

## **Submission to Cultural Commission by the National Library of Scotland**

### Introduction

Libraries are possibly the most influential and well-used cultural institutions we have, yet they have one of the lowest profiles. Their impact (both present, and potential) on both individuals and society is often underestimated compared with organisations with a higher political profile, but a lesser influence. This impact affects everyone's lives from pre-school to adult learning and from individuals who just want to find something out, to humanistic, scientific and industrial research at the highest level.

Libraries have historically played a key role in widening access to information and culture and the democratisation of knowledge. Library services will continue to play a vital role in Scotland's economic, social, cultural and learning life, evolving to meet the new challenges and opportunities of technology, and the needs of communities and individuals.

The National Library of Scotland has a unique part to play in guaranteeing access to culture and knowledge of all kinds through its preservation and promotion of comprehensive and historic collections and through the privilege of legal deposit.

### Cultural Rights

Libraries have a key role in enabling individuals and communities to enhance their lives and the lives of others by providing access to knowledge. We propose the following specific rights:

The right to access and use all the country's collections, and particularly;

- the right to access and use the recorded knowledge and memory of Scotland;
- the right to access and use the recorded knowledge and memory of the world.

These rights embrace both quality (ensuring the highest standards) and equality (access is for everyone).

### The role of Libraries

The publicly accessible collections of all libraries (and the library/archive and related collections held by other cultural institutions) should be thought of as the country's collection over which these rights can be exercised. The key task is to enable this diverse, geographically distributed collection to be recorded and developed coherently, to meet user and potential user needs. Central to this task is improved partnership working – at and between all levels (national to local, and whether funded by central or local government or by bodies such as the higher and further education funding councils).

The advance of digital technology presents an unprecedented opportunity to disseminate information and heralds a fundamental change for society. Publishing is increasingly an electronic activity and we should not underestimate the importance of web publishing. Digitisation also provides new opportunities to improve access to and interpretation of knowledge and cultural artefacts. Libraries have a key role in driving and harnessing these changes for the public benefit to ensure access in an increasingly complex information environment.

A national infrastructure for the preservation, conservation and archiving of content regardless of format (printed, digital or manuscript) is essential. This should reflect

the extension of legal deposit and the developing trusted digital repository that the National Library will develop to preserve electronic materials for future generations. The role of national licensing of digital publications will be important in ensuring an entitlement approach to online content.

#### The role of the National Library

The National Library recently (March 2004) agreed a new strategy (*Breaking through the Walls*) which sets a clear direction of excellence in the quality of access and collection development. We see these strategic goals as a strong platform for the delivery of cultural rights, and intend to develop a set of rights specific to the National Library.

The National Library of Scotland is developing as a genuinely National Library Service so that everyone knows they have a right of access. It will retain its unique character through the comprehensiveness of the collections, its iconic treasures and its crucial role of preserving the culture and memory of the country.

New outreach programmes, exhibitions and events, tailored to the range of public needs, will be implemented so that all visitors can enjoy, benefit from and exploit the treasures of the Library. At the same time, purposive research will continue to be supported at every level.

We see the National Library playing a central role at the hub of wider public, academic and other library networks, helping co-ordinate the distributed national collection. This will be based on detailed audit of the current (dispersed) collections. New, more efficient models for managing the collections will be developed – such as joint, low cost, remote storage (currently piloted by NLS through the “CASS” project – the Collaborative Academic Store for Scotland) and greater collaboration between institutions over preservation. This will be extended to digital publications over the next few years.

People will be able to find items from the country's collections much more easily than today (regardless of their physical location); online search tools will eliminate the need to trawl through many different catalogues. Smart card and other technology will revolutionise access, enabling services such as digitisation-on-demand and virtual exhibitions, and assist new barrier-free access policies including licensed publications. The Library has a key role in helping develop Scotland-wide licences for digital media with publishers, so that the knowledge they contain is widely accessible.

#### Education and research

At the heart of all libraries, and the National Library in particular, is learning (this being one of the core values set out in our strategy). Everyone has a right to access and use the country's distributed collections, and this must be matched by the right to acquire the key skills which unlock these collections and make them understood and enjoyed.

The education sector therefore needs to develop community skills in literacy, information handling, digital technology and research. A core part of library services will be working in partnership with education providers and learners themselves to build this capacity effectively. Partnership working and learning will drive the development of the Library's collections, public programmes and services.

Library services play a critical role in supporting research – for the arts, sciences, professional, business, academic and personal purposes. The National Library plays a central part (especially through preserving the country's recorded culture and knowledge) underpinning this role in Scotland.

#### Institutional Infrastructure

Libraries, especially public libraries but backed by libraries of higher and further education institutions, can form a core network for cultural access to Scotland's local communities. In our judgement, the present institutional framework for libraries and other cultural services in Scotland is not best equipped to meet key challenges such as the co-ordination of the distributed collections (both physical and digital). A step-change in collaboration over access, preservation and storage is necessary.

We would therefore welcome an investigation by the Commission of other organisational models in the UK and abroad. This would include the governance of, and relationships between libraries, museums, archives and related cultural organisations, as well as that of national bodies with similar remits (e.g. national libraries and archives throughout the UK) and the role of local authorities, universities and colleges and of representative and expert bodies.

The National Library is constituted by an Act of Parliament, and the legal foundation of various cultural bodies may need to be taken into account in exploring proposals for change.

#### Marketing and Promotion

The National Library is currently undertaking a programme of market research to identify stakeholder needs, including those of under-represented groups. We will use these findings to inform our programme of marketing to re-position the Library as a service for all and to raise awareness of this great national resource, while preserving its key role as a hub in the research, business and cultural activity of Scotland.

The development of new technology to enable users to find out what materials are in the country's collection (ie in all publicly-funded Scottish libraries and potentially in museums, not only the items owned by the National Library) will raise public understanding of the breadth and depth of the collections and services available.

#### Encouraging Creativity

Libraries are not only a means for the public to read the cultural products of others; they are also crucibles for individuals to generate new ideas and creativity. Inspiration is thus fostered by access to the creativity and knowledge of domestic and international culture.

The new emphasis on interpretation and education will enable libraries to provide a new era of inspiration to users, as the first public libraries did.

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From: Hunter, David [D.Hunter@nls.uk]  
Sent: 13 October 2004 10:29  
To: info  
Subject: Submission by the National Library of Scotland[Scanned]

Importance: High



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Please find attached a copy of the National Library's initial submission to the Cultural Commission.

I am grateful for the extension to the deadline for this, which has enabled our Trustees and staff to contribute to discussions. I anticipate that we will wish to make further submissions in the future.

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact Martyn Wade, the National Librarian or myself. I would also be grateful if you could confirm that you receive this message.

many thanks

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