



Response to National Cultural Strategy

1 Culture defined?

1.1 We believe that a National Cultural Strategy should recognise the importance of a wide ranging definition of culture. Every individual or organisation will want a different emphasis: for some the performing and creative arts will be paramount, others will want to emphasise the importance of the scientific and technical while others, including SMC itself, will wish to emphasise the importance of preservation and interpretation of material culture.

1.2 One approach is to recognise that culture defined is not simply a sum of activities but a set of values. Within Scotland we suggest

- a respect for material culture and intellectual traditions
- the importance of cultural memory
- a recognition of the importance of science and technology as well as the arts.
- a recognition not only of high art but also popular expression
- a recognition of the importance of external influences
- a respect for the regional dimension

1.3 We suggest that culture is therefore ***the historic record and contemporary creativity which distinguishes Scotland and Scottish life***. Critically in our view culture involves an engagement with the past and the future as well as the present. It is the vital mortar which binds the building blocks of a healthy society and has an impact and resonance which reverberates far beyond the conventional confines of the “cultural sector”. SMC warmly supports the principles of the coalition agreement, which we believe have cross party support and which should be at the heart of a National Cultural Strategy, *“that arts and culture have a central role in shaping a sense of community and civic pride in the new Scotland”*

and that government should “*invest in Scotland’s diverse cultural life and heritage*”.

2 Aims and objectives of a national cultural strategy

2.1 It follows from this approach, that the aim of a national cultural strategy should be quite simply to ***maximise the cultural dimension of people’s lives.***

In order to maximise the cultural dimension, we believe the key objectives of a strategy should address the underlying issues identified throughout our consultations over the last 2 years. In this summary and in the remainder of our response we concentrate upon the specific issues relating to museums and the cultural heritage sector, but we believe that the issues we have identified and the objectives we outline are common to the whole cultural sector.

2.2 We suggest that the key objectives of a National Cultural Strategy should be

One : Ensure that culture is integral not peripheral to policy development at all levels.

The greater the recognition of the importance of culture and the contribution which cultural activities can make to so many areas of Scottish life, the greater the need for cross cutting policies and mechanisms for developing these. This is true at every level:

International

Debate on the impact of the proposed European Directives on copyright and on Freedom of Information on access to information.

United Kingdom

The need to consider at UK level fundamental issues which are not reserved but which are of cross border importance, such as ICT infrastructure and research and development.

Consideration of the impact of VAT and of charity tax law which, for instance, cut across the National Museum of Scotland’s wish to maintain free admission.

National, including government departments, Executive agencies, NPDBs and grant aided organisations

The importance of the relationship between culture, education and life long learning, particularly as reflected in the National Grid for Learning and community education planning as well as in planning and delivery of the school curriculum.

The importance of cultural facilities to implementation of an effective National Tourism Strategy.

The fact that engagement in cultural activities addresses key government objectives, helping to combat social exclusion and to develop community capacity.

Local level

The relationship between funding agencies investment decisions and the sustainable development of cultural facilities.

The importance of balancing local autonomy with a drive to improve quality whether for educational or recreational provision.

Two: Develop an integrated policy framework for museums and the broader cultural heritage sector

Throughout our consultations, the absence of an inclusive policy framework has been recognised as the single most important issue for the museum sector. SMC initiated and developed a National Strategy for Museums which was endorsed by SMC, NMS and NGS and which offers innovative and creative choices for a new approach to museum policy. Critically, the National Strategy highlighted the need for a national framework, the need to align funding and strategic planning and the benefits which would flow from that approach including:

- A framework for museum development throughout Scotland
- A more integrated approach to policy development at national and local level
- A context for sustainable development within the museum sector
- A commitment to geographic and cultural diversity
- An opportunity to unlock the true potential of collections throughout Scotland

Almost one year on from the publication of the National Strategy we believe that the issues identified and the range of solutions offered are even more pertinent, and that the overwhelming need is for a new and inclusive policy to replace the current strategic vacuum.

Three: Develop viable structures or mechanisms

Current structures and mechanisms mitigate against the aim and objectives. It has long been the case that current structures and mechanisms are inadequate to meet current possibilities and expectations of museums. This is even more true as user expectations change and

develop. Individual museum visitors expect higher standards of information, of display and interpretation and customer service on site as well as having new expectations of information and access on line.

