

# **A Response to the Cultural Commission By the University of St Andrews**

## **Introduction**

*I wad ha'e Scotland to my eye  
Until I saw a timeless flame  
Tak Auchtermuchty for a name,  
And kent that Ecclefechan stood  
As pairt o' an eternal mood.*

**Hugh MacDiarmid**

In his 2003 St Andrews Day address, given at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, the First Minister, Jack McConnell, set out “a vision and an ideal of arts and culture [in Scotland]”, seeking agreement on “the importance and the centrality of cultural activity to all aspects of our lives, why it’s important and how it can be used to revitalise us individually and as a national community”. He also signalled the announcement of a review of culture in Scotland. The terms of that review were further described to the Parliament by the then Minister for Culture, Tourism and Sport who announced the establishment of an independent commission to “to look seriously and maturely at our culture and decide the framework for its support in the future”. The appointed Cultural Commission has opened the review to the nation through a consultation process and it is in response to this that the present paper is offered.

## **Objectives & Approach**

*Then let us pray that come it may –  
As come it will, for a' that –  
That sense and worth, o'er a' the earth  
Shall bear the gree, an a' that...*

**Robert Burns**

In crafting this response, the University has drawn upon the views of individuals who have thought deeply about cultural provision and the role that culture can and could play in Scotland. The Objectives of this Response are:

- To offer possible definitions and ways in which the review might be framed in order to embrace the complexity and multiple dimensions of cultural provision.
- To suggest ways in which the cultural provision of Scotland could be enhanced in order to address a variety of challenges related to quality of life, national identity, celebration of creativity and a vibrant economy.
- To illustrate suggestions with useful examples of cultural provision and of good practice in promoting this dimension of Scottish life.

1) The Response will, therefore, begin by providing an overview of possible ways of defining culture and framing discussion of related issues. 2) Heritage will be explored as one dimension of culture, with particular emphasis on the role institutions such as museums and libraries play in the enhancement of cultural provision and its accessibility to Scots. 3) The contributions that can be made to

Scotland by creative and performing arts will be explored, particularly as fostered by Scotland's universities. 4) Finally, potential linkages between culture, creativity and the creative industries will be noted as benefits for Scotland's economy. 5) Concluding comments will highlight issues and recommendations for the Commission to consider. In addition, an Annex providing in-depth discussion of the subtleties of the concept of 'cultural rights' will be appended.

This Response may perhaps be best appreciated in the light of a usefully stimulating comparison between culture and the environment. At its broadest, a nation's culture is its language, customs, morality, art and architecture, systems of education, law and religion, and other practices *in which* the people express themselves and *by which* they give meaning and value to their lives. In that sense culture is not something rare and special; nor is it something for the few.

A parallel is the idea of the natural and built environment as what surrounds our lives and influences their quality. And culture, like environment, is not just something created by individuals in their own lifetime for their own benefit. It reaches into the past and out to the future; however important may be the leaders in any field, culture as a whole depends upon the many.

This way of thinking need not lead to levelling down, or uncritically accepting just anything as 'culture', any more than recognising that environment is universally shared, implies that there are no general standards for healthy and pleasant surroundings. Clean air and water, sustainable farming, manageable roads, public parks, decent housing, are part of what we and our successors need to live well.

Likewise, the culture of Scotland should be examined with a view to restoring and improving what we have, and adding to this for our good and for that of future generations. As with the environment, we will be judged by what we bequeath them. We want to bequeath to them a culture of internationally recognised 'sense and worth'.

## **Understanding Culture**

*aien aristeuein*

*always be to the best*

**Homer**

In his original address the First Minister said the following:

"Our devolved government should have the courage and the faith to back human imagination, our innate creativity, as the most potent force for individual change and social vision"

"I believe we should make the development of our creative drive the next major enterprise for our society. Arts for all can be a reality, a democratic right and an achievement of the 21st century"

"I believe this has the potential to be a new civic exercise on a par with health, housing and education – the commitment to providing and valuing creative expression for all".

