

Minutes of the Joint Forum on Museums, Libraries and Archives across the UK.

27th May 2004

Present

Dr Aideen McGinley (DCAL) - Chair
Phillips Wilson (DCAL)
Colin Watson (DCAL)
Kathleen Ryan (Southern ELB)
Gerry Slater (PRONI)
Chris Batt (MLA)
Sue Wilkinson (MLA)
Fran Hegyi (MLA)

Elaine Fulton (SLIC)
Jane Robinson (SMC)
Irene O'Brien (SCA)
Linda Tomos (CyMAL)
Jane Edmonds (CyMAL)
Emily Adams (NMDC)

1. Introductions

- 1.1 Aideen McGinley welcomed the group to Belfast and to the second meeting of the Joint Forum.

2. Minutes and Matters Arising

- 2.1 The minutes were agreed as a correct record of the previous meeting.
- 2.2 Linda Tomos informed the meeting that the results of the creative industries review in Wales would be available this summer and would be circulated to the Forum.
- 2.3 Gerry Slater enquired as to whether representatives from the Home Nations had been invited to join MLA's Workforce development Strategy steering group. It was confirmed that this was the case and that representatives from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland were participating.
- 2.4 It was confirmed that CyMAL was working with both the Lifelong Learning and Cultural and Creative Industry Sector Skills Council bids. DCAL confirmed that they were working with other departments including Department of Employment and Learning.
- 2.5 Chris Batt informed the Forum that it was unlikely that further information on the Goodison review would be available until after the announcement of the Spending Review this summer.
- 2.6 It was confirmed that the latest developments regarding the development of the National Collections Advisory Service were included in an update note already circulated to the Forum.
- 2.7 Aideen McGinley informed the meeting that DCAL was beginning a project looking at the spatial distribution of services and agreed to circulate further information to the Forum.

3. People's Network Sustainability

- 3.1 Chris Batt presented the accompanying paper to the Forum which collated information on the current PN situation in each country and highlighted issues for consideration. He reported that the focus in England was to identify funding to sustain the Network and to persuade local authorities to maintain the service. MLA confirmed that the PN formed part of its bid to DCMS for the forthcoming Spending Review.

- 3.2 Linda Tomos commented that the PN had been a successful UK-wide project but that now, in Wales, the main priorities were how to develop services and to explore branding issues. It was felt that a future brand which included the word 'libraries' would prove to have a broader appeal across the whole of the libraries domain.
- 3.3 Kathleen Ryan suggested that future development of the PN in Northern Ireland was dependent upon the outcome of the Spending Review but that future emphasis should be placed on the development of content as the ELFNI project had delivered the infrastructure.
- 3.4 Elaine Fulton confirmed that the PN brand wouldn't be used in Scotland in future but that SLIC were exploring ways of widening out the service to ensure more equitable delivery across the country. It was suggested that as formal cross domain working was relatively new in Scotland, each domain would need to understand its own requirements before extending a seamless 'PN' type service to the public, which was agreed as the ultimate goal. The meeting agreed that delivering high quality services to the individual should be the driving aim and that the institutions from which the information was retrieved were relatively unimportant.
- 3.5 Chris Batt suggested that there might be some tension between the desire to ensure that the 'journey' from question to answer for an individual user was invisible to the user whilst developing a recognisable brand in order to guide the user in the first place. In England, MLA is currently working on a national identity with public libraries but it is hoped that all initiatives would eventually be able to work with the brand.
- 3.6 It was noted that in Northern Ireland and parts of Scotland that libraries fulfil an important role as neutral cross-community spaces and that this was more important than developing a 'library brand'.
- 3.7 It was suggested that libraries and future 'PN' services have an important role in promoting access to impartial information and advice and thus offered a different kind of service to search engines such as Google.
- 3.8 It was agreed that there was value in co-ordinating efforts in developing impartial access to information services on a UK wide basis and that the Joint Forum should be made aware of future developments.
- 3.9 Elaine Fulton described the work that SLIC had undertaken on the production of ICT Legacy training. A post 16 on-line training course has been developed which has met the requirements for SQA Level 2. NOF have identified funding for future development of this course and had asked SLIC to explore through the Joint Forum whether it could be delivered on a UK-wide basis with SLIC leading the project.
- 3.10 There was enthusiastic support from the Forum for this initiative but it was enquired how far it could be made relevant to museums and archives. It was suggested that the core libraries element is developed first but that it should be flexible enough for museums and archives to be included at a later date. It was emphasised that this course would be offered alongside the ECDL rather than in competition to it.
- 3.11 Elaine explained that it was vital that employers were encouraged to see the value in this as a longer term support mechanism would need to be identified. It was suggested that both SSCs should be involved. It was suggested that LSCs should be made aware of the initiative.
- 3.12 It was agreed that piloting and testing of the course would need to take place across the UK and Elaine agreed to speak to NOF in order to confirm the Joint Forum's support and to determine a methodology for rolling out a UK programme.

