

Cultural Commission Stakeholder Consultation Phase 2

Response from the Scottish Confederation of University and Research Libraries (SCURL)

1-5 Cultural Entitlements and Responsibilities

As far as members of SCURL are concerned rights of access are automatic to members of the institutions concerned, and extended to members of the public with minimum formality. While the mechanics, extent and limitations of public access to libraries in HE institutions might benefit from further codifying, SCURL itself is already a long way down that road. For the National Library of Scotland and public library members, free public access is available as of right. In terms of physical access to, or loan of, printed material, no further legislation would be required.

In terms of access to commercially produced electronic material, national initiatives for purchase and licensing to ensure universal access will be essential if Scotland as a whole is to benefit from access to such materials. Where electronic material is made available by the bodies themselves, including open access archives to research and other publications in Scottish universities, the question is one of ensuring the continuing long-term availability of this material.

By their very nature, these forms of access and entitlement serve to support wider agendas including lifelong learning and social inclusion.

There are issues relating to long-term maintenance of services and codifying or mapping collections (whether printed or virtual) and access to them. While such matters within individual institutions are a matter for each institution, there are wider issues which would seem to be suitable to be co-ordinated by a national body across domains of at least archives, libraries and museums.

6-15 Cultural leadership

Leadership for the library sector is centred on SLIC and NLS, although more widespread and complex than that in practice. A higher level co-ordinating body, possibly using a federal structure, and certainly encompassing the archive, library and museum domains would be welcome to co-ordinate policy and activity in access, digitisation, distributed collection development, distributed services, national, regional and local provision, and to supervise the standards, agreements and resourcing underpinning such developments. Such a body would obviously relate back to the organisations and institutions behind it, to the Executive and to other cultural or similar bodies set up (or existing) in other parallel fields.

Assuming a federal structure, nomination to such a body would be from the organisations represented (or subsumed). The Executive would also be expected to nominate a proportion of members. Such a structure should also allow individual institutions and services to have a stake in developing policies. It would also liaise

with other bodies, either which have a UK-wide remit or which operate in England and Wales but whose experience might contribute usefully to Scottish developments.

The wider role of HE institutions in Scottish culture is for other bodies to discuss, but SCURL would emphasise the centrality of its members' services in acquiring, conserving, and enhancing access to collections of cultural materials of many kinds, both physical and virtual. Its representatives, presumably on or through such a body as indicated above, would be expected to have a significant role in any broader cultural body.

16-21 Pan-sectoral planning

Cross-domain planning would be covered by the body suggested above. A pan-sectoral body would be likely to operate at a level which would require HE institutions' involvement either through Universities Scotland or through liaison with an archives-library-museums body.

22-33 Funding arrangements

Recurrent funding for HE libraries comes through institutions from the Joint Funding Councils. No change to that is foreseen. Project funding exists from a variety of sources, but this is rarely available on a cross-sectoral or cross-domain basis. A joint body to allocate funds to partnership projects irrespective of sectoral or domain boundaries would be a positive step. Major capital projects might also be viewed in the same structure, especially where they involve cross-sectoral or cross-domain partnerships. Longer funding horizons at such a level would be necessary: for major capital or for other major projects (such as national initiatives for purchase of electronic materials) a five-year horizon would generally be the minimum required. Such investment could then be justified against criteria set by the Executive or its agencies in line with major cultural, social or economic policies. Resourcing of such a funding body must not, however, impact adversely on recurrent funding for HE libraries through SHEFC or of the national archive/library/museums bodies.

34-38 Standards and evaluation

Archive, library and museum services of all kinds have existing service quality and benchmarking criteria which have proved suitable for their purposes and should continue to do so under any altered regime. These are tailored to the realistic outcomes to be expected of each type of service and such an approach which recognises the differences between different kinds of service (or cultural activity) would seem to be appropriate: there is no 'one size fits all' measure across services which is likely to have any meaning or validity.

39-43 Operations and administration

Considerable work is being done within the archive, library and museum domains to apply new technology to collections and services. This has been alluded to in earlier comments. A body across the three domains would be expected to have oversight of such issues, especially of investment of both recurrent and capital funding, while at the same time co-ordinating its activities with other cultural bodies. Most institutions

in Scotland have international contacts to varying degrees. A single body representing Scotland's culture abroad and formally to such as UNESCO would seem to be a sensible move, especially in terms of providing a clear and influential contact point for overseas institutions seeking partners or contacts (or information) within Scotland. Such a body should seek to strengthen and enhance institutional contacts and not attempt to take them over or manage them. Such a body should also be responsible for high level marketing of Scotland's cultural resources, services and activities, with marketing plans also developed and implemented as a domain, local/regional and institutional responsibility.

44-47 Local authorities

While not of direct relevance to other than two local authority members of SCURL, the cultural activities of local authorities overlap with those of higher education especially on a local basis. Such partnerships should be encouraged and enhanced by arrangements suggested elsewhere in this response. In terms both of interaction between the sectors and of providing services to all Scottish citizens, SCURL urges that public libraries in every area be properly funded to carry out the duties imposed on them by legislation and expected by members of the public.

48-51 Regional bodies

The need for regional bodies would seem to be a matter to be considered in relation to the activities of local authorities. As far as HE libraries are concerned, local or regional collaborations exist which could benefit from strengthening by funding and other arrangements considered elsewhere in this response. If regional cultural bodies are to be established between local and national provision, then library services across all sectors would need to be adequately represented.

52-58 National

The position and role of the National Library of Scotland are defined in existing provisions and serve an invaluable function in Scottish library services of all kinds and across all sectors. That role is presently being further developed in the terms of the NLS strategy. SCURL would expect any review of activity to strengthen further the standing and role of the National Library, and assumes it will play a prominent part in administrative arrangements suggested elsewhere in this response. When collaborating with other domains (especially but by no means exclusively archives and museums) we would expect the national institutions to play a major, often leading role. They can only do so if they are properly resourced and mandated. The introduction of a higher level body between the Executive and the services as proposed above would provide a forum in which such issues could be identified and discussed.

59-62 Cross-cutting

SCURL member libraries are, over and above their membership of SCURL, in many cases involved in local cross-sectoral or cross-domain partnerships. There is scope both within present arrangements, and on a wider and longer term basis for closer collaboration with other areas of education, and with tourism bodies. Examples of

such collaborations already exist among many SCURL member libraries. The collections and services available by or through SCURL members have considerable relevance to lifelong learning initiatives and to attracting tourism into Scotland.

Earlier comments in this response suggest the creation of a high level national body, perhaps to be supported by regional bodies. Such a structure would permit interaction with other areas such as lifelong learning and tourism both at strategic national and regional or local levels. Marketing of heritage collections and services has been referred to above: a marketing strategy would be expected to take account of and capitalise on synergies between tourism, education and heritage, and any other areas where mutual benefit can be demonstrated.

Stuart James
Chairman, SCURL

Stuart.james@paisley.ac.uk

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Review at 1/13

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From: Stuart James [Jame-li0@wpmail.paisley.ac.uk]
Sent: 13 January 2005 15:41
To: info
Subject: Phase 2: SCURL submission[Scanned]



CC2 SCURL.doc (52 KB)

Please find attached the submission of the Scottish Confederation of University and Research Libraries to Phase 2 of the Commission's consultation.

Stuart James

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