

NMDC Response to 'A Culture Strategy for Scotland' consultation

The National Museum Directors' Council (NMDC) represents the leaders of the UK's national collections and major regional museums. Our members are the national and major regional museums in England, Northern Ireland and Scotland, the British Library, the National Library of Scotland, the National Archives and Royal Botanic Gardens Kew. NMDC acts as an advocate on behalf of members and their collective priorities and provides them with a valuable forum for discussion and debate and an opportunity to share information and work collaboratively. While our members are funded by government, the NMDC is an independent, non-governmental organisation. For more information about NMDC and our activity see our website: www.nationalmuseums.org.uk

1. What is your view of the vision as set out in the strategy? What do you like or dislike or what would you change?

NMDC welcomes the opportunity to respond to 'A Culture Strategy for Scotland' and broadly welcomes the ambitions in the strategy, particularly the aim to place culture at the heart of policy making.

Museums preserve, protect and promote one of the few irreplaceable public assets: the nation's collective memory, knowledge and history. Preserving our heritage through museums is a fundamental aspect of maintaining a healthy and prosperous civil society. Museums are civic institutions that simultaneously serve a local, regional, national and international audience, as well as an online audience who may never cross the threshold. Museums matter because they uniquely serve a public past, a public present and a public yet to be born.

Museums already contribute significantly against the aims set out in the strategy. Overall, NMDC would encourage a more explicit link between the aims in the strategy and the strength of museums and other major cultural institutions in delivering against the objectives.

- NMDC is keen to ensure that the idea of 'excellence' is acknowledged and championed throughout the strategy, ensuring excellent cultural provision is available to all should be a priority for Government.
- Terms such as 'culture' and 'community' need further definition, while it's important to factor in a wide range of views to develop an understanding of these terms, leaving definitions too open may cause confusion, and may inhibit measurement and delivery of the strategy.
- While the strategy acknowledges there is good work being done across the sector, it would be helpful to highlight examples of excellence in cultural provision or good practice to determine what would be considered successful. The strategy could helpfully highlight examples of excellence across the sector that could be replicated or built on.
- Similarly, the strategy talks minimally about evaluation, and though we note a new panel of experts will be established to determine a suitable methodology, the vision for success should be clarified in the published strategy.

- More clarity is also needed on how other public bodies, agencies and sector support organisations will work together, though the document acknowledges this, it doesn't outline how it might interact with or build on existing strategies such as Museums Galleries Scotland's 'Going Further', or Historic Environment Scotland's 'Our Place in Time'.
- The final strategy should consider funding and resourcing to deliver the actions, particularly for activity across policy areas, where strategic relationships need first to be established. Partnership working particularly requires long term commitment and sustained resources.

2. What is your view of the ambition 'Transforming through culture'? What do you like, or dislike, or what would you change? Please provide comments on the aims and actions under this ambition.

NMDC welcomes the ambition 'transforming through culture', and supports the idea that culture has a central role to play across all policy areas. Museums are in a unique position to deliver across multiple policy areas, as set out in NMDC's 2015 publication ¹'Museums Matter' they do this by:

- Creating a thriving, vibrant and diverse cultural life for the nation
- Contributing to regional prosperity
- Developing tourism – as the UK's most popular visitor attractions
- Strengthening soft power
- Developing peaceful and prosperous communities by creating safe and welcoming community spaces
- Promoting health and wellbeing
- Education, life-long learning, skills development and apprenticeships
- Being world leaders in scientific, technological and creative innovation

The final strategy should recognise the key role museums can play in this ambition.

The aims in this section are quite broad, therefore further definition could help to ensure the resulting actions are those most appropriate. While a new post focused on 'cultural leadership' could provide value, there is a risk of complicating an already busy landscape of cultural institutions and responsibilities - it would be helpful to understand the wider strategy for cross-Government engagement and collaboration with executive agencies and sector bodies first, and the mechanism for securing the suggested partnership approach to understand whether such a post is the most effective mechanism.

A more structured and sustained approach to collaboration across disciplines would be welcome, as currently activities of this kind tend to be project based and short-term. This will require building support across disciplines to learn and understand the benefits.

The idea of a national partnership to measure and articulate the benefits of culture could be one mechanism for opening up the transformative opportunity of culture, but Government should also look to develop further actions to meet this aim, for example, removing barriers to participation such as the practical issues that prevent schools from pursuing cultural engagement opportunities.

While culture has a prominent role in facilitating delivery of ambitions across many policy areas, museum programmes that focus on health and wellbeing, community cohesion and education often operate on very small budgets, and are reliant on external funding beyond Government grants - if culture's position is 'central to progress' in these areas, then adequate funding provision needs to be taken into consideration.

