

Cultural Commission 62 Questions: Musicians' Union Response

- The Musicians' Union has already made a detailed response to the Cultural Commission. Answering the list of 62 questions that constitute the second round of consultation has taken some time. The Scotland & Northern Ireland Regional Committee met on the 30th January 2005 and we are now able to respond.

1. **Rights, Entitlements and Responsibilities (1-5):** Cultural rights are about enabling access and participation across the widest range of cultural activities and delivered where best accessible, which often does not mean exclusively in the central belt between Edinburgh and Glasgow. The opportunity to access such activity is often through education and the involvement of the Musicians' Union in the YMI (Youth Music Initiative) and in Musicwise is such an example. Cultural rights are also enshrined in a social responsibility aligned to our section entitled "Social Inclusion" in our original response. The Scottish Executive, ultimately has guardianship over cultural rights, but only with the closest working relationships with those organisations that can ensure that the right is a reality. This, of course, includes the Musicians' Union. We are not convinced that legislation is necessary to provide and/or guarantee access to cultural provision. It is more important that the necessary infrastructure is in place to enable access.

2. **Cultural Leadership (6-15):** The Scottish Executive must ensure that there is as level a playing field as possible to allow cultural activity to flourish. We saw, to our dismay, the eagerness of some of Scotland's 32 local authorities to impose a charging structure for instrumental teaching when realising that this service was not core-funded whereas the delivery of classroom music teaching was. Thanks to the YMI and the additional funding from the Executive (now £37.5M up to 2008) this is no longer a problem for Scotland's young people, but it aptly demonstrates why the authorities alone cannot be entrusted to deliver cultural rights. We do need clear leadership from the Executive and not necessarily a raft of policies and/or legislation. The role of the SAC (Scottish Arts Council) is critical here too as in most instances, the arms length principal has worked well, but the SAC must also be able to lead and have the necessary funding and infrastructure to do so. I would advise the Commission refers to items 7 (The National Companies) and 11 (The SAC and Lottery Funding) in our original submission. We do not, however, want to see the SAC subsumed into the Executive, as proposed in Wales.

There could be a stronger correlation between public funding and commercial reality. The two are not mutually exclusive and the problem lies sometimes more with the former than with the latter. The YMI research highlighted the excellent range of provision in the informal sectors and we are working hard to ensure that formal and informal work more closely with each other and are also encouraging local authorities to work together in partnership, both with each other and cross sectoral. Commercial music promoters in Scotland often understand the needs of Scotland's communities, with regard to access to cultural activities, better than some of the many organisations in receipt of public funding. The national companies have, however, proved themselves to be multi-flexible in their diversity of output and have lead the way in outreach programmes that involve local communities. Partnerships with the promoters have proved successful and could be expanded further, for example Celtic Connections and Unique Events. Leadership based on a working understanding of the commercial sector and its demands is often preferred.

Arts and culture is not only activity based, but has an identity that is important. High quality and creative work, of which we have a great deal in Scotland, also needs high quality selling. A promoter such as Raymond Gubbay, for example, has revolutionised the selling of western classical music in the UK. Whilst there are sometimes concerns expressed about the quality of the end product, there are lessons to be learnt from the way in which the Gubbay organisation markets the product. New audiences, attracted to this product often lead to their exposure to the high quality work of our orchestras, opera and ballet companies and ensembles, which would otherwise not happen. A crucially important factor in any performance is whether it attracts an audience and whether that audience feels they have had such an engaging experience that they want to return.

Cultural leadership must understand how the sector works and understand how local and national politics can engage with it. Any leader, whether corporate or individual, must be credible to the particular sector within the cultural industries with which they wish to engage. The creation of a Scottish Music Industry Association will certainly help in this regard where music related activities are concerned. Another problem is often the lack of forward planning, sometimes related to insufficient funding and/or to bad administration. The ability to properly plan ahead for organisations working in the cultural industries sector is crucial, as it is for any commercial company. Local authorities have a role to play here alongside the Executive and there should be no difficulty in balancing responsibilities if the initial prioritising of cultural activities is properly undertaken. This requires clear articulation in thought and policy from the Executive to the authorities.

