

THE FUTURE DISPLAY OF ART

1.0 INTRODUCTION:

Over the last two years, in two stages of consultation, NMGW has been discussing the future display of art. The responses to the stage two document, 'Views of the Future', express the great sense of opportunity this period of discussion has generated. They also maintain the positive reaction the process as a whole has engendered. It is clear that the ambition to create a distinctive solution to the 'National Gallery' question, sustainable and appropriate to Wales, is widely held.

As well as reflecting the constructive and affirmative elements, which were, hearteningly, the most substantial of the responses, this report reflects on the criticisms and general comments made about areas for improvement or re-thinking at NMGW.

Over 450 copies of the printed version of 'Views of the Future' were distributed. Approximately half were distributed beyond Cardiff, in order to promote awareness of the process.

Mailings, a 'flier' and a wide range of media coverage ensured general awareness of the process across Wales and beyond. Unlike in Stage One, there were no formal meetings. However, a debate organised by the north Wales group of the Institute for Welsh Affairs, attended by over 130 people, raised the awareness of the debate further.

Over the two stages of the process as a whole, formal contributions were made by 289 individuals and organisations (1) Of the latter, 51 (57.5%) responses were received from individuals; 25 (28%) were from organisations; and 13 (14.5%) acknowledged the process without substantive comment. 35 (39%) of responses were from the Cardiff area; 33 (37%) from the rest of Wales; 8 (9%) from beyond Wales; 13 (14.5%) were from an unknown location (eg submitted by e-mail)

2.0 GENERAL THEMES:

The summary headings of the options offered in the document were :

<i>Proposal one :</i>	identify lead regional partners around Wales
<i>Proposal two :</i>	maximise access and build quality of research
<i>Proposal three:</i>	more emphasis and promotion of the 'national gallery' role
<i>Proposal four :</i>	develop thematic presentation
<i>Proposal five:</i>	create a separate national gallery

For proposal five there were three options considered as follows:-

- 5.1 outside Cardiff
- 5.2 within Cardiff in a separate building
- 5.3 as a distinct 'north wing' at NMG

There were a few themes which ran throughout the stage two responses, not pinned to any single proposal. These echoed those made at stage one : first: a broad welcome of the fact that the consultation was happening at all, and that NMGW was taking the issue seriously. Second, a wide affirmation by respondents that there was a need to recognise an historic and continuing problem with the level of resources which underpinned the provision for visual arts at NMGW and in Wales.

Timescales

A consistent theme was that, having identified and sought views on the issue, it was essential that NMGW now demonstrated that it wished to respond positively and constructively. Many, felt the timescale mapped out in 'Views of the Future' (beginning design 2004/5; fund-raising beginning in 2006, following the opening of NWMS for which NMGW has to raise over £4m of private money, and.... to coincide with the 2007 centenary of NMGW; opening in 2010- 11) was too conservative.

However, for its part, NMGW emphasised in the document the implications of sponsoring another major project at this time, as it currently has three capital projects in the development stage as well as aspirations for the extension of its Collection Centre, to create the National Conservation and Access Centre at Nantgarw.

Specific critiques

A few people chose to praise or critique general issues around NMGW's overall approach to the fine and applied arts. The negative points were on the whole highly specific, and were useful to note for operational issues, eg specific artists being on display or not.

A few of the artists who responded made relatively personal comments about NMGW's style and approach. One submission linked the institutionalisation of a major organisation with the need for new developments to be "in the control of artists".

It is important to note that this echoes some of the points made in 'Views of the Future' itself. It raised the concern about the appropriateness of the cultural values of a large collection-oriented organisation working with the particular constituency of modern and contemporary art.

Meanwhile, many long-term supporters and stakeholders in NMGW, perhaps unsurprisingly but nevertheless in a most welcome way, took the opportunity to commend NMGW for its work, particularly over the last five to ten years.

3.0 RESPONSES TO INDIVIDUAL PROPOSALS IN THE CONSULTATION DOCUMENT:

The themes which were evident in the individual responses to each section were :

3.1 Proposal 1 : a network of partner venues

This received a broad welcome, and some reference to being 'first among equals' as a priority across the five proposals. Many recognised that it was evidently not NMGW's task alone. The Arts Council of Wales's (ACW) response proposed a joint presentation to the National Assembly to address the joint interests of NMGW and ACW in implementing, if not the full content of the Pratley Report, at least its major elements in principle.

One or two contributors from the professional sphere cited their ability to become the partner bodies – notably Oriel Mostyn Llandudno. A few mentioned combinations of established venues complemented by new ones where they did not exist on the current 'map'.

