

Ack by
Email 18/01/05

43

Ian

From: Murray Tyrrell [murray.tyrrell@blueyonder.co.uk]
Sent: 13 January 2005 22:32
To: info
Subject: Phase2 of the Consultation[Scanned]

Dear

I am a member of a group with broadly nationalist leanings. We have been working together for a year now to put together a coherent and cohesive cultural policy for Scotland. Robert Seaton, who is a lawyer, is submitting a report from the group as a whole but individuals in the group will also be submitting their own contributions. I should say at the outset that the members of our group had little respect for the Consultation and the Questionnaire. Quite apart from the appointees in the Commission and how they are appointed, I would think that any consultation should be as accessible to the mass of people as possible if we are going to view culture and the arts as something popular. There were 62 questions in the Questionnaire and 10 sections. As one of our group, a writer, said, "It would need a doctorate to answer many of the questions." They struck me as highly exclusive and I would imagine that only the exclusive members and groups of our society have replied to a document which should have been inclusive and accessible to everyone. This sadly has not been the case. Anyway I am attaching my meagre contribution, which in part went to forming part of our group's contribution. I hope you will take on board much of what has been said. We are looking for a really radical change in the place of culture in our society. By putting forward a questionnaire of this type will not help. I wonder who really contributed to this phase!

Best wishes

Murray Tyrrell

14/01/2005

The Cultural Commission Phase2 Questionnaire Reply by Murray Tyrrell

I should say at the outset that I have reservations about the questionnaire in two respects; it is much too long with too many questions for many people and much of the language is quite technical and would exclude many people from even participating in this consultation. Culture should be in the domain of all and not an elite minority.

Cultural Rights, Entitlements and Responsibilities

Culture is the ownership of an individual and a community. This should be recognised and is as an international right. Such things as language are already mentioned in international, European and national Rights charters. Denying people these as has happened in the past in our history is denying people their fundamental cultural human rights. This should be enshrined in our national legislation and the judiciary should be the custodians of upholding these basic human rights. The use of Gaelic and Scots are two such issues in Scotland.

Cultural Leadership

Culture and politics should be separated as much as possible. There should be a Minister of Culture but he/she should come from the field of the arts and should not be predominantly a politician. Leadership should come from many areas especially perhaps the education sector from primary to higher levels and they should seek to find ways of introducing our culture into the school curriculum and the university courses. Many English students studying in Scotland would have welcomed a course on Scottish culture as part of their university studies. Leadership too should come from local authorities (groups of people working in the arts) and less from the central level of government.

Pan-Sectoral Planning

The Executive and national agencies like the Arts Council should have as little as possible to do with the pan-sectoral planning of our culture. Years of experience have not shown the Executive to be effective at all and for most politicians our culture is very much on the periphery and takes second place. I would like to see pan-sectoral groups coming together at city/regional level. They could meet annually or more often to exchange ideas and common interests.

Funding Arrangements

Cutting tax and offering tax breaks are just a few ways of helping the cultural sector. In many ways I have more faith in local authorities making funding arrangements. This could be done by allocating a part of council tax to the arts, not expecting a local artist to pay any council tax for his/her workshop, encouraging local businesses to fund the arts etc. We cannot say that a local writer is more or less important than a local artist or musician etc. Monies should be spent equally on all the art forms.

Standards and Evaluation

Even when certain criteria are established to evaluate the arts, it can be very difficult to be absolutely fair especially in the field of the arts where personal likes and dislikes can intrude so easily. Many of the people who decide at present might be said to be establishment figures and one could question how they got their posts in the first instance. I would suggest that any evaluation is carried out by a wide range of practitioners in the arts coming from all the art sectors and indeed from different social and political backgrounds. Democratic decisions might be reached under these circumstances.

Operations and Administration

There would indeed be a case for a co-ordinated management especially in such areas like IT and Advocacy. Again central government incentives should be given to local initiatives such as galleries, museums etc where funding could be provided for building maintenance. Often such initiatives depend on Lottery money and it is a real lottery as to who gets what and if one gets. As much management and administration as possible should be kept at the most local level. This would avoid the unnecessary bureaucracy and hence costs which are often occurred at central level of government. Local/national culture should be influenced at a European level, not only the ideas of the artists themselves but the ways of promoting and encouraging the arts. Much of our cultural history has been influenced through contact with other cultures. This should be deepened and widened. Representatives from the many fields of art should be able to travel world-wide to exchange ideas. Monies and expenses could come from the national airlines. Why not fill a few a few empty seats on a flight to San Paolo or Rome rather than not having them used at all!

Local Authorities

I do not think that local authorities should be forced by central government to make any 'adequate provision' for culture. This might cause resentment. Every local

authority should find its own way to do this such as by waving council taxes to local art practitioners etc. The different council authorities do meet quite regularly and they will learn from each other ways of implementing ways to encourage local culture and often this will mean helping local practitioners financially.

Regional Bodies

One of the questions put forward in this questionnaire is the appropriate level to decide on and manage cultural issues. It should be done at different levels but for me at regional level is one of the best. The local residents in the Highlands and Islands Region of Scotland have done a lot to promote their own culture. This has not happened just a local level of Inverness. A regional body should be democratically elected. Members should come from all the political parties and from all the different art forms. Too much of our culture is decided by authorities and perhaps national agencies which are all too often associated with just one party.

National

In a small country like Scotland I would much rather see money being spent on smaller initiatives rather than national Companies like Scottish Opera or Scottish Theatre. World class operas, theatres, quartets, symphonies, art galleries etc have generally originated in one town or city and not at a national level. This can be seen clearly in Germany where great cultural institutions have grown up in the Land rather than in the country as a whole. The arts should first and foremost be promoted and encouraged at a local level.

Cross-cutting

Cross-cutting is very important. When areas of our culture are promoted by the tourist agencies and by cultural organisation working with them, the local economy can often improve. This will only have a beneficial spin-off for the artists. More money should be made available to send our artists (all people working in all the different fields of art) to the many festivals in the world. In a time of globalisation our culture must be influenced by what is happening in different parts of the world. We should have much more media attention. Very often the Italians learn about Scotland through RAI television and the Germans through Deutscher Rundfunk and not through our own promotional agencies. At a local level an awareness of local culture and history can provide many young people with more pride in their localities. This can lead to a lowering of the incidents of crime and a deeper sense of self confidence and awareness of being included as part of society. Many young people should be

encouraged to express themselves in different art forms. Money should be made available for this. Sport likewise should be encouraged. We should remember it is the doing and not the passive which is the really important. Playing an instrument or writing poetry and playing a sport are more important than being mere onlookers. Sport and the arts do have a real social value. We should always remember that. If it leads to a lowering in crime and better public health it must be all for the good.