problematic for the museum as decisions then have to be made on what to mark and what not to mark.

One final aspect of challenge considered the geographic setting and status of the museum itself.

"You have to attract people into a part of the city that sometimes has connotations of maybe a little bit of exclusivity ... It does feel to me that ... it has extended its reach probably through the exhibitions it's been doing and some of its promotions ... it's still one of the landmark places for visitors."

5. Summary of key project findings

What follows is a summary of the key project findings drawn from across all our work; our review of the exhibition evaluations, interviews with staff, focus group discussions with project groups and individual stakeholder interviews.

We suggest a public-facing document is comprised of the background to the project, an overview of the methodology and a version of the following summary of findings and conclusions and recommendations that follow after this section (and does not include a detailed summary from each audience as is provided in section 4).

5.1 What has worked well?

National Museums NI is seen to have developed important partnerships with individuals and organisations

The four focus groups assembled for this research, along with a majority of the individual interviews, were chosen because they had partnered with National Museums NI in an advisory or consultative capacity, collaborative capacity or in provision of a piece of work for the museum. Partnerships with other groups were evident in each of the four key exhibitions.

- Art of the Troubles required the development of relationships/closer relationships with the artists themselves;
- Silent Testimony was developed in partnership with Colin Davidson, WAVE Trauma Centre and the eighteen sitters;
- Voices of '68 partnered with Dr Chris Reynolds, eye witnesses of the Civil Rights Movement in the sixties and partnerships with schools as an annual conference is arranged;
- Troubles and Beyond was assisted by an academic advisory group and the collection was developed through connections with community groups.

The wide range of connections that National Museums NI has made in relation to its work in this area are broadly perceived to be working well and are considered productive for both the stakeholders and the museum. Staff and stakeholders alike are keen for these connections to continue; however, there were also suggestions that the museums engagement could be broadened further still.

Overall there has been very positive engagement with the exhibitions by the public

On the whole the material that we have reviewed about the exhibitions to date has been very positive with high percentages rating the exhibitions as good or very good (92% of visitors rated the Art of the Troubles as very good or fairly good. 91% rated Silent Testimony as very good). The visitor feedback also suggests high levels of engagement with often very personal, meaningful and emotional comments being made. There was also very little criticism within the questionnaires. The one caveat that needs to be placed on all this, is that all the questionnaires have been completed by a self-selected sample; often when this is the case the data is not necessarily representative of all visitors.

Stakeholders commented in most detail on the activity they had most engagement with, and most frequently on Troubles and Beyond. Art of the Troubles, while firmly in the mind of museum staff, was less to the fore in discussion. Feedback from across all the stakeholders that we spoke with has also been largely positive and supportive, whilst also making developmental suggestions.

Visitors have had a learning experience

Visitor responses demonstrate that people come to the museum and discover new information, or perhaps new perspectives. Across the evaluations there was evidence in the feedback of visitors engaging with content in fresh ways, often leading to a reflective response. Voices of '68 in particular seems to have offered visitors a new approach to engaging with what, for many, is a well-known period in Northern Ireland's history.

The direct references to reflection in visitor feedback, as well as the level of personal comment, evidence how many people see the museum as a space for reflection. The Silent Testimony evaluation lists the effects on visitors as bringing back personal memories; creating an emotional response; considering a common sense of humanity; and an appreciation of Colin Davidson's work. Aspects of these themes can be found in the feedback for each of the other three exhibitions, especially the return of personal memories, as well as many comments on what the experiences of the past meant for the present. Of 362 visitors who responded to the question 'How did the gallery make you feel?' when they visited the Troubles and Beyond gallery, 96% said it had an emotional impact on them. It is clear, whether a visitor had direct experience of the Troubles or not, the gallery prompted both a learning and emotional experience.

All stakeholder interviews/groups discussions likewise touched on similar themes around the art exhibitions providing an emotional learning experience at a relatable human level, and the exhibitions creating a polyphonic, accessible way in to learning about the Troubles.

In addition, visitors accept exhibitions that challenge their thinking and stakeholders see this as a fundamental role of National Museums NI

The feedback, particularly from the Voices of '68 evaluation, demonstrates that many visitors accept the museum has a role to offer new perspectives, challenge perceptions and invite visitors to re-examine previously held views. Within the evaluation findings there does not appear to be any expectation that the museum should only be offering traditional historical overviews.

As is noted under the summary section around the role of National Museums NI, stakeholders see challenging the audience as fundamental to the role of National Museums NI.

Stakeholder feedback on the programming of the museum has been positive

i. Silent Testimony created an emotive and reflective space

When Silent Testimony was commented on, it was specifically noted as having been effective as a first for the museum to engage visitors in a new, emotive reflective way, achieving momentum for National Museums NI to move forward. For some stakeholders it is considered as the closest the country has to "*a decent kind of memorial or recognition of the victims and survivors*" of the conflict.

ii. Voices of 68 Conference is perceived positively

There was extensive comment from the Voices of '68 focus group about the Ulster Museum's yearly conference on Voices of '68, which offers approximately 130 school pupils the chance to visit the museum and hear from and engage with some of the key protagonists of the period. The strengths of the

conference were perceived to be its format over the day, its placing of the Civil Rights movement in a wider, international context and the chance to engage with people with first-hand experience. The other strengths of the project were considered to be the range of people and perspectives included; one participant noted the model could be used for other anniversaries.

iii. The Troubles and Beyond gallery is perceived to be engaging and much broader than its predecessor

The new approach to the gallery was welcomed by many of the interviewees. Where the old gallery consisted only of black and white photographs and text, the new gallery now contains a variety of artefacts, artwork, video, 'memorabilia' and other voices from the time of the conflict. This much broader, social response to the Troubles, was welcomed as it is considered to be more engaging, documenting the 'everyday' experience of the Troubles, as well as key periods. Interviewees also noted how it engaged not only a much wider age range in the gallery's footfall, but also provided talking points for visitors; the artefacts particularly, are considered to invite conversation.