¹ <https://www.nationalmuseums.org.uk/what-we-do/museums-matter/>

3. What is your view of the ambition 'Empowering through culture'? What do you like or dislike or what would you change? Please provide comments on the aims and actions under this ambition.

NMDC supports the overall ambition to open up culture and its benefits to as many people as possible, and recognise that culture across Scotland is diverse and distinctive.

However, there should be some distinction made between what this strategy can and cannot influence, and there is a risk that by keeping definitions too loose, the strategy may become too open-ended. The role of excellence, not as a form of elitism, but as a benefit for all – should be given more weight in the strategy; excellence as a key driver in transforming and empowering through culture and in sustaining culture should be a central component of the strategy.

Developing opportunities for people to take part in culture throughout their lives is a positive ambition, but the actions underneath this aim will need further definition – as with 'transforming through culture', this will only be achieved by developing long term cross-sector partnerships and by ensuring sufficient funding enters the sector. Tackling issues such as transport for accessing cultural provision will be of key importance and Government could look to existing schemes such as Glasgow City Council Class Connections for successful models.

While community involvement in decision making is important, there should be more focus on inclusivity in which more communities are supported or enabled to benefit from cultural enjoyment and expression. A consideration of resourcing would also be helpful in the context of local authority funding cuts.

The contribution that museums make to place-making was recognised in the recent Mendoza Review of museums in England. Museums are rooted locally and provide a sense of place through their activities both within and outside the museum building. They foster curiosity and creativity and create a local environment which helps attract and retain workers, and are a significant contributor to what makes a place attractive to live in, work in, visit or invest in.

Museums' role should not be underplayed in developing people's sense of place and pride in where they live. Museums are safe and social spaces: warm and welcoming to the whole community. A museum that is fully embedded within its community means that no-one feels the museum "is not for them". Fostering a sense of community – understanding differences and sharing commonalities – is a powerful way of encouraging civic engagement and participation in civil society to celebrate, commemorate or help in times of crisis. Museums tell local, national and international stories, giving a sense of shared heritage and fostering a sense of common identity for a place.

The work that museums do makes for a compelling example in support of 'empowering through culture', therefore more focus should be placed in the strategy on championing this work and building on existing programmes – the actions could be further developed to reflect previous successes and to outline how progress will be measured.

4. What is your view of the ambition 'Sustaining culture'? What do you like or dislike or what would you change? Please provide comments on the aims and actions under this ambition. The final culture strategy will highlight where individuals, communities, and organisations are already working towards the vision, ambition and aims of the strategy.

Many museums are already suffering from a 'hollowing out', having been forced to reduce curatorial and scientific roles due to public funding cuts. Long-term erosion of expertise and an inability to invest in maintaining the basic fabric of buildings will cause long-term damage

to the vitality of the whole museum sector. Concerns about funding are compounded by the UK's departure from the EU, which will see numerous sources of culture funding disappear.

Other funding models can be considered, but only in addition to stable Government funding, which is crucial for leveraging investment from the private sector. The Government also has a role to play in encouraging greater support from private donors, trusts and corporate.

Museums need to be able to reach out digitally, nationally and internationally, meet education needs and provide a first-class visitor experience, all of which require an enhanced set of skills from the traditional museum model. Supporting development of digital skills is of key importance to the sector, though it goes hand in hand with ensuring the sector has suitable digital infrastructure. The museum sector needs to meet the long-term challenges of digital preservation, digitisation of collections, changing audience expectations and digital engagement. A sector-wide approach to skills development is needed, with adequate investment. Museums also often find they are unable to match the salaries offered to skilled workers by other competing sectors and so risk losing the expertise involved in developing digital projects. Sustained investment in skills and in the sector is therefore needed to meet political ambition.

Aiming for greater openness and diversity in the sector is welcomed, as there is a recognition that the cultural workforce and senior governance of many cultural heritage bodies would benefit from greater diversity. This aim should not be approached in isolation from the aim for encouraging skills development, leadership and innovation. There should also be support for the whole cultural workforce, though the focus on freelance workers is important, as this career model can face barriers.

International ambitions could be more clearly articulated, but the aim to develop a long-term, strategic approach is welcome. While museums have participated in many examples of successful international collaborations, work tends to be opportunistic and ad hoc, often funded by external partners. A more strategic and structured approach to international working – backed by adequate funding – would enable a more joined up approach from cultural partners or with other organisations with a stake in representing Scotland abroad.

Please provide details of any examples of good work and best practice, from Scotland or internationally, that you think could be included in the final strategy. We are interested in a range of different approaches. What can you or your organisation do to support the vision, aims, ambitions and actions of the strategy?

