

The Scottish Museums Council

Response to the Scottish Executive's Draft Strategy for Supporting Active Communities in Scotland.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Scottish Museums Council (SMC) warmly welcomes the Scottish Executive's consultative strategy *Supporting Active Communities*. Volunteering is at the heart of many of Scotland's most successful community museums and heritage trusts. Voluntary activity in museums is wide in scope. It ranges for example from the trusteeship of 129 independent museums to front of house roles as exhibition guides or behind the scenes work, documenting and preserving parts of Scotland's cultural heritage. This response sets out SMC's views on the proposals outlined in the draft strategy, but first we offer the following information as appropriate context :

2. Museums and Volunteering

Tasks undertaken by volunteers in museums

	1984	1998
	%	%
Cataloguing and documentation	67	72
Display and exhibitions	26	58
Guiding and interpretation	33	55
Administration, funds and committees	11	42
Research	16	53
Sales and information	32	45
Conservation and restoration	47	38

1984, Mattingley Survey for Museums and Galleries Commission and Volunteer Centre UK, updated 1998.

- 2246 volunteers work in museums in Scotland compared to 1203 permanent waged staff (*Museums Focus 2*, MGC, 1999)
- 61% of the museums surveyed use volunteer researchers (*Lifting the Veil: Research and Scholarship in United Kingdom Museums and Galleries*, MGC, 1999)
- In the Highland and Islands alone 1,200 people provide voluntary assistance in arts and cultural activity in the course of a normal week (*Economic and Social Impact of the Arts in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland*, Mackay, 1991)
- 25 independent museums in Scotland are entirely run by volunteers.
- 43% of museum volunteers are over 61.
- A number of research studies have shown that museum volunteers often develop a 'volunteering career,' and were not just involved in heritage organisations but in a variety of other organisations and activities.

- 2.1 In 1999 the British Association of the Friends of Museums (BAFM), the national

umbrella body for volunteers to cultural heritage organisations, produced a Volunteer Charter, and A Handbook for Heritage Volunteer Managers and Administrators, which provides guidelines for the sector on management and best practice.

- 2.2 *In the light of the developed role of volunteers within museums, the Scottish Museums Council would like to see a greater recognition at Scottish Executive level of the breadth and diversity of the voluntary sector. In particular, we would like the role of volunteers in cultural heritage activities to be afforded the same recognition as volunteers in other areas, such as social work and community care.*

3. The Scottish Museums Council

The Scottish Museums Council (SMC) is the membership organisation and representative body for Scotland's non-national museums. Our aim is to improve museum and gallery provision in Scotland for both local people and visitors. We have over 200 members who in turn manage over 320 museums. The members include all 32 Scottish local authorities, universities, regimental and independent museums, ranging in size from small voluntary trusts to large metropolitan services, attracting in excess of 1 million visitors each year.

4. Objective 1: To bring about more positive attitudes at all levels towards volunteering and community action

- 4.1 SMC recognises the immense value of the voluntary sector to museums throughout Scotland. There remains, however, a firm belief that volunteers should not be used in times of financial stringency to substitute for paid staff.
- 4.2 The draft strategy suggests that the 'Scottish Executive and its agencies' should set an example to all employees by developing and promoting employer-supported volunteering policies. While SMC would, in principle, be committed to developing such policies, the action suggests some naiveté about the diversity and relative resource base of different parts of the voluntary sector.
- 4.3 Although SMC, as the representative body for Scotland's 329 non national museums, fulfils many of the functions of an appointed public body, we receive only 4% (under £1million) of the funding from the Scottish Executive to the Scottish museums sector. The remaining 96% is awarded to the national museums and galleries. The Scottish Executive does not therefore currently have a framework for support of the non-national museums sector in Scotland, and this has consequent difficulties in developing cohesive policy across a range of areas, including the Active Communities initiative. SMC would like to see the Voluntary Issues Unit at the Scottish Executive working with the Arts and Cultural Heritage Department to address this through the National Cultural Strategy.
- 4.4 SMC is disappointed that the local enterprise networks, Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, have not been afforded a far more significant role and responsibility in the draft strategy. SMC in partnership with Highlands and Islands Enterprise, jointly fund the post of Highlands and Islands Museums Officer, based in the Strengthening Communities Division in Inverness. This post has been instrumental in supporting and developing the independent museums sector in the Highlands and Islands, and we believe offers a valuable model for future development.

