

NORTHERN IRELAND
WAR MEMORIAL
MUSEUM



Access Policy

Name of Museum	Northern Ireland War Memorial (NIWM)
Name of governing body	The Council of the Northern Ireland War Memorial Incorporated
Date approved by governing body	23 March 2023
Policy review procedure	Every five years or as required
Date policy is due for full review	March 2028
Policy written and reviewed by	Jenny Haslett (Museum Manager)

INTRODUCTION

This Policy describes our commitment to offering an inclusive service and outlines how access is provided and what processes we have in place to evaluate, monitor, reflect and respond to users' needs and develop our collection, facilities and services.

The NIWM is committed to offering an inclusive service. Being accessible is an integral part of our Mission. Providing access to the collection and all associated information allows the organisation to meet statutory, legal, accreditation and governance obligations and to ensure fulfilment of Statement of Charitable Purpose and Associated Public Benefit. The NIWM is committed to enabling access to the collection for learning, research and enjoyment by all within the reasonable constraints of resources, conservation and security.

This Access Policy and Plan has been informed by an access audit and has been developed in consultation with museum users.

OUR MISSION

The Northern Ireland War Memorial was established to provide an enduring memorial for the men and women of Northern Ireland who died in the two World Wars, and to commemorate the American presence in Northern Ireland during the Second World War.

Now an Accredited Museum, our mission is to tell the story of Northern Ireland's role in the Second World War comprehensively and authentically through engaging exhibitions, publications, research, outreach, and accessible learning programmes. In addition, we maintain war memorials to the fallen in the First and Second World War and the Belfast Blitz. We organise respectful commemorations, provide office and meeting accommodation to ex-service charities, and award small grants to projects which are in line with our charitable objectives.

DEFINITION OF ACCESS

When we refer to access, we mean the opportunity to engage with our museum, collections, and expertise. Access is made possible when physical/sensory, cultural, economic, intellectual, technological, geographic, and attitudinal barriers are removed, reduced, or overcome, leading to the engagement with the museum.

The NIWM considers the following barriers:

- **Physical/sensory/digital** – people with physical disabilities, limited mobility, or hearing or visual impairments may not be able to access the museum, website, social media platforms, resources and programmes.
- **Cultural** – some people may feel that the museum is not relevant to them and does not reflect their cultural or social heritage, or their interests.
- **Economic** – some people may not be able to afford to travel to visit the museum or take part in our programmes.
- **Social** – some people may experience a lack of self-esteem or confidence due to low skills levels, negative personal experience of learning, previously undetected or unaddressed

learning disabilities, social problems such as unemployment, abuse or bullying. Social barriers relate to the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, learn, work and age.

- **Intellectual** – some people may find the museum too specialist in its approach to subjects and how they are presented; some may have learning disabilities which affect their ability to engage with the museum; and some may not be able to read or speak English.
- **Technological** – some people may not have access to the internet at home or use a mobile phone.
- **Geographic** – some people will live too far away to visit the museum.
- **Attitudinal** – some people may have a lack of interest in, or awareness of, the museum and the subjects and issues it deals with.

PROVISION OF INFORMATION IN OTHER LANGUAGES IN RESPONSE TO THE NEEDS OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES

The NIWM acknowledges that some visitors to the museum may not be able to read or speak English. Provisions for improving access in terms of offering tours and interpretation in other languages is outlined in the Access Plan.

INTERGENERATIONAL EQUALITY

The NIWM pays due regard to intergenerational equality. Each generation has the right to inherit the same diversity in natural, cultural, health, and economic resources enjoyed by previous generations and to equitable access to the use and benefits of these resources.

The rights of future generations to enjoy access to the current collection are safeguarded by the high standards of collection care outlined in the *Collections Care and Conservation Policy and Plan*.