There are many examples of museums demonstrating good work and best practice that meet the aims of this strategy - from early years support, teacher training and development, youth outreach, skills and career development, participatory work to programmes with health and wellbeing outcomes connecting social care and family programmes.

Transforming through culture:

- National Museums Scotland (NMS) uses its expertise in education and outreach to run Maths Week Scotland, a 3-year national programme of maths engagement activity funded by the Scottish Government's Directorate for Learning. This example is a positive case of cross-departmental planning and funding in action.
- The Art of the Future project invited young people to create the kind of art they would like to see from an art tool kit sent to them by National Galleries Scotland (NGS). This involved working in partnership with youth groups and services across Scotland. The toolkit was used by the participants to produce work around themes which were important to them, e.g. mental health, social media, expectations of beauty. The works produced were exhibited both at NGS and Harbour Arts Centre in Irvine. The project brought together health, education and art through one partnership.

- NGS's 'Gallery Socials' and NMS's 'Museums Socials' are relaxed and informal sessions for people living with dementia, their family and friends.
- NMS's regular 'Early Doors for Autism' events provide opportunities for autistic young people and their carers/families to explore the galleries and exhibitions in a context in which they feel comfortable. Museum staff have had specialist training in order to facilitate these sessions.

Empowering through culture:

- New Scots is a new permanent exhibition display at St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art telling the stories of former refugees and asylum seekers living in Glasgow. It explores issues of cultural identities and the concept of 'home' through objects that former refugees and people within the asylum process have donated to or chosen from Glasgow Museums Collections, and an accompanying film.

Sustaining culture:

- NMS provides a free collection skills training programme, which has become a core support resource for the sector, providing opportunities for staff and volunteers to develop skills, knowledge and confidence in appraising and caring for all types of collections. In recent years, with marked changes to staff and resources across the sector, there has been a particular noted decline in levels of curatorial expertise in local museums. NMS has extended its skills training to deliver national specialist support projects in technology, archaeology, world cultures and natural science collections. These interventions have built local capacity and confidence and such collaborations will be important for the future of the sector.

NMDC would be happy to engage in more detail on the development of the final strategy and to provide further examples of good practice where needed – particularly in ensuring that museums are central to the vision for Scotland's cultural future.

NMDC is currently working with DCMS and its sponsored national museums in England to develop a new framework to ensure museum partnership working more strategic across the museum sector. NMDC recognises however that the UK museum sector is one ecosystem, and is therefore keen to reflect that partnership working extends beyond borders and ensure that the framework include museums from across the country.

The national collections in Scotland receive requests for loans and partnership working that far outstrips their ability to support such activity. Investment in appropriate local infrastructure across the country could further help support this activity, and ensure the national collections are seen by a broader audience. Additionally, funds such as the DCMS Wolfson Museums and Galleries Improvement Fund has been used to improve the quality of displays, exhibition spaces, collection interpretation and disabled access in museums and galleries across England. The active role DCMS took in brokering this fund for the benefit of the whole sector could provide a useful case study.

NMDC collaborates with ICOM UK on an annual 'Working Internationally' conference, which seeks to bring examples of successful international collaborations, best practice and emerging trends to the museum sector. Following the success of last year's conference in Edinburgh, we would be happy to share our learning.

5. What do you think success for the strategy will look like? What is your view of the proposed approach to monitoring and evaluating the strategy? Do you think the partial Equality Impact Assessment has identified where the strategy might impact on people differently depending on characteristics such as age, disability, gender, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation or gender identity? What would you add or change? Do you think the partial Children's Rights and Welfare Impact Assessment sets out how the proposals presented in the strategy might

impact on the rights and welfare of children? What would you add or change? How do you think this strategy might impact upon people on low incomes, people living in deprived areas, people in material deprivation, people with no/low wealth and people from different socio-economic backgrounds? Do you think the partial Business and Regulatory Impact Assessment identifies how the proposals presented in the strategy might impact on businesses, the third (voluntary) sector or have any regulatory impact? What would you add or change?

The strategy provides an outline proposal for arriving at a methodology. Government should ensure that in developing the metrics with which to measure delivery, appropriate practitioners are engaged from the cultural heritage sector to ensure that these focus on gathering possible and usable data. Where possible the methods of evaluation should look to existing successful models and build on existing work. Consideration also needs to be made of the resources and funding required for additional monitoring of activities.

A clear action plan for delivery setting out tangible outcomes and agreed leadership for achieving those outcomes now needs to be established. More specific actions will need to be articulated before assessing the potential impact on communities.

In case of any queries regarding this response or if you require any further information please contact Kathryn Simpson, Policy and Projects Manager, National Museum Directors' Council: kathryn.simpson@nationalmuseums.org.uk / 020 7942 4076.