At each stage National Museums NI has been learning lessons and growing in confidence

It is clear that the work so far has prompted ongoing internal reflection about developing greater coherency in National Museum NI's role with regard to the social peace process, and greater clarity about the aims when commissioning / undertaking work. At each stage the museum team appear to have taken on board important lessons and grown in confidence. Art of the Troubles and Silent Testimony developed understanding about creating a space for reflection, allowing visitors to develop a different perspective and to challenge their own thinking through art. Voices of '68 placed the events of 1968 in Northern Ireland in an international context and, engaging with protagonists from the time, tried and tested an agonistic approach to a period in history, where multiple perspectives, including contesting narratives, are expressed together. In contrast to the two previous exhibitions, Voices of '68 directly engaged with the political ideals and events that preceded the Troubles. The subsequent permanent Voices of '68 exhibition provided a link from the Ulster Museum's twentieth century history gallery to Civil Rights and then to the newly opened Troubles and Beyond gallery. The approach to the Troubles and Beyond Gallery provided opportunity for further learning and engagement. Various community groups donated artefacts and much wider consultation was undertaken on the gallery's development demonstrating the museum's increasing experience in partnering with others. Victims' groups, academic advisers, history teachers, community groups, and other parties who have all been engaged in addressing the legacy of the past and contributing to a social peace process have all regularly worked alongside National Museums NI in recent years.

Staff recognise the journey that the organisation has made. They see the changes as having been slow and measured, and in step with increasing levels of stakeholder engagement, as well as greater understanding of the audience. There was also reflection on the opportunity for future programming to have greater clarity in its aims and objectives, and contribute to the aspirations of the New Decade, New Deal agreement.

5.2 What has worked less well?

In general stakeholders found it difficult to suggest areas that have not worked so well. Consideration of what was working less well was generally expressed as what could work better. The following section focuses on the key issues raised in relation to the current activity.

The narrative within the Troubles and Beyond gallery needs developing

A large number (three out of four focus groups and 6 stakeholders) of those engaged in the research suggested the need for a clearer narrative through the Troubles and Beyond Gallery. There was some feeling that the gallery was primarily for people who already had some understanding of the Troubles and that there was a need for a clearer story to be told, not in the sense that there was one way to view the Troubles, but that some visitors might have needed assistance with the wider story in which the artefacts sit. It was considered that the Gallery is perhaps difficult for tourists (and those with less knowledge around the broad events of the Troubles) to engage with and that they might benefit from “more of a steer” through the events of that time. A minority commented there was a need for a stronger contested narrative. A broader narrative, providing greater context for the artefacts, was deemed as being one way to support deeper engagement.

This is also a theme discernible in the evaluation data collected from visitors. Evaluations of Troubles and Beyond specifically asked for what should be added. Just under two thirds of respondents (62%) suggested improvements: 20% asked for more personal/everyday stories, 19% suggested other artefacts, 13% asked for more background information and 10% suggested the enlargement of the gallery with some comments asking for more interactive content. Of the 440 data responses we have seen, 22 (5%) commented on finding the gallery hard to understand and asked for greater clarity in the form of a timeline or more background information. 16 of these were from visitors from outside of Northern Ireland demonstrating that there may be a need to improve this aspect of the gallery so that it is more accessible for a wider audience.

It is important to note that in each case these surveys have been completed by a self-selecting sample. Visitors who feel strongly one way or another are most likely to fill out a self-completion questionnaire and visitors who do not care greatly one way or the other may not provide detailed feedback. This means only extreme views may be represented in the survey results; they might not report what most visitors believe.

There are opportunities to develop Troubles-related work with schools

The Voices of '68 exhibition and the associated schools' conference is considered to be well attended, but it is also oversubscribed with only 130 places each year. The current education officer is stretched between primary, secondary and tertiary levels. This creates pressure on time, and the Troubles-related workshop, developed primarily for GCSE level, now tends to be used more for international visitors, three or four times a year. A Voices of '68 pack has been created for schools' use, but there are no records of how widely, if at all, this is being used, and there were also some concerns about the exhibition itself.

There was also comment that more support could be given to schools to support engagement with the Troubles and Beyond gallery.

A range of specific improvements were suggested

A range of detailed suggestions for improvement were made by staff and stakeholders. Staff made references to detailed aspects of exhibitions where some element could have been added or improved, for example the inclusion of more references to ethnic groups in Troubles and Beyond, or the inclusion of the video of interviews with the twenty artists who contributed to the Art of the Troubles.

Stakeholders likewise noted that ideally the Troubles and Beyond exhibition could have had more space and covered more themes such as de-industrialisation / the impact of the Troubles on Section 75 groups. Other minor elements of discussion included what was considered missing or could be added to the exhibition for example recreating the feel of the Troubles, particularly with sounds and visuals.

Staff also mentioned the lack of publicly available record of what the museum has achieved to date in this area. However they recognised that this is likely to be corrected in the future, as Karen Logan is currently writing a book on the museum's development, with stakeholders and the wider museum sector in mind.

5.3 What were the aims? What has been the impact?

There is a need to develop a more detailed evaluation framework

Having reviewed the internal evaluations, and completed discussions with staff, it is clear that National Museums NI's strategy (in terms of its broad approach) for its Troubles programming has evolved over time, with the aims of the last two exhibitions more defined than with the first two. A more comprehensive strategy (in terms of an integrated approach where the vision, mission and values of the organisation, its programming output with clearly defined outputs and outcomes, and means of assessment of these all interconnect) has not yet been developed. Further to this, stakeholders, while often positive about the work of the museum, have, on the whole, been unable to articulate National Museums NI's strategy.

5.4 What is the role and status of the museum?

National Museums NI is a well-respected and trusted institution

Over the course of all the interviews and focus groups, the significant role of National Museums NI and the Ulster Museum especially, in documenting the past, educating and assisting learning was acknowledged. The Ulster Museum is considered to have 'gravitas'; it is a well-known and recognisable historic building, a respected, largely trusted institution and, in the absence of a national gallery in Northern Ireland, some considered it as the most prestigious venue available to exhibit artwork. As National Museums NI, it was also noted as having considerable, though finite, financial resources, physical space over three sites, the resources to collect, as well as the ability to access international partnerships. Many of the interviewees also commented on the affection they, and sections of the public, have for the Ulster museum, often stemming from childhood. In summary, the view of National Museums NI is largely one of positivity and credibility.

Some stakeholders mentioned that the Ulster Museum is not necessarily seen as neutral by all communities in NI

Several comments were made across all groups (staff, focus groups and stakeholders) about whether the Ulster Museum in particular was perceived as 'British', or an 'imperial-style' museum, both in terms of its origins and history, as well as its collections (for example, the Egyptian mummy). Many of the comments were posed as questions however, and not as deliberate statements assessing bias; those who raised concerns about the museum's acquisitions also commented that while reflection of the institution's own past was important, it was still making a contribution to societal engagement with the past. There was also some comment, however, on the Ulster Museum's site in an affluent part of Belfast

and, being a prestigious institution, if there were barriers to visitors coming from other parts of the city, the north of Ireland generally and visitors from a 'working class' background, young people especially.

