

Peter Kelly
The Poverty Alliance
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Our Ref:

Your Ref:

19th June 2003

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Dear Mr Kelly,

Re: An Agenda for Action Against Poverty

I am writing in support of the above report being compiled by The Poverty Alliance. Although poverty is clearly about material circumstance it is also about poverty of aspiration and opportunity, as the Scottish Executive's *Power to Advance Well-being Guidance* (2003) acknowledges. Given this I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the important links between the work of the Scottish Museums Council [SMC], our member museums and social justice.

SMC is the membership organisation for local museums and galleries in Scotland. 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. SMC combines strategic leadership for the sector with the provision of professional information, advisory and support services to members. The Learning and Access team at SMC promotes lifelong learning and access, with a particular focus on developing new audiences and ensuring socially inclusive practices.

While Scotland's museums and galleries preserve and protect our culture and heritage, they also operate as dynamic learning environments. As stated in *Creating Our Futures ... Minding Our Past*, Scotland's national cultural strategy, culture is "... vital to the individual's quality of life and to society's well being". Museums are also uniquely placed to facilitate a shared sense of citizenship and entitlement to Scotland's heritage through the provision of exciting and relevant learning and access programmes. As such, they can help to break the link between material disadvantage and poverty of aspiration and opportunity.

Although the Scottish Parliament and Executive increasingly acknowledge the connection between cultural heritage and social inclusion, citizenship, and learning, these principles need to be instituted far more rigorously into dedicated programmes of action across a number of different organisations. As well as addressing wider concerns around welfare benefits, employment, taxation and law, we recommend that consideration be given to addressing cultural

disadvantage with its attendant consequences for individuals and society as a whole. For example, one of SMC's recommendations to the Scottish Executive's consultation on a national action plan for museums and galleries is to establish a national cultural entitlement which would secure access for all young people to Scotland's heritage. Access to the over ten million objects in Scotland's distributed national collection should be made equally available to everyone regardless of their circumstance. This is a matter of social justice.

SMC would welcome the opportunity to discuss the variety of social inclusion initiatives currently undertaken within the sector. Please see the enclosed copy of SMC's *Museums and Social Justice: How museums and galleries can work for their whole community* document. We have provided more detailed recommendations for how this work could be extended through further investment and closer partnership working across health, social justice, education, economic development, and so on, in our response to the national action plan consultation and the recently published top ten priorities for action in the new Parliament.

Yours faithfully,

Anja-Maike Green

Senior Policy Officer