

Citations from MSPI Assessors' reports read at the Museum Standards Programme for Ireland (MSPI) awards ceremony held on Tuesday 27 July, 2021

Crawford Art Gallery: Awarded Full Accreditation Certificate

The Crawford Art Gallery is a National Cultural Institution and holds a significant collection of art works of national importance with its strengths in 20th century and Irish art.

The Assessors were impressed by the amount of work that has taken place since the last assessment and the continued commitment of the Board and staff. The impact of the current pandemic, while causing a myriad of issues, provided an opportunity for staff to concentrate on specific areas of work related to the standards. This is clear in the quality of the application.

The relatively small staff deliver an effective programme of exhibitions and an extensive programme of learning activities. This includes a very effective website which is helping engage with people who are unable to visit during the Coronavirus pandemic. The team is to be congratulated for continuing to provide virtual events and opportunities, for example the annual animation programme, which was delivered through Zoom.

In recommending Full Accreditation the assessors congratulated the Gallery staff on their achievement.

Kilkenny Castle, OPW: Awarded Full Accreditation Certificate

Since its initial assessment the museum has progressed well, in particular with the scale and quality of restoration work undertaken, the interpretative offer at the Castle and development of a wide-ranging activities programme of the highest standard. The application was very well presented,

Much of the work programme in relation to visitor services were compromised in the last year due to the lockdowns. The team, however, used the time gained wisely to make significant progress in tackling collections-related issues.

The current assessment has confirmed that the team at Kilkenny Castle, drawing on advice and support from within OPW, are able to meet and exceed the standards required for Full Accreditation status.

It is the recommendation of the assessors that the Certificate of Full Accreditation be awarded to the museum.

Museum of Free Derry: Awarded Full Accreditation Certificate

The application was well presented, and the videos and materials, provided subsequently, usefully clarified points prior to the meeting.

Since the last assessment the Museum has completed its move of all artefacts from the off-site store which is very welcome. It has also invested in the Modes Museum Documentation system. The Museum continues to collect and now holds 10,000 items, largely archival. The visitor numbers continue to grow, doubling the numbers of visitors to the old building and reaching 38,000 in 2019. The small staff continue to deliver an impressive education and engagement programme which help audiences engage with the sensitive content of the Museum.

The ownership of 90% of the Museum's artefacts rests with the families of the Bloody Sunday victims which the family's treasure and value. It has taken advice from MSPI and from the Northern Ireland Museums Council and has developed its museum-specific care and curatorial systems in line with advice. It is a tightly-run operation with much dependent on the manager who has now widened his role, through MSPI, to work also as a curator of the collections.

The Assessors recommended Full Accreditation is awarded to the Museum of Free Derry.

The Thomas MacDonagh Museum: Awarded Full Accreditation Certificate

The Thomas MacDonagh Museum, situated in the small village of Cloughjordan, has rapidly become a cultural hub for the local community. This local connection is further enhanced by the undoubted willingness of all concerned to maintain a welcoming and inclusive facility open to all visitors. Assessors have previously commented on the passion exhibited by the volunteers who manage and operate the museum.

The Museum was closed to the public for significant periods during 2020. Museum volunteers used the period of closure to improve collections management and to re-think their organisational strategies. They have embraced the principles of MSPI and strive to enhance the standards achieved. As a result, they are confident the museum will continue to thrive.

Those involved in the development of the museum readily state that the Museum Standards Programme has helped them identify a clear path in several areas of operation. The level of professionalism, both regarding the application and level of work completed by the volunteers under difficult circumstances, is impressive and we have no hesitation in recommending that the museum achieves full accreditation.

Dublin Castle State Apartments, OPW: Awarded Maintenance of Accreditation Certificate

The iconic status and significance of Dublin Castle cannot be over-stated. It was clearly demonstrated through the assessment process that a comprehensive effort is being made by the Office of Public Works to both raise curatorial standards and to provide an exemplar public service at the site. Previous assessments have noted the importance of the State Apartments and the range and quality of education and exhibitions work. I can record further achievements in the collections management processes, participative education services, and important collections research programmes. These, coupled with a sensitive approach to identifying customer requirements, enhance the profile of the Office of Public Works as a body fully committed to the development of professional standards.

Exhibition and education activities and programmes have maintained their excellence and it is especially important to acknowledge the efforts being made to engage with disadvantaged sections of the community within participative education schemes. This approach has been acknowledged internationally.

I have no hesitation in confirming that all the standards have been maintained at Dublin Castle.

