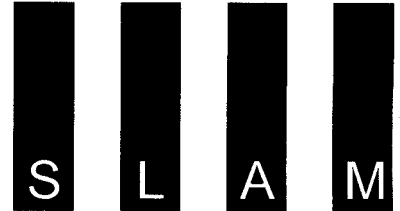


11 Oct 2004



Group for **Scottish Local Authority Museums**

A RESPONSE TO THE CULTURAL COMMISSION FROM THE GROUP FOR SCOTTISH LOCAL AUTHORITY MUSEUMS (SLAM)

1. Introduction

1.1 SLAM welcomes this opportunity to feed its views into the deliberations of the cultural commission. While there will undoubtedly be other submissions from the museum sector in Scotland, this submission will naturally focus on the role and contribution of those museums supported directly by local authorities.

1.2 SLAM represents 31 of Scotland's local authority museum services. While the level of provision can vary, only one authority provides no museum services directly but none the less supports a major independent museum.

Local authorities in Scotland are directly responsible for 185 museum buildings and a substantial proportion of the Distributed National Collection.

1.3 In constructing this response we have borne in mind the request that submissions should be concise. This submission therefore does not include supporting evidence. The Commission should be assured that this does exist and can be supplied if requested. Likewise we hope that the Cultural Commission will acknowledge the wide range of exciting and innovative work currently being carried out by local authority museums in Scotland as well as the potential to do more.

2. Framework

2.1 The Commission should continue to bear in mind that the museum sector in Scotland is made up of several types of museums each of which has its own drivers, issues and problems. If a single key improvement can be made to the existing system it would be to develop a national framework which would coordinate policy and deliver a consistent level of service across the nation for the benefit of all. The people of Scotland are entitled to know that their material heritage is in safe hands and being put to good use in providing opportunities for learning, inspiration and creativity.

2.2 Such a national framework could legitimately be branded as a 'National Museum Service'. This concept does not entail the creation of a centrally directed monolithic body but rather the formalisation of key areas of partnership across the sector. This single concept has major positive implications for the delivery of national strategy, cohesive funding, coordination of collecting, common standards, common systems, capacity building, staff development, sharing of expertise, increased access, access through new media etc. In fact, if properly constituted, such a model would have demonstrable impact within a comparatively short timescale.

2.3 It is worth stressing that within Scotland, the National Museums and the National Galleries have always had much closer links with the rest of the sector than is the case south of the border. The involvement of the national institutions in the framework suggested

above is absolutely essential. This would need to be reflected in their involvement in a single strategic agency for Scotland's museums.

2.4 Likewise, the responsibility of the Scottish Executive for the wider sector must be clearly acknowledged, particularly if the First Minister's aspirations in relation to cultural rights and entitlements are to be delivered. It is essential that the contribution of our local authority museums to delivering national priorities in the fields of learning, education, tourism, health and economic development is recognised and supported nationally in a coordinated way.

3. Cross Domain Partnership/Resource implications

3.1 Local authority museums form the 'spine' of the sector in Scotland. They are often the custodians of significant parts of the Distributed National Collection and have been embedded in their local communities for a considerable time. They are key players in the 'national museums service' and have potential for development as centres for regional partnership and professional expertise. They are uniquely positioned to work closely with colleagues in other cultural sectors such as libraries, archives, built heritage, sport and active leisure which are also delivered by local authorities.

3.2 Local authority museums and museums in general, are staffed by people who are committed and enthusiastic about their work. They realise the potential of the resources which they manage and want to do more with those resources. The people of Scotland, an increasingly sophisticated audience, want more from those resources and our elected representatives at all levels also want more, often while imposing reductions on available finances.

3.3 While museums are not alone amongst local authority services in coming under severe monetary pressure, local authority museums have been doing more with less for more than a decade. While staff costs have risen, supplies and services budgets have been regularly cut back (with few notable exceptions). There is now a serious lack of capacity within the sector. Staff are hard pressed (and indeed often fail) to cope with the basic tasks on which the operation of the service is based. New initiatives and opportunities to access external funding are taken up with difficulty or not at all because of the lack of matching funds or of staff to manage them. The lack of staff to deliver education / learning within our museums is a disgrace.

3.4 It is important to state clearly that the sector is under-resourced. Whatever form a new single strategic agency takes, it is vital that it is tasked with clarifying the funding streams available to the sector and targeting resources to support the care and use of the distributed national collection.

4. Cultural Entitlement

4.1 SLAM is aware of the ground-breaking work on cultural rights and entitlements being carried out by the SMC and commends this to the Commission. The application of the work would do much to move away from the unsatisfactory situation where local authorities seek to provide 'adequate' cultural provision without any recognised definition of what 'adequate' actually means in practice.

5. Glasgow Museums

5.1 Glasgow Museums are part of SLAM but as the largest local authority funded service in the UK are in a unique position which requires to be reviewed. The funding arrangements of similar large services south of the border such as the National Museums Liverpool (formerly Merseyside County Museums) or Tyne and Wear Museums may provide a context for such a review.

Summary

The creation of a 'National Museum Service' based on partnership

The creation / evolution of a single strategic agency for the sector

The development of local authority museums as centres for regional partnerships and expertise

Consolidation / coordination of funding streams, support for the Distributed National Collection

Coordinated support from the Scottish Executive

Definition of rights and entitlements to replace 'adequate' as a basis for service delivery

Review of the status and funding arrangements for Glasgow Museums

This package of actions will make a major positive impact. It will be possible to identify and report the very tangible improvements to the care and presentation of Scotland's heritage that will be delivered by these actions. Within a short period they will provide the people of Scotland with a very different museum service to that which is currently available. By 2030, people in Scotland and across the world will take for granted the access that they have to modern, exciting exhibitions, in well maintained buildings and on line through interactive technology. Museums will be integrated into the framework for learning in Scotland, pupil visits will be a valued feature of the school year and all learners will be comfortable in using museum resources to enhance their lives and personal development. Museums will be seen as engaging with the wider cultural scene. The high standards and innovation visible within the sector will be a key catalyst for creativity which in its turn will influence the perception of Scotland as an exciting place to live and work.