Report on the

New Zealand Museums Standards Scheme

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Introduction

The New Zealand Museums Standards Scheme Ngā Kaupapa Whaimana a Ngā Whare Taonga o Aotearoa (NZMSS) was devised to provide a framework that would encourage museums of all sizes to evaluate their work and continually improve their performance.

The NZMSS enables museums to work towards a set of relevant standards held in common with internationally accepted museum best practice. The NZMSS was officially launched in 2002 following in-depth research into comparable schemes internationally and extensive evaluation of NZ trials.

The scheme is fully funded and administered by National Services Te Paerangi (NSTP). NSTP works to strengthen the sector by providing practical and strategic help through training, and formal and informal advice to museums, galleries, and iwi throughout New Zealand. NSTP is the team within Te Papa that leads this work, developing partnerships, cross-sector initiatives, and joint work plans with other institutions and agencies to effectively share resources.

After 12 years in operation, the performance and content of the NZMSS need evaluation and updating. The aim of the evaluation is to add value to the NZMSS, to encourage participation and access to the scheme, and to continue to develop its usefulness to the sector. The scheme needs to reflect changes that have occurred in New Zealand and the sector over the last decade. This report investigates sector views and makes recommendations about the NZMSS, using a mixed methodology to find patterns in the way museums use and perceive the NZMSS and to understand how it can be improved.

Research objectives

The purpose of the research was to find out:

- How and why the NZMSS was developed, and how the scheme operates
- What can be learned from other standards schemes
- The recommendations from earlier reports on the NZMSS
- The level of awareness of the NZMSS in museums and partner organisations
- Who is using the NZMSS: size of organisation and location
- How the scheme is perceived
- The levels and types of participation in the scheme
- Whether the scheme is relevant and useful to the sector
- What changes are suggested and would be supported by the sector.

The research was commissioned by NSTP to provide guidance for updates to the NZMSS.

How and why the scheme was developed, and how it operates

Individuals and professional groups within the New Zealand museum sector had explored ideas for introducing formal professional standards since 1970.

The initiative to develop a New Zealand scheme followed on from a Churchill Fellowship study tour to the United Kingdom in 1994 by Lynda Wallace, then Regional Museums Liaison Officer for Canterbury. She suggested that the Museums Association of Aotearoa New Zealand Te Rōpu Hanga Kaupapa Taonga (MAANZ), forerunner of Museums Aotearoa, explore the possibility of introducing a standards scheme similar to the UK Museums and Galleries Commission Museums Registration system, in operation since 1988.

In principle MAANZ agreed, but as a voluntary organisation it was not in a position to undertake the investigation, development, or implementation of such a scheme. MAANZ therefore submitted a proposal to Taonga o Aotearoa National Services (the forerunner of National Services Te Paerangi, Te Papa) for it to develop and implement a museum standards programme. Extensive independent sector consultation, sector pilots, and trials were held and evaluated from 1997 to 2002.

In 2002 and 2005 comprehensive independent reports and an evaluation of the scheme in practice were published and recommendations made. Since 2002 over 111 museums have completed the NZMSS (about 20% of such New Zealand institutions), and many more use it informally as a reference or as a self-review resource.

The scheme developed from sector consultation, where the preferred characteristics for a New Zealand museums standards scheme were identified. These characteristics were incorporated into it.

The MZMSS operates as a development framework with options for self-review and/or peer review with report, which are further detailed on page 5.

The main aims of the NZMSS are to:

- Encourage all New Zealand museums to achieve best practice standards in managing their collections, exhibitions, public services, visitors, and resources, and to understand why this is important
- Build public confidence in museums as effective organisations responsible for the care of New Zealand's heritage collections
- Promote good practice in providing visitors and other users with access to the collections through exhibitions, displays, publications, public programmes, and other activities
- Provide a focus for strategic planning, training, and development
- Encourage the development of bicultural policy and practice in museums.

The benefits of the NZMSS include:

- Guidance in meeting approved standards in key areas of museum services
- Confidence among actual and potential donors and lenders that the museum they select is a suitable organisation to care for their objects, taonga, or collections
- Reassurance to Māori of the museum's commitment to honour the responsibilities and obligations of the Treaty of Waitangi/Te Tiriti o Waitangi
- Reassurance among actual and potential funders and sponsors that the museum manages its resources responsibly
- Knowledge among museum personnel that they are doing a good job and can identify where improvements need to be made.

In 2006 the Office of the Auditor-General reported that:

> *The New Zealand Museums Standards Scheme is giving museums the opportunity to benchmark their performance against a set of expectations for sound museum management, and review reports provide valuable feedback. [7.4]*

Its report recommended that:

> *… museums participate in the review processes facilitated through the New Zealand Museums Standards Scheme, as a source of independent assurance and performance benchmarks for the management of their collections. [7.7]*

Key events and dates in the development of the scheme are outlined in Appendix 1.

There was an understanding that the NZMSS could be improved by regular updates made in consultation with the sector. This would provide a framework of standards that all museums could aim to achieve and that would become a familiar and recognised mechanism for improvement and dialogue in the sector. The scheme is described as a "living document" (NZMSS, p5). Standards statements were to be regularly reviewed and updated in consultation with the sector, including those using the scheme each year.

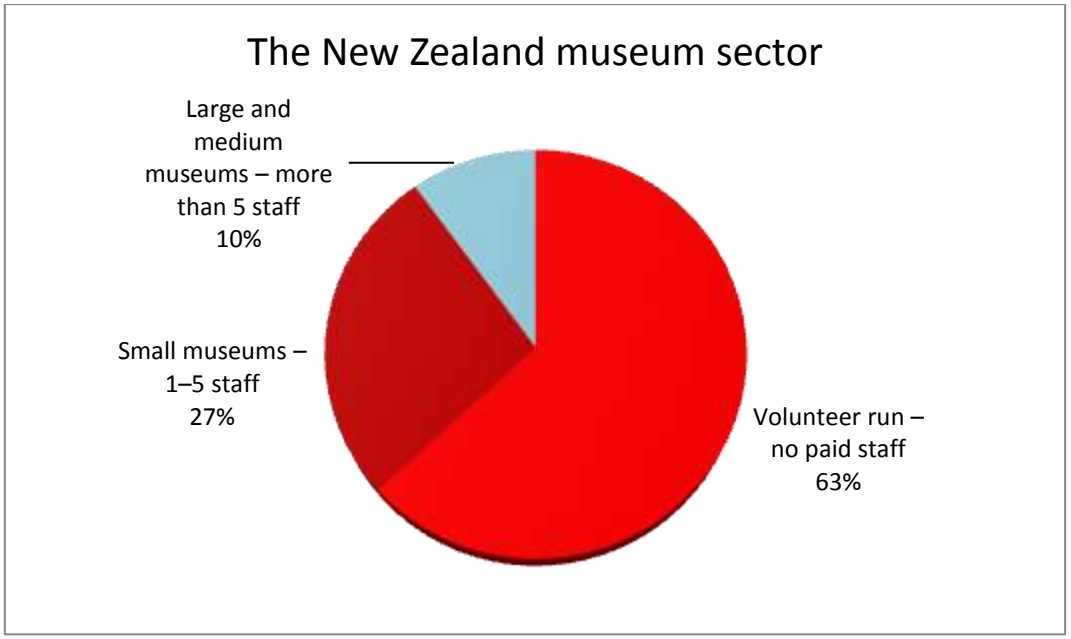
Since its introduction in 2002 the NZMSS has remained in its initial form: available in hard copy from NSTP and online. There has been limited consultation with the sector about the scheme and no modification to it. Collection of feedback from sector participants has not been systematic.

Context of the NZMSS in the New Zealand museum sector

The scheme recognises that there is a wide variety of museums and organisations holding collections in New Zealand. The term "museum" in the NZMSS is used to include any museum, art gallery, iwi museum/cultural centre, historic place, open-air museum, heritage or marae collection, science centre, or exhibition centre.

A Museums Aotearoa survey (2012) reported there were approximately 471 museums and/or galleries in New Zealand, one of the highest numbers per capita in the world (*2012 Sector Survey Report*, Museums Aotearoa, Lisa Cauley, 2013). The majority (63%) are run only by volunteers, and over a quarter (27%) are small museums with 1–5 paid staff.

90% of museums are small organisations that are volunteer run, or have 5 or fewer staff. Museums that are large (over 20 staff) or medium-sized (6–20 staff) make up 10% of all museums in New Zealand.



Statistics drawn from Museums Aotearoa *2012 Sector Survey Report,* 2013.

The estimate of museum numbers does not include all collections and archives or those that fall outside the usual definition of "public museum". These include taonga Māori collections, significant privately held collections, and collections held in schools, universities, RSAs, hospitals, churches, libraries, fire and police stations, machinery and sports clubs, government departments, and other charitable and social agencies throughout New Zealand. It became apparent in the aftermath of the Canterbury earthquakes in 2010 and 2011 that the range of collections and taonga held in communities was much more extensive than expected.

The NZMSS recognises that all museums are unique within their particular situation in New Zealand, and that the sector is a very diverse one that ranges from volunteer groups to large professional organisations that reflect multiple areas of interest and a wide range of expertise.

The intention of the NZMSS is to enable all museums in New Zealand to assess their performance against accepted standards of museum practice and to provide an assurance of quality and accountability, an appreciation of the roles and responsibilities of the museum, and a commitment to best museum practice.

Bicultural practice and its reflection in the NZMSS

As part of best museum practice in New Zealand, there is recognition and acknowledgement of Māori cultural values, knowledge, and tikanga, as underpinned by New Zealand's founding document, the Treaty of Waitangi.

The Treaty in the museum context relates specifically to collections and taonga, public programmes, each museum's location, and its community. These concepts were explored in the publication *Matauranga Māori and Museum Practice – A discussion* (2007), and best practice was outlined in the NSTP resource guides *Matauranga Māori and Museum Practice* in 2006 and *Bicultural Governance* in 2004.

Bicultural practice as best practice is reflected in the NZMSS through standards that connect Treaty principles to museum practice and taonga as well as governance. Standards applying bicultural practice are seeded throughout the modules. The expectation of bicultural practice is confirmed by the arrangement for a bicultural peer review pair to conduct onsite reviews with museums that have undertaken the scheme. The intention is to encourage insights that come from a strengthened bicultural perspective. While the NZMSS does address aspects of bicultural practice in the sector, it does not specify guidelines and practices relating to whare taonga, or focus on matauranga Māori and tikanga Māori.

In 2009 the Ministry for Culture and Heritage reported that Māori cultural organisations interviewed for the report did not feel that the museological framework in the NZMSS suited their structures. However, there was

support for NSTP's intention to adapt the scheme for cultural centres and other cultural bodies (*Report on Te Papa's Support to Other Museum*s, Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2009).

Content and structure of the NZMSS

The NZMSS has a five-module structure:

1. Governance, management, and planning
2. Care of collections and taonga
3. Public programmes (including exhibitions)
4. Customer service
5. Relationships with communities

For each area of activity within each module, the document outlines an Objective and a Standard, followed by a core query question and a series of possible answers. As the scheme was designed as a self-improvement tool, there are additional sections for comments and suggestions for future development (from either the organisation or peer reviewers).

The appendices contain reference material and additional information:

- Roles and responsibilities – explains partnerships
- The Treaty of Waitangi for museum practice – English and te reo Māori versions
- Glossary of museum terms – concise definitions of key terms used in the document
- Resources – full bibliographical details for all print publications and online resources references in the document
- NSTP He Rauemi Resource Guides – full list of available resource guides about museum subjects, written by NSTP

Key features of the NZMSS:

- Inclusiveness – museums of any size or status can commence the scheme
- Involvement is voluntary and the scheme has a self-improvement focus
- Recognition of a bicultural framework, including evaluation by a bicultural peer review team
- A credible, stable, central, resourced management structure for the scheme at NSTP within Te Papa
- Scheme was established and is well supported by the sector
- Free for all organisations
- Readily available data, resources, and supporting information
- NSTP has a programme for supporting the revision and updating of resources and the creation of new resources
- Provides processes, guidance, and advisers (NSTP has two Museum Development Officers and an Iwi Development Officer)
- Does not assess organisations on a pass/fail basis
- Is not linked to any specific funding source(s)
- Is not a compliance or accreditation system
- Does not have a time limit for completion or review period

For conclusions and recommendations made in earlier reports (Rivers, O'Regan and Lynch 2000, TNS 2005, MCH 2009, 2010), see Appendix 2.