National Museums NI should play an important role in challenging visitors about the Troubles

Despite the challenges of appealing to all communities in Northern Ireland, the museum was frequently perceived as a 'safe space'; a 'neutral' venue, inviting to all and a place for multi-perspectivity, in contrast to smaller, 'single identity' museums which might not always be perceived as 'neutral' due to a more focussed narrative. It is this overall reputation and status of the Ulster Museum that forms the basis for the broad perception among interviewees and focus groups that National Museums NI has and can make an important contribution to the peace process in its Troubles-related programming.

Interviewees in general, strongly expressed that the role of the museum was to challenge the audience to better understand the past, themselves and others, and to consider what this meant for the future. They saw the museum as offering a wider lens on the Troubles, and therefore the present, achieving this in part through the use of contested narratives. There was no expectation that an audience should be expected to agree with a different or opposing narrative, simply that an audience should be able to access it. Our review of the evaluation data collected through the museums own questionnaires showed that frequently visitors to each of the exhibitions were being challenged to reflect on their experience of the Troubles by learning about the experience of others.

5.5. What activity should be undertaken going forward?

Visitors were positive about the museum providing future activity in this space

In the feedback to Art of the Troubles, Silent Testimony and Troubles and Beyond, respondents were favourable to the museum continuing to offer Troubles-related work and made a broad range of suggestions. Evaluation comments very often responded directly to the nature of the exhibition, for example, 38% of evaluations from Art of the Troubles asked for more artwork, 17% for other aspects of the arts; 37% of evaluations from Silent Testimony simply said the museum should keep doing what it was doing. Persistent themes across all three exhibitions included incorporating other media/introducing greater interaction and gathering more human/everyday stories.

Stakeholders were largely unaware of National Museums NI's evolving strategy, and suggested the organisation continue its work and develop its values and strategy to help focus its activity

There was general agreement among stakeholders that the museum should be creating activity to engage people and offer the opportunity to consider new information about the Troubles. There was a desire to see fresh approaches in content and presentation that help people connect to the past and understand its effects on the present and future.

While there were many and varied suggestions for what the museum could or should do next, there were also broad suggestions from a number of stakeholders that National Museums NI should develop a clear strategy around its values, expertise and resources in this area to help focus its work on the Troubles, as it cannot do everything. Stakeholders said that it should look carefully at the context it is working in, who it is working with and where it is best placed to make a contribution.

National Museums NI needs to ensure that Troubles related programming is accessible to tourists

There were varying opinions from stakeholders on the accessibility of the Troubles and Beyond gallery for people who knew little about the Troubles to begin with, tourists especially. There were recurring comments that tourists needed more explanation, and that it could be a more immersive experience, however, these perspectives were not unanimous, and not every group discussed tourism extensively.

Stakeholders provided a wide range of ideas to develop current and new content

A range of suggestions were made:

- **More facilitation:** More facilitator-led engagement with Troubles and Beyond was suggested for general audiences but especially for schools. This built on the idea that experiential learning should be at the heart of any approach, and that any individual leading sessions should be a competent facilitator with inter-personal skills capable of assisting groups to navigate contentious and sensitive topics, as well as having a thorough knowledge of modern history. Ultimately, the aim for facilitated sessions was considered to be allowing perspectives to be challenged, simply by the presence of alternatives.
- **More storytelling:** Storytelling was a theme running through many of the content-specific ideas and the interviews in general, particularly the stories and experiences of ordinary people. Acknowledging the benefits of sharing narratives, stakeholders suggested the addition of further stories in the museum's work.
- **Peacebuilding:** Peacebuilding, both throughout the Troubles as well as in the recent past, was a theme mentioned by stakeholders. Ideas included looking at ways people had tried to process and interpret the conflict over the course of the Troubles, such as early manuscripts of key books, for example Seamus Heaney's 'North', or other plays about the Troubles, long since performed. Other ideas included considering the societal changes over the course of the Troubles (such as the Fair Employment Agency and the Equalities Commission etc), the Good Friday Agreement (and subsequent agreements) and reflection on what peace actually looks like.
- **Partition:** A number of stakeholders mentioned the upcoming centenary of the formation of Northern Ireland. It was commented that partition and the 1920's might be a period that could be approached by the museum. One group noted that while the Consequences of Partition is the title of a unit in the Key Stage Three History curriculum, that delivering this part of the syllabus can be an uncomfortable experience for many teachers, and so any offering from the museum in this space might encourage teachers to engage with it more.
- **Arts approaches:** Further arts-based approaches were suggested by a minority. Exhibitions in a similar manner to Silent Testimony, have a universality and this could be something developed with an international partner. Also, the permanent housing of Silent Testimony was mentioned by a minority with a desire to see it permanently housed at the Ulster Museum.
- **International opportunities:** International approaches and comparison were mentioned by a number of stakeholders. It was suggested that an international dimension to future content might explore comparison with other global conflicts and the responses to them, prompting discussion of learning from other places. Individual stakeholders commented on the possibility for exploration of the European context to the Irish peace process or US assistance.

It was suggested that National Museums NI engage more widely with audiences and communities

While there was staff and stakeholder recognition of a perceived increase in the museum's outreach to other communities, a strong theme was the possibility of broader engagement beyond the walls of the museums. Travelling exhibitions were suggested, taking the museum's collections out to communities, and also engaging with communities in order to extend an invitation to engage with the work of the museum. One group suggested that a template for this existed in Ireland during the 1916 centenary celebrations which used arts group engagement. However, there was recognition that setting up a travelling exhibition is time and finance consuming.

The group also suggested that a wider audience might be created by inviting community groups for select tours to see something that appeals directly to their interest. Groups also suggested programming could be "nimble" if the other National Museum sites were used.

The description used to define the Ulster Museum as a 'Troubles Museum' is problematic

Interviewees expressed a wide range of opinions on the Ulster Museum being a 'Troubles Museum' or 'Museum of the Troubles' with discussion frequently focussing on the value of a separate entity. There were reservations concerning the Ulster Museum's lack of physical space, and, if more space was given over to Troubles-related exhibits, would the balance with other aspects, such as natural history and art, be disrupted? Some interviewees suggested that a new site would be best; the Crumlin Road Jail was one suggestion; an interface site was another. Others expressed concerns that not enough time has passed to even consider the creation a Troubles museum and other stakeholders did not think a specific museum is required given the amount of work in this space already.