Farmleigh, OPW: Awarded Maintenance of Accreditation Certificate

Farmleigh is to be acknowledged for its success in continuing to reconcile the very different roles of collections development, care and access with its role as a State Guest House and functions venue. However, in recent years a fundamental shift has occurred in Farmleigh's strategy which now places the preservation and interpretation of the collections, and the care of the building, at the heart of all of the organisation's activity. Staff speak of this as a pivotal moment which has driven the professionalisation of their policy and practice; what was some years ago perceived as a government guest house is now perceived to be a 'heritage and conservation organisation' using a high quality and unique collection to build new audiences. The MSPI standard has given staff a framework for driving forward this strategic change which is reflected in plans and programming.

The application and assessment process demonstrated that Farmleigh continues to maintain the MSPI standards and in some cases it exceeds them. Farmleigh's governance, management and practice is to a high standard and staff are to be commended for their professionalism, enthusiasm and commitment.

The GAA Museum: Awarded Maintenance of Accreditation Certificate

The Museum has achieved much of note over the last five years – including significant development of the front of house and related IT systems; the outstanding range of exhibitions, education and events aimed at providing accessibility and inclusivity to multiple audiences: and improvements to collections access via the on-line archive and website. Most recently the Museum has developed and delivered the high-profile *Bloody Sunday Exhibition* accompanied by an extensive series of lectures and events, plus the hugely successful *Sport, Peace and Reconciliation Summer School* that took place on-site in August. All of this has been accomplished in tandem with achieving significant year-on-year growth in visitor numbers and profit.

It continues to be notable that the Museum's impressive achievements are the result of a very small staff team working closely with a committed board, that provides clear strategic direction and support for the Museum's development.

On the basis of this assessment, my recommendation to the Heritage Council is for Maintenance of Accreditation. The governing bodies and management of the GAA and the GAA Museum are congratulated on this achievement.

Galway City Museum: Awarded Maintenance of Accreditation Certificate

The success of Galway City Museum is a result of the support of the City Council and the enthusiasm and dedication of its staff. The Museum demonstrates high standards of collections management which underpins their activities of education and public engagement. At the time of the assessment, the Museum was preparing to start a major redevelopment project which will provide new opportunities for exhibition and improved environmental control. The application was very well-presented.

Like all other cultural institutions, the Museum has had a prolonged closure during the pandemic but, at the time of the assessment, the Museum had reopened its ground floor exhibitions to visitors, mainly by appointment, with mitigation measures in place.

The Museum has continued to develop since the last assessment. Galway won the European Capital of Culture designation for 2020, and although was badly affected by the coronavirus outbreak, the Museum produced a major multi-disciplinary exhibition, entitled 'Monument'. This celebrates the cultural landscapes of the islands in Europe and focuses on the Aran Islands in Galway Bay.

Since achieving Full Accreditation in 2017, the Museum has continued to maintain the Interim and Full Standards required by the Museum Standards Programme for Ireland.

Highlanes Gallery: Awarded Maintenance of Accreditation Certificate

It is very encouraging, to see ongoing progress as Highlanes Gallery Board of Directors and staff continue to apply and invest in the standards underpinning the MSPI programme. Particularly evident is a strong emphasis on programming and the quality of visitor experience. The Gallery's exhibition policy is clearly influenced by a good understanding of audiences underpinned by regular visitor surveys and analysis of statistic and qualitative data. Behind the scenes there has also been significant progress in collections care, with physical improvements to the Store, better seals on doors and windows in the building, an increased application of monitoring and analysis of environmental conditions and plans to improve gallery lighting.

Also commendable is the resilience being shown in the face of the Covid-19 crisis. Staff at Highlanes Gallery responded quickly and creatively, ensuring that the gallery has a strong presence in the local community and continues to make plans for partnerships and cross-border working.

Following a review of the application, the assessor recommends that a certificate confirming Maintenance of Accreditation be awarded. The assessor commends the high quality of the application, and staff are to be congratulated for the thorough production and clear presentation of all required evidence and documentation.

Rathfarnham Castle, OPW: Awarded Maintenance of Accreditation Certificate

Since the last assessment the museum has progressed well, in particular with its regular programme of activities and also with the near total elimination of the backlog in documentation of collections highlighted in 2016.

It was clear from the application and detailed discussions during the assessment, that great organisational and staff resilience was evident in the immediate and continued response to the pandemic lockdown. There was a clear recognition of opportunity within the current crisis.

It was also apparent that the museum has made very considerable progress and staff have developed accordingly through engagement with the Museum Standards Programme. The Collections Manager displayed a thorough knowledge of the Standards and the actions required for Maintenance of Accreditation.

The impact of COVID is likely to have far-reaching impact on the sector as a whole and it was reassuring that the team at Rathfarnham were looking at how to move the very full programme to a digital platform.

Rathfarnham Castle has a small team but the site is well managed and cared for and continues to meet all the criteria required within the Museum Standards Programme for Ireland. It is therefore recommended that a certificate confirming maintenance of accreditation be awarded.