How does the NZMSS compare with other schemes in 2015?

Internationally, several new schemes have been developed or reviewed since the introduction of the NZMSS (see Appendix 3).

The NZMSS shares key elements with standards and accreditation schemes internationally. Themes and the assessment methods for meeting core competencies are very similar.

However, the NZMSS alone recognises a bicultural framework. This is not shared by other schemes internationally. The UK Accreditation Scheme includes a bilingual framework (English and Welsh versions) but does not reflect other distinct cultural practices.

All international standards and accreditation schemes have been developed within specific political and environmental frameworks, taking into account national identity, current industry practices, existing resources, and levels of museum development.

In several countries, museums standards accreditation enables organisations to meet the requirements of a Museum Act so they can then officially register as a museum. The museum may then be eligible for guaranteed funding from the government or designated agency. In most instances, museums must meet the definition of a museum set out by the country or by the International Committee on Museums (ICOM). Museums maintain their registration as a museum by submitting regular reports to the administering authority and/or through external regular audits. While minimum standards and conditions have to be met as part of the requirement for registration, the process has few similarities to the NZMSS. In New Zealand there is no formal, overarching Museum Act (although many statutes and regulations apply to museums). While NZMSS achievement may support funder/donor/sponsor confidence, there is no guaranteed funding as a result.

Museum standards schemes internationally are primarily focused on key areas of activity common to organisations that care for collections and that provide collection-based services to the community.

There are some specific standards that apply to museums:

- ICOM has standards and guidelines for ethics, acquisition, personnel, and conservation.
- SPECTRUM (Collections Trust UK) has open and freely available collections management standards.
- ICOM's International Committee for Documentation and the Canadian Heritage Information Network provide documentation and data standards.
- Standards frameworks covering technical standards and legal requirements also relevant to the museum sector include those of the International Standards Organisation, Standards New Zealand, and Standards Australia.
- Archives New Zealand and the New Zealand Public Libraries, Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa also have their own guidelines and standards.

Standards schemes and programmes have been developed in a number of countries with the aim of supporting museums and galleries in their day-to-day activities, meeting their responsibilities to their various stakeholders, attracting support, and achieving organisational objectives. In some countries the framework of standards has been developed collaboratively at a national level, and the mechanisms of programmes are then administered through state-wide systems (for example, in Australia and Canada). These state-based programmes reflect national political and economic circumstances. Overall, the NZMSS shares many similar purposes and features with international schemes, though it does not currently have an accreditation role.

Museums Aotearoa report on accreditation

Museums Aotearoa and its members have expressed an interest in the development of an accreditation system for New Zealand. In 2011 the board reported that it hopes:

> … *that all properly constituted and publicly funded museums will become accredited in time … The strength of accreditation is to give the public, funding bodies and other museums confidence that the accredited museum is professionally run, whether it has paid or volunteer staff, and is achieving the same standards.*
>
> *Promoting Museum Standards – Accreditation for New Zealand's Museums*, a Museums Aotearoa report for discussion at the 2011 Museums Aotearoa Conference

The Museums Aotearoa report lists the perceived benefits of accreditation:

- Encourages museums and galleries (of all sizes) to achieve an agreed level of minimum standards in museum management, collections care, and public access.
- The potential to better regulate the museum industry. Currently a museum can claim national status with little or no scrutiny except the possibility of complaints under the Consumer Guarantees Act.

- May provide a further step for museums that have successfully completed the NZMSS, and set a higher bar for larger museums.
- Offers an opportunity to create a programme that seeks to measure the quality of the museum experience.
- Fosters public recognition of and confidence in museums as repositories of our heritage, including for public donations.
- May link to funding success.

Museums Aotearoa members and board are interested in accreditation centres having a "next level" for large museums, and regulation of the museum sector to provide standards of quality assurance for the public and funders. Accreditation system requirements are discussed below (p8).

Overview of key features of international standards and accreditation schemes

Eighteen schemes were reviewed (see Appendix 3). The oldest was the Nova Scotia Museum Assistance Programme, established in 1966. The most recent review of standards was carried out in 2015 (National Standards for Australian Museums and Galleries).

Key findings:

- Many schemes have a set of basic or core standards applicable to museums of all sizes. Some have additional levels for larger institutions.
- A timeline or deadline for completion is usual.
- Eight of the 18 schemes surveyed are full accreditation schemes, and six of those are directly linked to funding eligibility.
- Eligibility entry criteria vary, from meeting the ICOM or other administering organisations' definitions of "museum" to meeting a set of core standards, or "readiness" criteria.
- Entry costs of the scheme to participant museums vary from no cost through to A$1,000 and US$750.
- Mentoring is usually provided, and for some schemes additional training is available.
- A peer review can be compulsory or optional and often incurs costs to the museum.
- Programmes are frequently followed up by guidance on areas for improvement, priorities, and a development plan.
- Validity periods following an on-site assessment vary from 3 to 10 years.
- A certificate of participation, a plaque, or a listing or profile on a museums website commonly follow successful completion.

Administrators identified the following issues:

- Lack of resources for community-based organisations to undertake the scheme
- Too few programme staff to administer the scheme
- Less relevance to smaller organisations
- Absence of written policies in organisations
- No paid staff to undertake the scheme
- Too much time required to complete
- Peer reviewer training needs
- Differing needs of organisations
- Museums not motivated
- Unable to maintain level of funding to newly registered museums or developing registered museums

Aspects of international accreditation and standards schemes for consideration

A key component of accreditation internationally is the certification of competence awarded by a recognised and respected accrediting organisation. In some countries museum accreditation is closely connected with funding benefits and opportunities.

Accreditation systems tend to be very well resourced, with dedicated staff employed to administer a high level of organisation and complexity, strict timetables for achievement, trained peer reviewers, certification, and

external recognition. Systems also involve robust peer or independent auditing systems and rigorous adherence to a periodic review process.

Standards schemes and programmes emphasise the self-review aspect – institutional self-directed development and improvement supported by an administering organisation.

As discussed above, in the New Zealand museum sector the majority of museums are small organisations caring for collections in their communities. They are comparatively poorly resourced and often run solely by volunteers. Currently there is no statutory or self-regulated mandate for a prescriptive accreditation scheme and nor are clear benefits established for such an approach for the majority New Zealand museums. The NZMSS therefore relies on motivating voluntary engagement from a wide range of museums, many with limited resources.

Some recent developments in international accreditation and standards schemes indicate the following consistent needs:

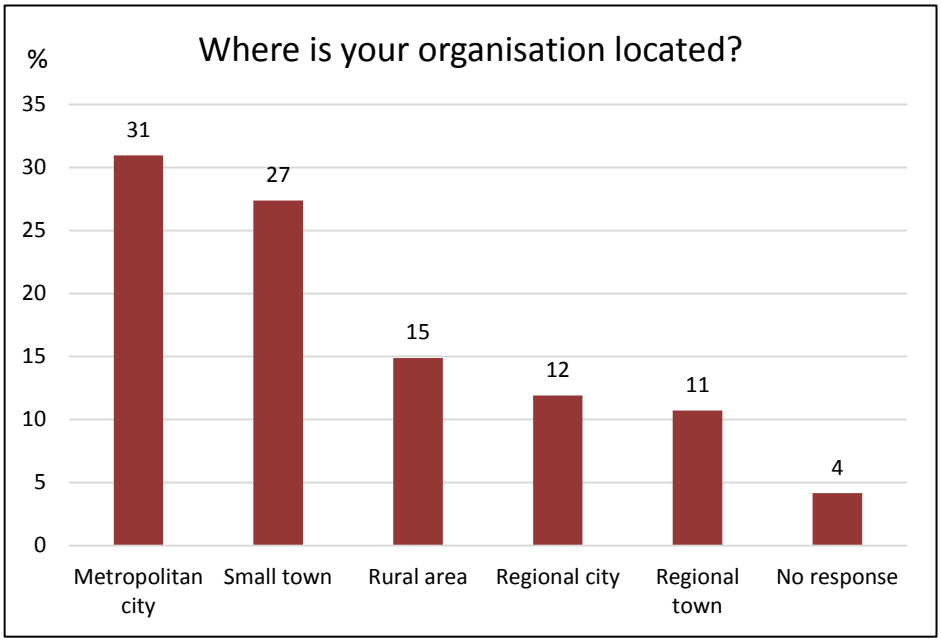
- Recognition or clearer benefits for museums meeting and adhering to certain standards. The community, stakeholders, and funders have an indication of a museum's commitment to good practice and also where more resources and support are needed
- Independent, trained, and experienced peer reviewers with a skill level appropriate to the organisation being peer reviewed and awareness of diversity
- Dedicated staff for effective promotion, coordination, administration, and support
- Regional approach to programmes, allowing focused support and training to museums
- Set timeline or timetable for completion of scheme modules
- Regular updates of content to reflect current developments and changes
- A set number of core non-negotiable standards to be met by all museums initially before commencing a standards programme to build confidence and ensure that basic museum practice requirements are in place
- Pre-standards activities
- Levels of achievement, from achievement of basic or core standards to a higher level
- More structured support, training, and follow-up for museums working towards standards
- Formation of an advisory group to undertake periodic review of management of the scheme – a structured body responsible for management, development, evaluation, and delivery of all elements of any programme

Background and standards scheme research indicates that adequate resources, core standards, trained peer reviewers, planned support and programme delivery, and periodic review are common factors in comprehensive standards schemes. A developmental approach with the aim of improving overall museum practice standards, rather than a focus on compliance or regulation, is common. These insights from evaluation of the NZ and international standards schemes inform this report's recommendations, together with the sector survey and the stakeholder feedback reported on below.

Sector survey findings

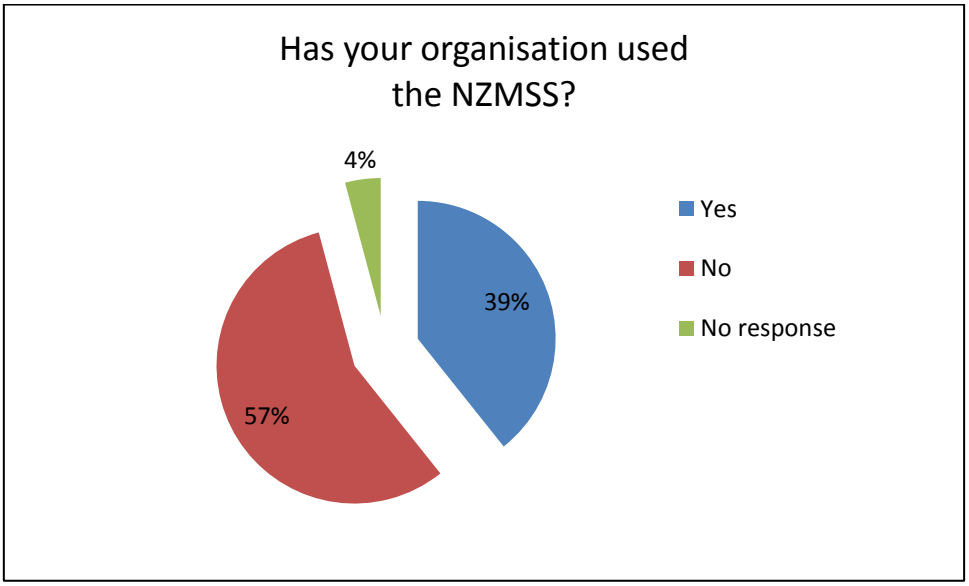
A museum-wide sector survey (quantitative) was sent out in March 2015, and 168 full responses from the 500+ individuals and organisations contacted were received. Further research included two cluster group focus activities and six individual phone interviews (qualitative), which were conducted from March to June 2015. There was a consistency in views and experiences of the scheme that was reflected across all methods (see Appendix 4: Methodology), which supports the validity of the findings.