This provides a useful starting point for thinking about the meaning of culture and the idea of cultural rights, particularly from the citizen perspective. The First Minister's words also signal a wish to aim high, to be the best, and to offer the best to the people of Scotland.

The notion of culture has evolved along two, occasionally intersecting, lines. One of these regards it as a broad term of social description. In this understanding 'culture' refers to the language, customs, mores and morals, arts and entertainments, systems of religion, education, and law, through which members of a large group or society express themselves and in which they find meaning(s) and purpose(s). As such, culture includes the playing and watching of sports no less than the writing and reading of literature and the making and viewing of works of fine art.

The second line follows a narrower interpretation of culture as signifying valuable activities and products, participation in which, whether as maker or recipient, calls for refined aesthetic and intellectual abilities. Culture in this second sense is more closely aligned to the arts but it would be a mistake to try to separate, let alone isolate, the two lines; and while the Executive and the Cultural Commission are obviously deeply interested in the promotion of the arts in Scotland, we do not assume that they mean to remove these from broader concerns about the quality of Scottish 'cultural experience' in the wider sense of the term. Indeed the First Minister's address indicates that he certainly was not thinking of culture as only having to do with the high arts, or of its benefits as being purely aesthetic.

One means of understanding and seeing the value of culture in the wide sense is by way of an analogy with the built and natural environment. In the last quarter century we have had our attention drawn to the ways in which we are embedded in a material world whose condition bears directly on our own well-being. The state of nature as it surrounds us, both locally and globally, largely influences the possibility of health and happiness – negatively, by posing threats, and positively by enhancing our state of being and experiences. On this account, individuals, groups and societies have directed themselves to repairing environmental degradation and to raising awareness of the dangers of pollution and of the benefits of well-protected natural settings and well-designed buildings and constructed spaces.

Similarly, the hitherto felt but little understood concern about the culture we inhabit might be expressed in terms of the quality of 'social space', the structure of activities, practices, expectations and values within which we are located – not by choice necessarily but simply in consequence of living in a particular society. It is no more elitist to be concerned about this than it is to be exercised by the condition of the environment; and as the last decade in particular has demonstrated the environmental imperative has the power to engage the imagination and will of individuals and groups at all levels and ages in society. Likewise, it would not be unreasonably ambitious for the Commission and the Executive to encourage cultural consciousness conceived in similar terms.

While a concern with culture might thus be broad there is no question but that the visual arts and architecture, literature and drama, music and dance, filmmaking and related activities have an especially important place in the life of any modern society. Again there is no reason to be anxious about asserting the importance of quality in

these areas, or the rarity of excellence. In every area of life it is easy to be bad and hard to be good. In some fields incompetence is, perhaps, unimportant; but in those areas of creative activity that are among the most powerful forces in shaping culture in the broad sense poor work is not merely unappealing, it actually disfigures social space, rather as a badly designed precinct scars a community and oppresses its members by lowering the quality of their experience and social interactions.

## **Heritage and Cultural Space**

*she wants to strip the willow*

*she desires the keys*

*to the National Library*

**Kathleen Jamie**

The “cultural space” within which Scotland’s citizens live is in part shaped by the heritage of the nation. Ideally, Scots come to appreciate their heritage in ways that encourage them to contribute to what will become the heritage of the next generation. Libraries and museums have important roles to play.

Increasingly, the Library is a portal, to which readers are using the keys for access to the wider cultural heritage of Scotland. University libraries promote the use of information through stewardship, management and access to resources. As illustration, the St Andrews University Library houses immensely diverse collections, including modern books and journals, electronic resources and extremely rich Special Collections consisting of older and rare printed books, manuscripts, archives and photographs. Although the primary function of the Library is to service the teaching and research needs of the institution, many of its resources, particularly the Special Collections, form part of the heritage and cultural background of a much wider constituency, both in terms of area and type of readership. The Library has a responsibility to preserve and manage this heritage for future generations.