4. Country Updates

4.1 England

Chris Batt described the overarching aim of MLA's Investing in Knowledge campaign which delivered messages for the current Spending Review and set the foundations for SR06. He explained the decision to use the word 'knowledge' as museums, archives and libraries are where people go in order to find out more.

- 4.2 MLA had submitted its bid for the Spending Review to DCMS, which contained proposals for the further roll out of the Renaissance in the Regions programme and the sustainability of the People's Network. MLA has received early feedback that the evidence contained within the bid of the impact that Renaissance was already having was well received. The Forum asked that information contained in MLA's bid be circulated to the group in order to inform their submissions for the Spending review which follow a different timetable. MLA agreed to circulate this information in confidence.
- 4.3 MLA was also exploring longer term ways of ensuring the visibility of the museums domain and described the forum that had come together to develop a joint voice for museums in England post-SR04 and which included MLA, the MA, NMDC and AIM.
- 4.4 Chris described progress made on the development of the Knowledge Web which will provide a mechanism for maximising cultural assets on the web.
- 4.5 Sue Wilkinson updated the Forum on the Renaissance programme. It was already apparent that the investment made in the Phase 1 museum hubs as a result of the last Spending Review was already having an impact.
- 4.6 Chris provided an update on the Archives Task Force report 'Listening to the Past, Speaking to the Future' and progress on the recommendations it contained. MLA and TNA have recently agreed a Memorandum of Understanding in relation to the development of the recommendations. It was emphasised that in order for the roll out of the ATF recommendations to be UK-wide, commitment from the Home Nations was necessary.
- 4.7 Tessa Jowell is intending to write to the Home Nations to propose that the ATF recommendations are progressed through IDAC (Inter Departmental Archives Committee). Members of the Forum had already seen a draft of the letter. It is intended that IDAC will receive the first implementation plan by the Autumn.
- 4.8 It is also proposed to create a UK Archives Forum of all interested parties although at this stage it was unclear whether the Archives Forum would have any executive functions. It is anticipated that there will be a small grant scheme (in the region of £400k) to support the ATF in its early stages of roll out.
- 4.9 DCAL reminded the Forum that they were developing an archives policy and that this would need to dovetail with the ATF plans.
- 4.10 It was requested that before the draft implementation plan goes to IDAC that the Joint Forum is able to see and comment upon the plan. It was agreed that this would happen as far as possible given the sort timescales involved.
- 4.11 Chris updated the Forum on progress with MLA's Routes to Knowledge programme for the libraries domain. The MLA Board had received an update of the programme which the Forum had also seen. The MLA Board agreed that R2K would follow a two-year plan consisting of identifying priorities in year one and actions in year two.
- 4.12 Elaine Fulton reminded the Forum that SLIC had been working in this area for several years and that in many respects was further on from MLA. It was agreed that R2K should learn from the work done by SLIC to date. It was also suggested the R2K, being an English brand might be taken forward in other countries under a different name. However, it was agreed that the Joint Forum should remain a key way of sharing information on this work.

