

## Cultural Commission

### Response to Phase 1 of the consultation process from the Museums Association

September 2004

#### 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This response concentrates on the Commission's remit as it relates to museums. It follows the headings suggested in the letter from James Boyle inviting responses (20<sup>th</sup> August).
- 1.2 The Museums Association (MA) is an independent membership organisation representing museums and galleries in the UK and people who work for them. Formed in 1889, it is a registered charity, receiving no government funding, which seeks to inform, represent and develop museums and people who work for them in order that they may provide a better service to society and the public. The MA has over 5000 individual members and 600 institutional members, including 400 individual members in Scotland and 50 institutional members, representing a wide range of Scotland's museums and museum bodies.
- 1.3 From the MA's perspective as a UK-wide organisation, it is evident that a large number of the issues facing Scotland's museums are common to museums across the UK. It is obviously imperative to find Scottish solutions to Scottish problems, where they are distinct from those in the rest of the UK. Nevertheless, there are a number of areas where UK-wide cooperation makes sense and these are highlighted under each of the headings below.
- 1.4 The Commission should also bear in mind that many Scottish museums have strong international links. Others could profitably develop them; either because the nature of their collections makes it appropriate for them to work with museums abroad, or because the nature of the community they serve makes an international approach appropriate. There will be further scope for working with European partners under the proposed Culture 2007 programme from the European Union.

#### 2.0 Education

- 2.1 Museums should be fully integrated into formal learning. The MA has itself been promoting the idea that all school students should have the opportunity to enjoy a fully funded and fully supported visit to a museum or gallery every year. This idea has been further developed for the Scottish context by the Scottish Museums Council.
- 2.2 Museums' educational remit is, however, not limited to formal education. Museums are important providers of life-long learning, and can offer inspiring and novel approaches for those turned off by traditional forms of education.
- 2.3 Museums have the capacity to be the "shop window" of higher education. All museums, but particularly university museums, have the potential to bring the results of research carried out in higher education institutions to a wider audience.

It is vital that the Commission engages with the higher education sector, to ensure that this potential is realised.

- 2.4 Sadly, at the moment, much of this is aspirational. There is currently a serious lack of capacity in the Scottish museums sector, with as few as 10 specialist educators working in local authorities, for example. If museums are to deliver on their educational potential, investment will be required.
- 2.5 For the museums sector to deliver an excellent service to users across Scotland, it requires a better skilled workforce. Training and workforce development is one area in which it is certainly appropriate to take a UK-wide approach, since cultural sector professionals frequently move between different parts of the UK. The Creative and Cultural Industries Sectors Skills Council, currently in development, will have a crucial role to play here and it will be vital that the Executive maintains its very welcome commitment to the SSC.
- 2.6 The MA is currently carrying out a major inquiry into the future of collections and collecting in the UK's museums. An important theme of the inquiry has been the growing shortage of specialist expertise within museums. If museums are to provide opportunities for people to engage properly with their collections, they need to have access to specialist knowledge about those collections. The MA anticipates that its inquiry will make recommendations for ways of developing and sharing skills based on specialist networks. In many cases, it will be appropriate for those networks to operate on a UK-wide basis; MLA has already expressed enthusiasm for working with the MA to develop the idea, and the MA and hopes that the Executive will also be able to contribute to this significant development.

### **3.0 Institutional infrastructure/ Delivery of services and access to them**

- 3.1 It is increasingly clear that, for the Scottish museums sector to deliver services to users across Scotland effectively, targeted – and more sustained – revenue support for a limited number of non-national museums will be of particular importance. The proposed significance scheme for Scottish museums will have relevance here and is a logical follow-up to the National Audit of Collections.
- 3.2 However, non-national museums should not only be funded on the basis of the significance of their collections. Assessments of significance should be based on a balance of factors, including the significance of the service to its users. Some funding should be allocated according to geographical location, to ensure that citizens have the opportunity to access excellent museum provision, wherever they live. There may be the opportunity to build on some Regional Development Challenge Fund schemes, with groups of museums pooling resources to improve the quality of provision, information about collections, etc. The Executive has the opportunity to go beyond the approach pioneered in England through the Designation scheme, which was entirely based on the importance of collections, by combining the significance of collections with a broader understanding of entitlement issues.
- 3.3 The National Museums of Scotland have already greatly extended their commitment to partnership working. This new commitment is to be welcomed and should be consolidated and properly funded, to ensure wide access to the best of

Scotland's museum collections. However, it will also be essential to ensure that the NMS approach is properly integrated with initiatives from the Executive, and from the other major institutions. As well as the National Galleries, Glasgow Museums may have the potential to take on a wider role across Scotland, as part of an overall re-evaluation of its role.

