

CULTURAL COMMISSION

STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION: PHASE 2

PAN-SECTORAL QUESTIONS

NOVEMBER 2004

Rights, Entitlements and Responsibilities

Cultural rights should be enshrined in a national constitution, which in the case of the UK entails the framing of such as constitution in the first place, but should be a prerequisite for Scotland on the assumption of independence. Cultural rights are important enough to stand alongside other forms of freedom and equality. The existence of such a constitution would plant the responsibility for upholding such rights fairly and squarely at the level of the nation state, although this need not exclude the creation of tiers of implementation. There are role models to be found across the world, not least in the member states of the European Union, notably those comparable in size and in other ways to Scotland, such as the Baltic States. Nordic countries also have made formidable statements of responsibility in terms of national culture.

Cultural Leadership

The number and range of the questions in this section in themselves provide clear evidence for the fragmented nature of cultural leadership in Scotland at the present time, and highlight the need for the rationalisation of management. I don't have the expertise to be able to suggest precisely how this might be done, but am convinced of the need for the avoidance as far as possible of both duplication of roles and of conflicting interests. A clear over-arching area from which rationale and oversight emanates is absolutely necessary, but below this there must remain always the ability for structures to exist which engage at sectoral, local, grassroots and individual levels. Thus, leadership will remain open and dynamic with clear channels of communication to and from these levels, and practitioners will retain a sense of engagement and power. The distinctive roles of local government, academic institutions and the private and commercial sectors are enriching and must be preserved, but this should be done within such a regime as indicated above. Perhaps a focus on more local (regional) bodies which bring together these diversities of interests might be considered ?

More specifically, where formal appointment of leadership bodies such as Boards of Trustees of national institutions is concerned, there is an indisputable need for a radical review to ensure that these are fully accountable to their stakeholders, the people of Scotland.

It is my belief that Scotland should in time have indigenous agencies for all cultural operations. These should take their place within the schema outlined above. At the same time, such agencies should be able to participate in appropriate cross-boundary alliances, such as those successfully demonstrated by Nordic countries.

Pan-Sectoral Planning

Much of my response to this part relates to my response for Cultural Leadership. Above all, it is absolutely necessary that the governmental body which occupies the key position, as Department of Culture (or whatever its title), should be all-encompassing and balanced across culture, widely defined. There is a need, not generally met at present, for its officers, both politicians and civil servants, to be highly informed and interested in the sectors they represent. 'Local / regional', or next tier bodies, may be composed of a wide range of experts and practitioners to represent the full range of cultural sectors. Election on a sectorally proportional basis might be the fairest way of achieving this, but I reserve judgment, again as a non-expert.

Funding arrangements

I have no expertise in this area at all, but it seems to me that in the regime I have suggested above, 'Regional Cultural Boards' might operate in a comparable manner and scale to current Health and Police Authorities. Although I am aware of existing problems in defining the parameters of authority between these and Central government, a funding method through the awarding of block grants with guidelines for distribution seems an even-handed method of distribution. It is accepted that such a method can be more easily and rationally implemented if only a single government (Scottish) is involved and the complications of reserved and devolved areas are removed from the issue.

On the detail, I can comment little. However, there appears to have been an over-emphasis in recent times on accountability in the use of public money and other resources and that greater trust ought to be placed in properly qualified professionals and elected representatives at all levels.

Standards & Evaluation

This is a very tricky area indeed, given the impossibility of framing standards that are applicable across all sectors and modes. Perhaps a more workable approach is to award grants on the basis of the acceptability of detailed proposals submitted by organizations / individuals seeking funding. Sanctions would then relate to the satisfactory completion of the original proposal. In this way the funding body has both initial and final responsibility for judging suitability. But, whatever method is adopted it would be virtually impossible to avoid charges of partiality.

Operations and administration

A number of discrete areas under this one heading !

IT has unquestionable ability to enhance the preservation and dissemination of culture internally in Scotland (in geographical and social contexts where access is difficult for a whole range of reasons) and to spread Scottish culture internationally. Both have inherent benefits as well as those of tourism and commerce commonly held important.

The Scottish Cultural Resources Access Network [SCRAN] has been a world leader in creating a vast and varied multi media database and building digital resources. It now has formidable expertise in the technical and legal aspects of this area, long experience of collaboration with other agencies, and arguably is best placed to take a central role in coordination. I would suggest that the formalisation of a 'Digital Scottish Archive' into a national institution of comparable status to the National Library, Archives, Museums and Galleries, would be a viable proposition. Scottish Universities, with their considerable resources, have also played a significant, if later, role but other, specifically National cultural, institutions have lagged and would significantly benefit from coordinated, securely funded, support.

Over all responsibility for Scotland's international cultural development must lie ultimately with the present Scottish Parliament or its successor. The present situation, however, of partially devolved status, has led to problems of direct participation in EU and UN cultural agendas, and hence knowledge of them. Particularly, this has meant that Scottish organisations have been disadvantaged in applying for and receiving the very considerable funding available under numerous EU and UN cultural programmes. Cultural management within the country would have to seek ways to achieve direct access and eliminate this deficit.

Local Authorities

Current unevenness across local authorities' provision for cultural resources is indeed disturbing. Especially so, is the precarious position, for instance of small museums, which rely in large part on local government grants on an annual basis for their survival. It does seem that there should be a permanent requirement for basic funding in such cases, but whether a wholesale definition of the responsibilities of local government, as opposed to a higher level source of support, is questionable. The proposal for regional bodies may obviate this question.

Regional Bodies

Covered above

National

Does the use of the term 'companies' imply merely performing companies? If so, how are these assumed to differ from the other national cultural institutions, such as museums, galleries? There seems no intrinsic reason why standards and commitment expected of national 'companies' should be different from those of any other organisation supported by the state in some form.

Scope for sharing resources is infinite and scarcely explored. I would suggest that it is only likely to occur when other, much greater, opportunities for leaders and practitioners to share experiences and expertise are created. Out of such meetings, cooperation tends more naturally to arise. Funding for 'partnerships' has been a popular theme of recent times, especially from supra-national bodies. Its success rate perhaps requires greater investigation.

Cross-cutting

First of all, a government department which encompasses all of these areas, would in itself create a better basis for cooperation.

The proposed Regional bodies also have greater scope than the present situation to gather together representatives from across sectors.

At the level of practical cooperation between individuals, networks can be encouraged by opening out procedures which are a part of the normal experience. For instance, the Clore Duffield Trust scheme, newly formed to train managers from all areas of culture, has as yet little uptake in Scotland, but is already being shown to have the ability to break down barriers between sectors. But, above all, it should be accepted that culture exists for itself. The perceived commercial and social benefits will come anyway, and should never become the *raison d'être*.

Lis Smith
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