In addition the increasing recognition and indeed expectation that museums and cultural activities can deliver socio-economic benefits cannot be met within current policy frameworks and funding structures. In the National Strategy and later in this response we address the issue of structures and funding, but it is fair to say at the outset that we see the need for a fundamental review of national roles and responsibilities and of funding anomalies if we are to unlock the true potential of collections throughout Scotland.

3 How can museums in Scotland contribute to the objectives of a National Cultural Strategy?

3.1 Education and life long learning

1. Museums represent an extraordinary educational resource for students of every age, interest and ability. With an increasing emphasis on self directed and on investigative learning, whether on site or on line, museums can provide both content and forum for exploration and learning at any age and stage.
2. In the National Strategy we outlined proposals including a national cross-sector committee responsible for co-ordinating relationships between the museums and education sector, including bodies with responsibility for curriculum assessment, teacher training and education standards. We advocated that this body should take the lead in encouraging and supporting the use of museums as inclusive learning resources, giving priority to introducing teachers at all levels to the benefits of museum education. SMC and many individual museums have worked with SCCC and with individual schools but not all teachers or indeed all museums are sufficiently exploring the educational possibilities of national and local resources.
3. We also highlighted the need for funding of qualitative research and evaluation and the development of standards for museum education and interpretation. Again SMC and individual museums have done pioneering work in this area, but there has been only limited central government commitment to development of standards. In response to the Anderson Report, the Scottish Office funded an education Officer within SMC, but with very limited resources, and at local level under 10% of museums have an Education officer. As the potential of museums becomes more clearly recognised, there is a commensurate need to invest in development of an appropriate standards framework.
4. Allied to this is a general proposition that we need to develop greater cultural literacy throughout society, corresponding to the already

identified need for computer literacy. We have only begun to explore the implications of what this might mean in the cultural sector but with new media and new technical possibilities, we are already radically revising our ideas of how individuals access knowledge and indeed what constitutes knowledge. A National Cultural Strategy should secure resources for applied research and should enable the dissemination of this research on a national, cross sectoral basis which embraces museums and the cultural heritage organisations such as Historic Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage who have an interest in interpretation of material culture. Some pioneering work has been done in this area but few organisations are sufficiently well resourced for this to be a priority and none have a clear responsibility for ensuring cross sectoral initiatives.

3.2 Access and audiences:

- 1 The need to increase access to Scottish museums for all sections of the community and all parts of Scotland is central to SMC's aim. In the last ten years significant progress has been made in addressing some of the barriers that prevent people from enjoying their cultural heritage to the full. For example, through:
 - development of education/outreach programmes
 - innovative projects such as SCRAN which use technology to enable remote access, and;
 - more recent efforts to understand and evaluate the contribution museums can make to wider social inclusion policy (see SMC's response to the Scottish Social Inclusion Unit October 1999, and recent research commissioned by the Group for Large Local Authority Museums).
- 2 For museums this marks a major change from a collection or 'object' oriented culture to one which is focussed on the people which a museum serves. In the National Strategy we developed an extended section on how museums can respond to the challenges of access and can ensure equality of access across the spectrum of ability, geography and economic profile.
- 3 However, the pursuit of such strategic policies has been hampered by the lack of a national strategic framework with clear links to appropriate funding. For example SMC was particularly disappointed that the Heritage Lottery Fund refused funding for an innovative National Loans scheme, a joint initiative between SMC, NMS and NGS which would have enabled reciprocal access to collections throughout Scotland. In common with other organisations we have also expressed concern about the funding of new "attractions" at the expense of maintaining and improving quality in existing facilities. Clearly a new, co-ordinated approach to funding

will be needed if a National Cultural Strategy is to have the desired impact.

