

## **Scottish Museums Council response to Resource's draft strategy *Using Museums, Archives and Libraries to Develop a Learning Community***

The Scottish Museums Council (SMC) is the principal avenue for Scottish government support to, and the membership organisation, for Scotland's 340 non-national museums and galleries. SMC combines strategic leadership for the sector, developing national policies and initiatives with the distribution of grants, practical advice and services for members.

The Council's mission is to **achieve the best possible museum and gallery provision in Scotland for the public benefit.**

### **Strategic Objectives**

- i. Promote recognition of the essential role played by museums in the life of Scotland.
- ii. Promote the role of museums in contributing to the learning society.
- iii. Make museums more socially inclusive and accessible.
- iv. Develop a national strategy for a sustainable museums network in Scotland and ensure this is implemented.
- v. Enable museums to develop their potential by promoting good management, high professional standards and the effective use of resources.
- vi. Always operate effectively and efficiently and provide value for money in our activities.

SMC welcomes this strategy from Resource and believes there is much in it to commend. It sets out clearly a vision for the sector in which learning is at the heart of all activities undertaken by museums, libraries and archives, a view which we endorse.

We have commented on a number of general points below followed by specific comments relating to paragraph numbers.

### **General Comments**

- The use of the term 'national' is not consistent throughout the strategy. At times it is used to denote the UK as a whole and at other times it is applied in a context that can only be English. National and English are not interchangeable words with the same meaning. It would be helpful if this inconsistency could be addressed.
- This inconsistency is partly due to the underlying ambiguity about Resource's remit for Scotland. We appreciate the ambiguity needs to be resolved at Ministerial level but the lack of clarity is seriously beginning to hinder forward progress for Resource and for SMC and Scottish museums overall (This is particularly acute in the area of ICT). We recommend that Resource press for clarification and consultation about proposed changes as matter of urgency.
- There are implications for Scotland and Scottish museums, libraries and archives in this strategy, even if Resource has no relevant remit in Scotland and even if Scotland does not adopt initiatives such as the Learning and Access Standard. The implications for the devolved administrations of Resource lobbying for an

essentially English standard to become a minimum requirement for UK funding bodies need to be explored fully.

- This strategy commits Resource to an extremely ambitious course of action against tight deadlines over the next five years. We hope that this important and potentially very valuable work will be conducted in a thorough way with comprehensive consultation across all domains and that this necessary degree of rigour will not be compromised for the sake of possibly unrealistic deadlines.

## Specific Comments

### Section 1

SMC shares Resource's vision that museums, libraries and archives have an important role to play in the lives of all people in Britain. We endorse the core values set out in section 1.2.

### Section 2

- 2.2 Scotland does not have a National Curriculum in the same way that exists in England.
- 2.5 The illustrations given here are relevant to an English context but could easily be adapted to be meaningful to a Scottish environment.
- 2.8 *The Learning Age* outlined a number of initiatives that would be developed in England.
- 2.9 Learning and Skills Councils are organisations with a remit for learners in England only. Museums have a role to play for learners throughout the UK.

### Section 3

SMC endorses the sentiment behind the definition and approaches to learning given in this section. SMC has itself, adopted the Campaign for Learning's definition of learning for use in its Learning Strategy which will be developed for museums and galleries in Scotland.

### Section 4

- 4.1 No formal National Curriculum operates in Scotland but citizenship is certainly something that museums are well placed to promote. While there is no statutory requirement for local authorities in Scotland to provide a museum service, as is the case in England, there is a requirement for every local authority to ensure *adequate cultural provision* for its citizens. In addition, all Scottish local authorities provide free access to museums and galleries which they hold in trust for the citizens of Scotland.  
Scottish Local Authority Museums (SLAM) can provide further information if required.
- 4.2 While some museums are able to provide safe places which can encourage people to learn, there is evidence to suggest that many people still feel intimidated by the thought of entering a place such as a museum.
- 4.5 We endorse and echo these sentiments. Many smaller museums in Scotland are still not linked to the Internet nor have access to email or other forms of electronic communication.
- 4.6 There is much case study material in existence to indicate that museums can make a positive contribution to the lives of people who are *already* considered to be excluded, rather than those *at risk of exclusion*. The use of this term attracted criticism in the original DCMS report as being meaningless; we are all at risk of exclusion. There are definite steps museums can take to engage with individuals and communities who are already excluded from one or more sphere of society.

We welcome the recognition that a key issue for the sector is to create methodologies that will measure the social impact of this work.

## **Section 5**

- 5.4 We agree that an overall change in the institutional culture of museums and galleries is needed. In our recent publication *Museums and Social Justice*, we went further than 'accepting' that people had a right to be involved in the activities of museums and *asserted* that this right was a matter of justice. This access to the decision making process for the people who essentially own public collections, becomes part of the *social justice* agenda, a stronger statement than social inclusion.
- 5.5 We endorse the aim of the strategy – unlocking collections – as being at the heart of what museums should be concerned with.

## **Section 6**

- 6.4 We agree that a key focus for work in this area should be on the development of indicators that assess the impact of learning using a museum. This work will be of use not only in England but the rest of the UK and of international importance.

## **Section 8**

- 8.2 We welcome the wide-ranging aims of the strategy. These form the basis of an ambitious programme of work for Resource.

## **Section 9**

The outcomes listed in this section will form important evidence of the value of the sector if they are achieved. With a small degree of adaptation they could be made relevant to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland if the strategy were to extend to the devolved administrations.

## **Section 10**

The development of standards, indicators and associated methodologies of collection information are a vital step forward for the sector. Measuring the impact of museums on individual and community learning will enable museums to demonstrate their unique role in society and is a welcome inclusion in the strategy.

## **Section 11**

- The action lines and commitments set out in this section apply to England only.
- Notwithstanding the omission of actions and commitments to the other home countries, SMC applauds the thorough and systematic way in which the work is being approached.
- A definition of regional is not supplied. It is therefore unclear whether the term regional is meant to imply the English regions only (and to which funding is to be directed) or to include Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as it has done in the past.
- How will the proposed Regional Learning Support Units fit into a network of single Regional Agencies as advocated in the recent independent report commissioned by Resource?
- The implications for staff currently employed in education and learning work in the Area Museums Councils need to be addressed.
- We welcome the opportunity to consult on the development of standards across the sector.

- SMC would argue that one approach to the development of standards that Resource might wish to consider is that a UK 'core' standard is developed in partnership with each of the devolved administrations. Country specific, or even regionally specific amendments or additions could then be made to that UK core in order to reflect the differing agendas and priorities of the home countries and the regions. This would eliminate the duplication of work that would surely arise from the development of three or more separate standards for each subject area and ensure that comparable but differential standards are produced.
- Any standard that does not have a UK wide basis and is used as a minimum standard has serious implications for existing UK schemes e.g. Registration.
- There are also serious implications for the home countries if UK funding bodies are encouraged to adopt Resource's standard as a minimum requirement for funding and we recommend that these are explored on a multilateral basis.

We would welcome further discussion on any of the points we have raised in this response. For discussion of general comments please contact Jane Ryder, Director, and for discussion of specific comments relating to the strategy or Learning and Access Standard please contact Fran Hegyi, Senior Policy Officer (Education & Learning).

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Scottish Museums Council  
County House  
20-22 Torphichen Street  
Edinburgh EH3 8JB