Location of respondents

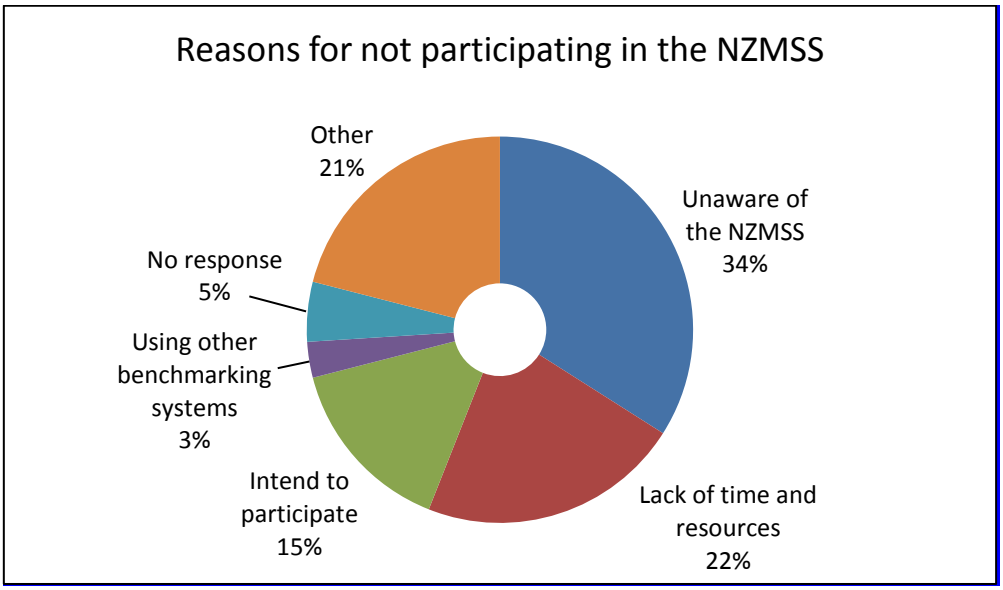


Respondents were evenly spread between museums in metropolitan and regional cities (43%), and in regional towns, small towns, and rural areas (53%). Almost a third of respondents (31%) were metropolitan-based. Paid and volunteer staff numbers and locations indicate that a broad spread of large and small museums responded, although overall responses were weighted towards medium to large institutions.

Participation in the NZMSS



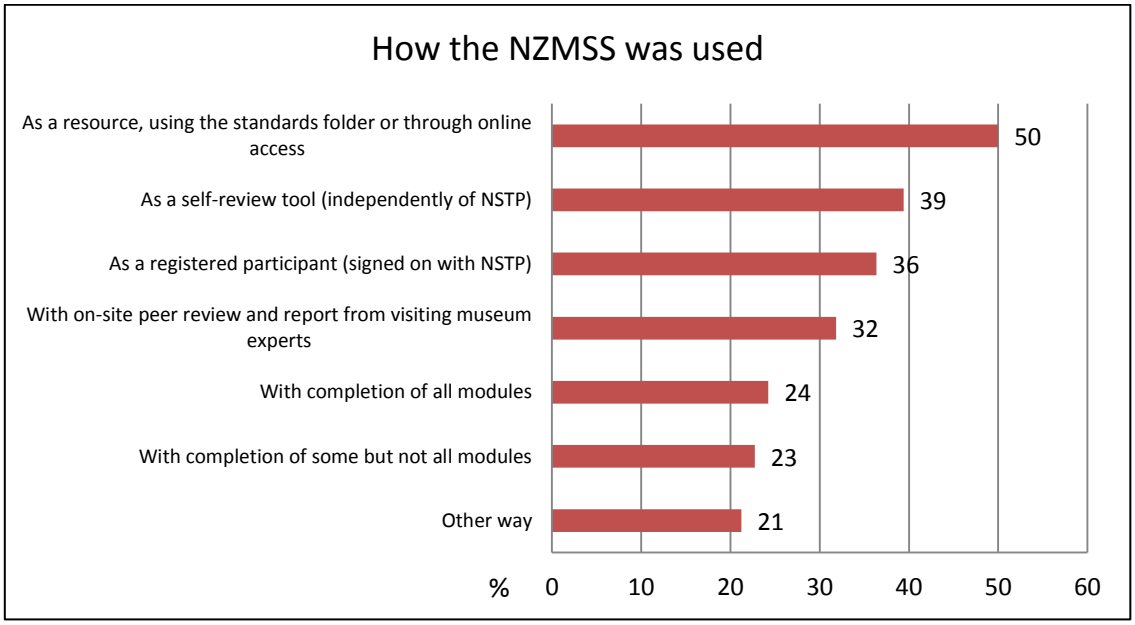
Respondents were asked if their organisation had participated in the NZMSS. 39% of respondents had used the NZMSS. The majority (57%) of respondents had not used the NZMSS. Respondents who indicated they had not used the scheme were excluded from the data analysis after answering this question. Results reported below therefore reflect only those with knowledge of the scheme in practice.



Respondents were asked to select the reason they had not participated in the NZMSS. The main reason given for not participating was being unaware of the NZMSS (34%). Lack of time and resources available to participate accounted for 22% of responses, and 15% had the intention to participate in the future.

Organisations with smaller numbers of paid staff (1–5) and in regional or rural areas were more likely to have used the scheme, compared with organisations with larger numbers of paid staff in city and metropolitan areas.

Almost half (45%) of users had used it in the last 10 years and almost another half (41%) in the last 5 years. 11% of respondents have made ongoing use of the NZMSS.

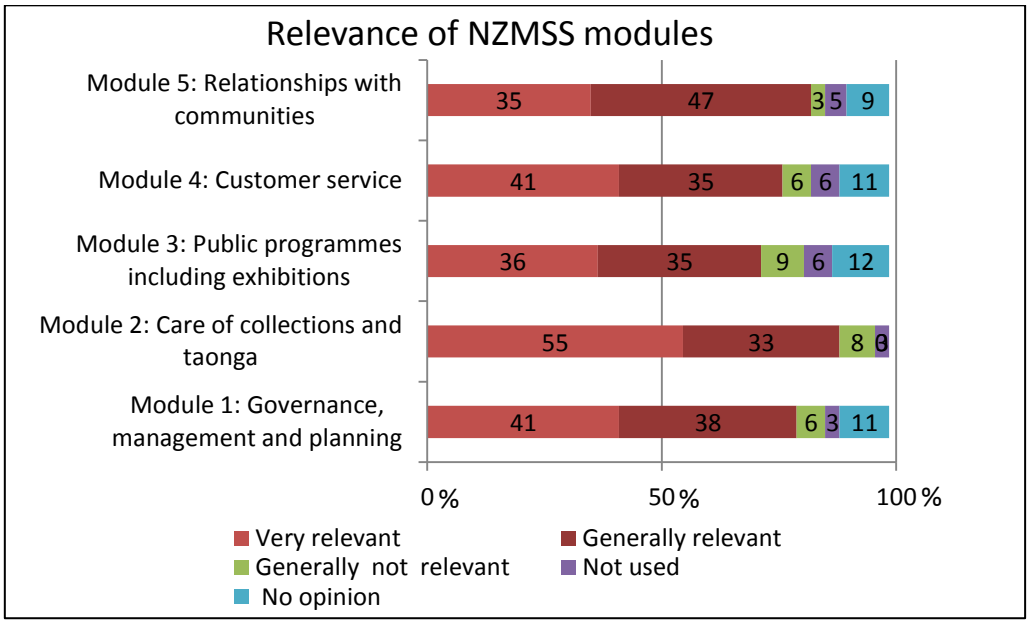


The main uses of the scheme were as a resource (50%) or as a self-review tool, independently of NSTP (39%).

36% used the scheme as a registered participant, and 32% with a peer review. There were 23 downloads of the NZMSS from the NSTP website between April 2014 and February 2015 (10 months), confirming ongoing use of the scheme as a resource.

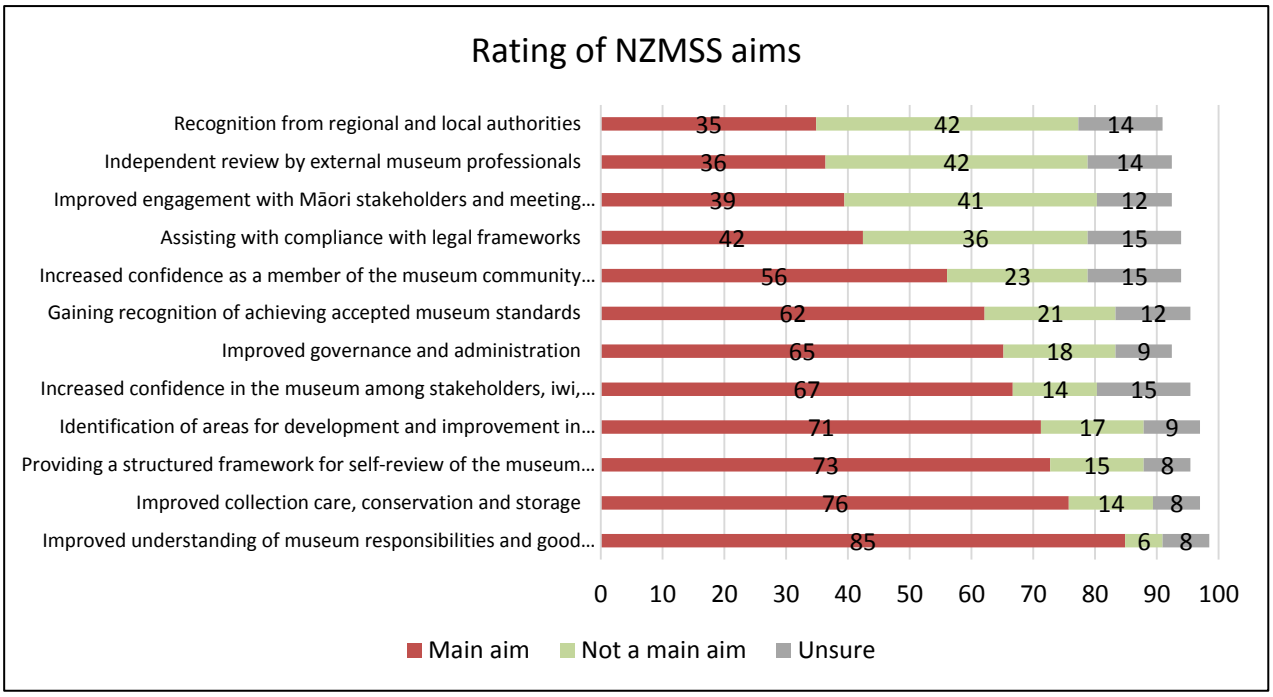
How relevant are the modules to museums?

Four out of the five modules rated over 75% in overall relevance (very relevant or generally relevant). Module 2: Care of collections and taonga had the most relevance (88%). Module 5: Relationships with communities ranked second highest (82%). Module 3: Public programmes including exhibitions was considered the least relevant (71%).

