

Welsh Museum is learning from the past, looking to the future



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Working across departments to connect the strands of sustainability

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National Museum Wales

Overview

This SD story looks at how for over 10 years Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales has put sustainability into its operations by involving all staff in delivering long term benefits.

Background

Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales (NMW) - is a family of seven national museums across Wales:

- National Slate Museum, Llanberis
- National Wool Museum, Dre-fach Felindre
- National Museum Cardiff
- National Waterfront Museum, Swansea
- Big-Pit: National Coal Museum, Blaenafon
- National Roman Legion Museum, Caerleon and St Fagans
- National History Museum, Cardiff
- National Collections Centre at Nantgarw

Results

Identify outcomes that increase the wellbeing of Wales

Evidence

Make decisions using better information

Collaboration

Work with others across boundaries

Long term

Fix the causes rather than the symptoms

Connect

Focus on the economic, social and environmental benefits

Transparency

Measure and report on the difference you make

This is one of a series of SD stories that can be found on the Welsh Government website at <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/sustainabledevelopment/>

NMW's primary aim is the advancement in education of the public. It employs approximately 650 staff, and gains around 1.6 million visitors annually across all seven sites.

Their overarching mission is to develop a family of world-class national museums to inspire learning and connect people with the past, present and future. NMW has put sustainability into their operations for three main reasons; money, purpose and ethics.

Why

NMW's core purpose is to educate the public. As sustainability has emerged as a big issue and the museum has a large amount of expertise in related topics such as biodiversity and physical sciences they saw it as their responsibility to communicate sustainable development in their exhibitions and sites.

As well as this academic interest there is also an ethical interest. NMW sees itself as playing an important role in tackling climate change as well as other environmental and social challenges. It is an organisation that likes to be seen as forward thinking on national issues that are in everyone's interest and not just for financial gain.

"As it has progressed, the sustainability agenda has been championed more and more by Welsh Government which has encouraged us to maintain our direction of travel and then also promote more about what we do in terms of sustainability."

Mark Richards,
Deputy Director General and Director of
Operations, National Museum Wales.

NMW has, like all in the public sector been hit financially by a cut in funding. Their revenue grant has been cut over 4% over the three years leading up to 2013/14, and their capital maintenance grant was decreased by £325k (from £925k - that is 35%) in 2011/12.

The cuts have led the organisation to focus on making savings and looking longer term at ways to create revenue through renewable energy schemes.

What they did

NMW began their sustainability journey in 2001 and quickly established a sustainability forum to guide a strategy that focuses on three key areas:

1. Public programming including sustainable development messages within a scientific, archaeological, social, industrial and agricultural history context.
2. Research related to natural sciences and the maintenance of the natural environment.
3. Operational practices such as procurement, waste, energy, and travel, all managed through Green Dragon Level 3.

NMW set up the sustainability forum about eight years ago with a cross section of representatives from the larger departments, about 15 in all, and includes staff who are dealing with sustainability issues but also anyone who has a general interest in this area. As a result the forum is well embedded into the organisation and helps drive through change which might otherwise be difficult to implement at a local level.

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The work of the forum is also well disseminated among staff via quarterly meetings of senior and middle managers, with senior management receiving regular updates of emerging issues. Importantly, NMW report on sustainability to their trustees on an annual basis, which means it is not side-lined at the strategic level.

To further support the forum, NMW have identified 20 sustainability champions in the larger departments who act as important communication routes between senior management and operational staff. The champions will flag up any issues that staff think need tackling and disseminate the wider work of the forum across the organisation making sure their department is doing what it needs to do.

NMW like to inform all staff of the work they do on sustainability, and therefore they produce a sustainability newsletter every 6 months, as well as keep people up to date through their intranet site and share success through their sustainability blog.

“We could have made the forum just have an environmental focus and include select individuals, but then there may have been the perception it was being managed by ‘green enthusiasts’ and wouldn’t have had ownership across the whole organisation.”