BALANCING CARE AND MANAGEMENT OF COLLECTIONS AGAINST THE PROVISION OF ACCESS

Access must be balanced with the need to care for the collection therefore restrictions will sometimes be placed on handling objects, their exposure to light, moisture or other harmful environmental conditions.

As outlined in the Care and Conservation Policy, the NIWM will seek professional conservation advice when exhibitions are being developed and will use facsimiles when an original cannot be displayed.

The NIWM is committed to continuing professional photography of the collection to further engagement with the collection online.

IDENTIFYING THE DIFFERING NEEDS OF OUR USERS

The NIWM has various processes in place to evaluate, monitor, reflect and respond to its users' needs and develop its collections, facilities and services. These include:

- Facilitating visitor surveys
- Examining completed comment cards
- Monitoring TripAdvisor comments
- Responding to feedback received from groups availing of learning workshops and resources.
- Reviewing comments at quarterly Museum Committee meetings and taking appropriate action.
- Ensuring that the operational team undertakes specific training, identified through regular appraisals, to eliminate barriers to access.
- Allocating resources to developing partnership projects which facilitate access to the collection.
- Completing an Access Audit every 5 years or as required.
- Responding to complaints and poor feedback by following the complaints procedure outlined in the External Complaints Policy.
- Strategic planning in consultation with users, as outlined below.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

The NIWM Strategic Plan 2023-27 was developed through consultation with trustees, staff, stakeholders, and museum users. Visitor feedback in the form of surveys, comment cards and online comments were analysed and considered. A draft Strategic Plan was produced and published online for a period of public consultation through focus groups with museum users.

As a result, the Strategic Plan has been shaped by the views of our key audiences including educators, students, older people, advocacy groups and charities such as the Alzheimer's Society, RNIB and Dementia NI.

To deliver on the strategic priorities outlined in the Strategic Plan for 2023-27 and the Access Plan, the NIWM will continue to consult with audiences to remove as many barriers to access as practicable, within the limits of budgetary and planning considerations.

ETHICS AND LEGISLATION

The NIWM acknowledges legal requirements in the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the Human Rights Act 1998, and the Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order 2005 (SEND0). The NIWM adheres to the Museums Associations Code of Ethics 2015 in all matters affecting access to the museum and its collection.

The NIWM considers research published by the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities, Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB), Action on Hearing Loss (RNID), ADAPTNI, Autism NI, Alzheimer's Society and MENCAP, when making changes to the museum and when developing new learning programmes.

In particular, the NIWM refers to the Museums Association's Learning and Engagement Manifesto from 2020 which touches on cultural rights, cultural democracy and social justice including access to culture and equality of access.

The NIWM is General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) compliant and the NIWM Privacy Policy is publicly available online at www.niwarmemorial.org

HOW WE PROVIDE ACCESS

The NIWM is committed to maximising access by through the following core commitments:

Physical access

- Taking reasonable steps to ensure that policies, practices and procedures do not discriminate against disabled people and by removing, altering or circumventing physical barriers within our building.
- Ensuring that lift access is provided to all public spaces.
- Ensuring that all the museum, learning spaces, meeting rooms, toilets and information desks are accessible to wheelchair users.
- Providing accessible seating throughout our building.
- Maintaining an accurate profile on AccessAble.
- Providing accessibility information on the NIWM website so that audiences can pre-plan their visit.

Sensory access

- Providing front-of-house staff who have the awareness and skills to successfully communicate with and provide a quality service to people with visual or hearing impairments.
- Following RNIB and Action on Hearing Loss good practice guidelines.
- Ensuring the exhibition includes a range of multisensory exhibits (e.g. touch, smell, listen to)
- Continuing to offer talks, reminiscence, and dementia friendly workshops, engaging external facilitators when required.
- Ensuring that video-based exhibits have subtitles.
- Providing free loan boxes of handling collection items to schools and groups
- Offering on request touch tours that are specifically designed for people with sensory impairments.
- Ensuring that our website meets the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) AA standard.
- Providing fun and engaging multisensory workshops for under 5s.