3.3 New technologies

- 1 New technologies offer extraordinary opportunities for developing access to Scotland's collections. Projects such as SCRAN have demonstrated how new technology can address the issue of remote access. Although intended primarily for educational use, it is clear that there is also enormous potential for interface with tourism and international promotion of Scotland.
- 2 This is an area which we believe requires not only government interest but a nationally funded capital programme. As highlighted in the National Strategy and developed by the "*Netful of Jewels*," this cannot be done on an ad hoc basis but needs a nationally co-ordinated approach which addresses fundamental policy issues and ensures that the benefits and lessons of successful programmes are made available on a national basis.
- 3 SMC has taken the initiative in setting up a Task Force of representatives of the relevant UK and Scottish organisations, including the Scottish Executive, with a view to developing a National Information Strategy for Scotland's museums. The Task Force has agreed that the way forward is to develop a first phase Scottish policy by February 2000, in tandem with the development of detailed proposals for implementation of *Netful of Jewels* proposals being developed by MGC and mda in England. Clearly decisions need to be made at government level as to whether proposals will proceed on a UK basis or whether some or all aspects are a matter of domestic policy: those decisions possibly rather sooner than production of the initial National Cultural Strategy
- 4 As with STB's Ossian project, the development of publicly funded national programmes raises fundamental policy issues about confidentiality and charging for access to information which we believe require cross sectoral debate and consideration at the highest government level.

4 Funding

4.1 The key issue

In the National Strategy we emphasised the need to align funding and strategic planning for the museum sector. The need has become even greater with national and local government emphasis on cross sectoral outcomes, on quality and on accountability.

4.2 The current funding position

- 96% of direct central government funding for Scottish museums and galleries is to NMS and NGS. SMC receives 4% out of a total of £20 million.
- The 320 local museums and galleries which SMC represents have no other direct central government funding. They are dependant upon local authority expenditure, earned income and other funding agencies such as SHEFC (for university museums) and the Heritage Lottery Fund for support.
- Local authorities expenditure is approx £30 million which represents a reduction of almost 30% since local authority reorganisation in 1995. The reduction has had a marked impact not only on local authority museums but also on independent museums where local authority support, although limited in amount, is the critical margin between survival and insolvency.
- HLF awards to museums and galleries to date total £41,820,949 of which 68.3% has been awarded to NMS and NGS¹.

4.3 Comparisons

These amounts and ratios compare unfavourably with a range of international and national comparisons.

- The National Museums and Galleries are not well funded by international standards (£3.9 *per capita compared to £6.9 in Denmark and £4.7 in England*) while central government support for other museums is negligible by international standards (£0.3 *compared to £3.6 in Ireland, £2.8 in Denmark*)²
- Non national museums and galleries in Scotland are significantly disadvantaged compared to English museums and galleries where government has recently made available significant additional sums. These include 2 challenge funds for Education, one for IT and a significant fund for a selected group of “Designated museums” (£2.5+ *per capita, compared to £0.3 in Scotland*).
- Limited central government funding for local museums and galleries in Scotland contrasts with the level of support for local arts organisations through the Scottish Arts Council (*Appendix 1*).

¹ Source: HLF to SMC: 23rd August 1999

² International museums comparisons: Solon Consultants report for SMC (1999)

4.4 Anomalies

There are significant anomalies in the allocation of funding:

- There are nationally funded air and agricultural museums but there is no national support for other industrial museums. Some of the most important national collections are the responsibility of the Scottish Mining, Maritime and Fisheries museums which are relatively small and underfunded independent trusts.
- Local authority support for museums and galleries varies enormously: Glasgow alone is responsible for almost one half of local authority museum expenditure and commitment varies from over £20 to under £1 per head.³
- These anomalies are likely to remain if there is no overall policy or mechanism for central government intervention, combined with a lack of incentive in the form of revenue or challenge funding.

4.5 Heritage Lottery Fund and other external funders

The failure of the National Loans scheme and the RCAHMS scheme for Sites and Monuments Records point to a potentially dysfunctional relationship between nationally identified priorities and HLF policies. This is all the more critical given that some 68% of museum funding is derived from external funders (including local authorities) and that direct central government support for local museums and galleries is currently only 1% of total funding⁴. Whether or not these ratios remain unchanged, a key issue for any National Cultural Strategy is therefore the relationship between national policies for heritage and the policies and priorities of external funders.

4.6 Information

SMC and the other cultural agencies have argued the case for centrally funded research to provide authoritative information about the cultural sector and its economic and social impact. In the absence of any central government unit, SMC has commissioned occasional research which has provided data and a prototype which allows us to model sensitivities and the impact of changes in funding patterns. We suggest that SMC should be resourced to develop this research and model as an aid to planning and decision making for government and other funders.

