



## Perth Consultation Meeting

26 November 2002

The notes taken at the workshops reflect the mature thinking that was characteristic of this stage of the consultation, as it became clearer that it was not possible to consider any of the major issues in isolation. As in previous meetings, a member of SMC Board or staff led the workshops, but the views expressed are those of the participants.

### Group 1

#### Roles and Structures / Funding

*What should the infrastructure be? What should the Executive be doing? What should Local Authorities be doing?*

- At the moment it is difficult to plan within the Local Authority set up - wouldn't want Local Authorities to have additional powers without taking on obligations and responsibility – which might be difficult to enforce. Museums are often a low priority in Local Authority plans, sometimes invisible.
- Any new structure must have built in to it appropriate advice at appropriate levels. The Executive needs to recognise the link museums can make to different agendas, departments and therefore, different pots of money. The Executive needs to join up its own thinking before channelling any money into Local Authorities and expecting them to make the links on the ground.
- If SMC is to channel funds, it must be value added – linked to standards and incentives for LAs. Core funding is needed for core services. The wider agenda cannot be addressed until core services are in place.
- There is a need for a standards body but there also needs to be Community Planning. There is no point in having a national strategy that overrides and goes against the whole process of Community Planning. But if planning is left entirely to the community, would the result be the burgeoning of community museums because that is what people want?
- Is Community Planning only another lip service scheme – does it actually work in reality? Perhaps what is needed is more radical change – including more staff at the Executive level with an internal interest in museums, definition of substantive museums and collections, and the 'casting adrift' of the rest.
- Some sort of intermediary is still required – need people who know about museums who can make informed decisions but who also have influence. But this needs to be a non-hierarchical structure – crossing Local Authority boundaries. If SMC disappeared and no other advice-giving body filled the gap, Scotland would end up with the same advice vacuum which currently faces English museums.

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- More emphasis should be placed on the role of the Nationals . So far there is nothing new in what NMS are proposing – what they haven't recognised is that it is a two way process – the regions can feed into the Nationals and not just vice versa. Two-way flow should operate for expertise and not just loans. Perhaps there should be a national register of expertise? NMS needs to take on a more listening role, to recognise the value of other collections and to share their own. Must not forget that the objects in the Nationals' collections also have a local dimension. Should NMS form formal partnerships with other museums to ensure close working and wider contribution to the museum sector? SNH has concordats with Local Authorities – encourages regular collaboration and communication.
- The disadvantage of coining the term "a distributed national collection" is that Local Authorities may feel the responsibility for those collections should be passed on to NMS i.e. Dundee. Local Authorities with significant collections may feel justified in asking for additional funding to help care for collections which are regarded as a national resource.

*Should organisation of the sector focus on Local Authority areas or take on a regional dimension?*

- Doubt about whether Scotland is big enough to support regional organisation, but is the current division into 32 Local Authorities too much? Regional change cannot be enforced and goes against the Executive decentralisation of power. Would the biggest player in each region end up taking all at the expense of everyone else i.e. Glasgow. Potential to make Glasgow a National and take it out of the equation – would level the field for the rest. There could be opportunities for different Local Authorities to work together but it needs an incentive to make it work – resources / funding. Regionalisation would have to take account of population density and distribution, and would need more process, criteria and transparency in funding to explain the distribution. Regionalisation could result in cross fertilisation of staff and councillors.

*How important is SMC? Is it worth fighting for the principle of a museum voice? Is an intermediary body necessary?*

- All agreed that an independent museum voice is important, but maybe this voice could still be heard through other existing organisations i.e. Scottish Museums Federation?
- Some would like SMC to be strengthened to have more influence with the Scottish Executive – to get Local Authorities to ring fence money for museums. If ring fencing is not enforced, any additional money to Local Authorities will be siphoned off to other more 'worthy' causes.
- SMC could become a quango – powerful agencies and structure easily understood by the Scottish Executive. But quangos are only important based on where they sit as a priority. Museums are not a priority now so would they become so just because a quango was the representative body?
- One benefit is that SMC fights for its members – SAC does not. SAC feels like a government agency.
- Could public membership be a way to raise the profile of SMC and museums?
- There are too many organisations under the 'heritage' banner – should SMC push itself to the centre of focus? But how against others like Historic Scotland?
- Joining with libraries would be a poor fit – too huge and with statutory obligations. But there could also be benefits – could tap into Peoples Library Network and

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increase sustainability. Would archives be a closer match?

- If setting up a new agency would need to know what it was being set up to do. Creation would involve loss of skill and knowledge. SMC currently does a good job and if dissolved would leave a breach, as in England. Change would need to be carefully managed.
- Should any additional money from the Executive be used in full to make museums fit for their purpose and then turn to links with wider agenda, or should money be divided half and half from the start? NMS has potential to help increase capacity for the sector.