The FE and HE sector has an important role, but must operate in the real world. High aspirations are laudable, but they must be followed up by realistic placement opportunities in the industry. The recent SQA validation of music performance and music technology modules on a pan Scotland national basis is a huge step forward, in this regard. The FE/HE sector must lead and engage with the delivery of cultural activities.

The commercial sector, as already intimated, already leads in many aspects of delivery, but networking through all sectors is crucially important to create and maintain a level plying field for access to cultural activities. We are unsure what the Commission means when referring to "grass roots" organisations, but good networking with clear signage will ensure that no-one is left out. The Musicians' Union, in promoting a possible Scottish Music Industry Association alongside the SAC, would also play a crucial role here.

3. ***Pan-Sectoral Planning (16-21):*** There is a range of services that could be provided nationally, including ticketing, the logistics of transport, provision of backline resources and not least, some form of repertoire/programming co-ordination. The Musicians' Union is currently engaged in compiling a music map of the UK. This will provide an invaluable tool to both promoter and artist/musician working in every genre. Pan-sector planning would also have to embrace all governmental departments in line with the First Minister's stated policy that cultural activity must engage with every area of governance in Scotland. It is only possible for individual artists and small organisations to plan cross sector activities through the representation of larger industry bodies. The Scottish Music Industry Association might be such a vehicle.

4. ***Funding Arrangements (22-33)***: There are no definitions of the cultural sectors within this questionnaire, but some sectors will always require more subsidy than others, simply to survive. Some arts forms are comparatively high maintenance and the recent problems experienced by some of our national companies are evidence that if subsidy is below a certain level, they are unable to compete and to develop, despite the highest standards of performance always being attained. There is always a perception, usually misguided, that certain art forms receive a disproportionate share of subsidy over others. A level playing field should mean that all survive and indeed, flourish.

In our original response to the Commission, we clearly outlined our thoughts on the role of the SAC and the funding of the national companies (section 11). If the funding of the national companies moves within the remit of the Scottish Executive, this funding would have to be established at an adequate level, ring-fenced and be subject to a pre-agreed inflationary linked annual increase set at the start of the term of the respective parliament and running through the life of that parliament, currently five years. Whilst we enjoy a close working relationship with the current Executive, it is slightly worrying that if the national companies were taken into the direct remit of the Executive, they could become subject to the vagaries of political votes and factions. That is why ring-fencing and inflation proofing would be essential. The SAC working with the Executive is our current preferred option. Local authorities could play a more pro-active role and that has been proven by the greater majority during the YMI funding negotiations. There are, however, far too many of the authorities not prioritising cultural activities and as a result, the communities served by those authorities are immediately disadvantaged. There would be great merit in local authorities working closely with local agencies and the national companies in partnership as is the case in some authorities already.

One point of access for funding might help what is sometimes seen to be a complicated process, but the most effective and efficient organisations know how to approach the funding bodies and in particular, the SAC. To guarantee funding levels to certain sectors would be dangerous, in our view. Funding should always primarily rely on artistic merit and engage with commercial viability within a structured framework. New work should still be work with which the public wants to engage and there are many good examples of where partnerships between the commissioned artist and the performing commissioner(s) have worked. This is also true of visual as well as audio imagery. Administration input should be low and performance output high. Funding bodies and again the SAC need longer term security of funding to be able to properly initiate and support creativity, both now and particularly to secure the future. The public are happy to engage in this area and to be consulted on cultural provision as the BBC does on its broadcast output. The Commission is part of that process.

5. ***Standards & Evaluation (34-38)***: The most important point to make here is that wherever public funding is utilised, the professional artists engaged to perform in whatever medium, are paid industry standard fees. The Musicians' Union, along with our colleagues in Equity have been regularly appalled at the cavalier manner in which some arts organisations in receipt of SAC subsidies, completely forget their responsibilities where the engagement and payment of artists is concerned. This must stop. We have also been concerned that, in isolated incidents, the theatre sector will compromise on the use of live music, especially when a production has a significant music content, and try to use taped instead of live music, for which the piece was written. This is cheating the audience and the funding bodies must take a clear view when considering their respective subsidies.

