

Ian

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Sent: 27 September 2004 23:18
To: info
Subject: Saltire Society Submission to the Cultural Commission[Scanned]

THE SALTIRE SOCIETY
9 Fountain Close,
22 High Street,
Edinburgh

Dear Mr Boyle,

SALTIRE SOCIETY SUBMISSION

Thank you for the opportunity to make an initial submission to the Commission. The Saltire Society has made similar observations to many gatherings of opinion over the years and, despite repeated disappointment at the lack of subsequent action, we remain optimistic that one day something significant will follow. Perhaps the moment has arrived with the present project.

As you will see from what follows we have limited our comments to a few key areas where we feel that the status quo seriously inhibits the ability of the Scottish people to access, understand, enjoy and participate in culture, and particularly Scottish culture which is our main concern.

We do have views on other aspects, like the role of institutions, delivering services and encouraging creativity, and note that we will have further opportunities to convey these to the commission in the future. In the meantime we offer our good wishes to you and your colleagues in the important work you have undertaken.

Yours sincerely,

IAN SCOTT

Chairman of Council
The Saltire Society

SALTIRE SOCIETY SUBMISSION

Cultural Rights for the Scottish Citizen

1. Education

There can be no greater denial of the right of access to culture than an education system which systematically denies to Scottish children a familiarity with their own history, languages, literature, music and dance. In virtually every country in

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the world, except Scotland, an acquaintance with their own culture is regarded as essential part of education. There has been some improvement in recent years, but the situation is still far from satisfactory. We recommend that the Commission should look again at the report on Scottish Culture in the Curriculum prepared in 1998 for the Scottish CCC by their own Review of Scottish Culture group which had received over 400 submissions. (This Report was widely circulated but withdrawn at the last minute from publication for what could only have been political reasons). The recommendations of this group offer an excellent guide to the steps that need to be taken. Of course, it is also desirable that our children should acquire an understanding of culture other than Scottish but this should be based on a sound understanding of their own background. Given the vast amount of information on all aspects of culture now available, and the unstructured, unregulated and uneven quality of much of it, it is essential that the schools should cultivate in all children an attitude of critical intelligence.

2. Broadcasting

Broadcasting is now the most widespread and influential means of cultural expression: but Scottish culture in all its forms is barely represented in broadcasting, either radio or television. It would appear that Radio Scotland no longer recognises its responsibilities in this respect. As the principal public service broadcaster in Scotland it ought to educate and inform as well as entertain. At present the Scottish people pay a licence fee for a public service broadcasting organisation, the BBC, which spends most of their money in England making programmes which are mainly about English conditions and which reflect an English point of view. This is another denial of access to Scottish culture. It contributes to the cultural confusion and lack of self-confidence which follow from the inadequacies of the education system. BBC Scotland should become an autonomous Scottish organisation and broadcasting should no longer be a reserved subject.

3. Libraries

Public libraries in Scotland are inadequately funded and have an inadequate supply of Scottish books. This is partly a matter of funding but also because most of the firms from which they purchase books are based in England and have little interest or knowledge of the situation in Scotland. Again another denial of the right of cultural access. We urge the adoption of the Norwegian system under which a copy of every appropriate Scottish book would be supplied to every public library. We recognise the need for public libraries to provide internet access, but books are still their most important resource. Our museums, especially the smaller ones, also suffer from lack of funding and the need to raise money has forced many into dumbing down the presentation so that their educational function has given way to entertainment. We would stress that we strongly support efforts to make our libraries and museums far more welcoming and attractive to users of all ages.

4 Consequences

It is widely believed that many Scots suffer from an inferiority complex which inhibits effort and achievement. This is surprising in a country which has such a remarkable record of accomplishment and of contribution to world civilisation. Perhaps the answer is to be found in the denial of the right of cultural access described above. It amounts to a deliberate marginalisation of Scottish culture, a process which might be designed to breed a feeling of inferiority.