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From: Ben Spencer [ben@vaga.co.uk]
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To: info
Subject: VAGA response to the Commission's remit.[Scanned]

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Please find attached the Visual Arts and Galleries Association (VAGA) response to the Commission's remit. I hope this is appropriate and look forward to engaging with the Commission again in due course.

Yours sincerely

Ben Spencer, Policy and Development Officer, VAGA Scotland
c/o 26 Queen Square Strathbungo Glasgow G41 2AZ (0141 423 9024)

Response from the Visual Arts and Galleries Association (VAGA) to the Cultural Commission

'Art coaxes out of us emotions we normally do not feel. It is not that art sets out to shock (that is rare), it is rather that art occupies ground unconquered by social niceties. Seeking neither to please nor to displease, art works to enlarge emotional possibility.' Jeanette Winterson 'Art Objects' (1995)

The Visual Arts and Galleries Association (VAGA) is a UK-wide professional association for organisations and individuals concerned with the exhibition, commissioning, display, interpretation and development of modern and contemporary visual art on behalf of the public. This membership bridges the arts and museums.

VAGA:

- operates as a professional community promoting best practice and sharing expertise and knowledge;
- represents the interests of its members to government, policy makers, opinion formers and the media;
- works with policy makers to further policies and initiatives that support a healthy sector fit to meet the needs of artists, the workforce and audiences.

Members of VAGA:

- promote innovation, creativity and knowledge through the work and ideas of contemporary visual artists;
- seek to remove intellectual, social and physical barriers to the enjoyment and understanding of the visual arts;
- work to develop the potential for education, lifelong learning and personal development in and through the visual arts;
- aim to broaden audiences and improve the quality of their experiences.

VAGA believes in the Right to Art - the opportunity to encounter, engage with and participate in art and in particular in the art of today - and the *creative, collective and moral values* expressed by such a right.

VAGA has been working with the think tank Demos on ideas around the public benefit value of art which resulted in an essay "The Right to Art: Making Aspirations a Reality" (<http://www.demos.co.uk/catalogue/righttoartreport>). This begins to explore creating public value and "*public value as an aspect of democracy – where individuals are citizens not consumers, and choice is not a synonym for the inequalities of individual wealth.*" (page 13)

CONTEXT

The visual arts are a powerful tool for the stimulation of the imagination and allow us to see the world differently. Artists and visual arts organisations strive to offer access to excellence ~ art of the highest quality made available and real to the broadest possible range of our community, while seeking to stimulate debate, foster creativity and nourish our capacity to appreciate difference.

VAGA is currently developing its work and effectiveness in Scotland and recently commissioned the University of Glasgow's Centre for Cultural Policy Research to produce an overview of the current condition of the gallery infrastructure in Scotland. (The CCPR report can be found at: <http://www.culturalpolicy.arts.gla.ac.uk> Enter the site and follow links to CCPR Research – Dissemination).

The report highlights:

- the achievements of the gallery sector;
- the diversity of the gallery sector;
- the complex infrastructure.

The report also demonstrates untapped potential, concluding broadly that the gallery sector is rich in artistic and cultural innovation and educational provision, but poorly supported through core funds and subject to fragmented structures and policies.

This currently under resourced and complex infrastructure needs to be seen against the backdrop of:

- the impressive international success and reputation of Scotland's artists over the past 15 years, whereby they have established themselves on the world stage and brought that attention back home;
- the rapidly changing cultural and social context of 21st Century society (from the ageing population to the technological advances of DIY media, changes in work patterns and drive for self directed learning and self improvement).

Scotland now needs to put in place a robust, imaginative, flexible and receptive infrastructure for the production and dissemination and enjoyment of contemporary visual culture through which to:

- provide public programmes and facilities - on a par with those to be found abroad - for our home audiences in all their complexity and including artists, through which they can experience and engage with art of the highest standard;
- develop an environment that will encourage and enable artists to remain engaged with Scottish culture and to develop internationally significant work from a local perspective;
- provide a national context and scope for international dialogue within exhibition making, commissions, higher education and collections;
- stimulate and develop a healthy and internationally recognised art market.

EDUCATION: *how do we develop artistic, social and cultural skills and provide cultural knowledge?*

The contemporary visual arts reflect and comment on contemporary life and encourage open ended, risk taking and innovative learning opportunities suited to both curricular and extra curricular work, life long learning and self development.