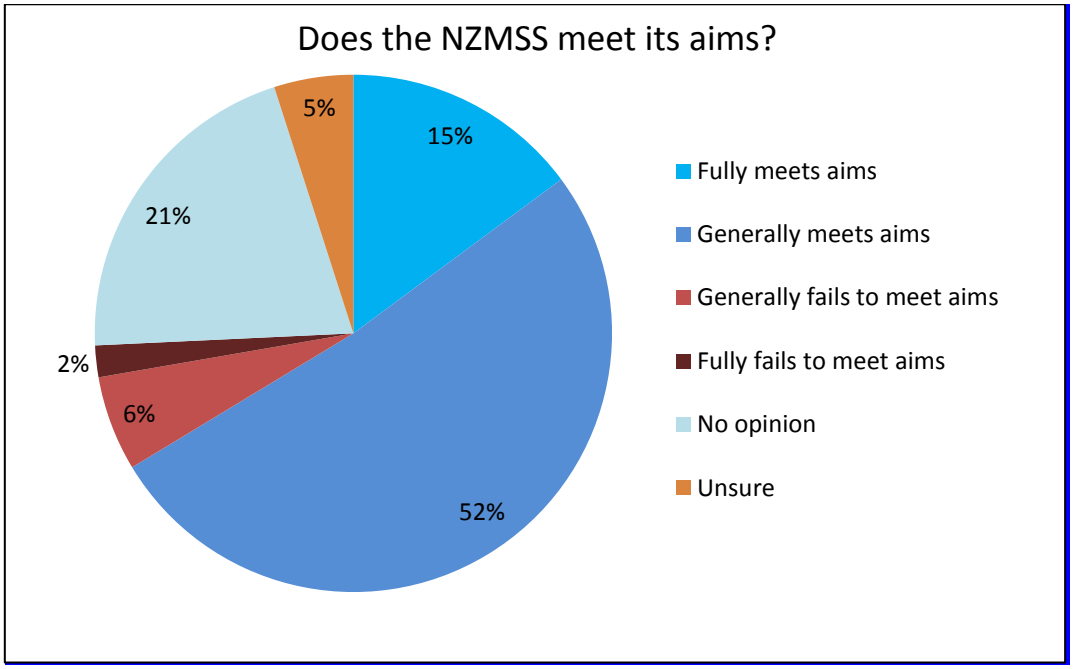


What did museums think were the main aims of the scheme?

Improved understanding of museum responsibilities and good practice (85%) was most consistently rated as an understood main aim of the scheme. Improved collection care, conservation, and storage came second (76%). At the lower end of the scale, independent review by external museum professionals (42%) and recognition from regional and local authorities (42%) were most likely to be considered not a main aim. 41% felt that improved engagement with Māori stakeholders and meeting responsibilities under the Treaty of Waitangi was not a main aim.



Does the NZMSS meet its aims?



67% gave the scheme a positive rating (fully or generally meets aims). 8% gave the scheme a negative rating (generally fails or fully fails to meet aims).

The top two procedures with the highest overall positive satisfaction rating were:

- appearance and format of folder and contents (67%)
- supporting information and resources available from NSTP (61%).

The most dissatisfaction was related to the peer review process:

- peer review with onsite process (12%)
- independent peer reviewer's final report (12%).

What was most useful?

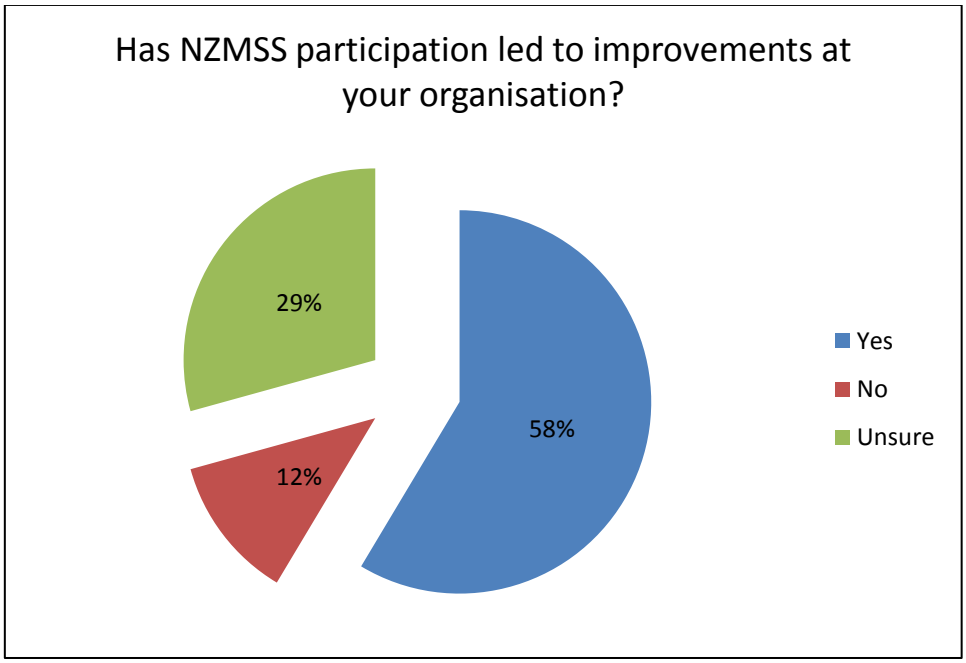
The top two choices were:

- greater understanding of museum responsibilities and practice (65%)
- identification of areas for development and improvement in museum operations (55%).

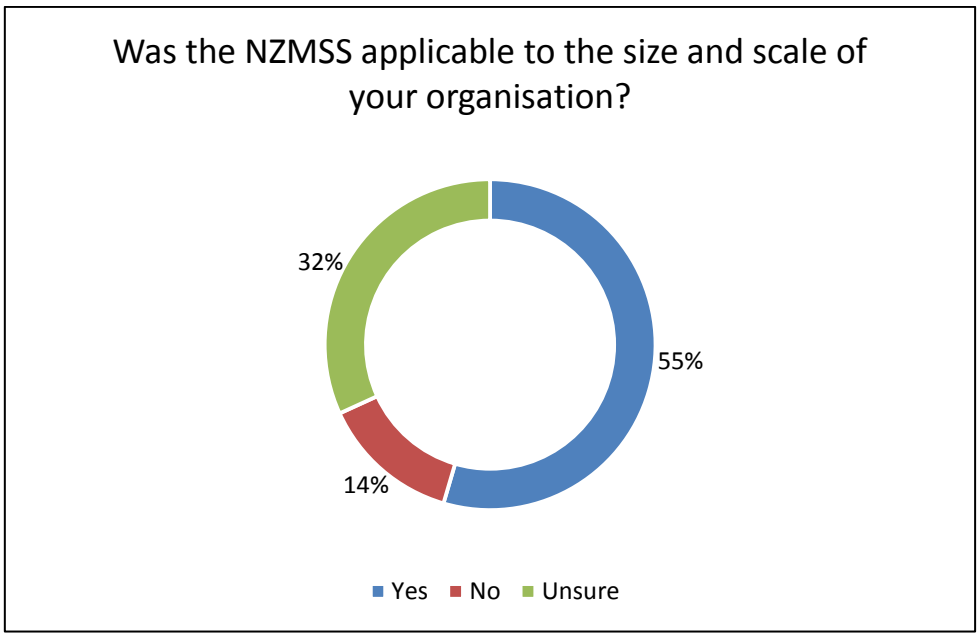
The least popular choices were:

- greater engagement with Māori stakeholders, and meeting Treaty of Waitangi responsibilities (8%)
- greater recognition from regional and local authorities and local community (8%).

Has the scheme led to improvements?



58% responded positively, 12% felt the scheme had not led to improvements, and the remaining 29% were unsure.

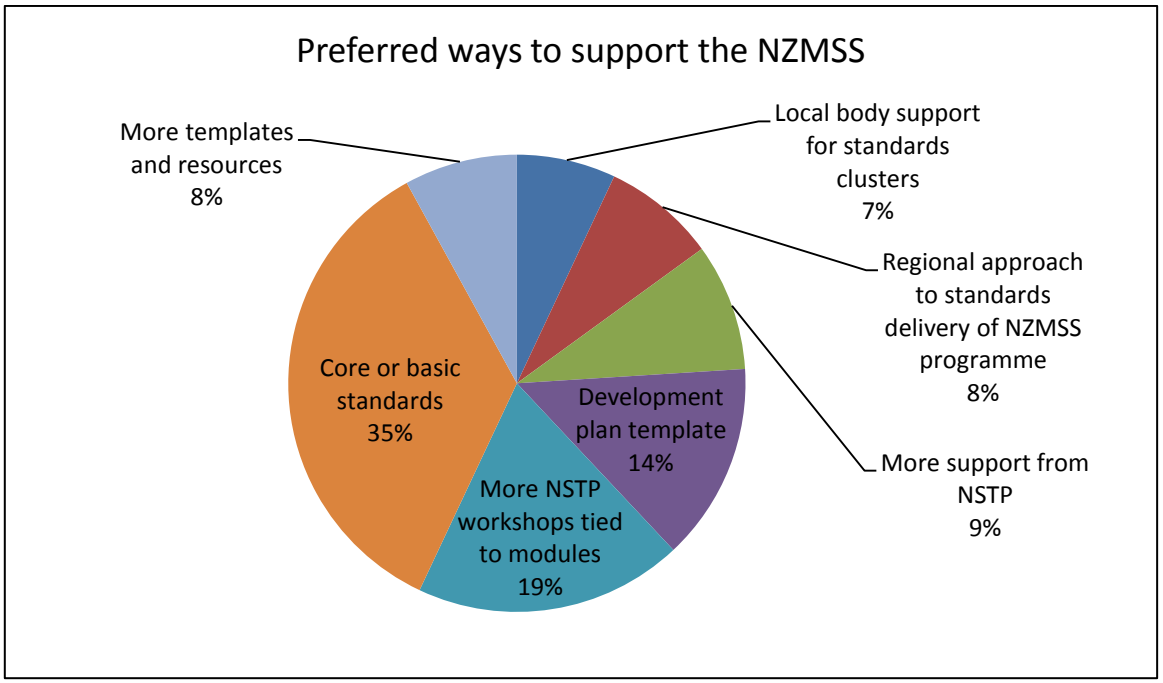


Over half responded positively (55%), 14% replied negatively, and almost a third (32%) were unsure.

Improving the NZMSS

The top three choices for preferred ways to improve the NZMSS are (in order):

1. Implement a system of basic or core museum standards to be achieved first and an option of more advanced levels to work towards
2. NSTP training workshops tied to achievement of standards modules
3. A museum development plan template to guide planning after completion of the NZMSS.



Key findings from the NSTP survey

1. A significant finding was that 39% of respondents had used the NZMSS. The majority of respondents (57%) had not used the NZMSS, including 34% who had not considered using the scheme because they were not aware it.

2. There are a substantial number of museum personnel, along with local body and other sector-allied organisations and representatives in New Zealand, who have either never considered undertaking or advocating for use of the NZMSS due to lack of awareness of the scheme, perception of the workload or resources required, or uncertainty about the value of the exercise to their museum or community.

3. Predominantly smaller museums with fewer paid staff in regional and rural areas are making the most use of the NZMSS.

4. Museums are using the scheme primarily as a resource or as a self-review tool. They are accessing and using the scheme both with direct contact with NSTP and independently. Use has tapered off in recent years.

5. Museums consistently rated improved understanding of museum responsibilities and good practice as a main aim of the scheme. This aim is followed by improved collection care, conservation, and storage.

6. Many museums felt that improved engagement with Māori stakeholders and meeting responsibilities under the Treaty of Waitangi was not a main aim.

7. Museums approve of the appearance and format of the standards folder and its contents, resources, and information from NSTP.

8. Aspects of the peer review (onsite process and final report) had the least approval, followed by degree of support from neighbouring museums when undertaking the scheme, and degree of clarity about future development priorities following completion.

9. All the modules are relevant to museums.

10. Museums indicated that they favour a system of basic or core museum standards to be achieved first and an option of more advanced levels to work towards.

11. Museums also requested NSTP training workshops tied to achievement of standards modules and a museum development plan template to guide planning after completion of the NZMSS.

Overall, the data highlights important NZMSS strengths and strategic issues about scheme awareness, perceived workload, and added value. There are some clear signals about areas for improvement. The data provides some evidence that the NZMSS is reaching important target audiences. City and larger organisations that are not using the NZMSS may have more access to other learning mechanisms. Further investigation of NSTP data may shed more light on whether there is a usage tapering-off effect within cluster groups after organisations have used the standards once. This may indicate that museums completing the scheme for the first time may feel they have "arrived" and have not continued to use the standards as a development mechanism.

The data points towards a focus on improving promotion of the NZMSS; making it easy for museums to "staircase" their participation on a voluntary basis in the standards assessment phase; and putting more emphasis on the developmental phase to guide and support learning, action planning, and implementation.

Cluster group feedback

Cluster groups are groups of museums from a region or area that meet regularly to share and plan activities. They can be formally or informally associated. The initial trials and evaluations of the scheme were undertaken with several cluster groups. Since 2005 fewer cluster groups have participated.

