

Northern Ireland Museums Council

# Volunteering in local museums in Northern Ireland

2010



**Front Cover**

Volunteers in Mount  
Stewart gardens

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## Introduction

'Museums enable people to explore collections for inspiration, learning and enjoyment. They are institutions that collect, safeguard and make accessible artefacts and specimens, which they hold in trust for society.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Museums Association 1998 definition of a museum found at <http://www.museumsassociation.org/about/frequently-asked-questions>

In Northern Ireland 42 museums met the requirements of the UK-wide Museum Accreditation Scheme at the time this report was compiled. To be recognised under the Scheme, museums must meet the requirements of the definition given above, and achieve specified standards under Governance and Museum Management, User Services, Visitor Facilities and Collections Management. Throughout the Standard emphasis is placed upon museums having staff appropriate in numbers and experience to fulfill the museum's responsibilities, with the term 'staff' taken as including both paid personnel and volunteers.

Of the 42 Accredited museums, 4 come under the aegis of the National Museums Northern Ireland and 38 are run without direct funding from central government. Of the latter, 20 are run by local government and 18 operate independently from central and local government, and many of these are voluntary-run. The Northern Ireland Museums Council operates as an umbrella body for these 38 local museums and details of the museums and the Council are available at [www.nimc.co.uk](http://www.nimc.co.uk)

This report has been compiled by NIMC and reveals the vital, and indeed indispensable role volunteers play across the local museum sector in Northern Ireland. It also offers pointers to museums towards 'good practice' and other sources of information with the aim of enhancing their knowledge and understanding of responsibilities associated with working with volunteers, and provides practical guidance which it is hoped will prove useful should museums wish to embrace the principles and objectives of the 2011 European Year of Volunteering.



**Left**

Volunteer working in  
Castleward gift shop

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## Volunteers

‘Volunteers and volunteering refer to individuals and the work or action they undertake for the benefit of others or the community (outside the immediate family), undertaken by free choice and not directly in return for wages.’<sup>2</sup>

Volunteers play a vital role in our museums, comprising nearly a third of the total number of people working in the sector in Northern Ireland. This is highlighted in the 2010 *Staffing and Employment Trends within Northern Ireland’s Museums*<sup>3</sup> undertaken by the Northern Ireland Museums Council, which established that 968 people work in the museum sector in Northern Ireland, of which 661 are paid staff and 307 are volunteers. The table below shows the number of volunteers in the National Museums, Local Authority Museums and Independent Museums in the years 2001, 2006 and 2009.

Museums	Volunteers		
	2001	2006	2009
National museums	12	2	0
Local authority museum	10	13	26
Independent Museums	151	157	281
<b>Total</b>	<b>173</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>307</b>

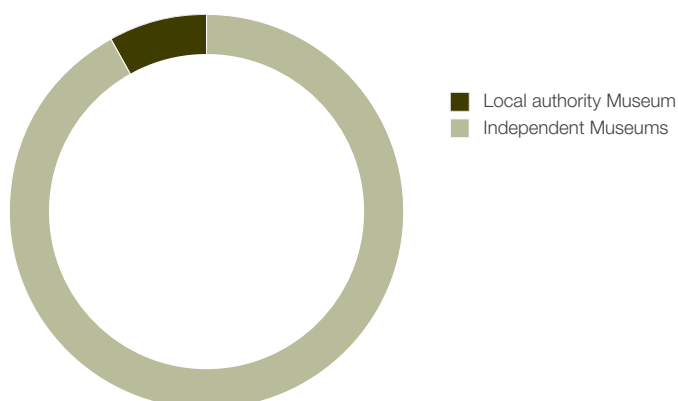
<sup>2</sup> *Its all about time* (VDA, 2007) found at [www.volunteering-ni.org/what\\_we\\_do/publications/](http://www.volunteering-ni.org/what_we_do/publications/)

<sup>3</sup> *Staffing and Employment Trends in Northern Ireland’s Museums* (NIMC 2010) found at publications section of [www.nimc.co.uk](http://www.nimc.co.uk)

**Table I:**  
Number of volunteers in museums in 2001, 2006 and 2009

Table I shows the notable growth in the number of volunteers working in the sector that has taken place over the last three-year period in particular. 92% of the volunteers in museums in 2009 were in the Independent sector, with some museums almost wholly volunteer led and run. Indeed the staffing survey reveals that 32 volunteers fulfil roles which, in other parts of the sector, would be salaried.

