

**Cultural Commission
Stakeholder Consultation: Phase 2
Pan-Sectoral Questions
(November 2004)**

**A Response
by
The Poverty Alliance**

January 2005

1 Introduction

1.1 The Poverty Alliance welcomes the continued opportunity to take part in the Cultural Commissions Cultural Consultation. The Poverty Alliance is a national anti-poverty network for Scotland and aims to tackle poverty by:

- Working with communities to help them combat poverty on their own behalf;
- Working with agencies to support them to work more effectively with communities and individuals experiencing poverty;
- Supporting the development of social policies that tackle social exclusion and combat poverty; and
- Promoting changes in public attitudes towards poverty and inequality.

1.2 This response is focused around the Pan-Sectoral Questions issued by the Commission as part of Phase 2 of the consultation process.

1.3 The Pan-Sectoral Questions cover a broad range of issues, subjects and areas. Each 'section' of the questions requires a complete consultation process in themselves in order to find workable, agreeable answers or indeed gather any sort of representative response.

1.4 It is clear from the breadth and depth of the questions that further and continued consultation in addition to what is already taking place needs to be developed in order to reach agreement, understand and practical solutions across all sectors.

1.5 Instead of trying to attempt to answer questions that our out with our knowledge and area of expertise we have used the questions as a starting point for a more general response.

1.6 The Poverty Alliance is holding a consultation with it members and other interested parties at the beginning of February 2005 in partnership with the Scottish Humans Rights Centre and the Commission; it is hoped through that process a more comprehensive response will be developed from a community and voluntary sector perspective.

2 Response

2.1 Participation in a broad range of cultural activities is not available to everyone in Scotland. Predictably those experiencing poverty, disadvantage and social exclusion have the least access. Rights enshrined in law should, amongst other things, protect the vulnerable and disadvantaged in the society. In this sense a Culture Bill of Rights could be used as a starting point from which to ensure access to culture for all.

2.2 The aim of any legal, governance and financial structures put in place as a result of the commission should be to provide a framework to enable the participants and consumers of culture to develop a unique and dynamic culture for Scotland. Such a framework should not be prescriptive or attempt to try and define or influence the development of that culture.

2.3 For example a bill of rights should be used to create the 'ideal' and 'guiding principles' from which the policy/delivery of culture is generated not attempt to define what that culture is.

2.4 Financial structures and funding bodies should provide a way in which 'creators' of culture - artists, museum curators etc - can access funds based on a set of 'guiding principles' but not attempt to develop that culture or define what that culture is.

2.5 These structures should be developed with a focus on releasing the maximum amount of funds as possible to create culture and provide access to that culture and not increase levels of bureaucracy and fund organisations to organise or simply duplicate what is already in existence.

2.6 The development of these structures requires further consultation.

2.7 It is impossible to separate cultural rights, entitlements and responsibilities from broader social and economic rights. Any action taken regarding cultural rights will impact on the other areas whether intended or not, just as access to economic and social rights will impact on cultural. The development of cultural rights should recognise this link, incorporating access issues as a core part of those rights.

2.8 Questions concerning guidance, leadership and governance across all areas of the Commission are possibly some of the most controversial and feared aspects of the commission. There is a genuine concern that the outcomes of the commission will lead to a restriction in cultural development and free speech by introducing a 'nanny state' system. There is also a need to put in place structures that increase access to a broad range of cultural activities to those currently excluded. In order to address these fears and encourage access The Poverty Alliance would support and like to see in place a full participatory process.

2.9 The structure, scope and responsibilities of this process would need to be properly identified and developed from further consultation with all interested parties. There are no simple or easy answers to any of the questions and to reach a solution that will work for all parties, all parties need to be involved in a detailed response to those questions. For example different structures may need to be developed and applied for different aspects of guidance and governance and different sectoral areas.

2.10 This participatory process will need to include all interested parties and be resourced to reflect the needs of all those taking part, especially in terms of facilitating inclusion in that participation by those most likely to be restricted from access to the process and culture: grassroots organisations, socially and economically disadvantaged participants and practitioners etc.

2.11 The development of culture, especially the arts is in general a loss making enterprise in financial terms. The benefits of a rich and diverse culture are not and should not be about direct financial reward although that may come as a by product indirectly. The majority of cultural activity is therefore not appealing or of interest to sectors that have financial reward as their

primary motivation. In this respect it is not applicable to apply a free market business model to the cultural sector: as has already been demonstrated in the failure of the current funding structure of the arts that attempts to attract private business to invest in the arts in terms of direct and in-kind funding. There are many concerns regarding pursuing this approach not least reduced access for those most disadvantaged, reduced grassroots and community activity which all leads to a 'populist' culture rather than a popular culture; a rich, diverse culture that genuinely includes the citizens of Scotland.

2.12 The different cultural sectors are distinct each has its own remit, aims, needs, demands and inspirations. Whilst in certain circumstances it will make sense and be advantageous to all parties to combine efforts or develop cross sectoral initiatives or interacting on a cross-cutting basis with other areas of government the unique quality of each of the aspects of the different cultural sectors. There is a fear and danger that with an emphasis on a centralised approach the very diversity that is the strength of any culture will be reduced and the needs of some or all of the different sectors will not be met to any degree of satisfaction. Again leading to towards a populist culture that excludes every body but those considered 'main stream' reducing access to different cultural experiences for those discriminated against and disadvantaged, socially, economically and physically.

For further information:

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