There is a growing body of evidence to support the benefits of learning in, and through the visual arts. See, for example, the recent reports following Department for Education and Skills' Museums and Galleries Education Programme. The Cultural Commission is also referred to the work of Engage, the action research emerging through the Creative Partnerships Programme in England and the Clore Duffield's Artworks annual awards programme for work between schools and galleries, all of which provide models of emerging practice. Further information can be found at both:

<http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/resourcematerials/museums/mgep2>

<http://www.art-works.org.uk/>

This evidence emphasises:

- the importance of the professional artist as a catalyst and role model in the learning environment;
- the need for long term sustainable investment and partnership the arts and education sectors;
- the benefits of developed networks and training for arts educators and teachers .

To achieve a visually literate, artistically and culturally confident society art needs to be a core educational entitlement, not a bolt on, and all young people should have a minimum cultural entitlement through co-ordinated and professionally run formal and informal education settings.

Scotland needs to:

- develop diverse international collections which provide opportunities for all to experience and contextualise the art of our time and our history;
- support and develop archives, publications and other tools to provide a long term record of the impact and resonance of our cultural activity and with which to engage diverse audiences;
- support exhibitions, events, commissions and other means of distribution which provide opportunities for all to experience and contextualise contemporary and historical art;
- ensure imaginative and intellectually honest standards are applied to the display of cultural products to foster an understanding of cultural identity;
- support all parts of the visual arts infrastructure to deliver and facilitate educational and outreach activities to meet growing and future demand;
- support the inclusion of practical experience and understanding of using the arts in teacher training programmes at every level including continuing professional development;
- ensure that arts/cultural educators have the opportunity to acquire the appropriate skills and knowledge to work in partnership with the formal and informal education sectors.

Primary & secondary education:

- facilitate regular high quality visits to museums, galleries and art events throughout formal schooling and across the curriculum;
- address practical issues of transport, timetabling within school and capacity within cultural organisations to meet demand - from staffing to physical facilities;
- Implement exchanges with and visits by artists, as role models and catalysts, (e.g. all future school building/refurbishment programmes could include an artist's studio);
- put in place an adequate infrastructure/network of cultural co-ordinators /schools liaison;
- establish long term partnerships between local education authorities/schools and cultural organisations through secondments, funding programmes, training and resources;
- build an infrastructure of high quality professionally led out of schools activity for young people in partnership with cultural organisations.

Tertiary education:

- visual arts organisations have the potential to stimulate critical dialogue and debate about culture and cultural identity through events, exhibitions and education programmes and the establishment of research and teaching partnerships with higher education;
- Ensure equality of opportunities for all wishing to enter the cultural professions and foster a diverse workforce.

Art Schools:

Art Schools are the powerhouses of national creativity and must be resourced to:

- enable access to higher education for a diverse range of students;
- provide CPD for mid career and established professional artists;
- provide up-to-date technical facilities and buildings;
- establish partnership with other educational institutions and cultural organisations at home and abroad.

INSTITUTIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE: how best to organise and support the cultural sector in Scotland to deliver the maximum value in the most effective manner?

The current infrastructure is complex ranging across the independent sector, national museums and galleries, Local Authorities, higher education and the commercial sector.

Policies are often structure led rather than looked at holistically across cultural producer, activity and audience.

Organisation:

- enable priorities, activities and evaluation to be generated bottom up by cultural organisations and artists, local and regional conditions and audiences;
- encourage diversity in organisations in response to local and regional circumstances;
- develop modern and effective governance that allow partnerships, sustainability and ability to respond to a rapidly changing world;
- recognise special long-term responsibilities of those organisations with major collections
- encourage greater sharing of resources and knowledge across the sector;
- ensure the Scottish Executive is resourced and has the appropriate expertise to engage with the cultural sector when necessary.

Support:

- ensure arm's-length principle from the Scottish Executive is maintained and developed – a specialist body with a national and international overview is strongly advocated to allow development of long-term initiatives and support outwith the cycle of political elections;
- encourage a network of specialist advice and professional support from across the sector in Scotland and externally – for example The Contemporary Art Society's partnerships with SAC to form the National Collecting Scheme is currently providing expertise and knowledge, as well as funding for the development of collections throughout Scotland;
- support centres of excellence that are able to share and develop expertise within a network/region – for example the programme at Dundee Contemporary Arts has provided access to ideas, artists and expertise for curators working to develop contemporary collections outside the Central Belt;
- establish policies that will encourage partnerships across different parts of the sector – for example between temporary exhibition spaces and collection based organisations;
- support networks for the sharing and dissemination of good practice and professional development.