The Library also has a responsibility for education within the wider community by opening its collections to non-University students. For example, local schoolchildren can develop skills and knowledge by exploring the Library’s resources and identifying it as a welcoming space in which to study. This not only helps them with their existing studies, but also prepares many of them for higher education or indeed self-directed, work-based and informal learning. Thus university Libraries promote cultural literacy and lifelong learning.

Already working collaboratively toward an integrated cultural resource, university Libraries will help the nation move into an era when digitisation and on-line access to information will make it easier for everyone to enjoy and benefit from their cultural heritage, appreciate its value, and build upon it to develop their own skills and strengths.

Museums also strive to preserve and enhance understanding of the nation’s heritage. Increasingly, within the limits of constrained resources, museums have been changing to meet the changing expectations of society. So, for instance, the type of “cultural product” they promote has changed to attract new audiences, particularly young audiences. Furthermore, Scotland’s museums, including museums at more than a dozen of its universities, have been evolving as

organisations into centres of cultural and creative activity, inspiring further creativity. Exhibitions and community services have been developed to increase access to Scotland's living heritage, in ways that complement other facilities for public education or entertainment.

Given the challenges being taken on by museums, it is critical that those working in the "cultural industries", such as museum curators and gallery managers, represent the highest quality of expertise and understanding, with the ability to interpret as well as conserve. Collections themselves are critical to preserving heritage, but they are mute without people to understand them, care for them *and* open them up to others. The University of St Andrews has been developing top quality professionals for over 15 years, through its world-class Museum and Gallery Studies programme, Scotland's only postgraduate training programme for the museum sector. In addition to preparing new generations for leadership roles in the cultural industries, the programme also provides convenient distance or part-time learning opportunities to broaden the capacity of professionals already in-service.

In addition to financial resources, museum and gallery professionals need to be accorded the respect due to their professional role. This will allow them to lead activities that will benefit their "customers" and to find satisfaction in cultural industries careers. By making explicit the value it places on museums and museum professionals as critical to heritage and creativity, the Cultural Commission can inspire outstanding individuals to seek the training and careers that will enable them to take on these challenges successfully.

## **Fostering the Creative and Performing Arts: the Role of Universities** ***Scholars and bards unheard of yet shall come...*** **Robert Fergusson**

Over the last six centuries Scottish universities have been significant supporters of contributors to not only the analysis but also the generation of creativity, or 'practice-based creative endeavour'. Their support has been wide-ranging. It extends, for example, from the employment of the poet and dramatist George Buchanan at St Andrews in the sixteenth century to the senior positions given to composers such as Thomas Wilson at Glasgow University and Kenneth Leighton at Edinburgh University in the twentieth. In more recent years important recognition has also been given to practice-led research in the creative and performing arts embracing such subjects as art, design, photography, film, music, dance, drama and creative writing. In some areas, such as creative writing, the work of the universities has been outstanding over several generations. Poets including Edwin Morgan (Glasgow), Norman MacCaig (Stirling) and Douglas Dunn (St Andrews) have held or hold permanent appointments. Today authors as different as A.L.Kennedy, Alan Spence, Tom Leonard, and Kathleen Jamie all hold permanent positions in Scottish universities where they teach and practise creative writing. Similarly, visual artists from Will Maclean at Dundee to the photographer Robin Gillanders and the film-maker Huw Davies at Napier contribute to the academic and artistic work of the nation, and are internationally recognized as ambassadors for Scottish culture.

What we now call practice-based artistic work in the Scottish universities has a long and distinguished history (one studied in such books as Robert Crawford's The

Modern Poet: Poetry, Academia and Knowledge since the 1750s , OUP, 2001). Universities Scotland, in their submission to the recent Scottish Higher Education Review, stated that, 'Another important role for Higher Education is creating a seedbed for the creativity of the future. It is where many of the practising artists, musicians, writers, architects and designers of Scotland's future are given space to find themselves. It supports them in their development, gives them a shop window for their achievements and creates a community in which ideas can cross-fertilise.'