Two cluster groups were interviewed by an independent facilitator. Both were groups that had completed the NZMSS as a collective. The descriptive statements that follow summarise the respondents' comments, provide illustrative examples using the raw data, and identify themes about the key strengths of the NZMSS and potential areas for improvement.

General comments about the NZMSS

Comments were generally positive about the guidance, support, and motivation the NZMSS provides towards quality museum practice outcomes, and the process that supports a learning culture within the museums and the cluster:

> *Our museum would not be at the standard it's at if it had not been for the NZMSS, because you can be quite sure we would have missed some things. You can't expect a volunteer coming off the street to know what to do. That system provided guidance and support.*
>
> *It validated what we are doing.*
>
> *The NZMSS was good locally in sparking us to look at things. We said, "We should be looking at our relationships with our community."*
>
> *It's very, very good.*

It was such a worthwhile thing to have done.

I enjoyed doing it because it made me think and rationalize what we were doing.

I feel very good about completing it.

Every museum should do it. There are no words to describe how useful it is.

You learn as you go along, but NZMSS gives you the bones to start with.

It made us look at ourselves and what we need to do – which was quite scary! It has made us really think about what we need to be doing.

We had good conversations.

It was beneficial to look in the mirror.

We felt some peer pressure but went with the flow and we haven't regretted it.

NZMSS was useful as an ongoing tool, an accessible framework for change, both to guide development and to bring everyone on board.

The NZMSS was used as a way of revising and tightening policies and procedures. It was regarded as useful at any stage and as an ongoing process**.** Some museums were using it in an ongoing way, commenting that "*It's a living document*" and "*We have to go through it every year.*" This demonstrates embedding of the standards in local museum practice.

Fit for purpose

Cluster groups found the scheme generally fit for purpose.

It is devised by museum people for museum people.

Yes, the scheme does fit its purpose. It told us what we needed to do and it got us talking.

Having one place to go for advice was important because there are so many different perspectives and opinions out there.

This informs the basis and a general direction to follow.

It's a path to follow.

I looked around for something to guide me and found the NZMSS brochure at a workshop. NZMSS guides you through everything. It was easier to have that to guide you through.

Museum diversity

The diversity of museum types and sizes was mentioned as a challenge for the content of the NZMSS. Although most museums found that the scheme applied to them, they also felt that the NZMSS didn't reflect the diversity of museum types. Machinery museums were mentioned as an example, because operating machinery has different conditions and building requirements. Standards should be better at reflecting diverse situations and resources.

Diversity does not come through in the scheme.

We can feel like the "country mouse".

The diversity of museum sizes is also a challenge in writing generic standards. There was agreement that Module 2: Care of collections and taonga could be more specific and give better guidance about realistic expectations for museum practice.

> *We are a very small museum and some standards were not possible to reach, for example, automated climate control within exhibition and storage rooms. While it would be ideal to meet such a standard, the cost of electricity to run such a system would be beyond us. So the NZMSS seem to be mainly aimed at bigger museums, not geared to small ones like ours, though we did get value from going through it.*

> *We are a very small museum with limited space, so many of the recommendations cannot be implemented.*

Some suggested that the standards include more content about volunteers, and more focus on visitors.

> *Time is a factor. It takes a lot of work.*

NZMSS presentation and process

The scheme's presentation was not seen to require any significant change. It was generally agreed that the folder should remain in hard copy with a choice of online access. The reason given was that *"everyone can look at it easily and share it"* and sections can *"easily be copied and handed out"*.

> *We encourage door roster people to read through the NZMSS folder.*

> *Everyone gets to use it and improvements are made.*

One cluster group found that some terms were new to them and needed some further explanation, especially te reo Māori, some museum terminology, and document titles. Repetition in content was mentioned by one participant.

In terms of the NZMSS process, both cluster groups felt well briefed before they started the scheme and felt informed about what to expect.

Peer review

The peer review was highly valued.

> *The peer review was brilliant.*

> *Confidence was gained.*

> *It was an excellent process.*

> *They [the peer reviewers] were encouraging as well as forthright.*

> *It was really worthwhile – talking about your museum.*

> *It was a really good day – I enjoyed it. The report coming back was really good – it picked up on some of the things we didn't think were important.*

> *It was a one-on-one conversation and they were seeing our spaces … because we all have different spaces.*

Some felt there could be better understanding of and arrangements for the peer review, more feedback following the peer review, and more timely delivery of the report.

The peer review took a long time to arrange. We were asking, "When are you coming, when are you coming?"

We just had to fit in – we are leading very busy lives in the community.

We would have liked the peer review and report quicker.

[The peer reviewers took] too long to arrive [and the peer review] didn't happen in a time frame that worked.

Formal recognition and follow-up

Some museums were disappointed there was no formal recognition of completion, as they wanted something to show and to let funders know about.

We thought we were going to get a certificate to say we had completed it and we got nothing. We got a peer review but it took a long time to arrange.

When we did get a certificate, we were disappointed that it just said we had participated, and we felt that it should have said which modules we had completed because we thought we could use it to show council that we had completed it. We felt disappointed after all the work that we got something that doesn't mean anything.

Suggestions for improvement of NSTP follow-up after NZMSS reviews were complete were made.

A phone line so you can call someone to expand on a point.

A certificate to say you have finished.

A revision or checkup period (3-5 years) [with key indicators checked against] a progress map.

No one has asked how we got on.

Iwi relationships

Museums did not find that the NZMSS helped them create a positive relationship with iwi.

We struggled to get sharing with iwi the way NZMSS wants it to.

There were delays in accessing help from iwi, finding the right people to work with, and finding replacements for iwi representatives, as well as differences in understanding of museum practice. More support was needed in this area of practice.

It hasn't helped our relationship with iwi.

Our museum is on a burial ground … this was a problem for our peer reviewer.

We need to be more aware of cultural sensitivities.

These museums wanted more help with developing relationships with iwi.

Developmental focus

Iwi relationships were part of a wider theme about focusing more on follow-up support to implement development action that built on the assessment phase.

Particular suggestions for strengthening this development focus included:

- earmarking priorities after completing the scheme, and time frames for reporting that fit in with museum reporting cycles
- a work plan at the end
- progress mapping and staying in touch
- a development plan
- a follow-up time frame created by the organisations.

Core standards

Museums in the cluster groups thought that having core standards would be a good idea, especially as a "*warm-up*", but they didn't want to "*repeat anything if they went on to a higher level*".

> *As long as it is clear to funders which level museums had achieved.*
>
> *One or two things could be highlighted as a signal that this is a basic standard, [or there could be] different colours for levels.*
>
> *As long as this didn't exclude museums.*
>
> *Having a foundation is a good idea, [or a] minimum standard.*

Museums liked that the NZMSS was associated with Te Papa and felt that "*people accept what Te Papa says*".

> *I'm totally happy with where it is.*
>
> *All the museums are associated with Te Papa.*
>
> *I understood that Te Papa NSTP was run by government so museums would be better museums.*
>
> *NSTP knows the kind of things that concern smaller museums.*
>
> *We had faith in it being a national scheme.*
>
> *Yes, I believe that [the NSTP is] the right place for national standards. It makes sense to have standards and resources tied together. They should feed into each other.*

Free services

The fact that the NZMSS and NSTP services are free was also important.

> *NSTP is so valuable because it's free.*
>
> *NO! [If we had to pay] this would put museums off.*

Cluster groups

The formation of an ongoing collaborative cluster group of museums through the NZMSS and local council support was highly valued by both groups.

> *It was so much easier in a group situation.*
>
> *The cluster group has stayed together. It's chaired by a council member. Today we are looking at a district plan for heritage, and our museums will have input into this.*

Both cluster groups make submissions to the local body annual plan for cluster group funds.

Having all museums working together on standards helped.

> *We lobbied all the councillors [and] we go to each other's museums.*
>
> *It has built our cluster group communication.*

Summary

Overall, the feedback suggests many strengths in the current process, especially when groups of museums are working as a cluster to motivate and support each other in an ongoing community of practice. The feedback signals some minor areas for improvement of the current NZMSS assessment process and content to improve the scheme's relevance for diverse museums, its timeliness of reporting, and its recognition of success. The main suggestions for improvement support maximising the use of the assessment outcomes for developmental change, putting more of a focus on action planning, and providing more implementation support in the post-review period.

Key informants' feedback

Six key informants were chosen for their depth of knowledge and/or recent experience of the NZMSS, and were invited to participate in semi-structured anonymous phone interviews. Their feedback signalled themes broadly similar to those of the cluster groups. The strengths of the NZMSS as a learning and quality improvement mechanism were affirmed, and the challenge was how to have a scheme that is both prescriptive and inclusive of diverse museums.

Several areas of concern were raised. One area was how the scheme and its operation can be improved to assist in the development and practice of biculturalism in museums. Another was the need to improve the quality of peer review feedback. General management of the scheme and the potential for partnership with NSTP were discussed, including points about two-way feedback, consultation, and follow-up processes.

Additional concerns for informants were the future of the scheme, the need for resources, and ongoing commitment to improving it. Core standards and a development plan were supported.

There were some positive general messages about the NZMSS as a learning mechanism, despite the inherent ups and downs of any learning journey:

> *It's a well-received tool and fits its purpose. Over the duration participants had some surprising "light bulb" moments about why they needed to do something. There were some very fruitful discussions about preventive conservation, etc. Museums recognised the level they were at and understood what the next stage could be. They saw their potential.*
>
> *[The NZMSS] hits the right note. It covers most of the areas common to museum work that most museums would expect to be involved in, except for the more recent developments to do with the digital dimension and engagement with virtual visitors.*
>
> *The folder and module structure is great. It seems a bit overwhelming in terms of amount of work. Making sure there's a time frame and structure is important. Outcomes need to be recommended as follow-on, and pathway is not obvious to everyone.*
>
> *Museum talk is difficult to understand and when you are trying your best … we need a little bit more gentle help. It was brutal at the start. We are going in innocently trying to look after things the best we can. We can't afford to have anyone professional doing it.*
>
> *Anything that helps people work through a process of carefully sustained development in the longer term has to be helpful in terms of trying to get the primary funders to buy into the sustained support and get beyond the political cycles and the issues of the moment.*

Anything that can help institutions with long-term planning is really helpful. It's difficult to have all the skills.

The challenge is to support museums through the process and frame the content in ways that reflect the diversity of the sector, ranging from many volunteer-run groups to large professional institutions:

We have a real challenge in the sector of learning how to use a knowledge of ideal professional standards and adapting them to the particular circumstances of an institution, understanding that you have to work your way towards them sometimes … It's being realistic but also setting a reasonable challenge.

The comment was made that library standards are being reviewed because they "*do not reflect the diversity in the sector and this limits their effectiveness*".

There were also comments about prescriptive standards:

Less prescriptive standards would be more appropriate for volunteer-run groups.

There is a focus on guidelines and best practice in some areas but some technical areas still need fixed prescriptive standards.

I think the fact that it's not prescriptive and that you are assessing yourself against what is reasonable given your resources means that it should be less daunting.

Target audiences may need further clarification, given the feedback about very different expected outcomes that large and small institutions are seeking from their participation in the NZMSS:

It needs to be independent from Te Papa and include proper peer review processes for larger institutions.

At present the scheme seems to be geared towards smaller or volunteer-run organisations.

While I support the NZMSS and believe that it is really useful, it is not a big enough stick to wave at our governing body (local council), who are only interested in statutory responsibilities rather than "nice to haves".

Core standards were suggested as a good idea for small museums:

Make it simple and keep it simple. Core document templates would also be useful.

Stronger integration of the NZMSS with NSTP training and other resource support was also a clear message:

The intention was that NSTP would monitor progress and guide potential training … NSTP would use the document to identify the place in the sector where the museum was and use this to guide training or input of resources … there was a definite sense that museum training would overlap with standards … that the two would be connected.

Core standards are a good idea and they should be identified as priorities. NSTP could think about lining up training to help achieve those standards. An online version could be made more like a progress through a game and key words could light up with an explanation.