Pie chart to show percentage of volunteers in local museums



The Art Fund recently undertook a nationwide Museum Survey<sup>4</sup> in which 225 museums took part. Respondents ranged from smaller independent museums to national institutions. One of its major findings was that there was a rise in volunteers which mirrored a fall in paid staff. A quarter of museums reported an increase in the number of volunteers, 64% registered no change, while 22% of museums saw a fall in the number of paid staff over the same period. A key finding of the Museum Survey was a trend indicating that museums have an increasing reliance on volunteers. Simultaneously many museums in the survey reported improvements to their volunteering schemes, while some stated that they were concerned that they lacked paid staff to adequately supervise volunteers.

<sup>4</sup> *The Art Fund Museum Survey* — September 2008 — March 2009 (The Art Fund, 2009) found at <http://www.artfund.org/pdf/Factsheet%20autumn%2009.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Joe McVey, Chairperson and Wendy Osborne, OBE, Director of the Volunteer Development Agency in *Introduction to Volunteer Development Agency Annual Report 2008/09* (Northern Ireland, 2009) found at [www.volunteering-ni.org/what\\_we\\_do/publications/](http://www.volunteering-ni.org/what_we_do/publications/)

**Many museums in Northern Ireland owe their existence to the efforts of the volunteers who established them. Some museums would not be able to open to the public or operate without volunteers, particularly in the independent sector.**

As shown elsewhere, there are clear social and financial benefits for museums in working with volunteers, not least in view of the current economic climate. As the Volunteer Development Agency's (VDA's) *Annual Report 2008/09* notes 'the recession has raised the profile of volunteering as part of strategies to deal with rising levels of unemployment, helping people to maintain skills and confidence levels.'<sup>5</sup> These objectives are fostered by the network of Volunteer Centres across Northern Ireland (see Appendix I) which initiate, develop and support volunteering opportunities. Consequently, NIMC wishes to highlight the support, resources and opportunities that seem apparent from museums working with these centres.



**Left**

Youth team and volunteers at Railway Preservation Society of Ireland upon the completion of the Brake Van restoration project.

The mutual benefits of such collaborative working is highlighted within a report on volunteering published by the then Scottish Museums Council in 2009.<sup>6</sup> This found that;

- \_ Volunteers significantly increase an organisation's capacity.
- \_ The greatest benefit of volunteering for volunteers is a sense of achieving something useful. This is of particular importance for older volunteers.

This 'sense of achieving something useful' takes on a broader meaning given that volunteering is a major route into working in the museum sector, especially for younger people seeking entry level positions.

**Undertaking voluntary work, not only demonstrates commitment, but is perceived as a means of gaining such practical experience so as to put applicants for museum posts ahead of their competitors when applying for jobs.**

<sup>6</sup> *Volunteering in Museums: A research study into volunteering within museums* (Scottish Museums Council, May 2009) found at <http://www.museumsgalleries.scotland.org.uk/publications/publication/168/volunteering-in-museums>

### **Below**

Volunteers at costume collection, The Argyry, August 2009

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## Survey of Volunteers in Local Museums

The findings set out below were gathered through a combination of questionnaires completed by managers and volunteers, and visits by NIMC staff to museums to meet the personnel involved.

Given the objectives of the study, a selection of the 38 local museums were chosen on the basis that they had a track record of working with volunteers, had varying numbers of volunteers working with them, and were eager to share their knowledge and expertise. It was thought essential to have a representative cross-section of the sector with Independent, voluntary and local authority-run museums included in the survey.

The Northern Ireland Museums Council would like to express its especial thanks to the staff, both paid and volunteer, at the following museums the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland, the Royal Irish Fusiliers Museum, the Causeway Museum Service, and Florence Court, which is part of the National Trust.

The following areas were explored with the volunteer managers and volunteers from the four case-study museums:

- \_ Job position of staff that managed volunteers at their museums
- \_ Number of volunteers
- \_ Gender of volunteers
- \_ Age of volunteers
- \_ Roles of volunteers
- \_ Motives of volunteers
- \_ Recruiting and selecting volunteers
- \_ Barriers faced by volunteers
- \_ Volunteer procedures implemented in museums
- \_ Managing/supervising volunteers
- \_ Motivating/empowering volunteers
- \_ Benefits for volunteers
- \_ Volunteer policies and contracts
- \_ Setting targets and evaluating success
- \_ Training
- \_ Future support NIMC could give museums
- \_ Future support NIMC could give volunteers

### **Job position of staff that managed volunteers at their museums**

Out of the four museums interviewed only the National Trust property had a dedicated Volunteer Development Officer, in the other museums the curator, chairman and outreach officer managed the museums' volunteers.