So universities who employ and encourage artists, writers, composers, film-makers, and other practitioners help keep in Scotland figures who might otherwise emigrate for economic reasons. These people's presence in the country gives confidence to and formally educates younger generations of practitioners.

From a narrower perspective, such work is also crucial to Scottish universities in the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). The definition of research used by the RAE includes 'the invention and generation of ideas, images, performances and artefacts including design, where these lead to new or substantially improved insights.' This clearly applies to a good film, painting, poem, or musical composition, and to other forms of artistic research embedded in practice. Practice-based creative work forms, e.g., a significant part of the 5\* RAE 2001 returns under Drama, Dance and Performing Arts from Warwick and under English from St Andrews. Indeed, Creative Writing has been noted as the most clearly burgeoning aspect of English studies. In England many universities, e.g. Manchester Metropolitan, UEA, and the newly formed University of the Arts, have invested substantially in practice-based creative arts with generous support from donors, charities, and public bodies. In Scotland, universities have often had to fund such work from their own pockets. It is vital, therefore, that Scotland, where existing cultural infrastructure is often less well developed, more disparate, and less geared to standards of international excellence, is not disadvantaged.

An example of pro-active efforts by universities is the Poetry House, part of the University of St Andrews' School of English. This is thought to be the largest building in the UK (outside of libraries) devoted to the writing and reading of poetry, and it serves Scotland as a focal point for that art-form, hosting research, teaching, and poetry reading and workshops. This physical resource also anchors an international web presence for Scotland ([www.thepoetryhouse.org](http://www.thepoetryhouse.org)) which, with a team of international editors, provides a uniquely authoritative and wide-ranging resource on poetry of different times and places around the world. Through a rare critical mass of leading contemporary poets, the University continues to support the ongoing vitality of Scottish culture.

Overall, then, practice-based work in universities provides value for society as a whole, for research and teaching, and for maintaining and improving our standing in such exercises as the RAE. Though the jargon of 'practice-based work' may be relatively recent, Scotland's tradition of supporting creative and performing artists within her universities is almost as old as the nation's university tradition itself – a tradition as old and inventive as poetry and as innovative as video and digital imaging. We would hope that support would continue for artistic creativity as part of academic work at the highest levels.

Such creativity also plays a major part in international cultural life and contributes to economic well-being. Indeed, interest in the ways in which new ideas are generated and innovation encouraged has made creativity central to the national debate. The creative industries, now recognised as powerful engines of economic growth and employment, have captured the imagination of government and development agencies alike. Fundamental to this, of course, is the continuation of high quality research, including practice-based creative endeavour. Only if we invest confidently in such areas will we ensure that 'Scholars and bards unheard of yet shall come'.

## **Culture, Creativity, Creative Industries and the Economy**

*ach dèan dannsa dèan dannsa  
's e obair th'ann a bhith dannsa*

*but be dancing be dancing  
it is work to be dancing  
Aonghas Macneacail*

Scotland, the United Kingdom, cities, regions and countries around the world are all pursuing success in the creative industries as critical to competitiveness in the Knowledge Economy. The rationale for this rapid multiplication of policies, strategies and investments is illustrated by the sector's role as one of the fastest growing contributors to the UK economy. According to NESTA's recent Forward Thinking report, Creative Industries in 2000 brought in 7.9% of the UK GDP, over a third of the size of the UK's overall manufacturing sector, contributing £11.5B to the Balance of Trade in 2001, with an average increase of 13% per annum. The report cites even more dramatic Scottish Enterprise figures, saying that the Creative Industries sector is expected to grow by a third in Scotland over the next 5 years. Perhaps the best-known work articulating the many ways in which a vibrantly creative culture can contribute to the economy is Richard Florida's The Rise of the Creative Class, in which he makes the case that creative people in any sort of enterprise like to be near other creative people in locations rich with arts and other related activities. Indeed, the new Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport, Patricia Ferguson, has already declared, at a Conservatoires UK conference, 'We intend to further establish Scotland as a vibrant, cosmopolitan, competitive country and an internationally recognised creative hub.'