### **Professional issues / Contribution to the wider agenda**

- Issues of staffing and age of staff – little upwards movement from curatorial posts creates blockage. Generational issues with volunteers – the next generation may not be interested. Need for volunteer training – funding an issue. Current capacity is staff and volunteers – should museums look more to using consultants and gaining access to specialists?
- Peripatetic curators are not a solution to core staffing problems. They write reports to tell people what they know already but can't bring about actual change. Funding for posts may also be unsustainable. Need a long-term link with NMS to develop work on different collections areas and share expertise.

*What are the core functions? What should a strategy deal with and how?*

- Documentation backlog is critical – supported by audit results. Documentation 'puts the flesh on the bones of the significance rating of collections'. Documentation needs money and people – methodologies exist but need the staff to do it. Perhaps documentation hit squads could tour around. Could documentation backlogs be turned into a learning opportunity for the wider public – raise profile in the process and make it a true learning resource from the start – focus on ICT skills as well as knowledge. Would make a better resource if users were involved in the process and would link with the learning and access agenda. Independents are at a slight advantage – each volunteer takes one role and the collection may be smaller scale – Local Authority staff have more roles to perform and history of backlogs to clear.
- Storage is another issue – including buildings, maintenance and storage at object level. Museums are not displaying collections well either. Local Authority maintenance budgets are a problem – how far could hypothecating go in defining museum budgets? Need dedicated streams of funding with sustainability – not enough to have to compete within larger Corporate Services pool.
- Collections work must be linked with the wider environment i.e. archaeology, natural history, oral history. Outreach should become more central to museum work – education beyond the remit of the Education Officer – not an add-on but at the core of the service. Local Authorities could provide a service to the wider area but additional capacity is necessary to enable delivery. Local museum sectors need to set priorities for delivery within their own areas – Local Authorities and independents setting goals together for wider delivery of services.
- Recognise that culture is good in its own right but it delivers other things as well.

## Group 2

### Roles and Structures

#### Scottish Executive

- There is a need to identify within the Executive individuals with a clear responsibility for museums. Alarming that no one has museums in their title.
- There is a justifiable need for more civil servants to be working within the department.
- It is impossible to have an effective management strategy for museums unless there is someone with accountability.
- The Executive has a statutory responsibility to core fund the nationals that would be difficult to change.

#### Nationals

- SMC does not currently have responsibility for the nationals: the new body representing museums needs to include everybody.
- The nationals' key benefit to non-nationals is curatorial support but is there a better way of regionally consolidating such support for the museum sector.
- It was mooted that the speech Gordon Rintoul delivered at the Collective Vision conference on 4 November carried a clear message – *Your system has got to change but we are staying the same.*
- Nationals would strongly resist any model that meant they would lose their direct link with the Scottish Executive.

#### SMC

- SMC has the correct mechanisms already in place for being able to make difficult decisions e.g. Strategic Change Fund.
- Why can SMC not remain a membership organisation and take the strategic lead?
- Currently SMC may be a thorn in the Scottish Executive's side, as it cannot be told what to do?
- There was some fear that SMC might lose some independence but gain bigger budgets and therefore more power to act in line with Executive priorities if it became an NDPB like SAC.
- The organisation should not be looking at immediate fundamental change but incremental change.

#### Local Authorities

- There is a need for Local Authorities to be instructed to deliver key priorities to the sector.
- Local Authority museum budgets should be ring fenced.
- The term “adequate provision” used as a benchmark for Local Authority provision is unclear and needs to be properly addressed.
- There was an argument that the nationals potentially duplicate local provision with their educational work. Better regional funding for regional museums to provide educational work was argued for.

#### Independent Museums

- If there was an information / strategy led central agency – What would happen to independent museums?
- Grampian Transport Museum highlighted their relative success at generating informal assistance from the nationals. They also currently receive help from educational office in Aberdeen City Council – possibly the success in achieving this could be shared to enlighten others.

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- It is important that the independent museum sector responds to the consultation exercise. A lack of time and resources was recognised as a major block for many independent museums, which may account for a lack of understanding when it comes to the issues raised in the consultation exercise. It was also recognised that their voice may not be heard against the noise generated by larger establishments such as LA's, industrials, Glasgow etc.
- The nationals may make loans to the independents but it is forgotten that the independents also loan to the nationals.

