

**SCOTTISH
MUSEUMS
COUNCIL**



Cultural Statistics – Response to Draft Single Survey Form

2nd December 2003

Introduction

The Scottish Museums Council [SMC] welcomes the development of a single survey form as a more efficient and coherent approach to gathering cultural statistics across Scotland. As it stands the current form will provide useful data on base-level financial expenditure and some information on facilities, staffing and number of attendances. It will also be very useful to have such data available on a regular basis across the different service domains.

The survey does, however, lack detail and ambition in its current form. It does not cover as comprehensive a range of questions as the previous SAC/COSLA questionnaire, for example. What is made up for in the breadth of those surveyed, across the different sectors, is therefore lost in depth of information gathered within any one sector. Consequently, whilst it will be possible to make broad comparisons across different local authorities services, the survey does not facilitate more sophisticated benchmarking opportunities in relation to the detailed nature of current provision within the individual sectors. It will not, for example, be possible to draw conclusions about the exact nature and type of services provided, relative levels of use and by whom, or the potential benefits and outcomes resulting from investment. As such, the potential impact of the survey on effective planning and policy making, and on the assessment of “the outcomes and impacts of spending” (stated as objectives within the covering letter) is less powerful than it could be. This is not necessarily a problem but these limitations should be acknowledged.

It is our view that the current form would be greatly enhanced if viewed as the first step in a staged process towards a more ambitious and revealing data gathering exercise. However, without any indication that this is the case, we believe the current form represents a missed opportunity. There will, for instance, be outstanding information needs in relation to standards, benefits, outcomes and the strategic impact of the cultural sector that will need to be addressed through other means. As discussed by the working group, in time it may be useful to produce two separate surveys (or a single one with a Part A and Part B) which cover financial information and benefits respectively.

Please refer to the SMC response to the first survey draft, dated 7 March 2003, for suggestions on how to expand the content/scope of the survey through a more developmental approach to data gathering.

Content

In addition to the reservations expressed above, we would like to make the following suggestions in relation to the content of the survey:

- While the question (Section C) relating to education/lifelong learning is welcome, it seems inconsistent to investigate expenditure in this area and not in the area of access/social inclusion. Grant funding, project work and supplementary programming activities are generally developed according to the twin principles of lifelong learning and social inclusion. As a result funding is also allocated according to this basic criteria. It may be confusing for respondents to have to conflate differentiated spending into the single education/lifelong learning category.
- The section on museums and galleries in Section D could be improved by including a question on numbers of exhibitions/events. It would be helpful if the guidance notes indicated what is meant by events. In relation to museums and galleries, for example, this could involve learning programmes, project work and outreach activities. The question on the aggregate size of museum and gallery

facilities also seems to be less interesting or potentially useful than other possible questions, which could be asked.

- Questions 106 and 107 should supply some interesting evidence to help authorities promote school involvement.
- A question on acquisitions expenditure for museums and galleries would be useful.

Terminology and clarity

The form would benefit from some clarification in relation to:

- The current title for the survey 'Cultural Statistics' is vague and it would be useful to specify the type of statistical data the survey covers.
- Museums and galleries should not be listed under the 'arts'. This appears throughout the survey. Either the phrase 'arts and heritage' should be used in the subsections or the term 'culture' could be used. In the latter instance, the term 'culture' should be clarified in a glossary of terms as including museums and galleries. Use of a broad definition of culture would ensure consistency with the definition of culture exercised in the National Cultural Strategy.
- Museums and galleries are missed out of Section C, and it is unclear what is meant in question 52 by 'other cultural activities'. The terms art, culture, heritage, museums and galleries should be referred to consistently throughout.
- The difference between 'heritage' and 'museums and galleries', for example in Questions 36 and 37, should be clarified further in the General Guidance Notes. It is unusual to refer to 'heritage' as specific to local history. It would be worth ascertaining whether local authorities do allocate spending according to a local history category as well. In our experience they are more likely to support lifelong learning and access programmes which deal with a range of historical concerns. Is question 36 a programming or a resource question? It should also be made clear whether 'galleries' refers to galleries without collections, which would come under the 'arts' or galleries that are collection-based and therefore exist within 'heritage'. The definition of 'museums and galleries' should be improved. There is also a typo that should read 'historic houses, museums ...'.
- What is meant by 'education/lifelong learning' in Section C. Respondents may have some difficulty distinguishing between the kind of outreach and developmental work suggested in questions 32 – 37 and the education/lifelong learning provision surveyed in questions 46-52.
- In relation to 'attendances' it would be helpful to distinguish between visitors/audiences and those participating in additional programmes, projects and events.
- Use of the term 'income' could be expanded to include retail sales as many museums and galleries have retail facilities on site. This should then be indicated in the General Guidance Notes.