For Scotland, the theme of 'creativity' may form an important bridge between a society possessing a vibrant culture and an economy thriving on innovation. So, for example, imaginative encouragement of creativity among children in Scotland is not miles away from both laying the groundwork for a healthy culture and an entrepreneurial economy in Scotland's future.

Given the timely focus of the Cultural Commission, Scotland can also take steps now to benefit in the shorter-term from linking creativity, culture and the economy. For example, the University of St Andrews, the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, and Duncan of Jordanstone Art College of Dundee University are planning an innovative initiative to empower creative individuals with the tools of effective management. A Feasibility Study, funded by Scottish Enterprise Fife, has confirmed the premise that a serious need exists for more effective management in creative industries in Scotland (and indeed in other countries). To bridge this gap, thus giving

Scotland's top creative people the opportunity to stay and work successfully in Scotland, the initiative will centre on an internationally leading Master's degree, to begin in 2006. Scholarship funds will be essential if the course is to attract the best of Scotland's creative people who have the will and drive to take on management challenges. The initiative will also: hold think tanks on complex issues -- perhaps some to be prioritised by the Cultural Commission during its deliberations; showcase efforts of creative students; provide public/educational outreach as to the process of creativity and how it can be blended with success; forge links with individuals in industry and across the cohort of students in order to lay the groundwork for unpredictable creative joint ventures in the future; and offer continuing professional development and master classes at a centre that will be a showcase for Scotland.

## **Concluding Comments**

***at Errol, Grange, Longforgan, and St Madoes  
they stand dumb in their doorframes, all agog...***

**Don Paterson**

In this Response, the University of St Andrews has attempted to provide some ways of thinking about culture and also some examples of mechanisms that can benefit the vitality and impact of Scotland's culture. While these thoughts of course arise from the perspective of a university, this is perhaps not inappropriate, given the longstanding role of Scotland's universities in its culture – and their potential to continue to contribute in innovative ways.

So, perhaps, the central message of this response is to encourage the Cultural Commission to look on – and work with -- universities as its partners in enhancing the future of Scotland's culture. Undoubtedly the rest of Scotland's universities would join the University of St Andrews in willingness to assist the Commission with each of the points to consider offered below.

The Cultural Commission may find it helpful to communicate some thoughts about culture by making comparisons to the increasingly pro-active roles that government, organisations and individual citizens have been taking in the protection of the environment as something both to enjoy now and to pass along in even better shape to future generations.

The Cultural Commission may wish to consider the natural tension that exists in a democracy between necessary 'elitism' of rigorously-achieved quality inherent to many aspects of culture and goals of widespread accessibility to and interaction with a variety of dimensions of a cultural space. Providing more people with the opportunity to engage in the enhancement of their cultural space may be a goal.

The Cultural Commission may, for example, wish to develop innovative mechanisms of various sorts to encourage and support creativity as, in a sense, part of Scotland's national identity.

The Cultural Commission may wish to consider examples across the UK and internationally of cultural infrastructure that will promote and support excellence.

The Cultural Commission may wish to recommend that Scotland move deliberately to develop high-level 'nodes' with high visibility in the UK and internationally (poetry, for example, has a head start on such positioning).

The Cultural Commission may wish at times to connect 'culture' with leadership in the Knowledge Economy, via creativity and the creative industries. Empowering some of Scotland's top creative people with the tools of management can lead to successes in this arena. Think tanks can facilitate exploration of related complex issues, as well.

The University of St Andrews wishes the Cultural Commission well, and stands ready to provide further explanation of, or indeed help with, issues raised here. We hope for a report that will make Scotland stand "all agog".

## Annex: Cultural Rights

The terminology in which values and imperatives are presented is itself indicative of cultural trends and forces. Societies with a strong sense of common identity, and which are in agreement about what is deserving of respect, tend to speak simply in terms of the 'good' and the 'bad'. Societies that are in a state of some concern about whether traditionally shared values are being lost speak of the 'desirable' and the 'undesirable'. Those that see themselves as divided and fear disassociation typically emphasise notions of 'rights' and 'duties' as if to impose what might otherwise be absent. This said, the idea of rights is coherent one but it has to be handled with care, not least with regard to its logic.

