

## **SCOTTISH MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES WORKING GROUP**

### **RESPONSE TO THE MINISTER ON THE CULTURAL COMMISSION REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Scottish Museums and Galleries Working Group (SMGWG) has studied the recent report from the Cultural Commission with great care. The SMGWG supports many of the Commission's recommendations, but not all. We are taking this opportunity to set out some comments which reflect views held widely across the museums community. Below we have set out:

- The points in the report that we particularly welcome.
- Areas of major concern.
- Solutions which we believe can enable Scotland's museums to deliver more effectively for everyone.

#### **2. POINTS TO WELCOME FROM THE COMMISSION**

There is much to welcome in the Commission's proposals:

- The Commission's strong support for enhancing the learning potential of culture for people of all ages, but particularly in schools, to grow the appetite for culture in the next generation. We particularly welcomed the Commission's recognition that, through their expertise in object centred learning, museums can play a far greater role than they do at present in delivery of learning for people of all ages.
- Recognition of the need for investment in Scotland's museums and galleries, together with an effective strategic framework for delivery and closer links with tourism.
- Support for the establishment of national standards for museums and heritage.
- Endorsement of cultural planning and partnerships, within a community planning framework, as a means of delivering cultural entitlements, including access to museum services of assured quality within a reasonable distance.
- Support for the importance of wider digital access to museum collections.
- Support for the principle of encouragement to private philanthropy towards museums through changes to the tax system.
- Recognition of the national role played by collecting institutions such as NMS, with a recommendation that these should be explicitly recognised in funding agreements and outcomes monitored.

### 3. CONCERNS

#### 3.1 A Strategy for Museums in Scotland

The Commission's report recognises many of the points which SMGWG made in consultation, about the many challenges facing Scotland's museums. What is missing however, except as a very general statement of support (p.109), is identification of a coherent framework for museums in Scotland. This is something for which the museums community has argued since the publication of the National Cultural Strategy, and which we proposed in our response to consultation phase 1 of the Commission's work. We believe that this is essential to provide an effective basis for investment in Scottish museums, resulting in better services available to all. In section 3 we set out how we believe such a framework could operate.

#### 3.2 Infrastructure

We do not believe, for the reasons given below, that the Commission's preferred model for infrastructure (Option 1) would operate in the wider public interest as far as museums are concerned:

3.2.1 Accountability. It is not clear how the proposed structure could maintain accountability for very large amounts of public funding. Transfer of the Culture Minister's budget to the Culture Fund, on which the Minister would sit as one of a number of Board members, could raise some very difficult issues.

3.2.2 Policy. There would be a significant risk that Culture Scotland would be dominated by the largest or most vocal sector, to the detriment of effective policy to support and develop museums. There is a need for clear responsibility for museum policy and standards, and links with the museums community.

3.2.3 Funding. Museums hold their collections in perpetuity. In this respect they are very different from many art forms, which have a more transient presence, with all that this implies in terms of priorities, planning cycles and responsibilities. We question whether the Culture Scotland and Culture Fund funding model proposed would be capable of prioritising and delivering the stable long term support and investment which museums require.

3.2.4 Complexity, bureaucracy and cost. All of the proposals for infrastructure are complex and bureaucratic. They would make it difficult to establish clear roles and responsibilities. If they were implemented, it is likely that costs would increase. We do not believe, for example, that the creation of a National Collections Board, in an area where there are already a number of mechanisms for collaboration, would add sufficient value to justify its cost.

### 4. SOLUTIONS

#### 4.1 A Strategic Framework for Museums

We believe that the key issue for the museums sector is to create a sustainable strategic framework for museums, which will deliver enhanced services to communities across Scotland, ensure the effective care of collections, contribute to cultural tourism and promote Scotland in an international context. We have given this a working title of a **Scottish Museums Partnership** and below we set out what it could include and how it could operate.

We made this proposal to the Cultural Commission during the first phase of consultation. The Commission gave support to some separate elements of it. While we welcome this and understand that there are choices as to what a framework could include, we would like to emphasise our view that it is essential that a **coherent framework** is introduced, rather than disparate parts of it.

We believe that the potential benefits of a Scottish Museums Partnership are considerable:

- It would create a strategic approach to policy, funding and delivery.
- It would create greater capacity, with delivery through partnerships.
- It would be a “national” museums service, neither wholly centrally or regionally controlled. It would be a sustainable network of museums large and small (national, local authority, university and independent), sharing collections, resources and expertise, united by adherence to international standards of best practice and by their common delivery of the ‘national cultural entitlement’.
- It would be an ambitious venture which could have the potential to place Scotland’s museum sector at the forefront of museum organisation and delivery internationally, drawing on best practice from developments in the museums sector elsewhere such as in England, Denmark, the Netherlands, Australia and New Zealand.