The definition in National Museum's NI's draft masterplan ("*the place that provides the most comprehensive and balanced orientation to our recent past and contemporary 'post-conflict' Northern Irish society*"), proved problematic on two accounts. Firstly, there was, on occasion, a perception of exclusivity in the language ("the most comprehensive"). Secondly, there was concern over the use of the word "balanced" in its approach.

National Museums NI needs to continue to work in partnership with communities and organisations as well as other museums

A theme from all the discussions was that whatever the museum goes on to do, it has to continue to work in partnership with others. A key partnership, mentioned specifically by some of the stakeholders, was the idea of working in a network of other Northern Ireland museums. The advantage of this concept was considered to be that museums could collaborate as well as develop ethical approaches to communicating contested narratives. A museum's network could also look at the approaching anniversaries, but with a wider, collective lens. As 'the national museum', National Museums NI could perform a leadership role in setting up and facilitating the network of museums. Not every interviewee explicitly stated that National Museums NI had a role to be a leading organisation for other museums, but those who did felt strongly that playing a key role in developing an active forum for museums working with the legacy of the past and encouraging social cohesion, was critical. There was some expression that working with National Museums NI would be desirable for many smaller museums.

Stakeholders offered other ideas for partnership. One interviewee in particular affirmed the idea that partnership does not always have to be directed towards collaboration. Partnership, they considered, can also be about listening to others about what stories need to be told. In their experience, conversation

between cultural and community partners can often raise certain issues or ideas, which, in time, may become pieces of work. Partnerships were considered to create spaces for honest conversations about what narratives are missing and how a new audience can be engaged.

Adding to this idea of partnership without agreed collaboration, one stakeholder proposed a seminar for various groups and individuals contributing to projects related to conflict and peacebuilding. The meeting would create a space for each group to showcase what they have done, or are working on, as well as discuss creative ideas where future collaboration might be possible. They considered that there was considerable ongoing work in this area which could be shared with NMNI.

Various specific collaborative partnerships were suggested e.g. with community based organisations, Four Corners Festival, Festival of Ideas, links to academics and universities, theatres, local museums such as James Connolly Interpretive Centre and the Museum of Free Derry etc. Cross border links and international partnerships were also mentioned as a means to offer new and creative ways of seeing the conflict in Northern Ireland.

6. Challenges

A range of future challenges were mentioned across the research:

- **Navigating sensitively the presentation of Troubles-related themes:** The challenge most frequently mentioned by stakeholders and staff was presenting multiple perspectives in a contested period of history. They noted difficulties may arise in taking an approach that actively tries to challenge audiences, leaving the museum open to criticism in a whole range of ways. There was some concern by a minority that the museum could come under political pressure for using an agonistic approach (allowing a range of contributors to tell their, at times conflicting, stories). Stakeholders noted that it will be an on-going challenge to make sure that the content the museum creates provides multiple perspectives and that providing a platform to previously unheard voices in and of itself can invite criticism. It was also noted that some of the themes the museum may wish to explore will just be deemed too contentious. There can also be an expectation of 'balance' in presentation, when a more complex approach is required.
- **Deciding on clear focus:** A challenge that was noted by a number of stakeholders, and that is already noted above, was National Museums NI deciding where it is best to put its focus, and what it is best placed to work on rather than trying to do everything.

Other challenges mentioned by smaller numbers included:

- **Financial and physical space constraints:** for example, budgets and space at the Ulster Museum impose limitations on the museum's future activities.
- **Audience perceptions:** A minority noted the positioning of the Ulster Museum in an affluent area of Belfast as facing an ongoing challenge to engage audiences as well as noting that perhaps some people see the museum as British, and with strong links to the UK, thereby limiting its credibility to work on contested narratives.
- **Co-creation can be a complex and lengthy process:** Staff felt that whilst there is a desire to engage with a broad range of communities, achieving this in practice could be challenging as it takes time and resources to deliver successfully.
- **Ensuring visitors can engage at different levels with each exhibition:** Staff considered that it was an ongoing challenge to creatively engage different audiences.

6. Conclusions & Recommendations

Conclusions

1. There is overall positivity about National Museum NI's activity in offering the public the opportunity to engage with the contested history of the Troubles through the presentation of art, artefacts and multiple perspectives. Overall there has been very positive engagement with the exhibitions by the public, and stakeholder feedback on the whole is positive. National Museums NI now has experience in creating exhibitions that through learning and challenge provide a space for reflection; this is evident from all four key exhibitions (Silent Testimony especially).
2. It is clear that National Museums NI has been on its own learning journey, becoming more comfortable and confident about playing a role in examining the legacy of the past from multiple perspectives. Its strategy in this area has also evolved. Interviewees in general recognised a developmental journey for National Museums NI and desire to see this trajectory continue.
3. Offering multiple perspectives on Troubles-related topics is a challenge in itself and may attract some 'push back' from sections of the museum's audience.
4. The Ulster Museum in particular, has in general a trusted and respected reputation and there is broad recognition that it can supply a multi-perspective narrative to what preceded, happened during and came after the period of conflict referred to as the Troubles. Some stakeholders questioned if the museum was perceived, by some people, as a 'British' institution, however, there is an acceptance that National Museums NI have a significant role to play in challenging audiences to think and reflect.
5. The current Troubles and Beyond gallery has many positive aspects, not least its more inclusive approach, focus on a social perspective and collection of artefacts, but there is broad agreement that the narrative within the exhibition needs to be improved. Stakeholders suggest it can be improved by providing greater context for the stories, making it more accessible to visitors who have little understanding of the Troubles. The addition of a broader narrative, providing greater context for the artefacts was noted as being one way to support further engagement by tourists from outside of Northern Ireland. There were also suggestions that more personal stories might be included.
6. It is evident that National Museums NI has developed partnerships widely over the past several years and these are acknowledged as having helped to produce a depth and quality of work. Partnerships have been wide and varied including relationships with individual artists and academics through to more formal working relationships with community-based organisations. Stakeholders suggested widening these partnership approaches to include Northern Ireland Museums, and/or perhaps even more extensive work to create a network of Northern Ireland museums that works collaboratively together.
7. A wide range of ideas were suggested for what National Museums NI might do in the future; however, stakeholders suggest that the organisation first establishes a clarity around its role in this area, and associated values, which help to inform its strategy, and therefore focus its activity.
8. The research suggests that there continues to be a desire for fresh, inclusive ways of looking at the conflict in Northern Ireland. Suggestions to develop current and future content have included:

opportunities to develop the Voices of '68 work with schools, the suggestion of more facilitator-led engagement with the exhibitions, including more of the stories and experiences of ordinary people during the Troubles, work on themes such as Peace Building and Partition, further arts based approaches and work to develop international comparisons.