Two issues are particularly relevant in this regard: first, the distinction between 'permissive' and 'provision' rights; and second, that between 'one-sided' and 'two-sided' rights – i.e. between rights which hold whether or not any other person or group thereby has a corresponding duty, and those whose existence entails such a duty-bearer. An illustration of the first distinction is provided by the contrast between the right to have children and the right to basic health care. In the case of the former the idea is that each couple has a right not to be interfered with in their reproductive choices. This does not imply any positive responsibilities on the part of others, only negative ones, namely: not to interfere. A right to have children is not a right to be provided with children or even with the means of having them. In the case of the health care right, however, the idea is that each member of society is entitled to be provided with the basics necessary for the maintenance in ordinary circumstances of life and good health.

The one-sided/two-sided distinction is related to the foregoing in as much as one kind of right implies a co-relative duty upon others whereas another type of right does not imply active responsibilities. Robinson Crusoe's right to walk the beach of his island has nothing to do with a responsibility on the part of others to provide for this, or even to take note of it. By way of example, think of the practice of compulsory purchase which does not deny an original owners rights of disposition, but equally does not regard these as inhibiting action on the part of social interest.

It is within this conceptual framework that claims to cultural rights need to be framed, and while recognising the good intent of the Cultural Commission we cannot help but point out the need for some rethinking of the claims made in the consultation paper, particularly in relation to the idea of a 'scheme of entitlements'. At one point (Cultural Rights, Consultation paper, 2) we read the following:

"The idea is that culture in Scotland is a basic citizen's right". ...

"That means that culture's not a privilege, not something for other people, not something outside everyday life. It's what everyone is entitled to". ...

"Everyone in Scotland has cultural rights. So every Scot has the right to say what they are".

Whether culture is understood in the broad or narrower senses (analogous to environment or to high art) then the claim that everyone has a right to it is intelligible, but differently so. More problematic, however, is the claim that everyone has the right to say what his or her cultural rights are. Consider the parallel case of rights to sexual fulfilment. It would be widely acknowledged that individuals have a (permission) right to sexual fulfilment, but even so this would be constrained in

various ways and very few would think that it followed that individuals have a (provision) right for others to supply their sexual fulfilment. Even fewer would think that this sexual fulfilment right implied a right to say what that right consisted in (e.g. the paedophile defining his right in terms of relations with children).

The desire to be inclusive in considering the support of culture in Scotland is creditable, but it needs to be thought through clearly and reframed in a more coherent and inevitably selective manner. Not every 'cultural claim' will be legitimate and it would avoid inevitable disappointment and protracted dispute if that fact were anticipated now. The area of culture is inescapably normative and that means identifying society with some values and not with others.

This last point connects with a second issue raised by the terms of the consultation paper. Under the section on Responsibilities and Rights (2.4) it is written (as if in definition of the term "Tolerance"): "There will be tolerance of all cultures within Scotland". While its liberal intentions are not in doubt this is doubly problematic. First, it cannot be supposed to be true; for there is surely no possibility of tolerating cultural groups committed to the mutilation of female members, or of others committed to the persecution of homosexuals, or of others committed to the degradation of particular ethnic groups or classes, and so on. Second, to the extent that these implications can be guarded against there remains a conflict between the neutral procedural stance implied by this view and the substantive idea of a Scottish culture defined in terms of actual excellences within certain areas of existing practice.

If, as must be the case, some things are to be excluded as intolerable and others are to be selected against, both directly and by others being selected for (as in special keeping with existing cultural traditions, for example), then better to be clear about that from the outset. Such clarity could hardly offend and it is more likely to inspire a sense of competence and seriousness of intent. Such are what is needed for the Commission to discharge its task effectively and with credit.