## 4.2 Scottish Museums Partnership

A Scottish Museums Partnership could comprise some or all of the following:

4.2.1 A network of Regional Centres of Excellence, based on existing significant museum services across Scotland. These could be funded by Local Authorities, the Scottish Executive (and the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council where appropriate) and operated by the former, linking regions to delivery and the community planning process. Such centres could have a broader role in providing advice etc within their region and could even have funds provided to offer grants, funds projects etc. A key role would be helping build capacity in the sector. A similar, but more complex, model based on ‘regional hubs’ was introduced in England in 2000, funded by DCMS and administered through the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (see [www.mla.gov.uk](http://www.mla.gov.uk)). There are parallels in Denmark.<sup>1</sup>

4.2.2 A ‘significant collections’ scheme for museums having collections of national and international importance. This could serve as a mechanism to secure a sustainable future for nationally important collections (those of Glasgow City Council being a case in point), but also deliver defined outcomes in terms of enhanced access. A consultation on proposals for such a scheme is already being undertaken

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<sup>1</sup> In Denmark there are over 300 museums, of which about half are in receipt of state support awarded on the basis of recognised criteria which include professional standards and quality. Denmark’s museums co-operate on a nationwide basis, directly and through agencies such as regional museum councils and the Danish Council of Museums (see [www.kum.dk](http://www.kum.dk) for a copy of the Danish Cultural Policy document).

by SMC. A Designation Challenge Fund was established for England in 1999, funded by DCMS and administered by MLAC (see [www.mla.gov.uk](http://www.mla.gov.uk)).

4.2.3 A Capital Challenge Fund open to significant collections and regional centres of excellence could be established to provide a source for capital grants, particularly for collection related projects, including renewals of buildings and displays or digitisation projects. A Capital Grants Scheme has recently been established under the Regional Museums Policy introduced by the government of New Zealand (see [www.mch.govt.nz](http://www.mch.govt.nz) for details).

4.2.4 A Project Challenge Fund could be created to develop and deliver innovative projects in the areas of audience development, learning, leadership and development, to equip museums to be dynamic contributors to Scottish society. This would build on the model of the Regional Development Challenge Funding.

4.2.5 A 'Scottish Museums On Line' portal could be established as the public face of the Scottish Museums Partnership. This could both provide a free and well structured way for the public to access information about museums and serve as a central resource for museum professional reference and discussion. Australia developed an online museums service in direct response to problems of geographical access, and the model has now been adopted by Canada (see [www.amol.org.au](http://www.amol.org.au) ).

4.2.6 There should be a museums strategic agency (building on the experience and network of the Scottish Museums Council) which would service the framework for the Scottish Museums Partnership and provide support for its museums. Wherever this might sit within the wider cultural infrastructure, there is a need for a clearly defined responsibility for administration of the funding mechanisms above, liaison with the Scottish Executive on policy development, dissemination of best practice and standards.

4.2.7 The role of the National Museums of Scotland and National Galleries of Scotland in the partnership framework should be both to deliver services directly to the public and also to serve as a national and international source of collections, advice and expertise, working in partnership with the museums community to ensure that museums are able to play their full part in delivering on cultural entitlements?.

4.2.8 There could be a Partnership Forum to act as a steering group, involving local authority and independent museums, university museums, NMS, NGS and the museums strategic agency, with input from related bodies such as Historic Scotland. There are parallels to the heritage sectoral council proposed by the Cultural Commission.

### **4.3 National Cultural Rights and Entitlement**

#### **4.3.1 Cultural Rights**

The museums community believes that there should be a national cultural right of access to cultural heritage.

#### **4.3.2 Cultural Entitlement**

The museums community has undertaken a consultative project to develop a definition of entitlement in a museums context, to inform the wider debate. The

project has identified the following as what museums and their users see as key components of cultural entitlement to museums:

- Access for all users to museum buildings, collections and services / removal of current barriers to access;
- Provision which meets the diverse need of all potential users – and therefore;
- Citizen involvement in the planning, programming and provision of museum services;
- “Quality” provision, which would need to be defined;
- Conservation of national, regional and community heritage for present and future generations.

Based on these findings, we believe that a national cultural entitlement to museums should include:

- Every school child should be able to visit a museum of assured quality and within a reasonable distance, as part of curriculum based activity.
- Access for everyone to museum collections of assured quality and within a reasonable distance.
- Access to museum services which are responsive to community needs and aspirations.
- Online access to significant museum and gallery collections and services in Scotland through a national “museum portal”.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The above proposals, would provide a framework through which museums in Scotland could be enabled to realise their potential for enriching the life of all citizens and visitors to the country, and for contributing to the cultural, social and economic renewal which was the ultimate purpose of Devolution. They provide a mechanism by which the Executive can not only invest in the museum sector, but do so in ways which are led by policy objectives and which will have demonstrable outcomes in terms of those objectives. They provide a vehicle through which difficult decisions (such as those relating to the funding of the Industrials) can be processed in a rigorous and transparent fashion, while at the same time providing a stimulus to the creativity and innovation which is required if museums are to make their contribution to Scotland’s future.