9. The language used to describe the museum playing a nationally and internationally significant role as a Troubles Museum (*"the place that provides the most comprehensive and balanced orientation to our recent past and contemporary 'post-conflict' Northern Irish society"*) at times proved contentious. Stakeholders were informed that it was draft language, but it was sometimes perceived negatively, as National Museums NI desiring to dominate the space. It also raised queries about a "balanced approach". Our research has shown, from the perspectives of various key stakeholders, they are comfortable with National Museums NI connecting organisations and collaborating with others in this space.
10. While it was not a central theme in this research, there were recurring questions and comments about the breadth of the museum's audience not being inclusive enough of 'working class' and wider geographical audiences. The museum's current draft masterplan recognises the lack of engagement with visitors classified in the C2DE socioeconomic bracket who currently comprise 17% of the museum's annual visitors, despite 50% of households in Northern Ireland being classified as C2DE. Stakeholders also mentioned National Museums NI developing activities outside of the walls of their museums such as travelling exhibitions.

Recommendations

Local strategy

1. We recommend National Museums NI continues to develop its strategy in its Troubles programming, moving towards a more connected approach where vision, mission and values, programming decision-making process, programming choices with clearly defined outputs and outcomes, and means of assessment of these can be clearly articulated in a single framework. In turn, where appropriate, National Museums NI should give consideration to defining and communicating key elements of this to stakeholders.
2. Throughout this project stakeholders have demonstrated varying levels of awareness, and at times a lack of awareness, about aspects of National Museum's NI programming, development, values and intentions. We recommend National Museums NI reviews the key messages it is seeking to communicate and its methods of communication to key stakeholders.
3. We recommend National Museums NI focus on the opportunity to lead and facilitate a network of museums, who can work together collaboratively to provide a multi-perspective view of the Troubles. A key contribution to the social peace process could be made by developing such a network for the purposes of discussion and development of an overarching approach across these museums and attractions. This would provide a coherence to learning about the Troubles for visitors, as well as support the sharing of good practice, and enabling innovation through the collaborative sharing of resources such as artefacts and exhibition space. Contacts in this network might also provide a sounding board for expression of National Museums NI's internal development.

International strategy

1. There is an opportunity to further expand National Museum NI's approach to partnership working outside of Northern Ireland. Specifically we recommend consideration is given to developing an international relationship, for example this could result in a co-created or co-curated exhibition that prompts reflection on the effects of conflict on human relationships in a similar manner to Silent Testimony or indeed any other manner of appropriate collaborative activity.

Content ideas

1. We recommend, that consideration is given to how the narrative of the current Troubles and Beyond exhibition can be developed through, for example, the addition of a broader narrative to provide greater context for the artefacts.
2. There have been many and varied suggestions of content for the museum going forward – all of these merit investigation by National Museums NI. We comment on three specifically: partition, work with schools and peace making:
 - We recommend National Museums NI give consideration to its contribution to the centenary of Northern Ireland / anniversary of Partition in 2021. While this undoubtedly was a divisive period of time, it was also a critical moment in British and Irish history that places the Troubles in context. If the museum is to offer leadership within the context of a social peace process, then we perceive it has to make a noticeable contribution in 2021. It is a topic that would allow a polyphonic approach; the museum might offer hidden or forgotten narratives from a century ago. It is also a topic that invites examination of the present and the future and might include further examination of identity (nationality in a globally connected age) following on from the current work of CultureLab. It might also be a topic for collaboration or coordination with other museums or key stakeholders.
 - Programming related to Partition might also offer a resource for schools, given that the Effects of Partition is a component of the curriculum at Key Stage 3. Our research has found there are limitations in the museum's connection to schools in the Troubles space; the Voices of '68 conference, while highly engaging in its delivery, can only cater for 130 pupils per year and there is little school engagement with the Troubles and Beyond workshop developed with Corrymeela. We recommend National Museums NI review its current links to education and facilitated provision in this space, including offering wider facilitated engagement with the Troubles and Beyond gallery.
 - We recommend National Museums NI consider the peace process and peace building for future programming. This is a broad theme that could span efforts for peace at both social and political levels before, during and after the Troubles as well as ask provocative questions about peace means currently, and for society in the future. We are also aware this is an area currently under discussion within the museum.

Engagement and partnerships

1. We recommend National Museums NI review its current engagement with community groups, particularly those with community influence, as part of the museum's wider audience development strategy, so as the activity in this space reaches as wide an audience as possible. Inclusive, creative

and engaging ideas, however, can only be sustained through active partnerships with others who can stimulate and challenge National Museums NI from across society generally, and specifically in the arts, community groups, other civic bodies and organisations seeking to develop the social peace process and engage with the legacy of the past. Community engagement may also help address any negative perceptions of the organisation.

2. We recommend that National Museums NI looks strategically at its current partnerships both in terms of who it is engaged with (and which voices are missing) and also the means of engagement, specifically where there is opportunity to have a broader discussion and an exchange of ideas not always centred on the work of the museum.

7. Appendices

Appendix 1: Stakeholder organisations engaged

Organisations in Group 1
Bloody Sunday Trust
Colin Davidson
Conflict Textiles
Kabosh Theatre Company
National Lottery Heritage Fund
Special EU Programmes Body
Towards Understanding and Healing
University of Ulster

Organisations in Group 2
British Council
Corrymeela Community
Community Relations Council
Department for Communities
George Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice, Queens University Belfast
Queens University Belfast
Queer Space
Tourism NI

Appendix 2: Summary of the National Museums NI Evaluation of Art of the Troubles (2014)

This exhibition was developed in collaboration with Wolverhampton Art Gallery and provided a broad representation of responses to the Troubles by a range of artists from Northern Ireland and beyond. Some works were direct responses to violence inflicted on innocent victims. Some were shaped by the social and political outlook of the artists. Others captured visual aspects of conflict and division. Together they evoked a variety of experiences and emotions and reflected on the causes, impact and complexity of the Troubles.

The key exhibition aims were to:

- Represent work created by the artists themselves from their own particular perspectives
- Bring to a fruition the partnership with Wolverhampton Art Gallery
- Foster and develop relationships with leading artists
- Raise awareness and understanding of the artistic response to the Troubles

The evidence summarised in this report was collected through self-completion questionnaires, which were available to all visitors throughout the exhibition. 741 questionnaires were completed. As the data below shows the questionnaires were completed by visitors of varying ages and from different countries of origin, with the majority of people being drawn from the home audience of Northern Ireland (63%).

