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LIBRARIES



27 AUG 2004

Chairman
Stuart James
University of Paisley Library
Paisley PA1 2BE

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

25 August 2004

Dear James,

Submission to the Cultural Commission by the Ayrshire Libraries Forum

The Ayrshire Libraries Forum was established in 1998 as a voluntary collaboration of local library services. Its mission is to improve information provision to, and learning opportunities for, residents of the county of Ayrshire by developing public sector partnerships. The Forum includes three public libraries, two higher and three further education libraries, four hospital and health libraries, and school libraries throughout the county. The National Library of Scotland has also become a full member of the Forum.

Core aims are to promote the learning habit and develop a culture of lifelong learning among all members of the community. Facilitating wider access to, and greater use of, cultural activities and materials are key components of these aims. Our intention is to make services, facilities and materials available for local access in support of the public's lifelong learning and cultural needs at any required level from formal to informal, from basic to advanced, for any age group on any subject or in pursuit of any generic skill or purpose. While primarily providing services for regional and local community needs, we will enable these services and facilities to form part of the wider national grid for learning and culture.

It is natural, given our mission and activities over the last six years, that our submission to the Commission should emphasise the value of partnerships across different sectors in providing access, at all levels and by various means, to culture for all citizens, primarily in Ayrshire, but beyond that throughout Scotland by still wider collaborations. Similarly, while our activities as library and information services, lead us primarily in the direction of literary culture (and information for and about Scottish culture), we would also stress the benefits of partnership working at both local and national levels on a still wider basis – with museums, archives, art galleries, performing and producing agencies and individuals.

Libraries exist and operate at different levels and in various ways within cultural processes: through their collections as preservers and purveyors of literature; as sources of raw material and inspiration; through their buildings as locations for cultural activities of all kinds, including performance, display and social or more formal meetings; and through their activities in stimulating reading among all social groups and all age ranges, but with special reference to children and teenagers.

Varying levels of local provision can be ameliorated by collaboration on different levels. But it must also be stressed that collaboration supplements and cannot, and must not be allowed, to substitute for proper provision of resources by local bodies. Improved access to wider ranges of materials of all kinds is an obvious benefit to all; the experience of the Ayrshire Libraries Forum has been in county-wide collaboration. We have warmly welcomed the recent strategy document of the National Library of Scotland as extending its provision out of Edinburgh and across the country and look forward to collaborating with NLS in pursuing the reality of that policy. We are also embarking on a SLIC-funded project to explore direct access by users to material in the collections of member libraries. Once this has been established within Ayrshire, SLIC will look to our expertise to roll the service out across Scotland.

We raise these initiatives to demonstrate the importance of collaboration starting on a local basis and developing nationally. We believe that these examples can be applied more widely across many cultural activities in Scotland, involving producers, facilitators, and suppliers and enabling them, and the public at large, to gain maximum benefit from one another's expertise and resources.

This co-operation is enabled by the use of information technology. Indeed, it would be impossible to achieve what has been achieved without IT support. The People's Network has been an outstanding success within public libraries, while JISC services underpin HE and FE at all levels. These have, for at the time very good reasons, been taken forward on a sectoral basis. What is now needed is a cross-sectoral approach to IT exploitation, whether within a cultural, educational or civic context.

The use of IT for basic communication is well established and, while developments and improvements are always being pursued (such as in the SLIC Resource Sharing project), this can generally be left to the library sector. Much has been done in terms of using IT for content creation, of educational, community or historical materials but here there is much greater scope both for amounts of work, and for collaboration across sectors and domains. One local example is an Ayrshire Libraries Forum project between member libraries and Ayrshire Archives to create material illustrating the history of Ayrshire. Other examples exist across the country, but there is still enormous scope for further development - on a local, regional, national and even international basis. The funding for such work is currently opportunistic with a lack of national co-ordination. Funding and resource discovery are therefore areas where the Commission might wish to recommend a more logical and structured approach.

IT is also increasingly fundamental to the provision of 'purchased' information, some based on existing or former printed services, others using the power of IT to create new and valuable electronic resources. Here there is a clear and detrimental divide between sectors as a result of commercial contracts, which also preclude the sharing of resources on the basis which we have developed for printed materials. The Scottish Confederation of University and Research Libraries is investigating a national licence for

purchase of science material, which would be accessed through any publicly funded library in Scotland. If this licence is successful, it should provide a model that could be applied more widely across Scotland, although there will of course be major funding implications.

Current sector-specific funding arrangements imposed by Executive and agency funding models have a major negative impact on cross-sectoral collaboration. If the benefits of partnership working indicated in our submission are to be realised, this funding anomaly has to be addressed. Levels of difficulty encountered at the moment within the library domain between local authority and HE/FE libraries (the merger of the Funding Councils might help address one of these anomalies) are compounded when attempts are made to work across domains i.e. between libraries, archives, museums and other cultural areas. Given the geographic, demographic, social and economic circumstances of Scotland, partnership working at all levels is an obvious benefit. Artificial administrative or bureaucratic and financial barriers must be removed for the country as a whole to gain the best value from investment in services and projects.

We would therefore urge the Commission to:

- recognise and affirm the value of partnerships between organisations in different sectors in promoting cultural activity and access to culture;
- recognise and affirm the value of such partnerships at local, regional and national levels;
- affirm the place of all publicly-funded libraries in the development, promotion and delivery of all types of cultural activity;
- urge that libraries be properly resourced at the local level, both to allow them to continue and expand their existing missions, and to enable them to play a proactive role in wider partnerships;
- commend the strategy of the National Library of Scotland in taking its services out to local communities and potential users across the country, by both physical and virtual means;
- note the high level and value of existing collaboration among libraries in Scotland and commend both its continuation and wider development;
- note the value of the high level of IT provision in libraries across Scotland and urge the Executive and its agencies to ensure funding is in place for its long-term sustainability and further development;
- note and, when appropriate, commend to the Executive attempts to secure national licences for Scotland for purchase of published electronic information and literature;
- urge the Executive to address and remove anomalies and restrictions in funding across different sectors of public provision in Scotland.

Yours sincerely,



Stuart James
Chairman, Ayrshire Libraries Forum