4.13 Scotland

4.14 Jane Robinson informed the meeting that the main issue concerning cultural agencies in Scotland was the cultural sector review recently announced by the Scottish Executive. Copies of the Cultural Policy Statement had been circulated in advance. The review will be wide ranging and include arts, creative industries, museums and heritage, galleries, archives, architecture, events, festivals and sport and literature and libraries.

4.15 A commission, chaired by James Boyle, had been established and will work over the next 12 months, producing an interim report in October 2004. Its remit will include consideration of the concept of cultural rights and the infrastructure and governance of the sector, with creativity, collaboration and commitment to excellence at its core.

SMC informed the meeting that they have commissioned research into the issue of cultural entitlement

4.16 Elaine Fulton described the work that SLIC was involved with on the third set of public library standards which were based on the idea of entitlement, as well as evaluation and inspection.

4.17 Irene O'Brien informed the Forum of the work of SCA and in particular the development of the Scottish Archive Network. SCA are currently working on a bid to HLF for a project promoting access to archives and hope to have a project officer in place shortly.

4.18 Jane Robinson described some of the major projects which SMC is engaged with including the development of an ICT strategy and Learning and Access strategy both of which will be launched in the coming months after consultation. SMC has convened a joint advocacy group in order to promote the work of the Scottish museums sector and to increase the relevancy of the museums manifesto published in March. The group includes SMC, NMS, SLAM, NGS, UMIS and AIM. SMC's new director, Joanne Orr, is due to take up post in July.

4.19 Wales

4.20 Linda Tomos provided an update on the establishment of CyMAL which operates as a policy division of the Welsh Assembly Government and therefore has primarily partnering relationships with the sector in Wales rather than a funding or sponsoring role. An advisory council for CyMAL has been established and will meet for the first time in September. It includes representatives from ACW, WLGA, and the National Library and Museum.

4.21 CyMAL has recently produced a prospectus which outlines what it will be doing in the coming months. More detailed plans will be produced at a later date. It is likely that CyMAL will develop programmes and funding strategies which meet the development needs of each domain rather than pursuing an entirely cross-domain agenda. It is hoped that over time, the cross-domain work will develop and be a focus of CyMAL's work.

4.22 In common with other countries, CyMAL is interested in evidence-based policy making and therefore is particularly interested in the evidence collected as part of the Renaissance programme. The current Spending Review presents CyMAL with an opportunity to begin to create the necessary baselines which will inform the collection of evidence in future years.

4.23 Linda Tomos described the challenges and opportunities presented to CyMAL as a new organisation and emphasised the importance of the Joint Forum as a mechanism for sharing information and learning from colleagues.

4.24 Northern Ireland

- 4.25 Aileen McGinley described a number of initiatives and publications recently produced by DCAL. Creativity and the concept of cultural capital formed major themes for DCAL in relation to the Spending Review and have informed the production of DCAL's second corporate plan which would be circulated to the Forum shortly.
- 4.26 DCAL also described the current review of public administration involving all of Northern Ireland's local authorities. In addition a sum of £20m has been made available for new capital investment in libraries and information services through PPP as part of Northern Ireland's overall Strategic Investment Programme. DCAL is currently exploring the potential for delivering new and replacement libraries through library-school clusters in single PPP procurements.
- 4.27 It was agreed that there was much to learn from Northern Ireland's experience of work on equality.
- 4.28 Gerry Slater informed the meeting that the Archives Policy for Northern Ireland would shortly be out for consultation. It would recognise the cross-domain role of archives e.g. in genealogy and working with a range of partners including museum and library bodies and local government.