Age of respondents

Under 16	20%
16 - 24	17%
25 - 39	19%
40 - 59	27%
60 +	17%

Where respondents were visiting from

Northern Ireland	63%
Republic of Ireland	10%
England	9%
Scotland	2%
Wales	1%
USA	6%
Canada	2%
Europe	5%
Elsewhere	2%

58% of visitors said that they came to see the exhibition especially. Of these, 81% did so because they had a particular interest in it expressed as:

- General interest 38%
- Historical / artistic interest 31%
- Personal interest 16%
- Educational interest 14%

How did visitors rate the exhibition?

Very good	72%
Fairly good	20%
Neutral	4%
Poor	1%
Very poor	2%
Don't know	1%

How long did visitors spend in the exhibitions?

Under 30 minutes	22%
30 minutes – 1 hour	47%
Over 1 hour	31%

Visitors most frequently commented on two individual artworks. These were 'The Other Cheek' by John Keane and 'Woman in a bomb blast' by F.E. McWilliams. Numerous other artworks received comment, however.

When visitors were asked if they had learned anything new from the exhibition, 52% of respondents answered 'yes'; 15% answered 'no' and 33% left this question blank. Many people answered 'no' to this question saying that they had done so because they had lived through the Troubles and were familiar with the kinds of images displayed. Of the 52% who said they did learn something new the following trends were identified:

- Learning about the place of art in the Troubles
- Learning about the Troubles and the impact they had on people's lives
- Learning that not all artists who responded to the Troubles were from Northern Ireland
- Learning about the respective roles of Wolverhampton and the Ulster Museum in collecting and exhibiting Troubles art

When asked if the exhibition made visitors think differently about the relationship between art and the Troubles, 50% of respondents answered yes, 18% answered no and 32% left this question blank. Those who answered 'yes' felt art helped them to view the Troubles in a different light and that it is particularly important in capturing and eliciting an emotional, empathetic response to the Troubles. There was also a sense that art can show different viewpoints.

When asked how else visitors thought the museum should be interpreting the Troubles, they responded:

- Art and information (38%): more art exhibited and interpreted
- Audio/visual (19%): there was some demand for a more multi-media approach
- Performing arts/music/poetry (17%)
- Peace/future (14%): some comments related to capturing the situation now and looking to the future
- Social History/Human Stories (13%)

The Museums Libraries & Archives Council's 'Inspiring Learning for All' framework identifies five generic learning outcomes (GLOs). These are:

- Knowledge and Understanding: Knowing what or about something. Learning facts or information. Making sense of something. Deepening understanding. How museums, libraries and archives operate. Making links and relationships between things.
- Skills: Knowing how to do something. Being able to do new things. Intellectual skills. Information management skills. Social skills. Communication skills. Physical skills.
- Attitudes and Values: Feelings. Perceptions. Opinions about ourselves (e.g. self-esteem). Opinions or attitudes towards other people. Increased capacity for tolerance. Empathy. Increased motivation. Attitudes towards an organisation. Positive and negative attitudes in relation to an experience.
- Activity, Behaviour and Progression: What people do. What people intend to do. What people have done. Reported or observed actions. A change in the way people manage their lives.
- Enjoyment, Inspiration and Creativity: Having fun. Being surprised. Innovative thoughts. Creativity. Exploration, experimentation and making. Being inspired.

The evaluation reported:

- Knowledge and Understanding were commented on in approximately 20% of responses
- Skills were not commented on
- Attitudes and Values were commented on in approximately 40% of responses
- Activity, Behaviour and Progression were commented on in approximately 25% of responses
- Enjoyment, Inspiration and Creativity were commented on in approximately 15% of responses

Appendix 3: Summary of the National Museums NI's Evaluation of Colin Davidson, Silent Testimony (2016)

This was an exhibition of portrait paintings by Colin Davidson (born 1968), of eighteen people connected by their individual experiences of loss through the Troubles.

The aims of the exhibition were:

- To continue National Museums NI's exploration of the theme of conflict and, specifically, the Troubles
- To raise awareness of those affected by the Troubles and its continuing legacy
- To develop National Museums NI's relationship with Colin Davidson
- To continue to foster the partnership with WAVE, which was established with the Art of the Troubles exhibition in 2014

The evidence summarised in the evaluation was collected through self-completion questionnaires, which were available to all visitors throughout the course of the exhibition. 995 questionnaires were analysed; 60,139 people visited the exhibition. As the data below shows 66% of respondents to the questionnaire came from Northern Ireland with most respondents being over 40 years of age. 59% of respondents said that they came specially to the museum to see this exhibition. About 4 in ten spent under thirty minutes in the exhibition, with 5 in ten spending up to one hour. Almost all (91%) respondents rated the exhibition as very good, and most respondents had not previously visited the Art of the Troubles.

Where respondents were visiting from

NI	660	66.3%
Scotland	19	1.9%
England	87	8.7%
Wales	3	0.3%
Europe	72	7.2%
Canada	16	1.6%
Australia	10	1%
New Zealand	5	0.5%
USA	42	4.2%
ROI	65	6.5%
Blank	9	0.9%
Elsewhere	7	0.7%
	995	

Age of respondents

Under 16	63	6.3%
16-24	122	12.2%
25-39	122	12.2%
40-59	383	38.4%
60+	255	26.7%
Blank	50	5.2%
	995	

How long did visitors spend in the exhibitions?

Under 30 mins	412	41.4%
30 mins - 1 hour	512	51.4%
over 1 hour	53	5.3%
Blank	18	1.8%
	995	

How did visitors rate the exhibition?

Don't Know	0	0%	
Very Poor	3	0.3%	0.3%
Poor	0	0%	0%
Neutral	9	0.9%	0.9%
Fairly Good	61	6.1%	6.1%
Very Good	913	91.3%	92.5%
Blank	9	0.9%	
	995		986

Had visitors to the exhibition previously visited the Art of the Troubles exhibition in 2014?