Management / Funding

- develop 5 year funding agreements for established organisations to foster efficiency and effectiveness;
- establish funding benchmarks with international comparators;
- address inconsistent levels of support for culture across Scotland: suggest standard % or per capita for urban and rural areas (current spread from £0.20p to £21 per capita);
- reward outstanding achievement with awards for general excellence, international working and new initiatives;
- recognise long-term issues for public-sector cultural organisations in competition for commercial support for core activities.

THE DELIVERY OF SERVICES AND ACCESS: *how best to provide cultural facilities and ensure the widest access?*

In order for people to access the infrastructure being advocated transport is a key issue. In addition, building based venues need resources to be open when people want to use them and events to take place when people want to attend –which is not always possible through local authority support. Evening opening, for example can increase and develop gallery attendance, but increases staff costs and is therefore currently impossible for most.

Develop policies to support the use of broadcast and other media which enable different types of experience, engagement and creativity. (The Super Channel projects supported and facilitated by FACT Liverpool is an example of new media being used for community and artistic purposes with an audience that does not have natural access to cultural facilities).

Support must be flexible to allow risk taking/experimental initiatives that aim to reach new audiences and develop new ways of working .

AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT: how to increase and broaden the profile of the audience and the public engaging with cultural activity in Scotland?

Visual arts organisations are key players in the community, but this can only be effective through policies and budgets that allow education, interpretation, outreach and marketing to be fully integrated functions and resourced accordingly,

Research needs to be undertaken, a common language developed and a strategy put in place to ensure that the value of visual arts practice is understood across government and granted legitimacy by the public.

ENCOURAGING CREATIVITY: what is the best way to maximise the creative potential of the people of Scotland?

- Offer ambitious ideas, projects and artworks, to stimulate imagination, provoke healthy criticism and foster creativity.
- Modernise conditions of employment for cultural workers and put in place adequate rates of pay, commissioning fees and contracts for professional artists.
- Demonstrate high public and economic value of creative individuals / groups / companies.
- Encourage / enable risk-taking in audiences and institutions alike through new ways of measuring and evaluating outcomes and sustaining transformation.
- Embed creative practice and critical understanding and interpretation of creative products within the formal education system.
- 'Bottom up' projects encouraged, in addition to 'top down', programmes.
- Offer wide-ranging vision of creativity internationally.
- Recognise vital role of non-vocational education / training and 'blue skies' research in the arts.
- Create evaluation/measurement methodology appropriate to unknown and unpredictable outcomes.

THE CONCEPT OF 'CULTURAL RIGHTS FOR THE SCOTTISH CITIZEN, AND THOSE OF ITS CREATIVE COMMUNITY'

The concept is meaningless unless audiences are given the necessary tools and opportunities for the access, understanding, engagement with and appreciation of art. The shape cultural rights take must be developed from local and individual circumstances and not resort to 'dumbed down' minimum entitlements.

Tools include:

- open, democratic and effective organisations, resourced to achieve full potential;
 - dynamic and accessible collections of historical and contemporary art;
 - integrated education policies for both collections and galleries.
- Rights include, but are not limited to:
- freedom of expression
 - freedom from discrimination
 - freedom from exclusion
 - equality of opportunity in employment, education and leisure
 - freedom to develop creativity
 - access to a healthy and diverse cultural life
 - access to excellence
 - access to ideas and debates across international boundaries
 - access to good representative collections and records of cultural production
 - opportunities for audiences and artists to take risks in enjoyment, work and learning
 - a physically and emotionally safe environment for all children and adults

VAGA Scotland Executive

Mungo Campbell, Hunterian Gallery , Chair
Fiona Bradley, Fruitmarket Gallery
Katrina Brown, Dundee Contemporary Arts
Suzanne Dunn, Edinburgh College of Art
Victoria Hollows, Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow
Philip Long, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art
Jennifer Melville, Aberdeen Art Gallery
Ian O'Riordan, City Arts Centre, Edinburgh
Lesley Woodbridge, Art in Partnership
Rebecca Marr, Engage Scotland (Observer)

Contact:

Ben Spencer, Policy and Development Officer, VAGA Scotland,
c/o 26 Queen Square, Glasgow G41 2AZ
0141 423 9024 / ben@vaga.co.uk

Hilary Gresty, Director, VAGA Central Office
The Old Village School, Witcham, Ely, CB6 2LQ
01353 776356 / hilary@vaga.co.uk