³ CIPFA statistics

⁴ Solon Consultants (1999)

4.7 Standards

SMC would wish to see any reallocation of funding and priorities allied to commitment to a clear standards framework. Within the UK, SMC has pioneered the development of Best Value standards for local authorities and is developing an integrated standards framework which we believe should be integrated into any reallocation of funding at national or local level. SMC work on non accounting standards has attracted international interest, and again we believe there is a clear case for SMC to be resourced to develop this pioneering work.

5 Structures and mechanisms

5.1 Structures or mechanisms?

It is fair to say that there is far more interest within the cultural sector in establishing effective mechanisms than reform of structures as such, but it is equally true that neither structures nor mechanisms are meeting the needs and expectations of museums and their audiences.

SMC members have already endorsed the principle that there needs to be a managed restructuring of the sector but this cannot be achieved except in conjunction with a comprehensive review of funding and a review and clarification of national roles and responsibilities.

5.2 Local authorities

- 1 The role of local authorities is critical for the future of local cultural services. The time is right to review the scope of local authority responsibilities in terms of current legislation - particularly clarifying the definition of “adequacy” and issues relating to admission charges.⁵
- 2 The implications of a local authority role as community planner also need to be considered against the background of widely differing support by local authorities for culture in general and museums in particular.
- 3 As part of their contribution to meeting new educational and social agendas, there is a need to ensure greater museum input to local authority planning and policy development.
- 4 Above all, we believe there is a need to forge a new financial and operating relationship between central government and local authorities, if the latter are to remain charged with the responsibility for ensuring local cultural provision, however delivered.

⁵ “How Good is your museum service”: report of SMC/ COSLA conference (1999)

5.3 National roles and responsibilities

- 1 The governance and responsibilities of NMS and NGS are determined by relevant legislation and their primary responsibility is stewardship of their own collections. Both have undertaken pioneering access and educational work over the least 10 years. In addition the magnificent new Museum of Scotland and the Dean Gallery have proved exceptional ambassadors for Scotland on an international stage.
- 2 SMC in contrast is a membership organisation which fulfils many of the functions of an appointed public body. SMC has traditionally provided an integrated service to the 320 non national museums, with the emphasis on direct member support, although there is an increasing demand for strategic and practical advice from non members. Over the last 3 years, SMC has moved to a more strategic role, taking the initiative in the development of the National Strategy for Scotland's museums and acting as co-ordinator of all-museum programmes or projects such as the National Loans scheme, National Audit and the Information Task Force.
- 3 However there is no single organisation which either represents or has a strategic remit for museums as a whole, nor has there been any joint forum to parallel the Scottish Library and Information Council, or indeed the Museums and Galleries Commission. The roles, responsibilities and activities of various organisations have evolved over the years in the absence of any coherent policy framework or clear definition of roles.
- 4 There are good arguments for a review and possibly redefinition of roles. For instance, particularly with the demise of MGC, there are arguments for NMS and NGS to develop a pastoral role and provide specific support services to museums as part of their national function, although this would have significant governance, resource and management implications. NMS and NGS offer some selected support services eg the Museums Documentation Officer, but interestingly very few of the objectives or indicators proposed by the KPMG Efficiency Review of the national museums involve other museums. Meanwhile both NMS and NGS are forging operating partnerships for instance with Historic Scotland and the National Trust for Scotland as well as individual museums. Such developments have the potential to destabilise further an already fragile sector, in the absence of any overall policy framework or strategic organisation.
- 5 There is therefore a clear need not only for an inclusive policy framework but to review and clarify the roles and responsibilities of the various organisations - SMC, NMS, NGS, Historic Scotland - both within Scotland and in the context of new UK relationships with

organisations such as MLAC, the National Training Organisations and the various Lottery distributors.