Yes	270	27.1%	28.1%
No	688	69.1%	71.8%
Blank	37	3.7%	
	995		958

The evaluation noted five reasons why people came to see the exhibition:

- Personal connection to the subject matter
- Interest in Colin Davidson and his work
- Recommendation from a friend or family member
- Positive publicity for the exhibition
- A connection to WAVE

It also noted 5 ways people were affected by the exhibition:

- They brought back memories of personal experiences
- They moved and upset people
- They made people shocked/angry/sad about the Troubles
- They brought home a sense of the common humanity
- Appreciation of the exhibition and Colin Davidson's work

58% of people thought the exhibition made them think differently about the relationship between art and the Troubles. The evaluation considered that this happened in three main ways:

- Art has the power to communicate powerful emotions such as grief, pain and loss
- Art is important when bias is stripped away
- Art promotes healing and remembrance

The evaluation suggested 6 themes when visitors were asked how they thought the Ulster Museum should be interpreting the Troubles:

- It should keep doing what it's doing (approximately 37%)
- It should focus on personal stories and ordinary lives (approximately 17%)
- Potential of this exhibition: it should be made permanent / toured to other venues / it should be seen by as many people as possible (approximately 9%)
- It should be left well alone, as NI needs to move on (approximately 4%)
- It should work closely with external groups and individuals (approximately 3%)
- It's not up to the museum to do this (approximately 1%)

The Museums Libraries & Archives Council's 'Inspiring Learning for All' framework identifies five generic learning outcomes (GLOs). (For a full description of these, please see the evaluation summary for The Art of the Troubles). The evaluation reported against these:

- Knowledge and Understanding were commented on in approximately 19% of responses
- Skills were not commented on
- Attitudes and Values were commented on in approximately 68% of responses
- Activity, Behaviour and Progression were commented on in approximately 3% of responses
- Enjoyment, Inspiration and Creativity were commented on in approximately 12% of responses

The evaluation listed the learning points for National Museums NI as:

- Art is a powerful way of communicating to the public about the Troubles
- This was a significant exhibition that demands to be seen. Consideration needs to be given to exhibiting it in other venues and displaying it again at the Ulster Museum
- It is important for National Museums NI to continue to take a leading role in researching and interpreting the subject
- Our audiences need an outlet to express their own feelings about the Troubles. We underestimated the scale and intensity of the public response

Appendix 4: Summary of Northern Ireland's Voices of 68 Exhibition Evaluation at National Museums NI (Chris Reynolds)

This report was written by Dr Chris Reynolds, Associate Professor at the School of Arts and Humanities, Nottingham Trent University. Dr Reynolds was the principal collaborator with National Museums NI in the gathering of oral testimonies which are the basis for the Voices of '68 exhibition.

Activity

Reynolds' approach was rooted in seeing the events of 1968 in Northern Ireland as both separate from the violence of the Troubles that followed, and also as part of a transnational narrative of upheaval in many other countries across Europe and in America. The collaboration with National Museums Northern Ireland had four phases:

- An initial minor intervention in the representation of 1968 in the Ulster Museum's permanent gallery which added subtle references to the international context.
- Followed by a complete overhaul of this section with new objects curated and the embedding of video testimonies of key protagonists from the time. Educational resources were also developed to enhance a series of GCSE study days hosted at the museum and extended versions of the videoed testimonies were made available via the National Museums NI YouTube channel.
- The project was expanded with the number of testimonials increased from an initial 10 to 30 and formed the basis of a new exhibition entitled Voices of 68. This new exhibition was hosted at the Ulster Museum to coincide with the 50th anniversary. Two travelling versions were designed and toured in excess of 25 venues (other museums, local libraries and cultural centres) in the UK and Ireland.
- The incorporation of this extended, improved exhibition into the permanent gallery of the Ulster Museum.

Reynolds writes that *"the ongoing perpetuation of parallel, contested narratives that never come into contact with each other"* need to be challenged by an "agonistic" approach. This might be considered the opposite to an antagonistic approach, where a more positive approach to discussion of conflict is taken. Reynolds comments that this includes:

- Situating the past within its correct context
- An emphasis on multi-perspectivity
- A terrain of 'narrative hospitality' to facilitate the inclusion of a greater diversity of voices

Examples of this are cited, contrasting nationalist and unionist perspectives on the significance of key events in 1968, as well as looking at the divergent perspectives taken in both of these groups: *"The agonistic approach exposed tensions within the two communities as well as between them."*

At each stage of the project, there was a conscious effort to take on board the feedback received from visitors, interviewees, users and the results of evaluation workshops. In the extended 'Voices of 68' exhibition, this participatory element was expanded with the integration of videoed testimonies and written feedback from users and visitors with the objective of stimulating even more feedback from other users, which in turn was curated and included in the exhibition.

Online educational resources were created in collaboration with CCEA, tying together the curriculum with the content and approach of the 1968. These resources were sent to all schools in Northern Ireland, providing preparation for the subsequent four study days at the Ulster Museum.

Reaction and Feedback

Reynolds begins this section with an assessment of the challenges and difficulties of taking an agonistic approach, considering aspects such as convincing potential contributors to participate or how the inclusion of contested narratives is not always welcomed. He also outlines how the inclusion of certain voices, who have outspoken views on other societal issues, might risk *“undermining the integrity of the project through the criticism that would inevitably follow.”* In spite of this, however, Reynolds affirms what he considers to be a new direction from National Museums NI:

“...with a new team defining a bold new direction for the museum that resulted in the launch of a new Troubles Gallery in 2018 that not only refused to shy away from hitherto marginalised debates and discussions, it actually has made them an explicit part of what is an ongoing and vibrant treatment of the dark days of the Troubles (Gannon 2018)... the difficulties faced by the agonistic approach of the 1968 project are very much offset by the advantages on offer.”

The report cites examples of feedback, without any numerical data, to demonstrate that the exhibition:

- Placed the events of 1968 in NI in an international context
- Told a more complex, detailed story, from multiple perspectives
- Enabled people to better understand the conflict

Reynolds recognised how people were often challenged by the exhibition’s approach, but concluded, with examples of visitors’ affirmation of the exhibition and its effects on their thinking, that the objective of enhancing the visitors’ level of understanding and empathy had been realised.

“It is important to hear two sides and conflicting views within sides. It has made me want to read a bit more.”

“It is very important. It is rare to hear a more balanced view. It challenges things I’ve been told.”

“It has opened my eyes to other views.”

“To understand the past, we must listen to all points of view not to provide a consensus but to try to understand why people take different routes and make different decisions in their lives.”

A further section outlined the feedback from the GCSE study days hosted by the museum. The feedback largely covered the same aspects as the feedback from the visitors to the public exhibition.