5. Forward Planning

- 5.1 Chris Batt circulated the summary MLA plan for information and explained that it also acts as the high level strategic plan for the nine English Regional Agencies.
- 5.2 Linda Tomos commented that in order for the Forum to work effectively outside of the formal meetings it would be useful for each organisation to share contacts lists in order to encourage contact and joint working between people at all levels within each organisation. It was agreed that contact lists should be sent to Fran Hegyi who would then circulate them to the Forum.
- 5.3 Colin Watson suggested that there might usefully be a number of core things which the Forum could work collectively on e.g. the development of an evidence base for the sector.
- 5.4 Linda Tomos suggested that it would be more productive to concentrate on mechanisms through which the Joint Forum could operate as the development of policy presented difficulties within a devolved environment. It was agreed that the Joint Forum had an important role in sharing information and gathering views when a programme was at an early stage.
- 5.5 Fran Hegyi informed the meeting that a closed email discussion list was being set up by MLA for the Joint Forum. This would facilitate discussion and sharing of information and good practice outside the meetings.
- 5.6 It was agreed that the main purpose of the Forum was to learn from each other, to ensure that we didn't encroach on other's work and to work jointly when appropriate in order to determine how best to work - either on a UK or individual basis.
- 5.7 Elaine Fulton suggested that in order to get the most out of the Joint Forum meetings, Country updates could be circulated in advance if the meeting to free up time for discussion, which could be themed around a particular topic. 'Cultural Entitlement' was suggested for the next meeting as it is a current theme across the UK. It was agreed that the Forum would suggest themes for future meetings.
- 5.8 It was also suggested that a future meeting might consider European working as a theme as accessing European funding and participating in European projects was something that was equally relevant to all countries as regions in Europe, including the Republic of Ireland.

- 5.9 Expanding the membership of the Forum was discussed. It was agreed that the Forum needed more time to establish itself but that the Republic of Ireland, the Isle of Man and the Channel Isles would be invited to participate in an occasional (possibly annual) themed meeting, whilst the other scheduled meetings were retained as business meetings with the existing membership.
- 5.10 The Forum was also invited to consider how it reports the work of the Forum to the relevant ministers. It was agreed that this would be considered by each country before the next meeting but was unlikely to be taken forward before Autumn 2005.

6. NOF Veteran's Re-united Project

- 6.1 Fran Hegyi described the NOF Veteran's Reunited programme that each country was taking forward. The MLA development grant bid which had secured £130k in England was circulated for information.
- 6.2 Linda Tomos expressed disappointment that the NOF project wasn't particularly relevant to Wales. CyMAL was developing another proposal to NOF which would involve local authorities in producing an all-Wales living archive.
- 6.3 Elaine Fulton commented that the steering group in Scotland had also envisaged a more holistic approach to the programme and were disappointed at the narrow focus that meant that books and the creation of the digital archive weren't adequately considered.
- 6.4 Jane Robinson informed the Forum that Scotland's bid for the development grant had been accepted. At this stage individual venues for the exhibition had not been identified. It was agreed that the short timescale of the programme had caused difficulties for each country and that NOF should be encouraged to involve the Home Nations at an earlier stage of development in future programmes.
- 6.5 It was commented that evaluation of this project would be a useful exercise in seeing how the Joint Forum could work collaboratively.

7. Joint Forum Representation

- 7.1 This was covered under item 5 above.

8. Date/Venue of next meeting

- 8.1 It was agreed that the next meeting of the Joint Forum would be held in Scotland probably during November. Confirmation of a date would wait for the new Director of SMC taking up post.
- 8.2 MLA confirmed that it would provide the secretariat for the next meeting. SLIC agreed to take over the secretariat to the Forum from 2005 for 12 months.

9. Northern Ireland Presentations

- 9.1 The Forum received presentations from Kathleen Ryan on the ELfNI project and Wesley Geddis on the eCATNI project.

10. Any other Business

- 10.1 Aideen McGinley was thanked for the warm hospitality that DCAL had shown the Forum during its visit to Belfast.

The meeting ended at 12.45pm