

Cultural Commission: Pan-Sectoral Questions Response from the Scottish Poetry Library

1-5 Rights, Entitlements and Responsibilities

Cultural rights are inextricably bound up with rights in other fields – education, the economy, social justice – and cannot be exercised independently of these. Cultural policy, similarly, cannot be developed independently of policy in such areas, and as these areas are the responsibility of the Scottish Executive answering to the Scottish Parliament, then they must also take responsibility for the broad delineation of cultural policy and standards. Cultural rights are already enshrined in various declarations and conventions to which the UK is a signatory, however, and to enshrine them in Scottish law seems to be a misdirection of energies and focus. It would require some very precise definitions that are unlikely to serve the cultural community well, and may be contested, whereas keeping the broad lines of the conventions – on the right to the dignity and development of the individual personality, for example, and the right to freely participate in and share the benefits of the cultural life of the community – keeps the outlines broad but allows for policy developments to underpin them.

Culture should not be seen as a tool of social policy, but as valuable in itself and therefore contributory to social welfare. A child whose imagination and creative gifts are stimulated will be a more confident and responsive person, but if that same child has no opportunity to develop those gifts (e.g. because tuition is only available for a year, or there are not enough teachers to support arts programmes), and goes home to a house where the income is inadequate, the parents unconcerned, in a town/city/village where there is no provision for local theatre or arts classes or sport, and no decent public transport to reach such amenities, then 'culture' cannot flourish. This requires a great degree of joined-up thinking, and planning, but doesn't require a law.

If Parliament/the Executive has broad responsibility for cultural policy – as for education, transport and housing – then it needs to consult with the community it serves, artists and arts workers of all kinds – not in order to establish a 'standard consumer model' for the arts but in order that the artforms themselves – and all that is critical and experimental in these forms – should flourish, as well as their creators and users, performers and audiences.

The Executive may choose to do this through an advisory body, which could review cultural policy and the way arts organizations in receipt of public monies fulfil the aims of the policies, and whether these policies need amendment etc.

6-15 Cultural leadership

The First Minister's 30 November 2003 speech raised expectations of a strongly committed governmental lead for culture, which is not apparent within the Executive's own hierarchy. Culture should be seen as a powerful contributor to the welfare, education, economy and international profile of Scotland – an intangible and tangible aspect of the wealth of the nation. Thus its status needs improvement within the Executive in order to assert cultural rights and priorities more eloquently and productively.

The arms-length principle remains worthwhile and appropriate because cultural development and enrichment is a long-term project, not divisible into three/four-year terms or indeed part of the political process that delivers electoral gains in the way that e.g. better roads, shorter NHS queues do. The Parliament should appoint a body able to take this long-term view and then have the confidence to stand back and let them get on with policy-making and funding.

Such a body might have a two-tier system: an Arts-Council-type organization that formulates detailed policy for answering larger policy aims, that enables cross-sectoral co-operation, and can lobby the government for changes to the broader policy and funding increases or amendments. It could report to a larger Board of elected/nominated members that meets say 2/3 times a year with the Minister in attendance, including representatives of the constituency, local government, voluntary arts, universities and artists themselves to discuss policy and strategy. This larger Board would be on a 3-5 year rotational basis.

I am sure that the Cultural Commission and the government is aware of the new structure in place in Wales and will be looking at that model with interest.

The effective representation of artists is difficult because what they want most of all is to be left to get on with their work in peace! Meetings involve loss of work time and loss of income – at least there could be payment for consultation.

Similarly, the difficulty of grassroots organizations is their inevitably changing nature – perhaps their best connections are with local authorities.

With regard to strategic & operational alignment between Scottish agencies/organizations and UK cultural agencies, perhaps there could be a presentational forum once a year where a rotating group of organizations could meet and learn what each other is doing?

16-21 Pan-Sectoral Planning

I am not sure what is implied by this set of questions. It sounds like an extra layer of bureaucracy – or does it imply a replacement for the SAC?

22-33 Funding arrangements

If the money for support for the cultural sector comes from taxpayers, then clearly the government must have some control over its disbursement, but it need only do so broadly: allotting £x billion for 'culture', and devolving spending decisions to a non-governmental body with transparent procedures.

If the model of a two-tier structure suggested above were adopted, the funding allotment would be decided by the SAC-type body, and approved or disputed by the larger Board. The funding within each cultural sector would be a matter for the SAC-type body. As it does now, it can lay down certain criteria in its funding agreements.

The big national companies skew public perception of cultural finances, and should be hived off from the cultural budget, although this leaves open the question of applying for project funding. On the Welsh model, these companies would include the national

Opera, the National Ballet, the National Orchestra, the National Theatre. If the Cultural Commission accepts the model for Literature as submitted by the Literature Forum, then the organization outlined there as 'Literature Scotland' might qualify as a national company rather than having individual elements qualifying for that designation.

State monies should not be guaranteed for traditional & indigenous arts: who is to judge whether poetry is less 'indigenous' than folksong or basket-weaving?