- 3.4 In the light of this expanded role for the national institutions, it is becoming ever more desirable that there should be an approach to policy making for museums which includes the national and non-national museums. There may be a need for a new forum, which can bring the nationals and non-nationals together on a more equal basis.
- 3.5 Other forms of joint working will make the most of additional investment from the Executive. For example, groups of independent museums may be able to share specialist staff and marketing, etc. The Highland Council model might suggest a possible way forward.
- 3.6 Better electronic access to collections will be crucial in delivering museum services in future. However, before further resources are invested, further research is needed into the way that existing online resources, notably SCRAN, are used. SCRAN offers high-quality educational resources, based around selected parts of museum collections. Other models being discussed favour the digitisation of entire collections. Scotland needs a proper strategy for the provision of online resources. Moreover, online access will never be a substitute for seeing the real thing, and citizens living in remote areas should not have to settle for only having electronic access to museum collections.
- 3.7 Improving museums' infrastructure will clearly require additional long-term revenue funding, not only from the Executive, but also from local authorities.
- 3.8 Many museums also need capital investment. The Heritage Lottery Fund obviously offers one source of investment, but there are other models. One possible model for the Commission to explore is the DCMS/Wolfson fund in England, where the government works in partnership with a grant-making trust to target some resources for capital improvements. Given its significance in funding the cultural sector, the Commission must ensure that it involves HLF in strategic discussions.

#### **4.0 Marketing and promotion**

- 4.1 The Museums and Galleries working group has suggested that there is a need for a Scottish Museums Online portal, to help tourists, educational users, and others to plan their visits. Such a resource could be particularly important in drawing visitors' attention to important museums in remote areas, and would require a comprehensive system of links to regional sites. However, it should be noted that the 24 Hour Museum ([www.24museum.org.uk](http://www.24museum.org.uk)) already has some coverage of Scotland, and care should be taken not to duplicate this resource.

#### **5.0 Encouraging creativity**

- 5.1 Museums have always provided inspiration for designers and others working in the creative industries. The challenge is to find ways of strengthening the links between

museums and industry, to ensure that the potential of museum collections is properly unlocked. Renaissance in the Regions included a proposal, which has not been implemented, but which offers great potential, for a creativity fund for objects. A similar model could be developed for Scotland. The aim would be to take existing collections, and to ensure that there were increased opportunities for artists and designers to work with them to stimulate new designs for the twenty-first century.

## **6.0 Cultural rights**

- 6.1 Scotland's publicly funded museums have a long tradition of free admission, thanks to the 1887 Libraries Act, for local authorities, and the Executive's generosity in funding free entry to the national museums since 2000.
- 6.2 However, many people see museums as not being for them, while others live beyond easy reach of the main publicly funded museums. The concept of cultural rights in the museum sector must be based around extending the "ways in" to museums for individuals who might not currently choose or be able to use museums.
- 6.3 The Commission will be aware of the Scottish Museum Council's work on developing an entitlement model for museum provision, and the MA urges the Commission to give these proposals serious consideration.
- 6.4 Touring exhibitions and partnership working can extend the opportunities for engaging with cultural heritage to those living in remoter areas. The Commission should explore ways of encouraging these, building on NMS's expanding role.
- 6.5 The concept of entitlement must somehow encompass independent museums, which are often the only museums in remote areas, and which play a very important part in preserving Scotland's past and helping to develop a sense of national and community identity. They can be very important community resources and shared civic spaces.
- 6.6 The role of museums – and of other cultural forms – in developing a sense of identity is something which the Commission should explore further. Museums can help people to establish a sense of personal identity; they can be valuable expressions of community identity; and they can help to foster a more complex and nuanced understanding of national identity. The MA believes that thinking in this area is currently under developed, but that it is a vital aspect of the entitlement/rights agenda. Scotland has an opportunity to take an international lead in developing thinking in this area.

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