There was perceived inconsistency in the quality of peer reviews, where some museums found their review very helpful and used it "*all the time*", while others felt that the peer reviews "*were a bit thin*", they "*had to wait a long time for these*", and they "*weren't as constructive as they might have been*".

The need for a stronger focus on development action steps at the end of the review was another message from the key informants:

Having some steps following on – and commitment as a result.

Some kind of planning tool to help people. Maybe at the end of the NZMSS a matrix or grid to show which areas you are doing well in and areas you are not doing so well in. You could set some modest goals … that would give a sense of achievement … [and] that identified things to improve on, and then an action plan.

Follow-up was also highlighted as an important element in maximising the impact of the NZMSS and maintaining momentum for a continuous quality improvement and learning culture.

I don't think anyone came back to me and said, say, 2 years in, "How are things going now?" or "How many of the recommendations have you acted on?" That would have been very useful. It needs to be done carefully, but if it's part of what the institution buys into from the get-go, that's really good.

It's probably helpful for local bodies to have an update too.

It would definitely help to provide some backup over the next couple of years, follow through with people.

Bicultural aspects of the scheme

Bicultural aspects would be "*the hardest area for most museums*". It was felt that examples of good partnerships, instructive videos, and a robust unit supporting good bicultural practice would be helpful.

In our group there was no iwi participant. There was some discussion about needing support with this through council. It was put into the "too hard basket". There is only one person locally who is involved as an iwi liaison person – there is no marae in our area.

You have to have a robust unit that deals with bicultural practice. If people don't have experience in that area or much capacity in that area or are going through a process of change in response to those issues, they really need the support that you can bring to that. You need to bring particular skills, and it can be a little more complex than getting change in some other areas. It mainly has to do with providing sustained support in that area. It's not necessarily something that you can say, "Here's a set of guidelines" or "Here's a generic outline of a policy." It's something that has to be worked through that's appropriate in the particular context. It takes a bit of time.

Raising the NZMSS's profile and increasing participation

A number of suggestions were made on how to increase the NZMSS's profile and motivate participation. There was a concern that "*Councils are not aware of it, nor Heritage NZ, schools and libraries and others that have collections."*

Practical communication through free online tools like the newsletters and websites of stakeholder agencies were suggested. In museums there could be acknowledgement that they are participating in the scheme, with messages such as "*Working towards improving standards*" or "*a chart in the reception area that shows progress towards completion*". Other suggestions included "*Give it better name? A promotional brochure with stories and benefits?*"

.

Some raised the question of whether completion of the NZMSS should be a prerequisite for some funding sources. This would mean more prescriptive measures and evaluation of the NZMSS:

[It would] require looking closely at the way the scheme is run just to be sure it's consistently applied.

There's a need to be careful and to reassess the NZMSS from time to time.

However, promoting the benefits of the NZMSS to councils may be considerably more achievable:

Council thought it was useful to have that external benchmarking exercise they could refer to and to be reassured that this was not the museum trying to get resources for bells and whistles but was

actually advocating for the basic infrastructure required to run a public institution that was responsible for collecting, maintaining, and making accessible a community's heritage resources.

My impression was that the smaller institutions were participating at a higher level than larger institutions. If that's the case, we need to look closely at why that is.

A partnership between NSTP and NZMSS participants to manage the scheme

Key informants identified a number of elements that could shape the current relationships into a partnership culture with clearer mutual accountabilities in the way the scheme is managed in the future.

There needs to be a follow-up process – accountability types of things like you get from funders. Some sort of involvement to foster the relationship with NSTP.

I think we're all conscious that it comes down to the people that you have managing the scheme and the way they approach that task. It's probably partly to do with the way they are trained to do the job and it's probably partly the level of resourcing.

If the people administering it are stretched and don't have a lot of time to talk to people, inevitably it will seem more like a bureaucratic process rather than a partnership. You have to try to think about how you do this in a way that makes it feel more like a partnership rather than a remedy that's being applied.

You have to ask how well the people administering the scheme understand what it's like to be working in the institutions.

Having people on the ground, engaging one-to-one and face-to-face with institutions. Understanding what they need to be able to move forward and place themselves in a more sustainable position.

Talking to people about how practice is changing.

Thinking about the programme moving into the future, how do we make sure that the scheme reflects changing practice and reflects the way in which our communities are changing and the consequent implications of that for institutions, the impact of changing technologies, and those kinds of things?

It needs to have built into it a fairly regular pattern of change and review. Perhaps the scheme needs to be a process. We need to see it more as a two-way thing that's designed to help institutions to develop but [is] also a process where the institutions feed back into the kind of scheme and standards that we need and that are more responsive to the situations that the institutions find themselves in.

Resources need to be considered at every level to support the outcomes the scheme is seeking:

You've got to have the resources to be able to participate in those kinds of discussions and spend the time reviewing it.

If we all say the scheme is important in terms of ensuring some basic standards across the sector and increasing credibility of the sector with the wider community, then we have to be prepared to invest in it rather than run [it] on a shoestring, and if it is, it will fall over.

The attitude of councils is a problem. They need to address where museums are at and provide funding and resources. It's frustrating. In our group it was lowest common denominator mentality and little recognition of potential.

Summary of stakeholder feedback

1. Many cultural organisations are unaware of the NZMSS. However, participating museums across all sizes of organisations are generally satisfied with it. They find that participation is a positive experience and see the scheme as relevant and fit for purpose.

2. Content is relevant and few specific additions were suggested; however, the scheme would be improved by simplifying and clarifying terminology and language. The appearance and approach of the NZMSS needs to be refreshed to make the scheme more user-friendly.

3. With increased promotion and advocacy, the current scheme could be more widely used and appreciated.

4. The "one size fits all" approach does not acknowledge the diversity of NZ cultural institutions. Some participants from all sizes of organisations felt that the scheme did not fit their size or type of organisation. There is a need to address museum diversity in areas such as size and type of organisation, levels of experience and knowledge, and readiness to undergo a change and development process.

5. Most museums felt there would be benefits in detailing core standards in the NZMSS.

6. A partnership with NSTP or a large museum during the review process, more feedback, and support for development planning were seen by many as adding significant value to the scheme.

7. Although museum valued the peer review process, they felt dissatisfaction with some aspects of it. Larger museums wanted independent peer reviewers who were a better fit for their organisation. Smaller museums wanted more feedback, with quicker delivery of the peer review and report and continuing follow-up after the peer review.

8. Applying bicultural museum practice presented difficulties for organisations. More support was requested with this. The standards-based format and independent learning structure did not generally suit the range of knowledge and experience required to initiate relationships with iwi or work towards meeting best practice.

9. Development of relationships with other museums, local bodies, iwi, visitors, and volunteers are frequently mentioned as an outcome or expectation of the NZMSS.

10. Museums requested and expected more support from NSTP and a partnership approach throughout and after the scheme where expectations on both sides are clearly spelled out and agreed on.

11. The scheme works best where there is cluster group involvement, ongoing assistance from NSTP, and good peer support. As the scheme was developed and launched with the expectation of cluster group involvement, this result is not unexpected. There were many benefits from cluster group involvement, some of them unexpected for the groups themselves. Smaller museums did not usually find or ask for assistance from larger museums in their region to undertake the scheme but did get limited support from councils, NSTP, and trained staff members who were part of their cluster group. Leadership was important to the success of the programme, whether from NSTP or from within the group or institution. Larger museums were less likely to form an NZMSS cluster group or to need assistance to complete the scheme.

Discussion of findings and emerging issues

What do these findings signal for moving forward with the NZMSS in a changing environment with a diverse and complex museum sector? The findings suggests that the participating museums are likely to need different kinds of support for the benefits of NZMSS participation to be fully realised. Differentiation between core or basic standards and other levels is one means identified to respond to this diversity. The particular needs of whare taonga and cultural centres require further consultation. NSTP's ongoing role has been affirmed as administrator of the NZMSS, and various areas identified where NSTP and peer support networks are to be enhanced. Promoting the benefits of and reducing barriers to scheme entry, as well as more actively supporting planning and sustaining quality improvement actions after standards reviews, have been identified as means to further support engagement and the impact of the NZMSS.

1. Changes affecting the sector

Changes affecting the sector since the NZMSS launch include: technological developments, digitisation across all aspects of museum work and interactions, social media, more pressure for sustainability (economic and environmental), new building requirements and awareness of disaster preparedness since Canterbury earthquakes, responding to climate change, expanding expectations of the visitor experience, and complex relationships with all stakeholders and audiences. While museums will use a variety of learning mechanisms to address such issues, all areas require additional focus and standards development to keep the standards up to date in a constantly changing world.

2. Recognising diverse sector needs

The museum sector is very complex and diverse. It is important to recognise that one size cannot fit all. Larger organisations have professional staff and well-planned work programmes. Their requirements for accountability and reporting require rigorous benchmarking against performance measures. The NZMSS offers a framework for best practice with a programme based on the requirement to show evidence of best practice. It is not a system of absolute performance measures and has limited application for organisations where such specific measures are a main requirement. Guidelines for best practice used in all standards schemes are not based on objective performance measures that can be consistently applied. Provision of documentary evidence of good practice in an institution at a given time does not necessarily translate into consistent standards of good practice. Standards are most useful as a reference point for understanding and working towards best practice.

Best practice will be expressed in diverse ways across organisations of different sizes, types, and cultures. There may, however, be scope for some clear, consistent, and measurable standards in Module 2: Care of collections and taonga, which most museums saw as the module most relevant to their operations. That is, the standards themselves need to keep a careful balance between some areas where evidence-based criteria and consistency is appropriate (for example, use of basic museum standard materials for storage) and other areas where diversity is to be encouraged within broadly defined parameters. The risk is that in being more specific across all standards, they could become unduly prescriptive and less inclusive of museum diversity.

At the core of the standards is an intent to encourage all museums to strive for better practice. Given the different starting points of institutions – large or small, run by volunteers or paid staff – the support required to achieve an organisational culture of better practice will vary widely. Independent, trained peer reviewers working in partnership with and providing feedback to larger institutions, based on their requirements, would go some way to addressing concerns about the larger institutions' need for clearer performance assessments. Additional higher level standards could be added to the NZMSS as these needs are better understood. Museums Aotearoa believes it is desirable that the NZMSS is built on to create an accreditation scheme (Museums Aotearoa, 2011), although the resources required would be significant and overall benefits to the wider sector are unclear.

For smaller museums, core or basic standards may be sufficient to embed an organisational culture of and networks for ongoing quality improvement. Standards schemes are most useful as a reference framework for a development journey towards best practice rather than as a place to be arrived at. More NSTP support, both face to face and remotely, was identified as a requirement during and following the NZMSS. Faster delivery of peer reviews and reports is also requested. Adequate resources and staff are needed for this level of management and engagement.

The idea that the NZMSS could be compliance-based was not well supported by the cluster group feedback and key informants' comments. However, the possibility that meeting some basic or core standards should be compulsory when it came to local body or other funding allocations was considered more equitable by a few stakeholders. Meaningful recognition of completing a standards process, promotion of the benefits, and reduction of barriers to participating were identified as alternative strategies for motivating engagement.

3. The role of NSTP

The scheme is currently fully funded and administered by NSTP. NSTP works to strengthen the sector by providing practical and strategic help through training, and formal and informal advice to museums, galleries,

and iwi throughout New Zealand. NSTP develops partnerships, cross-sector initiatives, and joint work plans with other institutions and agencies to effectively share resources.

NSTP was originally selected as the most appropriate agency to administer the NZMSS because of the good fit with the organisation's strategy, its perceived stability, and its resourcing. Museums noted that NSTP training and workshops, including workshops and assessment for the ServiceIQ NZQA National Certificate in Museum Practice, can be integrated into standards achievement. Mentoring and grants support are also available through NSTP.

Te Papa's national status and external confidence in its museum practice were mentioned by cluster groups as reasons that the scheme should be administered there. A change of administrative body was not supported. Survey results about administration demonstrated that museums were generally satisfied with this aspect of the scheme.