Digital access

- Designing and creating content for digital platforms that, regardless of a person's disability, can be interacted with in a meaningful and equivalent way.
- Formatting the NIWM website with consistent navigation, structured headings, titling hyperlinks and describing images (alt/on page) to enhance experience for all users.
- Including text-only versions of documents using Microsoft Word alongside online documents and PDFs to allow screen reader access to information.
- Adding captions and recorded voice to recorded audio/ video content.

Intellectual access

- Ensuring that the text used in exhibitions, educational resources, publications, website and social media channels is carefully tailored to the needs of their intended audiences, in line with the museum's style guide.
- Using a variety of interpretative methods to enable access through a varied events programme which includes lectures, musical events and dramatisations.
- Ensuring that the content and delivery of our learning programmes are tailored to the learning needs of their audiences.

- Providing a tailored programme for special schools and SEN units in mainstream schools and colleges.
- Continuing to engage with new audiences through pilot projects and partnerships.
- Enabling supervised access to the research and stored collection for researchers.
- Responding to research enquiries.
- Continuing to offer opportunities for volunteers and university students.
- Providing a free illustrated book, learning resources and loan boxes to preschools and children under 5
- Regular staff training in Dementia Awareness, JAM card, Autism awareness and SEN

Attitudinal access

- Ensuring that our promotional activities present the museum as a welcoming, nonthreatening, inclusive destination.
- Ensuring that visitors are made to feel welcome on arrival and are put at their ease.
- Creating environments in which people can feel comfortable, valued and able to learn at their own pace and level.
- Upholding NIWM Values to ensure all visitors are treated with equal respect within an inclusive atmosphere and welcomed according to their individual needs.

Cultural/social access

- Offering a programme of exhibitions, events, lectures and workshops which highlight the collection and are designed to involve, educate, and inform groups from a wide range of backgrounds, abilities, and all sectors of the community.
- Making the museum and its programmes as relevant as possible to Northern Ireland's culturally and socially diverse society
- Advertise across a range of publications and platforms targeting local visitors and tourists.
- Host commemorations for Armistice Day and the anniversaries of the Belfast Blitz.

Economic access

- Maintaining free entry to the museum and ensuring we are open to the public six days a week.
- Providing free on-site workshops for primary and post primary schools and a travel grant scheme to alleviate travel expenses.
- Providing free craft packs to primary school children.
- Providing free outreach programmes to schools and groups who would find it impossible to afford travelling to the museum.
- Providing free online resources such as learning resources, videos and publications.
- Offering small grants to projects which are in line with our charitable purposes.
- Offering a free self-led Belfast Blitz audio tour of the Cathedral Quarter

Geographic access

- Providing a rich online experience including social media, lectures and blog posts highlighting the collection.
- Continuing to sell publications online which highlight the museum's collection and related information.
- Providing outreach workshops across Northern Ireland.

- Collecting a diverse range of wartime accounts through a Research Officer who is resourced to travel across Northern Ireland to conduct relevant interviews.
- Providing object loans to other museums nationally and internationally.
- Offering virtual workshops for schools and groups.
- Continuing to deliver a Marketing Strategy which proactively reaches out across Northern Ireland to intended audiences.

INTERPRETATIVE METHODS

The NIWM currently uses a ranges of interpretative methods to exhibit the collection including:

- Exhibitions
- Publications
- Blog posts and articles on social media
- Lectures
- Family events
- Commemorations
- Responding to research enquiries
- Facilitating public access to the stored and reference collection
- Workshops (on-site and off-site)
- Loan boxes
- Learning resources such as online videos and Craft Packs of printed activities for schools
- Online videos highlighting the oral history collection.

PLEASE ASK TO SEE THE NIWM ACCESS PLAN TO SEE HOW WE PLAN TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO THE MUSEUM IN THE FUTURE.