### **Number of volunteers**

There were 3 volunteers in one museum, 35 in another, 40 in another and 50 in another. Three of the museums had more volunteers than actual paid staff and stated that they could not operate as a museum and open their doors to the public without their volunteers.

### **Gender of volunteers**

All the museums except for one had mainly male volunteers. Only the National Trust property had more female volunteers than male, with almost all of the former working in the house as opposed to the gardens of the property.

### **Age of volunteers**

All of the museums had volunteers from a variety of age ranges from 20 to 70 years old. One museum had a number of volunteers under the age of 18. All the museums said that most of their volunteers were retired.

### **Below**

RPSI engineering skills  
class at the Belfast  
Metropolitan College





### **Roles of volunteers**

The volunteer roles varied greatly among the museums. One museum had volunteers who worked on cataloguing and research of the collections, one museum's volunteers worked as front of house reception staff. Volunteers from another museum worked with the more technical aspects of railway track repair, wood work, carriage refurbishment and electrical work. Another museum gave work to its volunteers such as inventory, listing discrepancies and missing information, marking and labelling, preparing rooms for visitors, tour guides and cleaning the collections, working in the shop.

### **Motives of volunteers**

Most of the volunteers interviewed felt that the social aspect of volunteering — getting out of the house, giving structure to their day and meeting new people were their main motives. Volunteers from three of the museums also mentioned that they had a particular interest in the collections held at the museum and were interested in developing their hobbies and interest through these collections. Volunteers from two museums were also motivated by what they could learn from the collections by undertaking research and some stated that the collections were relevant to the academic and vocational courses that they were studying.

### **Recruiting and selecting volunteers**

Only one museum had a volunteer recruitment plan. None of the museums had problems recruiting volunteers, with 'word of mouth' being the universally common means of making opportunities known. The National Trust property indicated that the organisations website carried details of volunteering opportunities and how to get involved with its work.

### **Barriers faced by volunteers**

None of the volunteers interviewed identified any specific barrier which precluded volunteering at their museum. Volunteers from two museums felt that there was a lack of awareness of the existence of opportunities at local museums in Northern Ireland generally. The volunteers at Florence Court felt that the National Trust as a whole gave the impression that it was committed to providing volunteer opportunities and provides strong support and back-up to its volunteers.

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### **Volunteer procedures implemented in museums**

During the course of the interviews, those charged with recruiting and managing volunteers stressed the need for good guidance and direction on health and safety and the protection of children and vulnerable adults, in particular, as well as pointing to other legal requirements and ethical standards. One museum had screened all its volunteers and had checked references, one museum carried out checks on volunteers who worked with children and one museum screened new volunteers. One museum had not carried out any checks on its volunteers.

Three museums were confident that they had the appropriate insurance cover for their volunteers and one museum was unsure, being unclear as to who in the organisation held responsibility for this.

## One of the four museums surveyed carried out risk assessments on the duties to be carried out by volunteers.

### **Managing /supervising volunteers**

All of the museums stated that the volunteers were an integral part of their teams, some working alone and others alongside paid staff.

None of the museums had performance indicators in place for their volunteers. Only the National Trust property arranged meetings with their volunteers every 5-6 months to discuss their roles and any issues that had arisen.

### **Motivating /empowering volunteers**

Volunteers from two museums attended staff meetings. Another museum had invited volunteers to attend meetings but reported that the volunteers had not taken up the invitation. One museum gave supervisory roles to its volunteers.

All of those surveyed stated that their volunteers were invited to such events as seasonal celebrations for their staff, events to mark the successful completion of projects, field trips, training and other staff development activities. One museum paid its volunteers travel expenses and provided lunch and dinner when necessary and appropriate. Another indicated that free membership could be offered to long-serving volunteers.

### **Benefits for volunteers**

All of the volunteers NIMC staff met with highlighted that the most notable benefits to volunteering were the experience of making new friends and giving structure to their days. Most volunteers also felt that volunteering kept them active and involved with their community. At one museum the volunteers said that the positive comments from other staff members helped boost their morale and confidence, and made them feel that their work was valued.

### **Volunteer policies and contracts**

Only one museum had a volunteer policy. None of the museums surveyed had a volunteer contract in place. All felt that there would be reluctance amongst their volunteers to sign such a contract. One museum did provide each volunteer with a written 'role description'.

