

University Museums in Scotland

James Boyle
Cultural Commission
Broughton High School
Carrington Road
Edinburgh EH4 1EG

21 April 2005

Dear James,

As the final report of the Cultural Commission approaches, University Museums in Scotland (UMIS) would like to highlight the points it made last year in 'Opening Doors to Learning'.

Cultural entitlement

We welcome the suggestion that people should have an entitlement to benefit from the collections and activities of museums throughout Scotland. We highlight the importance of collections in the care of Scotland's universities and remind the Cultural Commission of the findings of the National Audit. *With some targeted additional funding university museums are exceptionally well-placed to deliver appropriate, unique and inspirational cultural experiences.*

Cultural leadership

With their long-standing commitment to both education and culture, and operating at local, national and international levels, university museums can offer leadership throughout the sector. *It is therefore essential that they are involved in strategic planning at local and national levels so ensure that full use is made of their potential.* Current cultural planning structures of local authorities have failed to engage with cultural organisations outwith their direct control, while the division between education and culture within the Scottish Executive has also prevented university museums from revealing their full potential. By addressing both of these structural dissonances, we believe that cross-sectoral leadership can be enhanced, and maximum public benefit obtained from the use of public funds.

Sustaining capacity

While university museums are enthusiastic supporters of developing cultural activity, they also have a duty to care for their collections to ensure that future generations will also have access to their collections. Some of the most important museum collections in Scotland are in the care of universities and receive no funding from government to provide access to them. As collections are the foundation on which the museum sector is built, and cultural rights are, correctly, to be a central tenet of Scottish society, we should

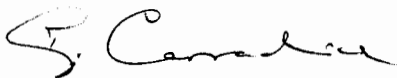
not ignore our responsibilities to future generations in the provision of funding for cataloguing, conservation, research, etc. today. We strongly support the goal of increasing access for all, but professionally we are bound to note that if it is secured at the expense of our other roles then it is irresponsible, ethically questionable, and may deny future generations their cultural entitlement. *UMIS urges the Cultural Commission to highlight the need for sustainable funding based on the importance of collections and so ensure that cultural entitlements are sustainable.*

Collaboration

University museums have a long tradition of being at the heart of a network of collaboration and partnership. Linking world-class expertise in a wide range of disciplines with the wider community, they offer an excellent model of successful collaboration. UMIS members welcome the opportunity to develop new partnerships, but are concerned that *the need is for additional capacity to deliver services to the community rather than a need for more co-ordination*. For example, the appointment of cultural co-ordinators has failed to improve access to university collections. The University museum sector is uniquely placed to provide a conduit through which the whole sector can access the wide breadth of knowledge and expertise that the higher education sector possesses, and this we see as a form of collaboration that the cultural sector has not yet fully exploited.

I hope that these thoughts will help you in your deliberations. I enclose a copy of 'Opening Doors to Learning' and would be very happy to discuss any of the issues raised.

Yours sincerely,



Ian Carradice
Convenor, UMIS

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