However, it was requested that more support be given to museums throughout the process than is currently sustainable for NSTP. In Australia some programme support and delivery is done for regions or cluster groups rather than for individual museums (for example, in New South Wales) and involves close local body support. This delivery method is more sustainable for the higher level of support that is requested for the NZ standards programme. However, New Zealand museums did not favour either a prescribed regional delivery model or more direct local body involvement in cluster group standards completion. These options were rated the least popular options in the sector survey for improvement to the NZMSS. There is a feeling that although local body support is helpful and funding is essential, museums prefer no more intervention than is necessary and they want to work with other museum practitioners. However, local body involvement in one cluster group in particular was regarded very positively, with ongoing council consultation and better support through shared knowledge of council and museum operations. Developing NSTP relationships with councils and funders to increase their awareness of the NZMSS would assist with recognition of the importance of standards participation.

Participants in cluster groups all clearly mentioned the ongoing benefits of working through the standards together. Cluster groups arranged a series of meetings to discuss and share progress with each other and with NSTP. This built strong and positive ongoing collegial relationships, as well as relationships with local bodies and, at times, with iwi. Museums that complete the standards individually can find it a lonely, even "brutal" and challenging experience, especially where there is no support from trained or skilled staff.

4. Resources for developing the NZMSS

In common with all schemes internationally, the NZMSS requires significant dedicated funding and staff to operate well. Additional and external funding should be investigated to support ongoing review of the standards, hardcopy re-publication, and development of interactive online delivery mechanisms. More intensive support for museums as they undertake standards also requires staff resources. Training peer reviewers and supporting further advisory and working group activity requires resources and professional leadership.

5. Standards for whare taonga and cultural centres

When the scheme was being developed, there was a clear recommendation that next steps should include engagement with Māori and adequate resources and support to discuss and develop:

- a unique set of standards driven solely by Māori cultural knowledge
- a strategy for the joint management of collections housed in museums
- a bicultural body of knowledge to drive museum practice in Aotearoa New Zealand.

(*The Trial of the New Zealand Museums Standards Scheme 1999/2000*, 2000, p69)

In the post-Treaty settlement environment and with current whare taonga developments, there needs to be discussion about the relevance of a standards framework. This area of New Zealand museum practice needs consultation.

Conclusions

The NZMSS still provides a relevant and useful best practice framework for museums and cultural organisations. However, some changes are needed to its content and to the way the NZMSS works and is promoted to the sector. Early trials and reports proposed core standards, a cluster group emphasis, integration of training into the NZMSS, feedback mechanisms, and ongoing sector consultation. These aspects are still requested by museums and are, if anything, even more necessary now to support a continuous quality improvement culture in museums and in the NZMSS itself.

Museums want a partnership engagement with NSTP in the process of working through the NZMSS. They are looking for more collaboration and peer learning with other museums to achieve better museum practice. The adoption of core standards, a development plan template, and additional standards recognising the diversity of collections and of organisations would improve the NZMSS in "staircasing" museums towards best practice.

More emphasis on visitor experience, audience orientation, social media, and stakeholder relationships for museum standards are needed to reflect the growing global trend for museums to focus on their interactions with audiences, and to assist museums to more fully integrate community relationships into aspects of best practice.

Clear requests were made for improved expression of diversity in the sector and for assistance with building bicultural understanding. Without assistance in this area, best practice awareness, let alone implementation, is a challenge for most organisations. With further consultation the NZMSS could be relevant to more cultural organisations, including whare taonga and cultural centres.

Museum development pathways are complex, mediated by community context, personalities, size and type of organisation, resources, levels of experience, knowledge, and readiness to navigate towards best practice. The NZMSS will become more effective as it incorporates the differing capacities, goals, resources, values, and cultures of the groups using it through a process of ongoing change and consultation.

The NZMSS needs to become more adaptable – a living document and a pathway that encourages collaborative learning and dialogue across the sector.

The research suggests that the best practice aspirations of the NZMSS remain important in strengthening quality museum practice. Future research and development could reflect the success of the scheme through the sharing of a diverse range of better practice success stories as museums build innovation, learning, and standards reviews into their annual work plans, workplace culture, and peer/professional network conversations.

Recommendations

Original intentions of the scheme, improvements and changes made to schemes internationally, and survey and qualitative feedback from the sector have led to the following recommendations.

		Recommendation	
1.0	**NZMSS working group**	Develop terms of reference and form a sector representative standards working group to undertake NZMSS module updates	National Services Te Paerangi (NSTP) Museums Aotearoa (MA)
1.1		Investigate additional funding sources for standards development, publication, and administration	MA NSTP Ministry for Culture and Heritage (MCH)
2.0	**Standards updates and additions**	Research gaps in current standards, introduce basic and updated standards that consider: archives in museums, economic and other sustainability factors, digitisation, social media, access, engagement with audiences, visitor experience, buildings, museum types including large object and machinery museums. Assess standards language use	NSTP Working group

2.1		Develop additional guidance and standards for assessment of care of collections and taonga	NSTP Working group
3.0	**Core standards**	Develop a set of core standards to be achieved before progressing to further levels of standards. Consider adding some more specific or “next level” standards	NSTP Working group
4.0	**Partnership development**	Develop and adopt a responsive, less hierarchical partnership model with all museums registering for the NZMSS. Encourage peer learning and cluster group participation	NSTP
4.1		Refresh the contents, appearance, and title of the NZMSS to reflect the development programme/partnership nature of the scheme	NSTP Working group
5.0	**Support**	Start online support and/or a helpline to specifically work with NZMSS partners	NSTP
6.0	**Integration**	Fully integrate NSTP advisory services, resources, and training with the NZMSS framework. Embed standards prompts across communications	NSTP Te Papa
7.0	**Development plan**	Introduce a development plan template to guide development and priorities following on from self-review or peer review	NSTP Working group
8.0	**Resourcing**	Resource a position within NSTP to coordinate NZMSS partnerships and training	NSTP Te Papa
9.0	**Review**	Regularly review and update the NZMSS and its operation through interactive participant and sector feedback forum	NSTP
10.0	**Bicultural practice**	Develop support mechanisms for museums developing bicultural understanding and practice	NSTP MCH
11.0	**Iwi consultation**	Consultation with iwi on support for and relevance of developing guidelines for a new whare taonga section for the NZMSS	MCH NSTP
12.0	**Advocacy and collaboration**	Advocate for scheme adoption and recognition in museums, museum cluster groups, cultural organisations, local bodies, the tourist sector, and funding agencies	NSTP MA
13.0	**Peer reviews and reviewers**	Train independent peer reviewers, improve quality of assessment and feedback, and incorporate peer review into development plans with institutions	MA NSTP
14.0	**Recognition and profile**	Provide methods for recognising and profiling museums undertaking and completing the NZMSS	NSTP MA

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Key events and dates in the development of the NZMSS

Period	Who	What	Outcome
1970s	NZ museum sector	Exploration of formal professional standards	
1994	Lynda Wallace, Regional Museums Liaison Officer, Canterbury	Investigates UK Museum and Galleries Commission Museums Registration Scheme and its impacts on small museums, via Churchill Fellowship	Proposes that Museums Association Aotearoa New Zealand Te Rōpu Hanga Kaupapa Taonga (MAANZ) initiate a similar scheme in NZ
1996	MAANZ	Submits proposal to Taonga o Aotearoa National Services (forerunner to National Services Te Paerangi [NSTP])	NSTP to develop and implement museum standards programme
Feb 1997	MAANZ and NSTP	Formal partnership agreement signed	NSTP to support initial stages of developing standards programme
May 1997	NSTP	Appoints project manager	Project planning commences
1997-98	Jane Legget, Standards Development Officer	Carries out feasibility study on behalf of MAANZ and NSTP	
1997-98	NSTP	**Standards scheme development Stage 1** Research carried out on overseas schemes and regional consultation meetings held with NZ museum sector. Pilot project of the draft scheme carried out with 10 museums	Research findings and consultation used to develop draft standards and pilot project for standards assessment process. External reviews (desk and on-site) carried out by 10 reviewers
1998	MAANZ becomes Museums Aotearoa		
1999	Legget, Jane, *Towards a New Zealand Museums Standards Scheme* – report on Stage 1	Makes recommendations (see Appendix 2)	In-depth regional trial to be carried out and independently evaluated
1999	NSTP	Establishment of Assessment Sector Reference Group, which agrees on development of a self-improvement scheme for museums	NSTP backs and supports scheme development financially and with staff
1999-2000	NSTP	**Standards scheme development Stage 2 – trials** Draft scheme trialled with museums and bicultural pairs of peer reviewers	Revisions and refinements made
2000	Rivers, O'Regan, Lynch, *The Trial of the New Zealand Museum Standards Scheme 1999/2000 , 2000* – report on Stage 2	14 museums involved in evaluation (see Appendix 2)	Adjustments made
2002-02	NSTP	**Standards scheme development Stage 3 – regional trials** Regional partnership trials carried out with museum cluster groups	Final alterations made
Oct 2002	**New Zealand Museums Standards Scheme is officially launched**		
2005	TNS New Zealand, *Evaluation of the Impact of the New Zealand Museums Standards Scheme Nga Kaupapa Wahimana a Nga Whare Taonga o Aotearoa* – report on standards scheme use, commissioned by NSTP	Extensive independent survey carried out with 81 museums that had participated (see Appendix 2). Aims of the research: • evaluate the impact of the standards scheme on participating museums • gain insight into museums' motivations for participating in the scheme • discover key learnings and most valued benefits obtained from participation • value of the peer review and self-review processes • assess how the scheme could be improved (see p14 of report).	Some changes made to standards process including addition of pre-standards briefing. Recommendations made

2005-14	NSTP	Administers and funds scheme	100+ museums participated
2006	Office of the Auditor-General Reporting on Performance 7.25, 7.26, 7.27	Recommends participation in the scheme as a valuable means of benchmarking performance and setting action plans for the future	
2010	Museums Aotearoa Accreditation Steering Group	Suggests NZMSS could be used as a basis for accreditation scheme. Suggests NSTP should become adviser and facilitator	
2014	NSTP	Commences scheme update. Independent and NSTP-peer-reviewed report commissioned	Sector survey and consultation in 2014

Appendix 2: Previous reports, findings, and recommendations

Name, author, date, (source of report)	**Key findings**	**Key recommendations**
Legget, Jane, *Towards a New Zealand Museums Standards Scheme*, 1998 *Purpose:* report on initial development project	• Confirmed feasibility of a standards scheme for NZ • Potential for a standards programme to guide planning for basic policy and procedures • More comprehensive trial is justified • Clear professional benefits for museums resulted from participation in pilot • Suggested a potential structure for targeted training • Suggested structure of standards and processes • Trial fostered a spirit of goodwill towards NSTP and Te Papa in the sector • Standards pilot gave participants a greater awareness of the responsibilities and tasks of museums	• NSTP facilitates and supports next stage of standards programme; a comprehensive regional trial to refine process • NSTP keeps sector informed on progress of recommended regional trial • Current report to be published and widely distributed • Standards-related issues identified can be addressed by lost-cost means of communication
Rivers, O'Regan, Lynch, *The Trial of the New Zealand Museum Standards Scheme 1999/2000*, 2000 *Purpose:* Evaluation of regional trials of the NZMSS	• Resource for development of the kaupapa Māori strategy is needed • Basic content of standards should be retained • A national coordination role is needed	• Agreement to engage Māori; provide resources and support for development of a unique set of standards driven solely by Māori cultural knowledge • Develop bicultural body of knowledge to drive museum practice in Aotearoa NZ • Strategy for joint management of collections housed in museums • Criteria for participation: must be more than one person committed to standards scheme work in museum • Clearer focus for any standards workshops and more discussion opportunities between museums • Reduce the amount of paper involved and use email more • Edit out repetition of questions and jargon • Restructure the content into a core of self-review that assists in overall planning and identifying needs • Develop an additional module on bicultural practice • Introduce up to three levels to cater for a range of museums and continuous quality improvement approach • Close linkages with training and other sector development strategies

