

LIBRARY



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21 SEP 2004

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James Boyle
Cultural Commission
Broughton High School
Carrington Road
Edinburgh EH4 1EG

15 September 2004

Dear James,

**Confederation of Scottish Mini-Co-Operatives (CoSMIC):
Submission to the Cultural Commission**

CoSMIC is a collaborative organisation supported by a wide range of key players active in archives, museums and libraries in Scotland. Working within a 'Scottish Cooperative Infrastructure' (see enclosed leaflet), it aims to co-ordinate and integrate collaborative work in the various domains to build and develop a well-organised, coherent, and interoperable 'Virtual Scotland' and to maximise the use of existing resources. Citizens increasingly use and need distributed cultural (and other) resources: these in turn rely on finding tools and standards to ensure interoperability and discovery of disparate virtual materials, and co-operation in these areas is now as essential as it has always been desirable. A CoSMIC joint research and development plan (see enclosed leaflet) maps how this co-operation can be achieved and put to best use.

Our submission therefore stresses the opportunity presented by a collaborative means of giving equal access to distributed virtual materials across at least three cultural domains. The opportunities are enormous and the benefits of achieving these aims are obvious both throughout Scotland itself and more widely in helping to take Scottish culture to an international audience.

These developments cannot happen at random or by accident: they need careful planning and the targeted use of (often existing) resources from the Executive and other funding bodies, both national and local. Specifically, the achievement of the aim of an accessible comprehensive distributed national library/archive/museum service

needs both collaboration and co-ordination. Common standards, both technical and for descriptive metadata and its elements, are essential. A range of leading-edge projects undertaken within Scotland (see, for example, the attached COSMIC 'shared services' leaflet) demonstrates both what can be achieved and the sometimes complex technical and other issues which need to be addressed.

To ensure that standards are adopted and maintained and that the benefits of pioneering work in Scotland are not dissipated, and so that the broader aim of a Virtual Scotland can be achieved, a degree of central co-ordination is required even though the basic ethos of CoSMIC is to encourage voluntary collaboration among distributed services and projects of different kinds and of different outlooks and sizes, from national to very local.

There are various bodies operating within the domains of libraries (Scottish Library and Information Council – SLIC), archives (Scottish Archives Council) and museums (Scottish Museums Council), as well as national collections (a National Library, National Archives and National Museum), which contain as part of their remit such a co-ordinating function. What is lacking is either a high-level body at Executive level to take on this role (such as operates successfully in the Republic of Ireland) or formal liaison between the various bodies to ensure that the aims indicated above are pursued and achieved.

CoSMIC sees no need to introduce an extra layer of bureaucracy to the system, but would urge the Commission to use its influence to pursue the establishment, presumably at the behest of the Minister, of a mechanism to ensure that the existing bodies set up a formal and effective system to pursue the successful outcomes indicated as the aims of CoSMIC.

One possible way of doing this effectively within the existing system could be to formalise the currently voluntary role of COSMIC as a coordinating mechanism, through which the three domains could work together towards Executive-sponsored aims, whilst still maintaining their basic independence. This could be done through the creation of a 'COSMIC Steering Group' that would oversee the work of the Task Group which currently manages the COSMIC programme and is mainly funded by SLIC to date, but supported by the other domains. The Steering Group could be made up of top-level representatives from each of the domains, a representative of the Executive, and at least one representative from the Task Group itself. It could then manage joint activities in the domains using COSMIC mechanisms such as the Joint R&D Plan.

Sincerely



Stuart James.
Chairman, CoSMIC