### **Setting targets and evaluating success**

During the discussions held with museums on target setting and the evaluation of the work of volunteers it was evident that the museums assumed a very flexible approach, without implementing precise administrative controls or operating specific deadlines or targets, as might be expected for professional staff. Instead the emphasis was upon the rewards of participation and the broad contribution made to completing projects.

However, it was evident that volunteers do play an essential role in museum operations. One museum said that the objective of its volunteer programme was to keep the museum open. Another stated that the volunteer programme contributed to the sustainability of the museum and fostered an increase in donations. And another indicated that their target was to allow their volunteers to increase their skills and to ensure that the museum was perceived as a place which could help people in this regard.

All the museums stated that the main benefit to having volunteers was to get jobs done which could not be done otherwise, either due to a lack of time amongst the professional staff, or the lack of other resources necessary to the completion of the work (skills and money). Two museums noted that their volunteers brought a range of new skills, knowledge and useful contacts and networks to the workplace. One museum highlighted how passionate their volunteers are about the work they do. This, it was felt, not only had the benefit of adding to the sense of purpose within the museum itself, but has enhanced the image of the museum as these volunteers prove able ambassadors and advocates on behalf of the museum.

All of the museums stressed the need for excellent communications across all staff and at all levels to ensure clarity in the roles and activity. Also in this regard, some of the museum staff interviewed pointed to the dangers of loading too much work onto the volunteers, not allocating sufficient time to manage, support and direct the work of volunteers, and ensuring that volunteers' skills and aptitudes are sufficiently matched with the ascribed duties.

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### **Training**

- \_ Only one of the surveyed museums provided specific volunteer management training for its staff who managed volunteers, in the form of a two day 'Working with Volunteers' course.
- \_ Three of the museums provided induction training, health and safety training and gave fire procedure training specifically for volunteers, and one did not. However, all museums provided task-specific training for their roles, which included conservation training, object handling, event planning, designing exhibitions and archiving requirements.
- \_ One museum sent its volunteers to child protection training and to cultural diversity training, delivered by external organisations, and one used the NIMC Training Days as the primary means of training its volunteers. Another museum paid for its volunteers to take accredited courses (at the Metropolitan College in Belfast, for instance) in technical subjects essential to the museum's specialism.

### **Future support for museums by the Northern Ireland Museums Council**

- \_ All the museums felt that they would benefit from further guidance from NIMC, especially on the management of volunteers. All suggested that the Council should provide sessions within its training programme which were specifically targeted towards enhancing the skills of volunteers.
- \_ One museum stated that they would like financial help from NIMC for running an object cleaning course for volunteers. All of the museums surveyed felt that the Council could do more to provide information on volunteering opportunities in local museums and promote the values and rewards of volunteering at museums. It was suggested that NIMC could co-ordinate 'try it and see' events and demonstration days to this end.
- \_ Another museum felt that it would be useful if NIMC could pair up potential volunteers with museums.
- \_ One museum felt that NIMC should run a visitor service training course for volunteers and another felt it would be useful if NIMC could provide training in first aid, health and safety and fire procedures to volunteers.

### **Future support for volunteers from NIMC**

- \_ Various suggestions arose during the course of the interviews held with volunteers at the museums. One person suggested that NIMC might 'develop a partnership with the Benefits Agency to develop a mechanism for taking young people off the dole queue, give them direction and skills-based work experience'. A volunteer at another museum commented that NIMC could run team-working training days, and it was also suggested that the Council should provide existing volunteers with more information about events and exhibitions at the other local museums. A general view was that NIMC should highlight the work of volunteers across all of the independent and local authority-run museums.

### Issues Arising

As indicated above, the survey investigated a range of topics, including; the diversity of volunteers, the benefits of volunteer programmes for both volunteers and for museums, recruitment and selection processes, volunteer roles, supervision, training, insurance and security arrangements.