High artistic standards should not be compromised purely for commercial gain, but there is a wide variance of opinion in what constitutes quality and what does not. If the funding mechanisms are set up properly and the associated regular scrutiny of processes undertaken by the awarding bodies, then it should be possible to determine when a project and/or performance does not meet the expectation of the funder and more importantly, does nothing for the proposed recipient(s). Audience satisfaction and often their participation in the performing cultural industries can determine success or failure. If projects fail, then the funding must be questioned.

6. **Operation & Administration (39-43):** The music industry leads the way in the application of new technology, so it is hardly surprising that we embrace all aspects that genuinely make a difference. Please refer to section 10 of our original response. There is certainly an inherent problem when organisations do not share basic IT resources and that would also apply to the national companies. There is no need to work in isolation when areas such as payroll, property and related services and ticketing could be shared, for example.

The Musicians' Union has been a partner in recent international enterprises which have highlighted the success of the Scottish music industry. We have only been able to do this in partnership with the SAC, Scottish Executive, Scottish Enterprise and with HIE (Highlands & Islands Enterprise). The benefits of international promotion on the home market are often overlooked and as a result unrealised. The 2003 Smithsonian Folklife Festival, the 2004 SXSW (South By South West) music convention, WOMEX (2003/2004) and Showcase Scotland at Celtic Connections are all excellent examples of the proper exploitation of our artists to their and to Scotland's immense benefit. Patricia Ferguson MSP, Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport also sees the benefits of these initiatives, which must grow and continue to attract Executive support. SXSW in 2005 will again contain a Scottish Showcase following the success of the inaugural representation in 2004. The Scottish Music Industry Association could focus on this international element, with decent resources put aside for this critically important promotional activity for our cultural industries. (See item 12 in our original response)

7. **Local Authorities (44-47):** The Scottish Executive can assist in creating a level playing field on which all 32 authorities can operate in concentrating on cultural provision for the communities they serve. As already intimated, some are better than others in this regard, but the YMI has broken both barriers and perceptions and would be a good place for the commission to start. Many authorities have too easily reneged on their responsibilities earlier laid down by the now seemingly defunct COSLA recommendations. We do hope that if the Commission highlights nothing else, it is that all 32 authorities in Scotland must prioritise cultural activity as they do good health and good education.
8. **Regional Bodies (48-51):** we are unsure what is meant by a regional body. We already have 32 of them, which at worst is 32 ivory towers.
9. **National (52-58):** To have achieved national status is not a prize, but an identity. Companies are truly "national" if they serve the people of Scotland and are accessible to all. They must also not trade on tokenism. Secure financial planning must be afforded our national companies as it must be afforded to the SAC. Their commitment in return is to provide the highest quality of work to the greatest number of people across the broadest range. That comes as much from education and development work as from performance. They should also be able to promote their work internationally and to record and broadcast to the widest possible audience base. These are flagship companies and can be exploited by the Executive to promote Scotland, far more than has been the case, to date.

- The national companies should also have a close working relationship with Scotland's communities through the respective local authorities and too much of their work in this regard is not highlighted enough. Do not overuse the word "Scottish" as much of the work that comes from Scotland and the artists who choose to work from a Scottish base are not naturally born Scots, but love Scotland with a passion that is always evident in their work and the promotion of that work outwith Scotland.

10. Cross-Cutting (59-62): The Stewartville Street Annexe in Partick, Glasgow is a living example of successful interaction between the arts, health programmes, drug rehabilitation work and alcohol abuse treatment. This is but one example of where the arts, in partnership with other agencies have benefited the lives of individuals and communities. The music industry has also worked closely with tourism, sport and with education to ensure that the exploitation of our members across all genres is related to the wider benefit their work can bring. Each cultural sector has its strengths and we are already following the lead of sport in appointing cultural co-ordinators for our schools. The more secure the partnerships can be the better the network for delivery of cultural rights to every citizen in Scotland. The infrastructure and support mechanisms must be securely in place before this ideal can become a reality.

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