**Museums Association – Further Information on Scottish Culture Strategy**

Following our previous correspondence in September on the new Culture Strategy, we have had more time to consult with MA members in Scotland on the role that the museum sector can play in the wider cultural life of Scotland. What follows is a summary of our position to date.

**Museums as Cultural Infrastructure**

Scotland has over 340 museums. Together, they constitute a key part of the country’s cultural infrastructure.

Scotland’s museums range in type from national museums to local authority collections, to university, military and independent museums, and in size from major attractions to small, volunteer-run museums. The diversity of this sector is a source of huge strength and a matter of pride to the people of Scotland.

The country’s museums allow the Scottish public and visitors to engage with culture, history and science through the medium of exhibitions and displays. But their spaces, collections and skilled employees ensure that museums play an extremely active role in Scotland’s cultural life. Visitors and communities that use Scotland’s museums have access to a wealth of cultural activity – music, tours, educational events, museum lates, lecture programmes, festivals, children’s events, outreach activities for vulnerable or disadvantaged communities and more. Through their role as hosts, story-tellers, partnership-forgers and researchers, Scotland’s museums sit at the heart of the country’s cultural networks and support cultural activity across the nation.

**Working Towards Government Priorities**

Given their place as part of Scotland’s cultural infrastructure, museums are well situated to work with government, local authorities, charities, education institutions and businesses to provide a range of positive social and economic outcomes. We have set out examples below of museum projects that make an impact which demonstrate how museums can help to meet strategic government priorities.

These examples are illustrative only, and there are many more museums doing similar work across the country. We would be happy to provide more details.

Education and Employability

The National Museum of Flight in East Lothian runs the Engaging with Experience programme, which is a cross-generational training project that allows experienced engineers – often retired volunteers – to share practical, hands-on skills with young people from Knox Academy, a local secondary school. Schoolchildren as young as 13 participate on the project, and are shown how to fix and care for engines and machines in the museum collection. The participants gain confidence and skills which will help them when seeking employment, and teachers involved in the scheme believe that it has particularly helped pupils at risk of disengaging from education.   
  
Health and Wellbeing

Glasgow Museums have been working with the charity Contact the Elderly since 2006 to offer monthly Sunday tea parties for older people in their venues in an effort to tackle loneliness and social isolation among older people.  
  
The events bring together small groups of people aged 75+ who live alone and may have little contact with family or friends. They are collected from their home by the same volunteer driver every month and taken to a gathering for the afternoon at a different venue each time.  
  
Alongside the social element of a tea party, looking at objects helps the guests to start conversations with other members of the group and with museum staff. The museums also put on workshops, talks and activities.  
  
While the tea parties are giving people who may have little contact with family and friends a chance to socialise, they are also enabling the museums to reach an audience they were not engaging in other ways.

Tourism Economy

Museums are a key part of Scotland’s tourism economy across the country. They play a particularly important part in remote rural areas of the country where they promote tourist spending and create jobs. The many museums on the North Coast 500 trail – from Inverness Museum and Art Gallery to Ullapool Museum and Gairloch Museum have seen rising footfall as a result of increased tourism in along the route. They will require investment if they are to continue to offer a high-quality service to tourists in future.

Scotland’s International Role

The V&A Dundee will open in 2018 as a major new statement of Scotland’s place at the forefront of design. It will tell the story of world famous Scottish designers past and present, drawing an expected 350,000 visitors per year and putting the East of Scotland on the map as a destination in its own right. And through partnerships with local universities, the local authority and the V&A in London, it will be a part of global networks that enable the museum to promote a dynamic modern Scottish culture of design to an international audience.

Placemaking

Paisley Museum has been at the forefront of the town’s recent shortlisted bid for the UK City of Culture 2021. As part of this bid, the museum has demonstrated how, working hand-in-hand with local communities, it can inspire local pride and make the town a better place to live, work and visit. The museum has used renovation plans to inspire local people about the quality and importance of the town’s collections, and has built highly accessible open storage on the High Street to ensure that people can easily access, enjoy and feel ownership of the collection.

**The Role of the Scottish Government**

The Scottish Government already plays an important role in supporting the country’s museums through its direct support for national museums and the development body, Museums Galleries Scotland. Museums also gain important public funding via local authorities and through a range of government supported social and economic programmes.

Some museums have faced a tough period over recent years, with reduced local authority funding posing the most immediate risk for many museums. This has led to the reduction of opening hours for many museums – such as City of Edinburgh Museums – the threat of closure for several independent museums in the Highlands, and the recent proposed auctioning of key cultural collections by at least two museums in North-East Scotland.

We believe that there are a number of areas where the Scottish Government can use the new Culture Strategy to ensure that museums play a key part in Scotland’s cultural infrastructure and increase their impact in meeting government priorities.

The Culture Strategy should make it easier for museums to:

***Improve Learning, Educational Attainment and Health and Wellbeing.*** Cultural partnerships with schools, colleges, the NHS and charities should be supported by government and local authorities. A nationwide programme that creates a hub system to support learning and capacity across a large number of cultural organisations could radically increase the number of museums involved in such partnerships.

***Deliver Information and Services Digitally.*** Museum visitors and users increasingly expect a high quality digital experience, either before visiting in person, or as a digital-only user. However, many museums have poor websites and limited ability to create digitised collections with high quality interpretation. Many current digital projects are carried out in a piecemeal way. A digital strategy and targeted funding could support real change in this area.

***Create High Quality Buildings and Services.*** Some museums – particularly those that are experiencing rapid growth in tourism and visitor numbers – require investment in their physical spaces and exhibitions in order to cater to demand. Targeted and meaningful grants for tourism hotspots could create quick improvements in this area.

***Provide Care for and Access to Museum Collections.*** Collections require expert management and their use can be a vital part of research, learning and engagement. Many museums have lost expert members of staff due to budget cuts. A focused project to support Scotland’s Recognised museum collections could help to avoid further hollowing out of expertise from our museums.

In addition to the above:

* We support further use of the themed ‘Year of...’ model which has proven a useful way focal point around which museums can plan events, focus outreach and source funding.
* We support a more collaborative or integrated approach between the various key culture funders, including the Scottish Government, Arms-Length Bodies and HLF.
* We note that Lottery funding is decreasing. HLF should be encouraged to invest primarily in existing museums and heritage places, except where there is a demonstrable need and clear business case for new-build heritage projects.
* We note the need for clear synergy between the Culture Strategy and the forthcoming Museum Strategy that is being developed by Museums Galleries Scotland, and that distribution of public resources should follow the priorities identified in these strategies.

For further information, please contact:

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