Mark Richards,
Deputy Director General and Director of
Operations, National Museum Wales.

What changed

In public programming there has been a shift towards greater inclusion of sustainability too. In 2010, in conjunction with the Welsh Government’s Sustainable Development department, NMW put on the exhibition ‘Climate Change What’s Occuring?’ with an educational message to enable people to understand the impacts and causes of climate change. The exhibition travelled to over 25 venues across Wales.

The SCAN project meanwhile helps schools promote Education for Sustainable Development enabling children to take part in investigations and access free sustainability resources. At St Fagans, Tŷ Gwyrdd eco home enables thousands of visitors to discover, talk and learn about sustainable living every year. In operational practices NMW has made good progress on procurement which now addresses the whole life costs and impacts of products and services, and the evaluation of the environmental performance of their suppliers and contractors.

NMW have invested now to generate income in the longer term. They installed a Combined Heat and Power system saving them about £90,000 a year in energy bills at the National Museum in Cardiff, while at Nantgarw and Big Pit they installed 50kW photovoltaic arrays at a cost of £70,000 which will give a payback of around £400,000 each over a 20 year period through the Feed In Tariff. A further combined heat and power plant is planned at St Fagans with another being explored at the National Waterfront Museum, Swansea.

In transport, the museum was a winner in the 2012 Cardiff Cycle Challenge with 50 staff coming to work by bike. The introduction of new facilities and showers really encouraged staff to cycle more to work.

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What obstacles existed

From the perspective of workforce engagement, getting every member of staff in the organisation on board is always a challenge noted Katie Mortimer-Jones, Secretary to the Sustainability Forum.

One of the biggest challenges is the balance between short term and long term thinking. With a 10 year vision, a three year plan and a one year operational plan NMW are working to a three year funding framework, making it difficult to take decisions for the long term. However improvements in technology and a mind-set to invest for the future have helped.

Going forward NMW is continually looking for improvements. It's working with the rest of the sector to change specific temperature guidelines for exhibitions giving more flexibility to adjust heating and humidity levels in buildings. It's also talking with Network Rail, Cardiff Council and Cardiff Bus Tours about improving public transport links to their sites in Cardiff and St Fagans.

“Not every member of staff will be passionate about sustainability which can cause obstacles when introducing policies such as reducing the number of computer printers across sites. Having departmental champions across the museum to explain the benefits and reasoning behind individual policies is extremely beneficial”.

Katie Mortimer-Jones,
Secretary to the Sustainability Forum.

What they learned

The most vital parts of NMW's journey to date have been gaining cross department representation in the sustainability forum and ensuring that sustainability decisions are led from senior management. Top level support has also proven instrumental for changing behaviour. An example is when switching to a centralised printer system, staff were reluctant to lose their individual printers. When these decisions come from the forum it means that there is senior level approval. The result has been electricity savings, more efficient printing, and reduced cost on PAT testing.

For Mortimer-Jones the forum works well because of the nature and mixture of people that make up its membership.

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Mark Richards emphasised the need to look at the evidence and the payback times when investing, explaining that NMW will never be an organisation that puts in a cutting edge technology first because of the risk involved. It looks at things with a risk based approach and want technologies to be proven first. However, once proven NMW will embrace them wholeheartedly.

Working with others and drawing out internal skills and passion has been a vital ingredient to NMW's success. By tapping into the expertise of their own staff and working with other organisations such as the Carbon Trust, obstacles to change have been overcome and sustainability is part of how the museum operates on a day to day basis.

Contact and Links

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“There were energy schemes we were considering previously which were not viable because of the payback period. Originally it would have been 4-5 years but now because of technology improvements and as the cost of gas and electricity has gone up, the payback period has gone down. Our general view now is that we will consider projects with less than a 10 year payback.”

Mark Richards,
Deputy Director General and Director of
Operations, National Museum Wales.

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