5.4 Key structural options

- 1 Key structural options for the museum sector are set out in the National Strategy for Scotland's museums, although there is scope for considerable variations and nuances within each of the key options, particularly if there is a demand to see support delivered on a more regional basis.
- 2 Nevertheless we believe the models are sufficiently robust to accommodate most variations. Broadly speaking they are:
 - An integrated national service
 - The creation of an arms length intermediary
 - Creation of a single strategic body with no funding responsibilities
 - The fragmented status quo
- 3 The first option, a nationalised service is hardly a realistic political option where government is looking to developing new working partnerships with local authorities. It is also increasingly clear that that the final option, the status quo, is an ineffective structure for developing an integrated policy framework. In SMC's view it is not sustainable in the face of more complex funding partnerships, particularly the introduction of central government revenue support for local museums, or greater government intervention to ensure standards and quality of provision.
- 4 The third option, the strategic agency, might well be effective if there were a significant reallocation of responsibilities and funding patterns, including redressing the balance in favour of local provision. Equally creating a single arms length intermediary (option 2) would be a viable option if that organisation has additional funding and a mandate to review responsibilities and historic funding patterns. As indicated in the National Strategy for Scotland's museums and confirmed in subsequent consultation, this has considerable support within the museum profession.
- 5 Above all the advantages of the second and third options, underpinned by financial investment, are that they facilitate the ability of museums to meet the more complex objectives of a range of funders and the increasingly challenging expectations of potential users.

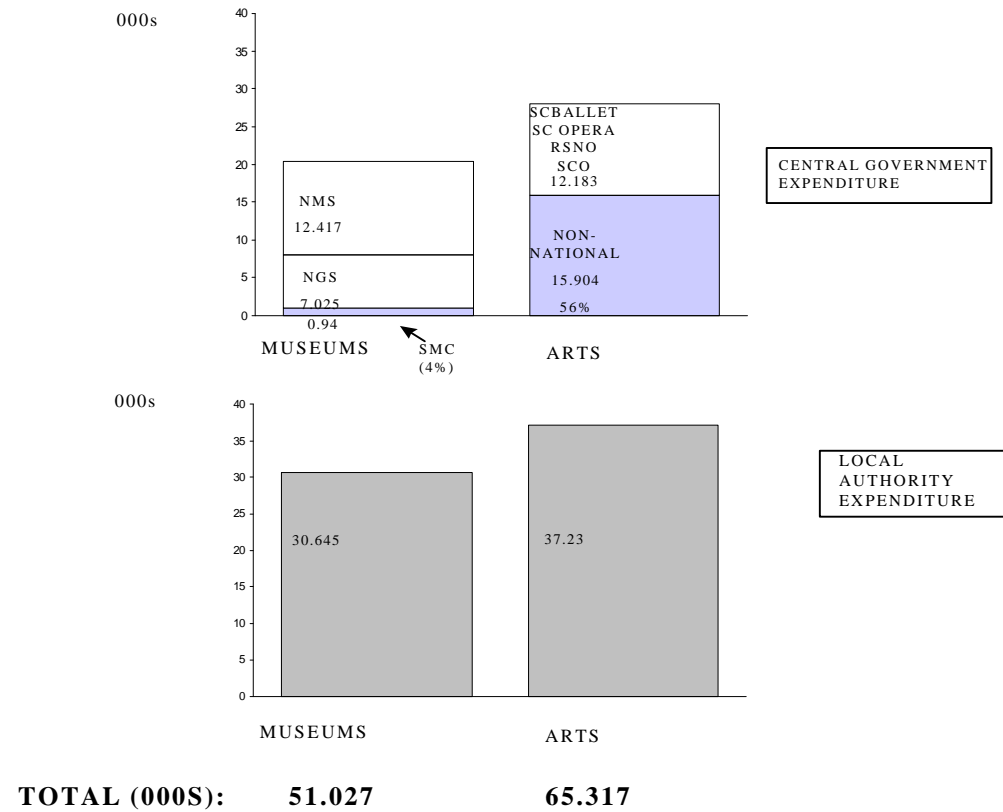
6 Conclusions

- 6.1** Given the underlying structural and funding issues which we have outlined in this response, we believe that there needs to be a fundamental review of all the funding and structural options, with a view to redefining relationships and creating a stable network of museums which can deliver long term benefits for Scotland in the 21st century.

- 6.2** Pending any fundamental review, we believe there are clear arguments for clarifying and possibly refocusing the work of some relevant organisations particularly in light of the need for more accurate data, for development of more sophisticated funding criteria and performance measures and for development of cross sectoral programmes. SMC would be pleased to work with the Scottish Executive and other agencies to develop the most appropriate interim and long term solutions.

Appendix 1

REVENUE FUNDING FOR YEAR 1999-2000



Source: Scottish Executive, CIPFA, Scottish Arts Council