



Review of Public Bodies

Response of the Scottish Museums Council

1 General

The Scottish Museums Council is a membership organisation which fulfils many of the functions of an appointed public body. Over the last 4 years, SMC has moved into an increasingly strategic role, taking the initiative in the development of a National Strategy for Scotland's Museums and acting as coordinator of all museum programmes or projects such as the National Audit. SMC is a founder member with NMS and RCAHMS in SCRAN. SMC is funded by the Scottish Executive to conduct the National Audit which will include not only non-nationally funded museums but also the National Museums of Scotland, National Galleries of Scotland and Historic Scotland collections and services.

2 SMC therefore has close links with a number of the public bodies sponsored by the Scottish Executive, principally:

- National Galleries of Scotland
- National Library of Scotland
- National Museums of Scotland
- Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland
- Scottish Arts Council

3 SMC has for some years argued the need for a fundamental review of the museum sector, which would be directly relevant to the position of the National Galleries of Scotland and the National Museums of Scotland as well as SMC itself. In responding to the National Cultural Strategy, SMC and many others urged the Scottish Executive to undertake a fundamental review of the sector. Many of the recommendations in the National Cultural Strategy, published in July 2000, are welcome but some key issues remain unresolved. In particular, there remains an urgent need for the Scottish Executive to identify which organisation(s) should have responsibility for national policy and strategic

development within Scotland and what resources should be allocated to these policy and strategic functions. In contrast with other areas of the cultural heritage eg buildings, monuments and archives, museums are distinguished by the relative lack of central government allocation of resources to any national planning or strategic development whether internal or as an arm's length organisation.

- 4 Given the need for a review of the sector, SMC has for some time highlighted the fact that there are good arguments for a review and possibly redefinition of roles across the NDPB's and SMC itself. The National Strategy for Scotland's Museums endorsed by SMC, NMS and NGS set out a series of options. In SMC's response to the National Cultural Strategy, we further explored the issue of national roles and responsibilities and structural options, and this response should be read in conjunction with the National Strategy for Museums and our response to the National Cultural Strategy (see attached).
- 5 Some of the points made in our response, were expressly or implicitly incorporated into the National Cultural Strategy. Actions to which the Scottish Executive gave a commitment and which have potential to effect significant changes in the roles and responsibilities of the NDPB's and SMC include:
 - recognising that the existing framework lacks consistency and strategic direction
 - considering how to promote sustainable funding in the museums sector
 - reviewing the existing statutory framework relevant to museums and galleries and considering the case for a comprehensive national framework
 - initiating a National Audit, now being undertaken by SMC
 - encouraging the National Museums and National Galleries to extend outreach roles to the non national sector
 - commissioning evaluation to include exemplification of standards, illustrations of good practice and advice on measuring the social benefits of cultural activity.

A rationalisation of funding and policy along these lines is likely to require not simply a rationalisation to the roles and responsibilities of existing NDPBs and SMC, but will require either greater Scottish Executive capacity (see para 3 above) or the creation of a new arms length intermediary with greater responsibilities than any of the existing organisations.

- 6 It is clear that it is not realistic to consider the roles of the National Museums and the National Galleries without also considering the roles and responsibilities of organisations not currently included in the review, including Historic Scotland as well as the Scottish Museums Council. Historic Scotland, a part of the Executive, has a complex role which includes both advice to Ministers on the one hand and operational responsibilities on the other. If the argument is against the Scottish

Executive undertaking museum and gallery provision directly (by undertaking the functions of NMS and NGS directly) it is not easy to determine the logic for the Scottish Executive continuing to act as one of the largest operators of visitor attractions through Historic Scotland. It would be logical to consider the nature of Historic Scotland's responsibilities in this area, particularly in relation to sites which are de facto museums with substantive collections.

- 7** We endorse the principle that every public body should be clearly accountable to either Ministers and Parliament or to a locally elected body. However, as part of a much wider issue, by no means restricted to the museum sector, we suggest that greater accountability requires greater clarity about the rights and duties of Directors or Trustees, with particular reference to potential conflicts of interests where there are reciprocal Board appointments. Clarification of roles across the NDPB's would also greatly assist.
- 8** .If there is to be any review of NMS and RCAHMS in particular, there are specific issues which arise in relation to SCRAN.

 - Any change to the constitution of these organisations will require the agreement of the Millennium Commission.
 - Changes should require consultation and consent of the 3 founder members (NMS, RCAHMS, SMC) whose IPR and other rights may be affected.
- 9** Finally, whether or not there are to be major structural changes, improvements could be made to achieving greater transparency in some areas of activity. One option would be an inter-agency forum which included not only the NDPB's under review but also Historic Scotland, the National Archives of Scotland and SMC. There are in existence a number of bi-lateral agreements e.g. NMS and Historic Scotland but there is also a need for some multi-lateral understanding of the cultural heritage landscape and the impact which individual initiatives can have upon the landscape, particularly in the absence of a strategic framework.