- 4.5 The Scottish Museums Council has a small project grants budget (£189,000) in 1999/ 2000. We do, for example, through our training budget, support volunteer training. In 2000/ 2001, we will consider in our annual grant aid review whether the number of volunteer hours might be used as matching funding. More significant to the museums sector than the small amounts of funding available from SMC, is the availability of Lottery funding, particularly from Heritage Lottery Fund. SMC applauds the steps taken by the joint distributors' scheme, Awards for All to make access to funding easier for smaller, voluntary groups. However, SMC believes that the main Lottery distributors have much to learn from this approach and that the application threshold to Awards for All is in itself at present too low.
- 4.6 The Scottish Museums Council participated in the recent UK wide research exercise to identify best practice undertaken by Museums and Galleries Commission as part of the UK wide Active Communities Initiative.
- 4.7 The Scottish Museums Council and the Scottish Arts Council in a joint exercise recently addressed the need to enable the voluntary sector in particular to optimise the promotion opportunities available through the UK wide Museums and Galleries Month 2000 initiative. This included preparing and circulating a media pack and list to the 400 museums and galleries involved, as well as contracting a PR specialist to generate press and media coverage on behalf of museums themselves. The early indications are that this approach has been successful.

5. Objective 2: To locate volunteering and community action at the heart of policy

- 5.1 SMC's Corporate Plan demonstrates our commitment to volunteering. Community action is less easily facilitated without a significant input of resources. In 1999 SMC established the post of Regional Co-ordinator. Part of this post's remit is to develop the role of museums fora, as a mechanism for self-help particularly in the independent sector. Early evaluation shows that we have had limited success with this function, not least because we have only 1 full-time post based in Edinburgh to serve 329 member museums around Scotland. SMC considers that in the longer term, this approach would still be valid but would be more effective with greater resources.
- 5.2 SMC believes that it is vital that the Scottish Parliament Social Inclusion Group should be invited to scrutinise the impact of Scottish Executive policy on volunteering and community action. SMC has taken the lead in convening a multi-agency group to develop a social inclusion strategy for museums in Scotland, due to be published in June. SMC has argued consistently in its response to various Scottish Executive Policy Initiatives including the SE Social inclusion Strategy, Opportunities and Choice and the National Cultural Strategy consultation, that Scottish museums have an invaluable role to play in offering lifelong learning opportunities and also developing active citizenship. There has been limited evidence to date to show that this point has been recognised and incorporated into cross departmental policy.

6. Objective 3: To broaden the range of people involved in volunteering and community action

- 6.1 SMC is supportive of the need to broaden the range of people involved in volunteering and community action. Removing some of the barriers to involvement and the development of policies to broaden the range of volunteers will be considered by SMC as part of the development of wider social inclusion strategy (see above). This has been a particular issue for the museums community, which

has often been stereotyped as attracting volunteers only from the retired professional classes. Research does show that 43% of museum volunteers are over 61. While for the museums community this represents an important and valuable resource, there is also a particular need to attract young people. In particular, we have anecdotal evidence of the beneficial involvement of young volunteers on museums' technology projects.

- 6.2 SMC is also engaged in early discussions with SCET, the National Grid for Learning and Community Learning Scotland on developing an electronic training module for museums aimed at building community capacity.

7. Objective 4: To increase the number of people involved in volunteering and community action

- 7.1 SMC would like to draw the Scottish Executive's attention to DOMUS, a database for the museums sector, administered formerly by the Museums and Galleries Commission, now Resource. DOMUS provides figures on the number of volunteers working in museums in Scotland and could therefore provide some form of baseline for future analysis. However, it should be noted that the future of DOMUS is uncertain in the face of change at the Museums and Galleries Commission.
- 7.2 SMC would expand the point about strengthening the network of volunteer development agencies and other public access points. It is our experience that such agencies do not usually deal with volunteers to the cultural heritage sector. In order to truly represent the breadth and diversity of the voluntary sector in Scotland, we would again argue that there needs to be an expansion of perception about what 'fields' such activity might cover.