### Funding

- Funding of museums is not just about delivering cash options but providing other resources.
- The Scottish Executive seriously needs to look at cross-departmental funding for museums and galleries in recognition of their contribution to education, social inclusion, tourism and communities.
- Could funding models be more flexible, moving bit-by-bit, changing incrementally?
- We need *outcomes* for any potential additional funding. This needs transparency and identifiable strategies from both museums and the Executive. Remember the case of industrials: no planning = no long-term solution. There is also the example of £3m to Glasgow Museums.
- There is a problem for independent museums finding 50% matching funding for SMC grants, this means it can be prohibitive (point shared with Perth Museum). There is also a difficulty in ensuring the capacity to use the funding for its purpose and to also in responding if extras are needed at the end such as marketing.
- Could there be funding for these issues so that museums can see them as part of the project?
- What about Local Authorities providing core funding and the Executive providing project funding?
- We need a core of funding that isn't threatened year on year.
- Confidence in applying for big HLF money isn't there. Additional money can boost confidence and the ability to appoint people with expertise in key areas such as education and marketing. Could money be distributed to make sure distributed national collection is safeguarded?

### Wider Agendas and Professional Issues

- How can the sector provide an adequate educational service without qualified staff?
- The 117 educational officers figure presented in the National Audit was highlighted as being not 117 individuals but the relative time put in by all museums staff. It was mentioned that less than 20 educational officers work within the museums sector.
- There is no point in every museum devising a different educational policy. This needs to be strategically structured and produced by a national agency.
- Educational Officers are vital. We could have travelling officers for 2 days a week on a regional basis. We should have a more open system with cross sharing of resources in order that we can do committed work in particular areas.
- If we could appoint professionals maybe they could be monitored by a National Agency. Monitoring and standards are an important aspect. Measurement of performance against PIs.
- Cultural marketing is fragmented across the country. The new Museum of Scotland was supposed to direct people outwards to the rest of the country – not happened. The quality is there, people just don't know about it. What about a book of Scotland's Museums?

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- Look at Edinburgh theatre marketing: they are aware of each other's agendas and programmes and they share information. Compare this to Perth and Dundee Local Authorities – they don't know what the other is doing or plans to exhibit (further example of theatre marketing in Glasgow).
- There was a missed opportunity for sectoral partnership when the Scottish Colourist exhibition was on in Edinburgh – there was no reference for visitors to go to Perth or Kirkcaldy. Now, if there was a National Officer co-ordinating this, it would be much easier and effective. These partnerships could be copied in marketing and education projects.
- What if there is a regional focus on what's already there, could this 'lead' to reorganising collections (too many museums)? Some small museums struggle with collections at the expense of other valid community based activities.
- SCRAN just doesn't seem to have worked. It has focussed on the education remit but hasn't disseminated collection information.
- Curatorial research units were established in NE England with nationals being key players. There was also a book developed about Scotland's natural history collections in a similar project. There's no way that this could happen now – no expertise, no staff, no resources. We need investment.
- A national collecting policy could help avoid duplication of collections and effort; maybe material in the 'wrong' location could be reassigned.
- Cultural Co-ordinators don't seem to be promoting existing programmes but are doing their own thing. They should be inducted at SMC. Although overall they are not a major consideration of museums.

## Other General Comments

- Scotland has too many museums. A comment accepted by some of the group but which one member in particular voiced her distress to hear.
- An agreed need for regional support was identified.
- Do people really understand how much SMC has changed over the last four years.
- The Highland model was mentioned whereby the independents have a service level of agreement with local authorities. However it was pointed out that the strain on local authority staff and resources is immense.

The Group unanimously agreed that the following model would best represent the needs of Scotland's museum sector:

- We need an evolved SMC with new powers, increased funding and improved resources to strategically lead the sector – it should be recognised as the national agency. Whether this would mean losing the membership is debatable.
- The nationals would need to come under the restructured SMC.
- Beneath SMC would exist a number of regional agencies to deliver education, tourism, marketing, curatorial support etc.
- Rather than the obvious local authority regionalisation it was queried whether a more efficient split could be into the Scottish Enterprise regional boundaries. Could this avoid the existing / expensive fiefdoms?
- All funding for the sector should eventually come through the re-structured SMC umbrella organisation. Currently Local Authority funding should be ring fenced and continue to be delivered through the Executive, however it would make sense for this to change at some point in the future and for all funding to be delivered through the evolving national agency for museums.
- The idea of an evolving organisation made more sense than attempting to deliver a completely new organisation overnight. SMC is the only organisation in a position to take on this role.

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A step change approach was agreed. Each step could, for example, involve:

- Step 1**        Implementing a curatorial framework – devising an information framework and national strategy – promoting Best Practice.
- Step 2**        Developing of a funding framework for the sector.
- Step 3**        All strategic policy and funding for the museum sector to come under the control of the agency.