A number of key points emerged from the survey, the responses received and the subsequent discussion on volunteering undertaken by the NIMC Board, which point to issues that might and/or should be addressed. These include:

- \_ Most volunteers are in their 60s.
- \_ Volunteers are involved in a very wide range of roles from research work, to repairs and technical work, to basic cataloguing, tour guiding, working at the front desk and answering phone enquiries.
- \_ Benefits for volunteers are mostly social ones. Volunteering also helps people to structure their day, relax, and contribute positively to their community, as well as giving them a chance to further their interest in a hobby or increase their knowledge in an area of study.
- \_ A range of benefits to the museums which used volunteers emerged. These included 'soft' benefits, such as generating a positive and enthusiastic feeling into the workplace, to more direct benefits, such as keeping the museum open, getting the work done, ensuring an appropriate skills base, and establishing essential new contacts and partnerships.
- \_ The need to communicate with staff about the volunteer programme was deemed important.
- \_ There is a very varied but generally quite informal approach to working with volunteers.
- \_ One museum pointed to the merits of holding informal interviews with prospective volunteers, doing reference checks and formally agreeing a role description (whether orally or in writing).
- \_ Finding volunteers is not a problem, most contact the museum directly and come to know of volunteering opportunities through 'word of mouth'. However, one museum suggested that relying on this method of recruitment could give rise to the 'problem of the clique'; where a group of like-minded people create the impression that new volunteers are not particularly welcome.
- \_ There is no consensus on the subject of contracts for volunteers: some respondents felt it opened up their museum to unwelcome challenge, while others indicated that such contracts demonstrated parity across all staff, paid and unpaid. One respondent stated that such contracts would 'frighten off' volunteers who wanted less formal arrangements.

- \_ Most museums it seems were not carrying out risk assessments on the work programme and environments of their volunteers.
- \_ Most of the museums surveyed do not have a volunteer policy in place.
- \_ All museums gave role specific training to their volunteers.
- \_ The museums were aware of, and carried out, health and safety and fire procedural training.
- \_ A common observation amongst the managers/supervisors was that they felt that they did not have enough time to give to their volunteers due to the pressures of 'their own work commitments'.
- \_ External training was felt to be of paramount importance.
- \_ Most of the museums made sure that insurance was sorted out for volunteers.
- \_ There is a general awareness of statutory obligations within museums (including, for example, the registration of those working with children and vulnerable adults), but clearer guidance from an authoritative source on legal requirements and good practice when it comes to working with volunteers would strengthen their confidence.

**Below**

Volunteer working in  
Mount Stewart Gardens

© National Trust Photo Library



## Guidelines

What emerges from the survey and an analysis of the associated issues is that volunteers play a significant, and in some cases crucial, role in Northern Ireland's local museums.

<sup>7</sup> See: <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/main/w-volunteering-policy-english.pdf>

Also, that many of our museums operate notably good volunteer schemes, which result in a broad spectrum of benefits to the individual and the institution alike, and which can be held up as beacons of good practice. Nevertheless, the sector generally continues to seek further guidance, succour and confidence that it is doing things well, especially in relation to working to acceptable standards, having appropriate policy frameworks in place, knowing about the relevant statutory duties and obligations and ensuring that all concerned have access to appropriate training.

In view of this NIMC has drawn together the following outline guidelines on these areas, on the understanding that they are not exhaustive in their content and that the Council will move to take these and associated matters forward through its information and advice service and its training programme in due course. In addition, Appendix II provides a listing of various websites which contain a range of guidance pertinent to the issues identified.

## Volunteer Standards

There are a number of standards relating to volunteer activity. Most are applicable to the volunteer sector generally, and while not specific to museums, can be utilised as such with effect. These include:

- \_ Investing in Volunteers – administered by Volunteer Now  
[www.volunteernow.co.uk/](http://www.volunteernow.co.uk/)
- \_ National Occupational Standards for managing volunteers  
– Skills – Third Sector are responsible for administering this  
[http://www.skills-thirdsector.org.uk/national\\_occupational\\_standards](http://www.skills-thirdsector.org.uk/national_occupational_standards)

Of particular note are the standards adopted across the National Trust, the UK's largest conservation and heritage body, contained within its Policy on Volunteering.<sup>7</sup> This covers such areas as;

- \_ Values and commitment
- \_ Responsibilities
- \_ Commitment to diversity and equality
- \_ Recruitment and selection
- \_ Induction, training and development
- \_ Support and recognition
- \_ Health and safety
- \_ Insurance
- \_ Communication

With a specific focus on museums the current Museum Accreditation Standard<sup>8</sup> sets out some necessary requirements at Section 1.9. It states;

- 1.9.1 The term 'staff' in this context refers to both paid staff and volunteers.
- 1.9.2 Museums must ensure that they meet all their legal requirements regarding recruitment and employment, including that of members of the governing body.
- 1.9.3 A full induction of new staff is an essential part of their development and ensures that staff have the basic information about the museum and their role in it. Museums must ensure that all new staff receive induction, and that induction is available and routinely offered to new members of the governing body; it is recognised, however, that museums cannot always ensure the take up of induction by new members.
- 1.9.4 Continuous training and staff development is essential to ensure museums have staff with a broad base of the requisite skills and knowledge. Museums must provide information about training provided and planned, and the basis on which they have assessed the training needs of their staff. As with the forward plan, the scale of training provision will be in accordance with the size and scale of the museum and its operation. Appropriate training need not lead to a formal qualification, and some forms of training have no direct cost attached, such as coaching, mentoring and shadowing.

