

## Response to the Cultural Commission initial letter by the Scottish Poetry Library

### Education

- We believe that the practical constraints of the present school curriculum do not allow for the integration of artistic skills and cultural knowledge across the curriculum, particularly at secondary school level.
- Integrated educational provision would give children and young people access to literature in all its forms, but the encouragement to enjoy literature will only be given by teachers who are confident in all aspects of the subject. Increasing this confidence is a primary aim of the literature organisations.
- Scottish children do not have sufficient exposure to the riches of their literary heritage and the achievements of contemporary literature; improving school and public library provision in this area, and better training and resources for teachers should be priorities.
- We need to value the quality of literary experience as well as the quantity available, bearing in mind that reading and writing are quintessentially private rather than communal activities, and thus difficult to measure while being vital to culture.
- Where a minority language/dialect is widely used, its status needs formal as well as informal affirmation.

### Institutional infrastructure

- A national literary strategy, applied across the country, should encourage a more coherent pattern of provision among the currently widely differing local authorities – bearing in mind that a gap can widen between strategy and its implementation at ground level.
- We need to define the relationships responsibility and accountability of institutions, not only in respect of taxpayers but also with regard to the creative communities they serve.
- Cultural institutions need to preserve their arms' length relationship to government, and this includes the funding institution/s that support them.

### Rights

- The Cultural Commission seems to have imposed the notion of rights at the start, instead of possibly coming to a notion of rights and entitlements after submissions and consultations.
- Rights run the danger of being too generalised to be functional, or so specific as to tie the hands of future generations.
- What can 'rights' add to the creatively encouraging environment that the arts community's suggestions and recommendations might create? The emphasis should fall on supporting an environment that encourages creativity through the arts; prescriptiveness can undermine such an environment.
- The fact that no other nation has them may suggest that in fact they are too difficult to legislate for, and that doing so can stand as a substitute for real change at the level of everyday experience.
- Again this returns us to the notion of coherence/integration – it cannot be considered separately from education and infrastructure.

### Delivery of Service and Access

- In terms of theatre, for example, access might involve something as practical as running a bus service at a more convenient time on a particular route. Literature is easier and more individual in delivery, but to find it in public places remains difficult – there could be a ruling that in any public space with advertising, a proportion – say 20% - must be allowed for community interests, including literature.
- Scottish public broadcasting needs to take more seriously its role as not only reflective of but also creating Scottish cultural life – its literary contribution, for example, is piecemeal and ad hoc, and its commissioning role and power very unclear to the Scottish writing community.
- Marketing is expensive and time-consuming for small organisations who lack human and financial resources. The encouragement and facilitation of co-operative marketing and the sharing of expertise would be helpful.

- So much information is available via the world wide web, but again smaller organisations lack time and expertise to develop that aspect of their work; shared IT/design pools, co-operatively funded, may be helpful here.

#### Encouraging Creativity

- Creativity does not exist in a vacuum: it arises from the individual's opportunities, and these opportunities are constrained when there is poverty, inadequate housing, poor health, uneven educational provision, a lack of civil responsibility, economic uncertainty. The Executive's plan to tackle these aspects of Scottish society will influence the creativity of its citizens.
- There need be no tension between inclusion and excellence: a high standard of cultural/literary life nourishes and sustains the nation and does not aspire to exclusion, though it may be critical.

#### The Scottish Poetry Library

A brief account of the Library's work is attached. The main priorities of the SPL's work are:

1. To enhance the appreciation of poetry in society at large and particularly in education, and to promote its value among the practised arts.
2. To provide an information and resource centre for poetry, backed up by catalogues, and thus to encourage increased study and awareness of Scottish poets and poetry in particular, within Scotland and abroad. To provide this as a service readily accessible to all.
3. To make available from the Edinburgh premises, by post, from our collections outwith the Library and via the world wide web, poetry books, audio and video cassettes, CDs, periodicals, other materials and information.
4. To promote and encourage international contacts, including translation from, as well as into, Scotland's languages, and poetry's links with the other arts.

The key issues in advancing these aims are:

1. The education of the public in general, and within formal learning, requires secure and ongoing resources rather than project-based initiatives which create expectations that cannot be sustained.
2. The SPL sees itself as working in fruitful collaboration with other literary and arts organisations to provide a more integrated service across communities
3. There is creativity in reading as well as writing; the development of appreciative and critical reading audiences is vital, but will often be accomplished on a small scale.
4. The promotion of Scottish poetry abroad as well as of deep-level exchange to nourish poets and audiences in Scotland needs to be seen in a general context of integrated literary publication and exchange rather than on the current stop-and-start model.

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Joyce Caplan (Chair, SPL Board)

## Scottish Poetry Library

Founded in 1984, the Library is now housed in purpose-built, award-winning premises in Crichton's Close, off the Royal Mile in Edinburgh. The building is a poem in itself, a light, airy, contemplative space. The SPL is more than an elegant building, however, more even than the books and people it houses: it exists to serve the art of poetry, and to celebrate and nurture the poetry of Scotland in particular.

The Scottish Poetry Library offers:

- About 27,000 volumes of poetry, mainly Scottish and contemporary, but with a range of other languages and other centuries
- Free borrowing and reference facilities; disabled access; postal borrowing
- A sophisticated on-line catalogue
- An indexed cuttings reference archive
- A selection of journals, audio-tapes, CDs, videos, Braille collections
- An extensive children's section
- An informative website at [www.spl.org.uk](http://www.spl.org.uk), including a poetry events diary for Scotland and a 'lost for words' query service for tracing quotations
- Workshops for schools and other institutions: at the Library; in partnership with other institutions such as art galleries and museums, Dynamic Earth; in schools throughout the country to which the Assistant Director travels in the poetry van, bringing books and workshop expertise
- Resources for teachers
- Readings and events, mainly at the SPL
- Ten collections in various libraries and institutions throughout Scotland – see the website for locations, plus two in development.

The Scottish Poetry Library is also a small-scale, occasional publisher, and has Lottery funding to produce some anthologies both Scottish and bilingual in 2004-06. It works with European partners on translation projects, and through the website and some publications maintains an international poetic exchange.

It is core-funded by the Scottish Arts Council, with a turnover approaching £250,000 and a staff of nine, mostly part-time, supplemented by volunteers. The Library receives over 8,000 visits per year, has about 1,000 registered borrowers, and annually enables about 1500 children and young people to participate in workshops outside the Library. Its website averages 13,000 visits/month, each visit lasting on average 12 minutes.