

Cultural Commission Stakeholder Consultation Phase 2

Response from the Ayrshire Libraries Forum (ALF)

Cultural entitlements and responsibilities

In the case of public libraries members of the public have automatic rights of access to services and collections. For other members of ALF access is automatic for members of the institutions concerned and is normally available more widely to the public with minimum formality. One of the core aims of ALF is to maximise access to one another's collections and services.

For access to commercial electronic material, while ALF members have an obvious interest in enhancing this, the means to achieving it are better seen as a national initiative or initiatives. National deals across all sectors, but for local delivery through libraries in all sectors, would seem to make the most efficient use of investment from Scottish public funds while allowing universal access to citizens on a local basis.

Wider agendas of lifelong learning, social inclusion and local economic development are fundamental aims of ALF to which all of its activities are geared. The inclusion of cultural services of all kinds in wider initiatives, where relevant, should be an important outcome from the Commission's work.

ALF works successfully on a partnership basis, but as services develop and expand and collaboration becomes closer across sectors, it becomes necessary to have rights of access codified and, if thought necessary, backed up by legislation. Much of this codifying activity is under way, initially on a local basis but likely to expand to other areas of Scotland, especially within the context of the SLIC Resource Sharing Scotland project being undertaken by ALF members.

We cover below possible forms of future governance and these will assume responsibility for maintaining and ensuring cultural rights, entitlements and responsibilities at all levels.

Cultural leadership

The initial establishment of ALF was facilitated by SLIC and the National Library of Scotland is a member of ALF. We are satisfied that leadership within the library domain is available when needed and is effective. The possible establishment of a

cross-domain high-level body might strengthen leadership and governance, although it would need to do so without interfering in local initiatives and services such as ALF. If it were to enable and support such local initiatives, and enable national initiatives such as national licensing of electronic materials for local delivery, it would perform a vital function.

Local initiatives can only derive from local bodies, although informed or enlightened by examples of initiatives in other areas. In that context, local authorities seem the natural bodies to facilitate initiatives, although as partners with other local providers such as HE and FE. The facilitation of such cross-sectoral partnership working, whether by loosening funding restrictions or active central encouragement, is key to future developments at the local level.

While satisfied with the leadership provided by SLIC and NLS, ALF members would note the desirability of a high-level body to co-ordinate cross-domain heritage and similar services from archives, libraries and museums. This could be established as a federal body with representatives of a range of bodies and institutions, but one which should have Executive presence and access to (and influence on) strategic planning and central funding.

Pan-sectoral planning

The kind of heritage body indicated above would seem a natural point of contact with other high-level cultural organisations as well as with the Executive. Part of its remit could be to advise the Minister on funding priorities across all cultural domains, as well as co-ordination of the distribution of project or capital funding across or within domains. Recurrent funding of individual services in all kinds of institution or authority would continue to be an issue for each funding source: the funds suggested previously would be seen as additional to an adequate basic resource of each service, not subtracted from it. Poor resourcing of public libraries especially leads, of course, to a form of cultural deprivation where the public is denied access to materials because resources do not permit their purchase.

Funding arrangements

Basic recurrent funding arrangements should remain unaltered as long as library services remain the responsibility of their present authorities or institutions. Project funding, however, would benefit from a higher level cross-domain body which could issue funds to cross sectoral organisations or individual organisations for development or other (most commonly digitisation) projects judged on their intrinsic merits and not affected by issues of what sector or sectors (or domains) the applicants are in.

Such a body might also act as a 'watchdog' to ensure that services are being adequately funded by their parent authorities or institutions. National agencies would be represented on such a body and could thereby add their expertise to any issues which arose.

The National Library of Scotland is charged with the role of collecting and preserving indigenous Scottish literature in any language; that role could be supported by local library services including duplicating collections for local use thus reducing short

term pressure on the NLS collection. Such a system would require widespread agreement and co-ordination, presumably by the NLS, to work to everybody's greater benefit.

Library services of all kinds presently engage in best value and benchmarking exercises to demonstrate their value for money. Increasing that activity would impose a severe bureaucratic burden on services, although a central co-ordinating authority could collect existing data and analyse and compare it across sectors.

Standards and evaluation

Leading on from present evaluative studies within and across library services, it would be possible to develop standards of service outcomes across sectors. While that would be a role for a higher level authority, useful work is already being done and could be usefully piloted further within local groups of services.

Operations and administration

IT is already used intensively across archive, library and museum services both for basic functions and to develop innovative services. Local initiatives are vital and fruitful, although there is a role for a governing body in publicising these initiatives both to the profession(s) more widely and to potential users outside the immediate catchment area of each project. Advocacy would also be a natural function for such a body. IT development within and for library services is already well established between the public and commercial sectors; the main role in this regard would be obtaining and allocating funds for consortial purchases to develop new services or initiatives by partnerships.

While individual services have various international contacts, more widespread or formal international cultural relations are best left to a suitable national body. This body should, in turn, support existing contacts and introduce possible new contacts to relevant library services.

Local authorities

The role of local authorities is implicit in our comments elsewhere in this submission. For local authority (i.e. public) libraries, ALF members would support the production of national public library standards coupled with ring-fenced funding and enforced by legislation.

Regional bodies

The Ayrshire Libraries Forum can claim success in its voluntary federal approach to developing and improving services across Ayrshire and so would support a model of regional bodies. From our own experience we would propose that the federal principle be continued, and expanded by defining the roles and aims of such a body more closely, thereby bringing in to its activities an even wider range of organisations than at present. It would face both inwards to the county as at present, and outwards to any higher level authority which might be established. It would also be a natural regional organisation to take on devolved responsibilities from any national strategic planning.

Such a body would also form a natural constituent of any wider regional cultural bodies which might be set up, with representatives both of ALF itself and of its constituent members.

ALF has begun an initial study to be able to demonstrate the economic value of the Resource Sharing Scotland project, in addition to its service value. Such work could be expanded into studies to demonstrate the justification for investment in regional collaborative services, although given the administrative burden thereby imposed, this would need to be seen as a separately funded exercise, possibly using outside consultants.

National

The National Library of Scotland is a member of ALF and is seen by other members as a key player both nationally in its own right, obviously, and in support of regional or local initiatives. Any proposals by the Commission should therefore take account of the need to maintain a strong National Library and to develop its 'outreach' services as stated in the NLS strategy.

Cross-cutting

ALF would be pleased to liaise more closely with tourism and other bodies within its area; individual members already have varying degrees of such contact, but a greater degree of formalisation would demonstrate the mutual benefits to be had from further collaboration. It should be clear that heritage initiatives and collections within ALF members can impact on tourism as well as on lifelong learning. There is also considerable actual and potential synergy with economic development initiatives.

Marketing Scottish culture abroad is best left to a suitable national agency. There is much value to be had from co-ordinated and carefully planned marketing within regions both within heritage services themselves and across heritage and other services. This requires funding which is not readily available in members' recurrent budgets but which would form a suitable topic for seedcorn funding from a national or regional body.

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13 January 2005

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Please find attached a submission under Phase 2 from the Ayrshire Libraries Forum

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