



Group for **Scottish Local Authority Museums**

A RESPONSE TO THE CULTURAL COMMISSION PHASE TWO CONSULTATION FROM THE GROUP FOR SCOTTISH LOCAL AUTHORITY MUSEUMS (SLAM)

1. SLAM is pleased to take the opportunity to respond to the Cultural Commission's Phase Two consultation. In drafting this response we have kept in mind our Phase One submission, the ideas from which are developed as appropriate below. While we have not dealt individually with the Commission's sixty-two questions, we hope that the statements below deal broadly with the themes raised.

2. We are pleased to note the explicit acknowledgement in the Commission's Interim Report of the crucial 'scale and scope' of cultural provision delivered by local authorities. We would wish to reinforce this observation. Local authority museums are not only central to the framework of museum provision across Scotland, but given the nature of the departments in which they reside, uniquely placed to deliver the cross cutting agendas emerging from the Commission's work.

3. It is therefore essential that the Commission's final recommendations facilitate these arrangements both across cultural sectors and between local authorities, national bodies and the Scottish Executive. We note that sport is not included in the Commission's current consultation and would point out that while this in itself does not directly affect SLAM members, it may not reflect local structural arrangements, nor indeed the current scope of cultural activity defined by the Scottish Executive.

4. We would wish to emphasise once more that while expectations rise, there has been little investment in the sector to support this. SLAM endorses the concept of rights and entitlements and hopes that these will form a foundation for service delivery which the present use of the term "adequate" does not. However, there may well be practical implications in enshrining these rights and entitlements in law. Such an approach may well prove inflexible over the long term as cultural policy and priorities evolve. Rather, they should be embedded within a clear statement of cultural policy and priorities from the Scottish Executive which would in effect provide a revision to the existing National Cultural Strategy. This in turn will provide the leadership which is required at a national level.

5. Locally, local cultural plans or strategies drawing on the community planning process will provide local direction to cultural activities. However the value and placing of culture in the community planning process depends on the quality of leadership of that process. There is a need to see culture firstly in terms of its social necessity rather than as a section within the structure of public service delivery.

6. Co-ordination across the cultural sectors would be provided by a national forum or partnership involving all the sectors. SLAM would emphasise the need for the agency (or group of agencies) to both act and be seen to act as a true partnership. In this respect SLAM was disappointed to note the response of the Scottish Arts Council to the Phase One consultation, when SAC proposed itself as the leader of the partnership. SLAM believes that this forum should be a partnership of equals which should not be dominated by a single

agency. Such an approach would be counterproductive, leading to suspicion rather than true involvement in the new forum. The mechanism for leadership is therefore crucial.

7. Such an integrated approach must also be reflected in the operation of the Scottish Executive. It is essential that, in particular, tourism and education are included in the planning, funding and monitoring of cultural priorities.

8. SLAM notes the references to the potential of relating initiatives to the needs and representation of 'artists'. The contribution that artists make to cultural life is significant and the involvement of their creativity in other aspects of cultural activity can lead to dynamic events. However, we would hope that no particular sector or individual group is singled out as somehow 'special'. The opportunity for true partnership should not be threatened by a particular focus.

9. The allocation of cultural funding sits quite correctly with the Scottish Executive. The Executive will no doubt take advice from the new national cultural agency or forum. It is appropriate that the Scottish Executive allocates funding in relation to its priorities. It is also appropriate however, that the Executive assesses local funding arrangements to see if these are capable of delivering core services. In relation to museums, it would be important to assess whether the funding levels available enable essential core functions to be carried out effectively in respect of local population size, the importance of the collections and the level of associated activities such as exhibitions, workshops, events etc. In this respect the information gathered are part of the National Accreditation Standard may be of help.

10. The 'national agencies' relating to museums are currently the Scottish Museums Council, the National Museums and the National Galleries of Scotland. As SLAM pointed out in its initial response, it is essential that these bodies act together as a single strategic partnership co-ordinating activity within the sector and inputting to the national cultural forum. It is essential that the partnership has a close working relationship with the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. Initiatives such as the development of professional standards and the Accreditation Standard (previously the Registration Scheme) do not stop at the border.

11. As regards 'ring fencing' of funds at a local level, SLAM recognises that this is one option in respect of stemming the tide of dwindling resources. However, we would also point out the traditional opposition of local authorities towards ring fencing of funds. In a time of financial stringency, cultural services, including museums, have provided easy targets for savings. A few local authorities have recognised the potential of these services to contribute positively to quality of life, tourism and education by investing in them but they are in the minority. Ring fencing of existing funding levels would provide one way of stabilising core funding which would then be topped up by 'national priority' monies from the Scottish Executive. An alternative approach might be to make any 'top up' funding conditional on maintenance of local levels of funding.

12. SLAM remains unconvinced of the need for regional levels of decision making. The geographical distribution of museums in Scotland is uneven and such an approach is impractical and undesirable. Under the present local authority structure, regional bodies are an unnecessary and expensive addition to the sector. However, there may well be a case for targeted investment where a museum or group of museums can develop services to assist others through joint initiatives. Any system must take account of the needs of communities which differ greatly across Scotland from central belt urban areas to the Highlands and Islands.

13. In respect of the status of 'National' bodies SLAM would refer the Commission to the useful definition of National Museums within the Accreditation Standard. All national bodies should be seen to deliver a national service which is more than an 'outreach' role. Services to communities away from the central belt and to other museums should be developed and delivered in partnership.

We hope that these comments are of use to the Cultural commission in its deliberations and would be pleased to elaborate on any point if required.