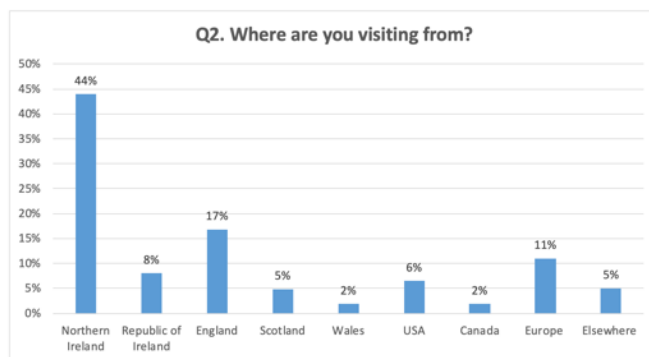
The report ends with a short conclusion, summarising the main aspects of the report.

“The evidence of the feedback garnered to date suggests a genuine acceptance of divergent voices, however challenging, as a necessary (and sometimes difficult) step in the quest to improve empathy and understanding. The effective translation of oral testimonies has facilitated the incorporation of emotions and passions across the various testimonies and also in terms of the reactions and participations of visitors/users.”

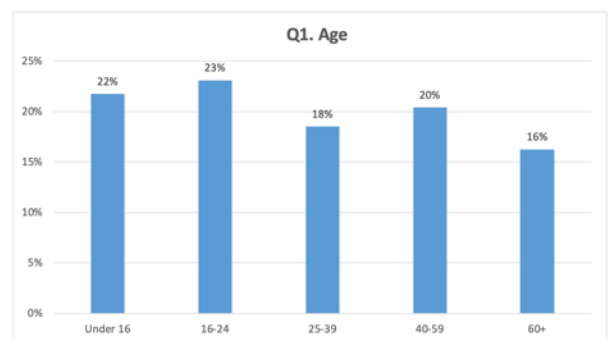
Appendix 5: Summary of National Museums NI Research, Evaluation & Insights: The Troubles and Beyond

The exhibition Troubles and Beyond opened in March 2018. Its focus was to bring together the wider social, economic, cultural, and political, influences which have shaped Northern Ireland. It is intended to be an ongoing initiative; the exhibition will evolve and change over time. The report is based on visitor data from March 2018 to November 2019, during which time the number of visitors to the Ulster Museum, in total, was 947,959.

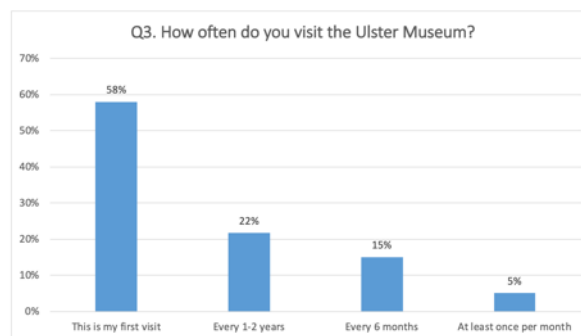
The evidence summarised in the report was collected through self-completion questionnaires, which were available to all visitors throughout the course of the exhibition. The evaluation form had nine questions, both quantitative and qualitative questions. In total, 606 questionnaires were completed, but the base varies on the questions as not everyone answered all the questions. The majority of those who completed the questionnaire came from Northern Ireland, and for about 6 in 10 this was their first visit to the museum.



Base: 599



Base: 584



Base: 411

Visitors were asked what aspect of the gallery had most impact on them in this gallery. 61% of respondents cited specific objects or sections.

- 28% of respondents made a general reflection on the exhibition
- 26% of respondents mentioned a range of other objects
- 25% of respondents referred to the personal stories board; the most frequently mentioned part of the exhibition
- 18% of respondents cited the 'slideshows from the decades' section
- 8% of respondents cited the bomb disposal unit, improvised explosive devices, and bullets
- 8% of respondents mentioned objects inspired by the conflict, notably the Peace Quilt – Common Loss made by Irene McWilliams (1996), and the painting Peace Talks by John Pakenham
- 8% of respondents mentioned posters, maps and newspaper clippings including a commemorative poster for RUC members killed during the conflict

-7% of respondents mentioned objects linked to the tragedies of the Enniskillen and Omagh bombings

43% of respondents had visited the old gallery, of those, 22% respondents gave a comparison between the two galleries; 51% of respondents who went to the old gallery appreciated the inclusion of more artefacts.

The report also noted:

- Respondents liked the inclusion of more social and cultural history
- Respondents found the new gallery offered a more personal and inclusive narrative
- Respondents found the new gallery was more interactive and the easier to understand

When visitors were asked how the gallery made them feel 96% of respondents said the exhibition had an emotional impact on them. The report broke these down into seven groups.

- 39% of respondents acknowledged they felt sad, moved, or emotional
- 17% of respondents felt educated, interested, curious, intrigued and informed by the exhibition
- 14% of respondents felt hopeful, proud, uplifted, resolute, inspired and optimistic for the future
- 5% of respondents were shocked, anxious, uncomfortable and uneasy as a result of the exhibition
- 4% of respondents felt nostalgic as a result of the exhibition
- 4% of respondents felt empathy, compassion and sympathy
- 3% of respondents felt angry, frustrated or annoyed

Visitors were asked if they thought anything was missing from the gallery, or if they would like to see something on display. 31% of respondents did not make any suggestions. Of the others:

- 20% suggested including more personal and everyday stories, oral histories as well as more in-depth information concerning Republican / Nationalist and Loyalist / Unionist history, customs and traditions
- 19% suggested adding more artefacts and other aspects of NI culture as well as other events that occurred during the Troubles and contemporary events
- 13% suggested the exhibition should contain more background information relating to the Troubles, simplified information for tourists, different languages and a more linear or simplified format
- 10% suggested enlarging the gallery, including more interactive elements, signage and improving the displays.
- 7% suggested showing the impact of the Troubles on rural and border communities, the rest of the UK and its global impact
- 6% suggested more photographs, video and audio
- 5% wished to see more from under-represented groups such as women, the armed forces, journalists, children and ethnic minorities

Visitors were asked if they had a story they would like to share. This invited a range of responses, from people who had lived through the Troubles, stories from people who were visiting the country and came to see the exhibition as well as messages wishing the museum or the country well.

The Museums Libraries & Archives Council's 'Inspiring Learning for All' framework identifies five generic learning outcomes (GLOs). (For a full description of these, please see the evaluation summary for The Art of the Troubles). It was reported that visitor feedback provided evidence this exhibition fulfilled two of the learning outcomes: Knowledge and Understanding and Attitudes and Values.