<sup>8</sup> At the time of writing the Accreditation Standard is under review, with changes to the Scheme anticipated to become operational in 2011

**Below**

Volunteers at costume collection, The Argory, August 2009





## Policy Making

A volunteer policy is an important framework for establishing the principles of how a museum will recruit and manage volunteers and clarify what the volunteer and museum may offer one another.

When drafting the policy it is essential to obtain as much advice as possible. A good place to start is by contacting Volunteer Now. Volunteer Now, is a new regional organisation that promotes, enhances and supports volunteering across Northern Ireland. Formed on 1 April 2010 as a result of the merger of nine Volunteer Centres and the Volunteer Development Agency, the new organisation enhances recognition for the contribution of volunteers, provides greater access to opportunities and increases the number of people getting involved.

[www.volunteernow.co.uk/](http://www.volunteernow.co.uk/)

Museums may want to consider some of the questions posed below prior to drafting a volunteer policy:

### Background

Why does the museum want to involve volunteers in its work?  
What will the volunteers contribute to the museum?

### The role of the volunteer

How will volunteers 'fit' into the overall running of the museum?  
What impact will volunteers have on existing staff relationships?  
What type of roles will volunteers in your museum undertake?  
What resources and training are required to enable them to carry out these roles?  
How will you match the volunteers skills and abilities to the museum's requirements?  
Whether or not to have a Volunteer Agreement?

### Recruitment and selection of volunteers

How will you recruit volunteers?  
Whether or not to use an application form?  
Will you meet with, or interview potential volunteers?  
What will you do about references?  
What screening checks are necessary for specific roles?  
Will there be a probationary or review period?



**Above**

Volunteer at Mount  
Stewart Gardens

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### **Induction, training, support and supervision of volunteers**

How will you introduce new volunteers to staff and existing volunteers?

What training will you give volunteers to allow them to undertake their specific role?

Who will be 'responsible' for the management of volunteers?

How will paid staff be supported in managing volunteers?

What will you do about 'out of pocket' expenses?

Will you have regular review meetings with volunteers?

What will be the expectation with regard to pattern of attendance?

### **Safety, Insurance and Security**

Who will provide induction training in health & safety, fire procedures, manual handling? Who will carry out the risk assessment of volunteer roles?

What type of insurance will you need for your volunteers?

How will you ensure confidential retention of volunteers' next of kin details or any medical conditions or allergies that can be referenced in case of emergency?

What levels of supervision will volunteers require?

What will you do about keys and security codes?

### **Problem solving**

What structures will you have in place to deal with complaints by or about volunteers?

What will you do if the volunteer has acted in an inappropriate manner?

What will you do if there is a staff or industrial dispute?

### **Reviewing the policy**

How often will you review the policy to ensure its relevance and usefulness?

What consultation will be required to ensure it is a 'living document'?

### Legal and Other Issues

Volunteers are not included in employment legislation, but a small number of volunteers in the past have been able to demonstrate that they were employed in the eyes of the law.

Museums should seek clarity on their position regarding volunteers and employment law. The role description for volunteers is recommended above a signed contract. Museums should be aware of using certain kinds of language when talking about volunteers, words such as informal chats, agreements, and reimbursements might be better used instead of interviews, contracts and wages. It is important that museums have structures and documentation in place to help them manage and support volunteers safely and effectively and in compliance with relevant legislation and good practice. This must be balanced with the fact that most volunteers prefer an informal relationship with the museum. Outlined below are some of these issues:

#### Health and Safety

All employers must conduct their undertaking in such a way as not to expose anyone to risks to their health or safety. They must also make sure that the workplace is safe and suitable for the tasks and activities carried out there. Risk assessment is an essential tool to identify, evaluate and control risks to volunteers.