The Council for Museums in Wales (CMW) emphasised in this respect that NMGW should build on its existing infrastructure, whilst the National Trust was notable amongst a number of responses which argued that we should not fragment the collection by specific or general dispersal, preferring the vehicle of mixed displays and exhibitions.

It is important, however, to emphasise the connections made between proposal 1 and proposal 5. Many 'supporters' of partnership in the regions also supported the key elements of a 'national gallery', seeing a small network of partners as a complement to a capital city investment.

3.2 PROPOSALS 2-4 : RESEARCH; PROMOTION; PRESENTATION OF DISPLAYS

3.2.1 Research:

Contributors pointed out that research and the wider responsibility to disseminate information was under-resourced and undervalued at present:

Collaborators such as the National Library of Wales and colleagues from Higher Education put forward valuable suggestions of ways in which NMGW could work with them. There were many valuable contributions particularly looking to fulfil ambitions around learning and access.

3.2.2 National gallery online:

There was widespread approval of the proposal to develop better IT based access.

Many contributors balanced their support of 'virtual galleries' with comments about the constant and ever more important value of the 'real thing'

3.2.3 Thematic displays:

There were a range of opinions on the presentation of displays. There was very little expression of interest in a 'gallery of Welsh art'. There was much greater interest in rotating displays and breaking up a fixed didactic installation.

It was suggested that the development of thematic presentations could bring more works out of store, to allow scope to borrow from elsewhere in Wales. Some contributors emphasised the need for greater interpretation of developments and importance of art movements outside and within Wales. There was general support for the approach to displays, exhibitions and interpretation to be specific to Wales, and that there were many opportunities to create an approach that was evidently so. It was recognised that great progress had been made recently on this.

The question of the underlying importance of a proper collections centre to this and other areas of work was mentioned by some of the respondents.

There were a range of views between those who felt that NMGW's multidisciplinary nature is a distinct advantage and vice versa. However it was evident, both explicitly and by inference, that the existing profile and identity of NMGW's art collections is confused with the overall perception of a multidisciplinary museum.

Colleagues in the tourism sector commented broadly on the importance of promotion work around cultural tourism, but emphasised that a 'capital city' focus would bring benefits.

3.3 Proposal 5 – a new national gallery

The options

Percentages are crude. Many respondents did not give a simple 'vote' for one or other option, and some expressed views which were conditional or linked between proposals. However, a stand-alone National Gallery in Cardiff was cited as the preferred option by 61% of all respondents, including those who gave no view on a specific location within the city.

Within this 61%, an extension to the existing building at NMG, was cited as the preferred option by 46%, a separate building within Cardiff, by 10% of respondents, the remaining 5% not specifying clearly either of the two.

In contrast, a 'north wing to the existing site in Cathays park in Cardiff was regarded as emphatically the only option by many contributors. Reasons given were partly because of sustainability, partly because of maintaining connections with the other disciplines.

Some chose to say that the priority was a capital city presence, with a preference for creating a north wing to the existing building if the building of a separate new National Gallery in Cardiff was not sustainable on revenue cost grounds.

Under Proposal 5, only 5 responses (6%) made a general plea for a stand-alone gallery outside Cardiff. Of these, three made specific proposals for the idea of a gallery being separate and in their own locale.

These were: Wrexham Council and 'NEWI' proposing the NEWI campus; Neath/Port Talbot Council proposing a seaside location at Aberavon; Flintshire Council for Clwyd Theatre. An individual AM's response proposed consideration of Colwyn Bay. One other general location was suggested as a complement to the capital city.

(It is crucial to note that there are already discussions in train with Wrexham for further enhancement of the relationship with NMGW initiated by the partnership scheme 'Cyfoeth Cymru Gyfan – Sharing Treasures'. Other proposals were made outside the formal process, and are discussed below.)

Without making a specific proposal, the NLW advised that "careful consideration should be given to north-east Wales".

The capital city

It is of note that a new National Gallery in a new building in Cardiff was supported by 3 (7.5%) contributors from beyond Cardiff, whilst the delivery of a National Gallery via a new North Wing to the National Museum & Gallery was supported by 62% of all contributors from beyond Cardiff. This reflects the ratio of views expressed by stage one contributors.

Other responses emphasised that, whilst they preferred a capital city option, its being in a separate building would make the strongest statement of a new start. It was not always specified whether a new build could be achieved as an extension of the NMG site.

The proposals for capital city development were often linked to regional development, as has already been noted.

Equally, some responses from within Cardiff emphasised the difference between a collection-based organisation and a 'flexible' contemporary gallery, and pointed up the need for both in the capital city or its immediate conurbation.

Sister organisations

ACW's response affirmed the value of regional partners. It also supported a new national gallery, but noted that we should take the issue of 'appropriate organisational capacity' for modern and contemporary art seriously, as was alluded to in 'Views of the Future' itself. ACW called for NMGW to make a joint approach to the National Assembly over the whole process.

