

CULTURAL COMMISSION

Public Consultation Phase 2 – Pan-Sectoral questions: An individual Submission

A Preamble: Meaning of Culture

1 I believe that it would be helpful for the Commission to acknowledge that there is a distinction between *culture* in the broadest sense of the ways of life of a group, and the *arts* as imaginative expressions of and responses to that culture. The arts are certainly one important set of components within any culture but they are not synonymous with it, as the consultations seem to imply. Very significant constituents of our distinctive culture are not normally regarded as falling directly within the sphere of the arts: politics, religion, history, agriculture, law, sport and environmental issues are but a few examples. For the sake of clarity I should therefore like to see a national strategy which explicitly treats Culture and the Arts as distinct but conjoined areas of human activity

2 There is of course no end to the defining of Culture. Pragmatically however I suggest that the Commission should make use of an inclusive interpretation such as: ‘. . . the transmitted, ever-changing but distinctive customs, achievements, products, outlooks, ideas, ways of life of a society or group’.

I think it important to bear in mind that:

- * The role of the education system in selecting, privileging and transmitting aspects of culture is of the greatest importance.
- * The complex language situation in Scotland is a crucial cultural factor.
- * As well as its contemporary manifestations culture carries a legacy from the past: heritage is an inherent component of culture.
- * Culture in this broad sense is not necessarily and uniformly ‘a good thing’. Some manifestations of Scottish culture are far from benign: take for example the conjunction of football rivalries and religious bigotry or the stubborn persistence of unhealthy dietary habits.
- * Culture operates at interacting levels: global, international, national and regional.
- * While it is difficult to show that particular components are unique to Scotland, its general cultural mix may well be identified as nationally distinctive and worthy of recognition.

3 Defining the arts is also fraught with difficulty, but practically I recommend that the Commission rely on the broad statement found in SAC’s *Charter for the Arts*, 1993. This definition, based on Public Law 209 of the US Congress, does not struggle with explanations of art but lists activities generally regarded as *the arts* (*Charter for the Arts*, p 4).

I believe that in considering the arts the Commission should bear in mind that certain balances need to be struck:

- * In fostering the contemporary arts, strategy should also sustain the inheritance of past artistic achievements.
- * It should be recognised that there are several equally valid modes of artistic activity, essentially creating, performing and appreciating. For there is always a danger, and it may lurk in the deliberations of the Commission, that much more attention will be paid to the ‘performing arts’ and the ‘cultural industries’ than to the less assertive needs of individual artists and of individual readers, listeners and viewers.
- * We should not be obsessed by distinctions and hierarchies among amateur and professional, high, popular, traditional and innovative art forms but insist nonetheless upon quality in all areas.

B Questionnaire

Despite the above reservations I am responding briefly to a selection of the questions as posed.

A statement of cultural rights should have the clear practical purpose of setting overarching aims, targets and standards for all involved in the arts and cultural life throughout Scotland: the artists, the consuming public, educators, legislators. . . . all stakeholders. These should amount to a code of legal entitlements and should be used to govern all public funding in 'culture and the arts'

2. *Should cultural rights be enshrined in law?*

The defined cultural entitlements of the Scottish citizen should be enacted by the Scottish Parliament. Particular emphasis should be given to establishing a birthright for all young people in the Scottish Executive's proposed *Curriculum for Excellence* 3-18. This should ensure that from nursery upwards their learning includes planned experiences of Scotland's cultural heritage.

3. *How should cultural rights reflect other areas of social policy, such as inclusion or social justice?*

If cultural rights are broadly defined, as at A1 above, they should be able to take generous account of other areas of national policy such as social justice for all sectors of society. Within this broad view of culture, however, artists and the arts, must never be regarded as convenient agents of social policy.

6. *How do we give grassroots organisations a stronger voice in the decision-making processes and how should the grassroots sector be represented and consulted?*

Full and persisting use should be made of media, the web and widespread meetings such as the Commission has been conducting, in order to grow habits of public involvement and promote bids for funding.

9. *What criteria should funding bodies use when deciding who to fund?*

Any arts enterprise should be considered for funding if it can demonstrate that its application addresses the relevant aims, targets and standards of the national entitlement (B1 and 2 above)

14. *Do we need to define the term "adequate provision" in regard to local authorities current responsibilities, including the requirement to develop local cultural strategies within the context of community planning, and if so, how?*

Local authorities should be expected and enabled to meet, within their 'local' areas of responsibility, the aims, targets and standards of the national entitlement.

15. *What are the merits and practicalities of adopting national standards for the provision of cultural facilities and services?*

The advantage of establishing a code of cultural entitlements is that it will avoid or at least expose 'postcode lotteries' in cultural provision. It will work, however, only if there is wholehearted, lasting commitment and resourcing by the Scottish Executive.

19. *What privileges/special considerations should be afforded to national companies and what responsibilities should accompany these privileges?*

If arts organisations have national scope in their ambitions and responsibilities, their privileges should be proportionate, but they must always be expected to measure up to the requirements implicit in the national entitlement.

20. *What standards of performance and production should we expect of our national*

companies and what commitment to Scottish work and Scottish talent should the national companies have?

It is easy but also essential to insist that national cultural organisations such as libraries, orchestras, museums, public broadcasting, theatre companies and publishing houses which secure public funding must set their standards by the code of cultural entitlements advocated throughout this submission. By definition their national aspirations should entail the cherishing and promotion of good quality work and talent of Scottish provenance. This commitment should not be minimal or token: it must be seen to be a substantial keystone of their activities.

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