#### Insurance

Museums must have appropriate insurance in place for their volunteering programmes and ensure that volunteers are specifically referred to in the relevant insurance policies. Do not assume that your insurance will cover volunteers, check with your insurance provider.

#### Expenses

Whilst it is good practice to reimburse expenses, these should be out-of-pocket expenses only. It is important to be aware that flat rate expenses payment, or any sum over and above actual expenses, can be seen as income from the point of view of benefits and tax, and could change the status of volunteer to that of employee.

#### Data protection

If the information kept by the museum on the volunteer falls into the Data Protection Act definition of 'personal data', the organisation has legal responsibilities concerning the collection, storage, use of and disclosure of such information.

#### Copyright

Museums need to be aware of copyright issues if volunteers are writing reports or publications or undertaking photography for them. They should arrange transfer of copyright to the museum or agree a licence whereby the organisation can use the work within agreed limits.

### Benefits

Volunteering should not affect a person's benefits as long as they comply with the requirements of their particular benefit. It is important that the volunteer seeks advice from the relevant benefit provider.

### Screening

Museums must be aware of the checks they may need to undertake in relation to their volunteers. Recently, increased safeguards have been introduced, further enhancing protection of children and vulnerable adults and it is vital that museums comply with current legislation.

### Young volunteers

Museums must be aware of their responsibilities to volunteers under the age of 18, as they are legally classed as vulnerable. There is an enhanced duty of care towards young volunteers and appropriate safeguards should be put in place. Written parental/guardian consent is required for young people under 16. A robust Child Protection policy that includes young volunteers is essential.

### Access

It is important that the museum ensures that all of their volunteer recruitment and selection procedures adhere to the prevailing equality and diversity requirements and that as far as is possible all of the perceived barriers to physical and intellectual access are addressed.

### Below

Volunteer working  
at Mount Stewart

© National Trust Photo Library



### Training

There is a wide range of training courses available to volunteers and those who manage volunteers. They include accredited and non-accredited courses and while most are not museum specific their principles and content are transferable.

#### Training for volunteers in-house

- \_ Training in manual handling, health and safety, fire
- \_ Induction on the museum's past, present and future and relevant policies
- \_ Task specific training

#### Training for the voluntary sector

- \_ Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) undertakes various types of training. <http://www.nicva.org/>

#### Training for volunteer managers

- \_ Volunteer Now undertakes various types of training. [www.volunteernow.co.uk/](http://www.volunteernow.co.uk/)
- \_ Queen's University, Belfast — University Certificate in the Effective Management of Volunteers <http://www.qub.ac.uk/schools/SchoolofEducation/ProspectiveStudents/Undergraduate/Certificate/UniversityCertificateintheEffectiveManagementofVolunteers/>

#### Training for volunteer managers working in museums

- \_ Training is available on an intermittent basis from the following organisations: Northern Ireland Museums Council <http://www.nimc.co.uk/> Museums Association <http://www.museumsassociation.org/home>, Museums Libraries and Archives Council , <http://www.mla.gov.uk/> National Trust have a 'Working with Volunteers' one or two day training. <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/main/>

#### Training for volunteers in museums for their personal or professional development

- \_ Volunteers could be informed of various training held externally at NIMC, MA, MLA for museum training. They should be informed of formal qualifications they could take in museum studies such as the PG Dip/MA Cultural Heritage and Museum Studies at the University of Ulster (site based) or PG Dip/MA Museum Practice and Management delivered by the University of Ulster (online). <http://prospectus.ulster.ac.uk/> Leicester University also run an on-site and online PG Cert/ MA in Museum Studies. <http://www.educaedu.co.uk/>

### NIMC and Volunteering

The process of compiling this report has helped NIMC to gain a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of volunteering in museums, and, it is hoped, provided a useful overview of the associated issues.

It is obvious that volunteers bring a wide range of benefits to our museum, including particular skills and knowledge. Their help is indispensable to many of our independent museums, in providing both core and additional services. And that volunteering in museums is an overwhelmingly a positive experience; benefiting both volunteers and the museums.

Nevertheless, further opportunities to enhance this mutually beneficial exchange are apparent, but they require to be underpinned by a sound knowledge of the duties and respective responsibilities of all those working with volunteers. In this regard it is hoped that the guidelines presented prove useful in signposting museums to examples of good practice and in strengthening confidence within the sector to the point where more museums initiate and run volunteer programmes.

The study points to various actions that could be brought forward by NIMC. The Council will continue to provide guidance around volunteering and museums – in the first instance through the publication and circulation of this report.