The National Library of Wales made it clear that it would consider itself a potential stakeholder in sharing material for display and exhibition, even though its collecting remit was narrower and differently defined. It proposed that its collections should be

regarded as a potential resource from which any future displays could be drawn, as indeed they are at present.

Organisational culture and terminologies

There were many comments to the effect that, if NMGW were to run a separate facility, or if there were only to be one of these two, NMGW should address the need for a north wing to become a separate organisational culture.

Many contributors emphasised that there was also an issue for all options as to whether what was proposed was a collection-based historic gallery or a modern and contemporary facility. Some contributors made the unsolicited point that if there were a parallel investment in a contemporary/modern facility in the capital city or its immediate catchment area, it would strengthen the case for a distinctive and separate 'national gallery' to be historic and collection based.

Some felt that an argument for a collection based gallery was less strong than for better provision for flexible display of modern and contemporary art. The latter comment was a particular feature of individual rather than organisational responses. In contrast, where there was a strong wish for a collection-based approach, there was a concomitant recognition that this would not address the other issue of a contemporary facility.

In contrast, there was a view that the possibilities of close connections with the historic and the modern and contemporary, and the arts and history and sciences, were both advantages.

4.0 CONCLUSION:

The themes and issues defined by stage one have been reinforced by the wider reception of stage two. The two stages together constitute a substantial piece of work which now has generated a need for a clear and substantive response.

4.1 Proposals supported:

There is clear support for:

the development of the Partnership programme
for other initiatives which will bring NMGW's Collections to a wide audience.
for the development of a "National Gallery", the preference being for it being sited in Cardiff as a 'north wing' to NMG
for this to be a collection based facility, complemented by a contemporary facility not run by NMGW but with appropriate artistic involvement
for this to retain the art of Wales in an international context.

and it is therefore important that a proposed strategy is developed which will meet all of these options.

4.2 Producing a strategy:

It is now proposed that a strategy document will be produced similar to the 'Industrial Strategy' document which led to the consolidation of its approach to WSM, Big Pit, Drefach and NWMS.

The strategy document will embrace :

- 4.2.1 the costed elements of the responses that can be addressed within NMGW's own corporate planning process, eg, investment in IT, interpretation, Partnerships work without major capital interventions
- 4.2.2 detailed feasibility of a 'national gallery', to be led by NMGW, which will be based on the following key principles:
 - a **collection-based facility, building on the existing national collections**
 - **with a structure to enable the best linkages to the multi-disciplinary opportunities offered by NMGW embracing the historic, modern and contemporary art of Wales and beyond, in an international context**

NMGW will also assist ACW in examining the feasibility of its proposal for a 'national gallery of contemporary art', to be a component of ACW's planning, which will be based on the following key principles:

- a **flexible facility, without a remit to build a collection,**
 - **with a specific , independent management structure**
 - **embracing the contemporary practice of Wales in an international context**
- 4.2.3 the implications for the remaining displays and facilities on the existing Cathays Park site
 - 4.2.4 the corporate organisational approach to addressing the preferred options and the role of collaborating stakeholders, notably ACW and the National Assembly for Wales
 - 4.2.5 the linkage to the development of the National Conservation and Access Centre at Nantgarw and development of a realistic timetable which acknowledges the development projects which are already in hand in order to ensure that any new Capital developments are deliverable without undue impact on the on-going work at NMGW.

Partnership working will be promoted as an immediate priority, whilst it is clear that the feasibility studies for the two new initiatives should address potential locations, resource implications and cultural and economic impact of the longer term development. The studies will take into account the recent consultation by NMGW, and involve further consultation and technical studies.

What NMGW proposes to do next:

The 'Views of the Future' document suggested that the landmark date of 2007 should be considered as a moment to 'launch' a national gallery development.

The following steps set out an indicative timetable, which reflects the implementation dates set out in Views of the Future. They take into account the fact that NMGW's Council has affirmed that developing the regional "national gallery partners" and related work on Cyfoeth Cymru Gyfan – Sharing Treasures is an immediate priority, whilst further work is required to develop thinking about the concepts of a 'National gallery' and a 'national facility for contemporary art'.