TNS NZ; *Evaluation of the Impact of the New Zealand Museums Standards Scheme Nga Kaupapa Wahimana a Nga Whare Taonga o Aotearoa*, 2005 *Purpose*: Evaluation of impact and processes, higher-level standards scheme, and pre-standards scheme	The survey results from 61 museums that completed reviews more than 6 months before survey date are positive overall. • 58% indicated no problems completing the scheme • 55% indicated no improvements necessary to scheme • 33% indicated a higher-level scheme would be valuable • 40% did not know if higher level would be of value Issues raised were: • lack of management interest • process too long • expected more feedback. Other findings: • The scheme is well received as a valuable tool to guide development and identify areas for improvement • The comprehensive self-review and peer review format is seen as valuable • Participating museums report many perceived benefits, particularly in regard to identifying strengths and weaknesses • NSTP is a key influencer in the museums' decision to participate, along with word-of-mouth recommendations • Senior management level making the decision to participate • An optional pre-briefing in-museum session is supported (in addition to cluster group briefings already held) • Higher-level standards and pre-standards scheme could be offered but should not dilute the current scheme • There is little or no perceived need for the management of the scheme to change hands • No major gaps in content were identified • Research supports only minor improvements to be made to the scheme	• Improve relevance of module content • Condense content where possible • Remove content repetition • Consider a pre-standards scheme • Peer review report, improve quality and amount of feedback, timely delivery and actionable recommendations • More contact with peer reviewers to discuss report • NSTP provides ongoing contact (visits, phone calls), advice, and encouragement for completion • There may be scope to reduce module content to ensure there is less duplication or repetition; possible reduction in number of sections • Simplify some terminology and reduce number of document copies required to provide to NSTP

Appendix 3: List of international standards and accreditation schemes

Country	Scheme	Year initiated	Revised
Australia	National Standards for Australian Museums and Galleries	2011	2013 2015 Plus annual review of standards
Australia (New South Wales)	Standards Review Program	2003	
Australia (Queensland)	Standards Review Program	2005	
Australia (South Australia)	Museum Accreditation and Grants Programme	c.1980	
Australia (Victoria)	Museums Accreditation Programme	1993	
Austria	Austrian Museum Quality Proof Mark	2002	
Canada (British Columbia)	Standards for B.C. Museums	1993	
Canada (Manitoba)	AAM. Standards for Manitoba Museums	1995	
Canada (Museums Alberta)	Recognized Museums Programme Museums Excellence Programme	2001	

Canada (Nova Scotia Museum)	Museum Assistance Program	1966	1996
Canada (Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport)	Standards for Community Museums in Ontario	1999	
Canada (Saskatchewan)	Museums Association of Saskatchewan	1998	
Latvia	Museum Registration Scheme	1998	
Netherlands	Netherlands Museum Register	1997	
New Zealand	New Zealand Museums Standards Scheme	2002	
Northern Ireland	Museum Standards Programme for Ireland	1999	2006-07 2011
Norway	Self-assessment programme	1999	
Scotland	Accreditation Standard	1998	2011 2014
South Africa	Professional Standards and Transformation Indicators Programme	1970	1989 1993 1996 2006
United Kingdom (Scotland, Northern Ireland, England, Wales)	Accreditation Scheme	2006-07 The Museum Registration Scheme was established in 1988	2011
United States of America	Accreditation Standards Scheme	1971	2001 2002
United States of America	Museum Assessment Program	1970s	

Appendix 4: Methodology

Background research
Background document review of the current NZMSS was undertaken to record key dates, rationale, sector input, and recent developments (Appendix 1 and Appendix 2). A search of current international schemes and recent developments was undertaken (Appendix 3). An email questionnaire was sent to leaders of schemes in several countries, requesting detail on specific aspects of schemes.

Quantitative and qualitative research
An online survey was developed using Survey Monkey™. This method was chosen because of its low cost and to encourage a broad spread of responses from NZMSS participants and non-participants across the sector (drawing from NSTP's contact list). Selected partner organisations and councils were also emailed a link and invited to complete the survey.

An incentive prize (value $500) was offered for participation in the survey.

A brief explanation of the NZMSS scheme with links to further information was included with the survey. The survey was sent to 500+ email addresses of organisations and individuals. An email reminder was sent to organisations after 2 weeks. Some randomised phone reminders were sent. The survey ran from 5 March 2015 – 4 May 2015.

There were 211 responses in total. Of these, 168 were complete. Respondents also had an opportunity to provide qualitative responses in several open-comment questions and comment fields.

Sample description (N=168)

Location of organisations	No.	% total responses
Metropolitan city (Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin)	52	31
Rural area	25	15
Regional city	20	12
Regional town	18	11
Small town	46	27
No response	7	4
Total	**168**	**100**
No. of volunteers in the organisation	**No.**	**% total responses**
0	16	10
1 to 5	34	20
6 to 10	31	18
11 to 15	14	8
16 to 20	19	11
21 or more	34	20
Not stated	15	9
Unsure	5	3
Total	**168**	**100**
No. of paid staff in the organisation	**No.**	**% total responses**
0	27	16
1 to 5	52	31
6 to 10	6	4
11 to 15	2	1
16 to 20	6	4
21 or more	27	16
Not stated	46	27
Unsure	2	1
Total	**168**	**100**

The margin of error on the sample of N=168 at the 95% confidence interval is +/- 7.21. A 4-8% margin of error at 95% confidence is generally considered acceptable for social research.
Survey population size = 1,850

The rural/urban spread proportion of museums responding is not representative of the New Zealand museum sector, where 90% of museums are small organisations that are either volunteer run or have 5 or fewer staff. Museums that are large (over 20 staff) or medium-sized (6–20 staff) make up a combined total of 10% of all museums in New Zealand, whereas of those organisations that reported staff numbers, one-third (33%) had 6 paid staff or more.

Respondents who indicated they had not used the scheme were excluded after answering the question about why they had not participated. Results reflect only those with knowledge of the scheme in practice.

Qualitative research
Qualitative research was conducted face to face with two NZMSS participant museum cluster groups (one in the North Island and one in the South Island). Independent facilitators led the sessions, which were audio recorded and transcribed for analysis. Cluster group participants signed an adult informed consent form. Several phone interviews were conducted with key informants. Key informants had significant background understanding or experience of the NZMSS or had very recently participated in the scheme. Descriptive statements and summaries of the respondents' comments and illustrative examples were used. The qualitative methods were chosen to provide more in-depth discussion and clarification on topics arising from the online survey to inform the next phase of development.

Limitation of research
Quantitative survey: the responses were weighted towards respondents from medium to large museums respondents and therefore did not accurately reflect the composition of the sector.
Qualitative research: views cannot be fully representative of the views of the general sector. Comments provide individual insights that expand on aspects of feedback from the general sector survey.
The research focused on sector views of the current content and administration of the NZMSS within New Zealand and is not intended as an overall exploration of museum standards systems.

Appendix 5: New Zealand Museums Standards Scheme survey questions

Where is your organisation located?

- Rural area
- Small town
- Regional town
- Regional city
- Metropolitan city [Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin]

Please select the appropriate boxes below to identify how many unpaid *active* volunteers and full time [30 hours or more per week] paid staff your organisation has.

- 0
- 1-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- 21 or more
- Unsure

Has your organisation participated in or used the NZMSS in any way?

- Yes
- No

If yes, was this:

- In the last 5 years?
- In the last 10 years?
- More than once over the last 10 years?
- Ongoing use?

How has your organisation used the NZMSS? [please select as many as apply]

- As a resource, using the standards folder or through online access
- As a self-review tool (independently of NSTP)
- As a registered participant (signed on with NSTP)
- With completion of all modules
- With completion of some but not all modules
- With on-site peer review and report from visiting museum experts
- What other ways [if any] has it been used?

How relevant are the NZMSS's five modules to your organisation?

	Very relevant	Generally relevant	No opinion	Generally not relevant	Not relevant at all	Not used
Module 1: Governance, management and planning	□	□	□	□	□	□
Module 2: Care of collections and taonga	□	□	□	□	□	□
Module 3: Public programmes including exhibitions	□	□	□	□	□	□
Module 4: Customer service	□	□	□	□	□	□
Module 5: Relationships with communities	□	□	□	□	□	□

In your view, what are the main aims of the NZMSS?

	Main aim	Not a main aim	Unsure
Recognition from regional and local authorities	□	□	□
Assisting with compliance with legal frameworks	□	□	□
Gaining recognition of achieving accepted museum standards	□	□	□
Independent review by external museum professionals	□	□	□
Improved collection care, conservation and storage	□	□	□
Improved understanding of museum responsibilities and good practice	□	□	□
Providing a structured framework for self-review of the museum and its operations against accepted standards	□	□	□
Increased confidence in the museum among stakeholders, iwi, funders, donors and lenders and local community	□	□	□
Increased confidence as a member of the museum community and networks	□	□	□
Identification of areas for development and improvement in museum operations	□	□	□
Improved engagement with Māori stakeholders and meeting responsibilities under the Treaty of Waitangi	□	□	□
Improved governance and administration	□	□	□
Other [please describe in comment box]			

In your view, how well does the NZMSS meet the main aims you selected?

Fully meets	Generally meets	No opinion	Generally fails to meet	Fully fails to meet	Unsure
□	□	□	□	□	□

OPTIONAL: If you have any additional comments, please enter them here.

How satisfied were you with each of the following aspects of the NZMSS procedure?

	Very satisfied	Generally satisfied	No opinion	Generally dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
Supporting information and resources available from NSTP	□	□	□	□	□
Independent peer reviewer's final report	□	□	□	□	□
Support of neighbouring museums (if in a cluster)	□	□	□	□	□
Clarity about future development priorities provided	□	□	□	□	□
Registration process	□	□	□	□	□
Clarity of concepts and language	□	□	□	□	□
NSTP briefing and mentoring session	□	□	□	□	□
Appearance and format of folder and contents	□	□	□	□	□
NSTP communication during process	□	□	□	□	□
Peer review with on site visit process	□	□	□	□	□
Adequate background information provided before registration	□	□	□	□	□
NSTP website access to NZMSS and supporting materials	□	□	□	□	□

OPTIONAL: If you have any additional comments, please enter them here. We are especially interested in your feedback about aspects that were very satisfactory or unsatisfactory.

When you participated in the NZMSS, what was of most value to your organisation? [choose up to 3]

- □ Greater understanding of museum responsibilities and practice
- □ Structured framework for self-review of the museum and its operations
- □ Independent review by museum experts
- □ Identification of areas for development and improvement in museum operations
- □ Increased confidence among stakeholders, funders, donors and lenders
- □ Increased confidence among your museum's team
- □ Increased confidence among the NZ museum community
- □ Greater engagement with Māori stakeholders, and meeting responsibilities under the Treaty of Waitangi
- □ Greater recognition from regional and local authorities and local community

OPTIONAL: If you have any comments about your choices, please enter them here.

Was the NZMSS applicable to the size and scale of your organisation's operation?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Has participation in the NZMSS led to improvements at your museum or organisation?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Below is a list of possible ways to support museums in the use of the NZMSS. Please select your top three 'most preferred' approaches. If you have no need for one of the options, please select 'not needed'.

	1st choice	2nd choice	3rd choice	Not needed
Support from local body for cluster group standards activity?				
A regional approach to NZMSS delivery with one region targeted and supported every year to complete the scheme?				
More NZMSS support from NSTP and/or Museum Development Officers?				
More resources and templates to support standards activity?				
NSTP training workshops tied to achievement of standards modules?				
A museum development plan template to guide forward planning after completion of NZMSS?				
A system of basic or core museum standards to be achieved first and an option of more advanced levels to work towards?				

OPTIONAL: Please describe any 'gaps' in the NZMSS in relation to your organisation. Please include any possible ways you think those gaps could be closed.

OPTIONAL: We would welcome any suggestions for *changes to the format and presentation* of the NZMSS that you believe would make it more useful for your organisation.

OPTIONAL: We would also welcome any suggestions for *amendments or additions to the content of the NZMSS.*

*** Thank you for your answers, it is appreciated. If you wish to enter the draw to win $500 worth vouchers from Conservation Supplies, please click here**

- Yes, I wish to enter the draw
- No thanks