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Communities - key to delivering cultural rights

The UNISON Scotland Response to the consultation of the Cultural Commission

March 2005

Executive Summary

- **UNISON welcomes the concept of cultural rights and the idea that everyone has an entitlement to have these delivered.**
- **It is important that any strategic overview makes accessibility a major priority, and that local funders address the issue of accessibility in any projects they fund.**
- **If we are serious about peoples 'rights' to culture the Scottish Executive will need to both broaden and strengthen the obligations on local authorities to provide cultural services - and provide the appropriate resources for them to carry this out.**
- **Local authorities are therefore central to the success of cultural rights and developing talent. This position should be recognised in the cultural commission's report, and support should be given for their lead role in the community.**
- **Current in-house local authority cultural provision should be maintained, and a survey to investigate any further role should be undertaken, working to increase joined-up provision, not the further fragment it.**
- **Locally based partnerships should be formed to break down barriers between organisations in the communities and to reflect the local demands for cultural provision**
- **We require a National Cultural Strategy and need a national body to co-ordinate, develop, and monitor it.**

Introduction

UNISON welcomes the opportunity to submit its views to the Cultural Commission.

UNISON is Scotland's largest public service union, with members working in many disparate parts of Scotland's cultural life, from voluntary arts projects to Scotland's major theatres; from education to sport and leisure; from community and therapeutic arts to library and information provision; and from archives to architecture.

UNISON has responded to previous discussions and policy documents on Scotland's cultural life and takes a full part in supporting cultural projects - in particular those aimed at increasing accessibility, and broadening the audience for arts and culture.

Therefore we would like to submit these views from both a provider and supporter perspective.

Cultural Rights

The concept of cultural rights, the right to access and excellence in our diverse culture, has been much discussed since the First Minister raised it on St Andrew's Day 2003.

UNISON welcomes this concept and the idea that everyone has an entitlement to have their cultural rights delivered.

However there are difficulties in providing this right as things currently stand; - problems of access and provision.

Access

Both geographical and deprivation problems mean that many areas of the country are not well provided. There is little 'right' to watch a play being performed in the centre of one of our cities if you live in a remote rural area; or have a disability that means you cannot physically get into, or see the performance; or are economically unable to afford to travel to the venue from an outlying housing estate.

It is important therefore that both the strategic overview makes accessibility a major priority, and that local funders address the issue of accessibility in any projects they fund.

Statutory provision and resources

The other problem with the idea of a 'right' to culture, is how that 'right' is to be claimed and enforced. Currently the levels of statutory standards in the cultural area are both vague and patchy. With the exception of some statutory requirements to provide 'adequate' levels of public library provision, and curricula requirements in formal education it is difficult to identify much else. This has led to varying levels of cultural provision by local authorities across the country.

It was particularly the case when local authority budgets were being savagely cut in the seventies and eighties, that services with no statutory minima bore the brunt of attempts to save money. This led to reduced opening hours of facilities, increased charges, failure to maintain buildings and reduced grants to arts organisations.

We suggest that if we are serious about peoples 'rights' to culture the Scottish Executive will need to both broaden and strengthen the obligations on local authorities to provide cultural services - and provide the appropriate resources for them to carry this out.

Community - central to cultural rights

It is clear that if a right to culture is to be successful, it will need to be successful at a community level. Most if not all, of the benefits of cultural involvement can be addressed most successfully by addressing the issue of people becoming involved in the cultural life of their community. Get that involvement and you will have a dynamic innovative and civilising culture, contributing to the educational and economic development of that community; involving people and creating an identity.

Local authorities should have a leading role in this. They already have the lead role in community planning, and they have [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] They currently run a number of services that are important in terms of access to culture, including education, libraries and museums, and cultural services generally. They operate halls and theatres in communities across Scotland, and back a bewildering array of cultural provision via grants and support.

We welcome the commissioning of a review into local authority culture and leisure provision and look forward to its publication. We are somewhat disappointed however that UNISON - the major local government trade union - was not consulted as part of this review.

Local authorities can provide the links between education, cultural provision, technical support and commercial creative industries.

To do all this successfully and across Scotland, two things need to be put in place.

- The kind of statutory guidance/enforcement of rights already referred to needs to be addressed
- Further fragmentation of local cultural provision would be threatened by attempts to hive off local authority responsibilities to trusts, central government or private business, and UNISON would strongly suggest that cultural provision and support currently provided by local authorities should remain as a local authority function. Indeed a survey to see whether other cultural functions could be included as part of local authority statutory duties would be useful.

Local authorities are therefore central to the success of cultural rights and developing talent. This position should be recognised in the cultural commission's report, and support should be given for their lead role in the community.

Current in-house local authority cultural provision should be maintained, and a survey to investigate any further role should be undertaken, working to increase joined-up provision, not to further fragment it.

Partnerships

It is however the case that cultural provision is provided by a huge variety of providers, funded at both local and national level. At one level this is a potential benefit, but the need to cut out cross-funding and duplication suggests that some kind of partnership between organisations (funders, providers and consumers) is needed - both at a local and national level. Local bodies would need to be geographically appropriate to different areas of Scotland, and should include the public and private sector, community and voluntary groups, and artists - both as individuals and companies.

These bodies should discuss, research and plan the cultural provision that is right for their area, and might be given a responsibility to award funding to cultural providers on a grant basis. This could be funded by local authorities working within national strategic guidelines and resourced by the Scottish Executive or national agency.

It should be part of local authorities lead role to lead these bodies.

Locally based partnerships should be formed to break down barriers between organisations in the communities and to reflect the local demands for cultural provision

National Cultural Strategy and a strategic agency

In a previous submission, UNISON welcomed the idea of a National Cultural Strategy to give some cohesion to the huge number and diversity of cultural agencies, providers and funders in Scotland.

We are still of that view and are clearly aware that such a strategy tends to suggest the need for a national body to co-ordinate, develop, and monitor it.]

We are not strongly inclined to lay down exactly how such a body should be structured, but would suggest that two tests should be adopted to measure any proposed structures against.

- The Strategic Body should be clearly democratically accountable to Scotland's political networks, responsible ultimately to the Scottish Parliament.
- The Strategic Body should have built into its structure; ways to ensure the input of cultural service providers and practitioners at all levels.

We do not feel however that it is necessarily the case that all arts funding should flow through this body. Indeed there is some advantage in having a multiplicity of funders in the cultural world, to allow different areas to react to different agendas. However it will be important to ensure that provision achieves the objectives outlined by both the First Minister and the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport, and that the people of Scotland are able to access their rights to excellent cultural provision. This is another argument for some strategic overview.

The requirement of some kind of national structure is also suggested by the role of national companies. It seems sensible to recognise that Scottish-wide provision will need to be funded at a Scottish level - at least in the short-term. The role of national bodies such as the National Theatre is unlikely to remove that requirement - especially for artforms not covered by such bodies.

Conclusion

The concept of cultural rights should be supported, and can only be delivered at community level. Local authorities have a key role in providing and funding local cultural provision and should have statutory and structural back-up to carry out a leading role.

This should be delivered by partnerships at local level and a national strategic overview.

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Ian

From: Chris Bartter [chris.bartter@unison.org.uk]
Sent: 15 April 2005 12:57
To: Ian
Subject: UNISON submission to Cultural Commission[Scanned]



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doc (120 KB) B)

Ian,

I attach a word version of the submission from UNISONScotland to the Cultural Commission.

I apologise for its lateness, but we need a quite extensive circulation when developing policy.

I hope this is useful. If you require any further info please let me know.