

Culture Commission Consultation

Initial Feedback

by

The Poverty Alliance

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1 Introduction

1.1 The Poverty Alliance welcomes the opportunity to take part in the Cultural Commissions development of a Cultural Bill of Rights. The Poverty Alliance is a national anti-poverty network for Scotland and aims to tackle poverty by:

- Working with communities to help them combat poverty on their own behalf;
- Working with agencies to support them to work more effectively with communities and individuals experiencing poverty;
- Supporting the development of social policies that tackle social exclusion and combat poverty; and
- Promoting changes in public attitudes towards poverty and inequality.

1.2 This initial feedback is in response to the consultation meeting held by the Commission on the 20/09/04.

1.3 The Poverty Alliance will hold a consultation with its members and it is hoped through that process a comprehensive response will be developed.

2. Barriers

2.1 There are a variety of barriers that prevent access to 'culture', particularly by people in poverty. In addition to financial issues that prevent access, one of the main barriers to providing full access to culture is the attitudes of potential participants and current professional cultural bodies. The attitude that culture is not something that 'you do' or that 'some one like you' does often means potential participants do not even consider cultural activity as an option in the first place. The elitist attitude of many professional cultural practitioners and organisations further precipitates this perception. The conception of 'culture' as broad based and inclusive is one of the strengths of the Cultural Policy Statement. However a wider discussion about this conception will need to take place in order to ensure that all parts of Scottish society have access to their cultural rights.

2.2 Financial issues such as costs of workshops, courses and training as well as ticket costs for attending cultural activities such as concerts, theatre shows, exhibitions, sports events etc are a key barrier for many people. The barrier of direct costs in accessing the above may also be compounded by other costs such as those for transport or equipment which prevents many on low incomes from accessing culture in the broadest sense.

3. The Commission - conflicts

3.1 The Commission could produce barriers by having too wide a remit, one that covers potential linked cultural activities but that are ultimately very different with distinct needs, traditions and demands that may not always be compatible.

3.2 The main aims of the Commission include: to assure access to cultural activities for all of Scotland's inhabitants, to develop an innovative creative culture, to increase Scotland's financial prosperity by developing the link between business and cultural activities, and an increase in tourism in Scotland. There is the potential for conflict between the business demands of the cultural policy and the emphasis on opening up access to all. Whilst the business and tourism impact on a cultural policy should not be overlooked, there is the potential for a policy that takes a rights based approach to providing access to culture.

3.3 The multi national nature of business in the current business market means that investment in cultural activity often only happens at a large scale, with larger corporations

able to make support available. Smaller business's are less likely to be in a financial position to offer any support in kind or otherwise. This will not help increase access for those excluded from cultural activities - most often those socially excluded and disadvantaged.

3.4 Increased tourism again will only be achieved by larger scale international events such as the Edinburgh Arts Festival - this does not necessarily encourage access for the inhabitants of Scotland who are currently excluded.

3.3 Innovation in the arts, in particular, is developed by taking risks and having the freedom to fail. Innovation often means producing work that is controversial or challenging and therefore initially often un-commercial. If culture is to be funded by 'bums on seats' then this suggests the development of a populist culture not an innovative, creative one. Some cultural activities are more commercially successful than others. There is a danger that access is increased to those financially successful activities and not across the broad spectrum.

4. Infrastructure

4.1 One way suggested to support increased access to the arts is to develop the role of 'Arts Representatives' that are currently in place, but with limited powers, across the local Authority Areas of Scotland. These Representatives would act as a 'one stop shop' for the arts providing information on what is currently available and developing what could be available by linking organisations and participants etc.

4.2 The main potential concerns with this approach are that the development of art activities in that area depends on the quality of those involved in the specific geographical areas. There is a potential for duplication of services currently available through Local Authorities, with the potential for similar problems that limit the effectiveness of the work of local Authority arts contacts: that of under funding and over work. It may be much better to spend the money on producing cultural activities at a community and professional level and increasing the effectiveness of services already available.

4.3 The other approach discussed was to increase access to cultural activities through education from a very early age. We would broadly welcome such an approach but it should not be seen as the answer to all access issues. It is accepted that education can play an important part in breaking down barriers and particularly through school based activities which can remove some of the financial barriers referred to earlier. However it is vital that the correct infrastructure is in place to support young people's interest in the arts and culture after leaving. Without this the successes made in overcoming barriers whilst at school will not be translated into later life. This also does not, of course, address providing access for adults and children outside of the school system. Education can play an important part in increasing access to the arts but it should not be seen as the only answer - schools and teachers are not miracle workers.

5. Rights and Entitlements

5.1 From this initial discussion The Poverty Alliance has formulated an initial simple list of potential rights and entitlements that could go some way to making up the Cultural Bill of rights.

5.2 Every citizen of Scotland, child or adult, has the right to participate in a cultural activity of their choice both actively in terms of production or attending an event of that cultural activity.

5.3 Every citizen of Scotland has the right to take part in training, formal or informal, in a cultural activity of their choice.

5.4 Every citizen of Scotland is entitled to demand access to the cultural activity of their choice if access is not currently available in their area. If that activity is available but there are barriers stopping that person taking part then they are entitled to support to overcome those barriers.

5.5 Every citizen of Scotland is entitled to demand access to training, informal or formal, for the cultural activity of their choice, if access is not currently available to them. If that training is available but there are barriers stopping that person taking part in that training then they are entitled to support to overcome those barriers.

5.6 As mentioned above, it is our intention to develop these principles and to further discuss a Cultural Bill of Rights in partnership with members of the Poverty Alliance across Scotland over the coming months.

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