- 1) Workshops with partners and stakeholders to confirm **boundaries, definitions and parameters**, including:
 - (a) Development of 'Cyfoeth Cymru Gyfan – Sharing Treasures' by comparisons with the Arts Council's priorities and establishing a strategy for 'national gallery partners' in regional venues in Wales *Mar – Sept 2003*
 - (b) Alignment with Cardiff 2008's contemporary art facility project, 'The Depot' scheduled for opening March 2005 – (following European Capital of Culture decision) *June 2003*
 - (c) Engaging the UK and international peer group – workshops through *autumn 2003 and 2004*

Production of a strategy document in autumn 2003 to embrace

- 2) **Implementing 'regional partners'** – three year pilot programme, *April 2004 – March 2007*
- 3) Researching synergy with **audience development, outreach and education** – working with education team, regional partners and UK and European initiatives : *from June 2003 - Sept 2004.*
- 4) Planning the other three areas of 'in-house' work – **curatorial and educational infrastructure** for new displays, and new interpretation (including audio tours and general publications); collection presentation 'on-line; and new branding – three year programme *April 2004-2007*
- 5) Feasibility study/options appraisal for a 'national gallery' - planned timetable:

scope and content	<i>January 2004- March 2004</i>
scale	<i>September 2004- June 2004</i>
revenue issues	<i>September 2004- June 2004</i>
site options appraisals	<i>March 2004- September 2004</i>

announcement of outcome of the above	<i>late 2004/early 2005</i>
commissioning of detailed designs, permissions, full costings etc	<i>2005</i>
announcement of 'centenary' development	<i>2006</i>

Staging the work alongside NMGW masterplanning issues :

development and relationships of other disciplines, eg archaeology and social history, defining the natural sciences, summer/autumn 2003, interim implementation of displays 2004 – 7 (2)

development of NWM Swansea and the Museum of Welsh Life gallery of Welsh History 2004-5

opening of phase 2 of Collections and Access Centre, Nantgarw – (2006)

Michael Tooby
Director National Museum & Gallery

30 April 2003

Footnotes:

1.0

30 of the 230 contributors to Stage One made a further formal response to 'Views of the Future'. All were contacted to ensure their full endorsement of this process, and informed that their views as expressed in stage one (recorded on verbatim transcripts) would be included in a final report.

Many people also responded through participation in events, through writing, broadcasting and other media outlets; and through contact and correspondence outside the process.

Some contributors asked for confidentiality. Others sent lengthy contributions which covered a variety of issues raised. NMGW has therefore retained a table of responses as a 'file trail', but it will not always be possible to briefly summarise responses point-by-point. The table, full responses and the full transcripts of all stage one responses will be kept for reference and can be made available on request.

A full list of names of respondents is available on request.

2.0 Addressing other disciplines at NMG

Inevitably, discussion of the art displays at NMG has also generated a consideration of the relationship of these to the other displays at NMG. The consultation on the display of art emphasised the benefits of reconciling a distinct identity of a 'national gallery' with the potential for interaction with adjoining or even occasionally integrated displays of other disciplines.

One of the recommendations of the Quinquennial Review of NMGW carried out on behalf of the National Assembly in 2000-01 was that 'the Museum and sponsor division consider the Museum's specific contribution to areas such as environment, land-use, mineral resources and construction and whether there is scope to develop and promote further scientific initiatives by the Museum'.

The addressing of these themes and issues has been endorsed by Council. The broad thrust is that NMGW should seize the opportunity to make known its major resources in this crucial field and thereby enhance its reputation and contribution as a key provider of biodiversity information and sustainability education to the people of Wales. Much of this work may well go on beyond the boundaries of NMG itself, in locations and contexts where interpretation and raising awareness of biodiversity and the environment is focussed.

In the immediate term, such a discussion throws into relief the need to understand the identity of a Cathays Park setting for the natural sciences in the context of a re-presentation of the art collections and related exhibitions and activities.

3.0 Archaeology's role and the development of a 'Gallery of Welsh Histories'

Archaeology displays at NMG need to be addressed in response to a variety of contexts:

Firstly, the archaeology displays are evidently the most outdated displays at NMG. They are the result of a highly specific, but low-cost project from the early 1970s. The result is not only the objects being housed in inadequate physical environments, but also the text and graphic material being 'locked in' being part of the displays' actual physical construction.

This inadequate, inflexible display needs investment. However, the archaeology displays also relate to an equally relevant need: to update the material culture galleries at MWL, and to provide an 'introductory' display which sets the exhibits at MWL in the context of an overview of the history of Wales as evidenced by its material cultures.

In setting these issues in the context of the long term development of NMG and MWL, there is an opportunity created by the temporary cessation of major exhibitions, from 2004-7.

Over this period a new experimental display will be mounted in the present major exhibitions galleries, galleries 35-6-7 at NMG. This display is intended to re-address how objects can be shown in the context of discussion of archaeological exploration of historic locations as well as through a chronological 'story'.

This display will also generate discussion of the role of archaeological information and artefacts in the presentation of 'Gallery of Welsh Histories' and 'art' displays, as well as the presentation of the processes of archaeology itself, and so inform the development of both NMG and MWL's gallery developments.