The greatest difficulty facing most arts organizations is the division between core and project funding. In the case of the SPL, for example, part of the funding for our education programme has come from project funding, whereas we consider it to be a core activity; ditto for marketing. Longer funding horizons would be one way of dealing with this.

Surely organisations' annual reports and accounts show expenditure and activities, and it is by these that interested members of the public can trace the use of taxpayers' money; and overall through the grants listed by the SAC? What further level of reporting can be asked for? Perhaps there is some means of constructing an end-of-year 'cultural balance sheet' showing the number of people participating in arts activities across the board, the number of people employed and so forth – which could be available to consult on a relevant website.

34-37 Standards & evaluation

The problem of evaluation is applying the same standards to large and small organizations whose aims and reach are different. It seems that quantity is all, not the quality of the experience. Perhaps setting targets for maintenance/increase is more relevant than absolute numbers.

To whom are these evaluations relevant? Presumably to the funding bodies and the taxpayer ultimately. Are annual reports not sufficient? The more reporting small organizations have to do, the more burdensome they find it.

Again, a plea for standard reporting as well as standard applications to Local Authorities.

39-43 Operations and administration

With regard to the maintenance of 'cultural property', it might be useful within the larger cities to have a 'bank' arrangement, a service shared between several buildings (e.g. Dance Base, SPL, SBT, SSC) so that matters from minor repairs to maintenance contracts could be delegated to a shared service for which each organization would pay an appropriate proportion.

Again, in the matter of IT development, perhaps a 'bank' arrangement by which several web designers and IT technicians were centrally paid for, with contributions from each organization and perhaps some central funding – and could be drawn on both for prearranged projects and in emergencies, and also in planning IT developments/requirements. This might help to avoid duplication of effort and allow for greater co-operation.

We would be happy to see advocacy for the literature sector in the hands of one organization e.g. 'Literature Scotland' representing the many relevant organizations.

International cultural development should be part of the SAC-type body's concerns, acting as brokers and development funders.

44-47 Local authorities

National standards for the provision of cultural facilities and services are difficult to impose on such widely varying regions, from the islands to the central belt. We have seen, however, in the establishment of cultural co-ordinators' posts, how varied the interpretation has been of these posts, their back-up and their financing. This may have been an example of individual definitions across councils being left too open.

One thing that would be very useful would be to have a standard form for applying for grants from local authorities – as the SAC has for all project applications – and an easy way of finding out from local authorities when their deadlines are and what their outline grant budgets are.

48-51 Regional bodies

I do not believe that there is any need for 'regional bodies', which could only lead to new levels of bureaucracy: more time spent on applying, reporting, evaluating and meetings.

52-58 National

National companies are those organizations with a clear national remit in that they house the treasures of the nation – galleries, museums, libraries (and these are not necessarily confined to the current organizations with 'national' in their title – Kelvingrove Museum in Glasgow, for example, is arguably a collection of national importance) should be funded directly by the government and have a clear remit that relates to their national status: free access, touring, loaning works, sharing expertise, whatever is appropriate to their form.

It is not as clear, but is definitely the case, that some literary organizations e.g. Scottish Book Trust, Scottish Poetry Library, Scottish Storytelling Centre, Gaelic Book Council have a nationwide remit and find it difficult to get local authority support for their activities which do benefit many areas and contribute to the authorities' cultural provision. There is a case to be made for such organizations – and no doubt some music and theatre groups – to be at least partially funded as 'national companies' in so far as they fulfil a national role. Or the government could treat a body which consisted of all the main literature organizations as a 'national company' and thus fund it directly.

An annual reporting structure could then be agreed for such companies, with an account both financial and narrative of their activities, on which their continued funding would be based. Under this new system of direct funding, a constitution and governance model could be set up that may need adaptation according to artform but which should have centrally definitive aspects.

They could apply to the local authorities for projects based in those localities, but their core funding should take into account touring, maintaining buildings, staffing levels etc.

An element of 'Scottishness' should be built into the notion of national, and in terms of standards, the provision of whatever service or artform should be comparable in international terms. Because there is no indigenous tradition of ballet choreography, for example, it may be inappropriate to insist that Scottish ballet produce 'Scottish dancing', but not inappropriate to ask that they commission choreography once a year from a Scottish-based choreographer or use music composed by a Scottish composer as the basis of one programme item a year – something along those lines. Scottish literature is more easily defined, and promoting the knowledge of that at home and abroad comes easily and naturally to most of the literature organizations so would be a straightforward condition to apply to them and with which they could comply.

59-62 Cross-cutting

I have no comment to make.

lan

From: lan
Sent: 13 January 2005 13:31
To: info
Subject: FW: pan sectoral questions[Scanned]

-----Original Message-----

From: Robyn Marsack [mailto:rmarsack@spl.org.uk]
Sent: 11 January 2005 18:09
To: Ian
Subject: pan sectoral questions[Scanned]

I am attaching some answers to the 62 questions you sent out last year. I'd like to register my feeling that these were - or should have been - the questions you started out with, and to receive them at this stage of proceedings, after your initial consultations, was very dispiriting. This feeling may be widespread.

Let me know if you have difficulty in opening the attachment.

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