It will continue to provide sessions within its training programme which are specifically targeted towards enhancing the skills of museum staff, and in line with the Museum Accreditation Standard, encourage museums to see their 'staff' as including both paid personnel and volunteers.

In conjunction with the local museum sector, the Council will look at how best to provide information on volunteering opportunities and to promote the values and rewards of volunteering.

**Such matters may best be brought forward collectively and thus we would welcome suggestions from everyone, whether professional or volunteer, on how volunteering within Northern Ireland's museums may be strengthened and diversified, and made a rewarding an experience for many more people.**

Please contact NIMC on 028 9055 0215  
or via email at [info@nimc.co.uk](mailto:info@nimc.co.uk)

## Appendix 1

### Volunteer Centres in Northern Ireland

Volunteer Now

[www.volunteernow.co.uk/](http://www.volunteernow.co.uk/)

Causeway Volunteer Centre

[www.causewayvc.org/](http://www.causewayvc.org/)

Cookstown & Magherafelt Volunteer Centre

[www.cookstownmagherafeltvc.org/](http://www.cookstownmagherafeltvc.org/)

Craigavon & Banbridge Volunteer Centre

[www.youcanhelp.org/cb/](http://www.youcanhelp.org/cb/)

Limavady Volunteer Centre

[www.lcdi.co.uk/lvc.html](http://www.lcdi.co.uk/lvc.html)

North West Volunteer Centre

[www.volunteeringnorthwest.co.uk/](http://www.volunteeringnorthwest.co.uk/)

## Appendix 2

### Useful websites

Volunteer Now

[www.volunteernow.co.uk/](http://www.volunteernow.co.uk/)

Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action

[www.nicva.org/](http://www.nicva.org/)

**Volunteers in Museums and Cultural Heritage** — *Here you can download *Volunteers in Museums and Cultural Heritage — A European Handbook* which explores the phenomenon of volunteering in the cultural sector at European level.*

[www.amitie.it/voch/index4.htm](http://www.amitie.it/voch/index4.htm)

**DIY Committee Guide** — *Online access to extensive resources and guidance for voluntary committees in Northern Ireland.*

[www.diycommitteeguide.org/](http://www.diycommitteeguide.org/)

**The Community NI** — *The Community NI website provides information, news and discussion on the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland.*

[www.communityni.org/](http://www.communityni.org/)

**Investing In Volunteers** — *UK quality standard for all organisations which involve volunteers in their work.*

[www.investinginvolunteers.org.uk/](http://www.investinginvolunteers.org.uk/)

**The UK Volunteering Forum** — *Brings together the national volunteering development agencies of the four countries in the UK.*

[www.ukvf.org.uk/](http://www.ukvf.org.uk/)

**Volunteer Development Scotland** — *The lead agency for the development of volunteering in Scotland.*

[www.vds.org.uk/](http://www.vds.org.uk/)

**Wales Council for Voluntary Action** — *The lead agency for the development of volunteering in Wales.*

[www.wcva.org.uk/main/dsp\\_home.cfm](http://www.wcva.org.uk/main/dsp_home.cfm)

**Volunteering England** — *The lead agency for the development of volunteering in England. The site also contains information on the Institute for Volunteering Research.*

[www.volunteering.org.uk/](http://www.volunteering.org.uk/)

**Volunteering Ireland** — *This website provides useful good practice information as well as information about volunteering in Ireland.*

[www.volunteeringireland.com/](http://www.volunteeringireland.com/)

**Brighton and Hove Volunteer Centre** — *This website contains an excellent and easy to use good practice guide for volunteer managers.*

[www.bh-impetus.org/volunteer\\_centre/index.php](http://www.bh-impetus.org/volunteer_centre/index.php)

**Energize Inc** — *Information on all aspects of volunteer management including helpful hints and tips for volunteer managers.*

[www.energizeinc.com/](http://www.energizeinc.com/)

**Casa for children** — *Casenet contains interesting and informative good practice articles about volunteering.*

[http://www.casaforchildren.org/site/c.mtJSJ7MPIsE/b.5466253/k.7C7C/Working\\_with\\_Volunteers.htm](http://www.casaforchildren.org/site/c.mtJSJ7MPIsE/b.5466253/k.7C7C/Working_with_Volunteers.htm)

**Points of Light Foundation** — *This website provides information on volunteering and volunteer centres in the USA.*

[www.pointsoflight.org/](http://www.pointsoflight.org/)





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