

Agreement on Museums, Archives and Libraries in the UK

Introduction

- 1 This Agreement sets out the understanding of all parties as to the principles that underpin the relationships between them in respect of the museums, archives and libraries sector in the UK. The overarching policy responsibilities of culture and education in particular - which are of most relevance to the sector - are devolved matters or functions in the relevant Acts of Parliament¹ concerned with UK devolution. It is recognised that the interests of the museums, archives and libraries sector are the responsibility of each devolved administration.
- 2 This agreement is made between the Parties nominated by Departments with responsibility for museums, archives and libraries in each of the devolved administrations. The Agreement sets out the understanding of all parties as to the principles that underpin the relationships between them in respect of the museums, archives and libraries sector in the United Kingdom.
- 3 This is a statement of intent designed to assist each administration and is not intended to be legally binding.
- 4 This document is supplemented by the creation of a Joint Forum, which is subject to separate terms of reference (see Annex 1). In addition, there may be circumstances when it will be appropriate for two or more organisations to work together outside of this in which case agreements between the Parties concerned can be drawn up as necessary.
- 5 The period of this first Agreement is from 2003 to 2006. It is proposed that detailed Partnership Agreements are reviewed on an annual basis and that this document be subject to periodic review.

¹ The three Acts of Parliament dealing with devolution – the Scotland Act 1998, the Government of Wales Act 1998 and the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Communication and Consultation

- 6 Good communication between all Parties representing Resource and its counterparts in the Devolved Administrations is essential and ultimately of benefit to the sector. All Parties are committed to the principle of ensuring swift, timely and effective communication with each other. In particular, all Parties agree to:
 - a) Identify and maintain a first point of contact in each organisation
 - b) Share and maintain contact details
 - c) Maintain close links with colleagues in all Partner organisations dealing with the same policy issues or initiatives
 - d) Consult with counterparts on anything that bears on their interests
 - e) Ensure sufficient time is allowed for proper circulation and consideration of proposals and forward plans by all Parties
 - f) Respond to consultations within the deadlines set
 - g) Give proper consideration to the views of the other organisations
 - h) Alert each other to relevant developments within the sector where these have a bearing on the interests of another organisation
 - i) Where appropriate, to establish arrangements for policies, strategies and initiatives to be drawn up and developed jointly between the Parties

Co-operation

- 7 All Parties recognise the importance of and potential benefits to be gained by co-operative working and agree to work together where appropriate on matters of mutual interest. Co-operation to enable co-ordinated forward planning and the identification of cross domain will be priorities for all parties.
- 8 The Parties agree that it may be appropriate on occasion to identify one Partner to act on another's behalf or to lead on an agreed area of work.
- 9 Each Party agrees to seek representation from the others on Working Groups and Task Forces etc. where there is a direct bearing upon the interests of the other countries.

Exchange of Information, Statistics and Research

- 10 All Parties aim to provide open and full access to information, research, policy papers and statistics where appropriate to facilitate the effective operation of each organisation in relation to the development of the sector.
- 11 Information, statistics and research when not subject to confidentiality or other restrictions, should be made available as soon as is practicable to all Parties.
- 12 Each Party aims to work together to ensure the provision of coherent, reliable, consistent and timely UK-wide statistics. There is a separate UK Concordat² which sets out the basis on which statistical information should be exchanged and used.

Confidentiality

- 13 Each Party will wish to ensure that the information it supplies to others does not prejudice its interests. Therefore each organisation agrees:
 - a) To state clearly the sensitivity of all shared information and to make clear what, if any, restrictions are placed upon its usage
 - b) To respect others' requests for confidentiality at all times
 - c) Not to use sensitivity of information as an excuse for not consulting other Parties

Transparency

- 14 The disclosure of information regarding the discussions of the Joint Forum and any supporting information relating to it, should be in line with relevant Freedom of Information legislation.
- 15 The minutes of the meetings of the Joint Forum should be made publicly available.

International and EU Relations

- 16 All Parties recognise that each organisation has an interest and a potentially significant role in international and European policy making and implementation of policies in respect of the museums, archives and libraries sector.
- 17 When a UK position on a matter is required, all Parties' views will be taken into account.
- 18 Each Party is able to develop bilateral agreements with countries outside the UK.

² This Concordat published by the Office for National Statistics sets out an agreed framework for co-operation among the UK Government and devolved administrations on all matters in relation to statistics. www.statistics.gov.uk/about_ns/downloads/concordat_on_statistics.pdf

Joint Forum

- 19 All Parties agree that the most effective communication and maintenance of this Agreement is best effected between colleagues from each Party on a day to day basis. Nevertheless, central co-ordination of the overall relationship is necessary. Parties agree to participate in the Joint Forum for Museums, Archives and Libraries comprising of representatives with responsibilities within each domain.
- 20 Meetings of the Joint Forum will be held on a biannual basis to monitor the relations between the Parties and to address specific issues of interest to the Parties, or problems which may arise.
- 21 Detailed arrangements for the Joint Forum are set out in a separate annex but the main Terms of Reference include:
 - a) Identify areas of joint responsibility, interest and future joint development
 - b) Consider new issues of relevance to the sector and the administrations not specifically covered by this Agreement
 - c) Review the operation of the Agreement and bilateral relations more generally

Review

- 22 Representatives at the Joint Forum agree to review this Agreement annually or as required and update as necessary.

Appendix A

Joint Forum Terms of Reference

- A1 The Terms of Reference of the Joint Forum are to:
- a) Identify areas of joint responsibility, interest and future joint development
 - b) Consider how these areas should be addressed by the Parties through Partnership Agreements
 - c) Identify Parties to take to lead on specific areas if necessary
 - d) Consider new issues of relevance to the sector and the administrations not specifically covered by the Agreement
 - e) Review the operation of the Agreement and other bilateral or multilateral relations
 - f) Consider disputes between the Parties
- A2 Meetings of the Joint Forum will be held at least biannually. The Joint Forum should comprise representatives from each partner organisation. The interests of museums, archives and libraries should each be represented by those comprising the Forum. A Chair will be nominated at the first meeting and will serve for a period of one year.
- A3 The Joint Forum is a consultative rather than an executive body so will recommend the creation of a series of Partnership Agreements. These will detail how all Parties will work together in specific areas of work, respective roles and any Funding Agreements to be applied e.g. International working; Registration; People's Network; Workforce Development etc. which the Joint Forum will agree and monitor
- A4 Resource will provide a secretariat responsible for servicing the Joint Forum in partnership with named contacts in the other organisations. The Chair of the Joint Forum will agree the agenda and the secretariat will organise meetings and co-ordinate the production and distribution of papers and minutes as necessary.