

Museums Association Response the Scottish Parliament Culture Committee Consultation on Funding For Culture – September 2021

- **What should be the Scottish Government’s immediate priorities in supporting the culture sector’s recovery through Budget 2022-23?**

Covid recovery

The Museums Association (MA) believes the immediate priority for museums and galleries is the need for continued support to manage the financial impact of the pandemic. Museums across Scotland have played a critical role supporting communities during the pandemic and have a critical role to play in supporting community recovery going forward, but they can only do this with continued support from government.

The museums sector remains very fragile and the road to full, pre-pandemic levels of financial health will be long. This is borne out by a recent survey conducted by Museums Galleries Scotland which shows that of the museums who responded, in late July:

- Every open museum was operating at a financial loss.
- 98% had seen a reduction in visitor numbers
- 55% were experiencing losses of more than 40% compared to 2019-20; 14% were at less than 80% of their former income levels.

These problems are compounded by uncertainty over the medium-term return of international visitors.

The urgent priority for the Scottish Government should be to prevent the permanent closure of museums due to the pandemic. Losses within our cultural sector would be damaging for community cohesion and wellbeing, and would reduce Scotland’s attractiveness as a visitor destination. Beyond this immediate priority, the sector will need to consider new models, including new models of public sector support, to become more resilient and sustainable.

Decolonisation: Dealing with the Legacy of Empire and Slavery

Museums have a vital role to play in ongoing efforts to uncover and confront Scotland’s complex and difficult history of involvement in empire and slavery. The Scottish Government has taken a proactive approach on this issue to date, and we are pleased that Museums Galleries Scotland is able to undertake its Empire, Slavery and Scotland’s Museums project.

The MA will produce guidance in November 2021 to support museums across the UK to undertake more work in this area. We highlight the leading role that museums in Scotland are playing in this issue. The Scottish Government should continue to view this area as a priority and should support museums across the country to engage audiences and communities. This could take the form of further funded project work to do research and outreach.

Climate crisis

The climate crisis is an area for urgent action.

Museums can play an important part in tackling the climate crisis. The MA has set out three key ways in which the sector can play a role:

- **Reducing museums' carbon footprint:** make sure that your organisation's footprint is as low as it can go, and commit to targets for reducing energy consumption, waste, travel and carbon use.
- **Raising awareness:** using collections, programmes, exhibitions and learning and engagement work to discuss the climate crisis and encourage audiences to think about what they can do to make a difference.
- **Championing change:** work with community and environmental organisations to implement greener policies in a local area.

With regards to the reduction of museums' own carbon footprint, we welcome the SNP's manifesto commitment to increase capital funding to help 'green' cultural infrastructure. Given the urgency of the climate crisis and the financial position faced by museums, we hope to see this commitment forthcoming in the 2022/23 budget. This investment could play a crucial role in improving museums' energy efficiency – especially the many museums that are in older and listed buildings with poor insulation. It will have the added benefit of reducing running costs.

There may be important lessons to learn from the roll-out of the Museums and Estates Development Fund (MEND Fund) in England this year. This scheme provides targeted funding from a pot of approximately £20m per year to enable museums to perform vital maintenance and upkeep tasks, such as replacing boilers and upgrading electrical fittings. It has been heavily oversubscribed. A similar scheme in Scotland that concentrates on reducing emissions – especially in historic and culturally important buildings – would help to ensure that museums in Scotland maintain high quality and safe buildings while also reducing their emissions and improving their climate resilience.

Museums can also play a role in raising public awareness and supporting community action through public engagement. Museums are experienced in presenting complex issues in an engaging way, and reaching diverse audiences. The sector can support the behavioural change that will be part of our climate crisis response, and it is vital that museums are recognised and supported to play a full role in public engagement efforts.

Efficient cross-portfolio resourcing and communication will be key to making the most of museums' potential in this area.

- **Do you agree with UNESCO that “a degree of restructuring is inevitable” [1] as the sector recovers from COVID? If so, what approach should the Scottish Government adopt?**

While the impact of Covid has been enormous, the long-term issues facing the museums sector pre-date the pandemic and have only been brought into sharper focus by the experience of repeated lockdowns.

The impact of austerity on Scotland's museums has been substantial – especially for museums run by local authorities or operated as ALEOs. Forthcoming research commissioned by the MA shows that local authorities now spend 23% less in real terms on museum provision in Scotland than a decade ago.

These cuts are already forcing local authorities to consider restructuring museum services. Many local authority services have been transferred to ALEO status in recent years in an attempt to reduce costs. This type of restructuring can be successful, but it is not a panacea and does not deal with underlying shortages of public investment. Several ALEO services have proved to be unviable in recent years and have been returned to local authority direct control.

Independent museums present a different set of challenges. As charities, their collections are not owned by the public and they do not have the safety net of a wider parent organisation when facing closure. The pandemic has weakened this part of the sector and there is a risk that some may close.

We believe that a sector-wide review of governance and funding models is urgently required to ensure the longer-term viability of museums across Scotland. We outline some possible avenues of investigation for a review in the following section.

- **A crisis can also trigger new ways of thinking – should the Scottish Government rethink how it supports the culture sector?**

The MA firmly believes that all museums can play a role in enhancing health and wellbeing and creating better places for us all to live and work as evidenced in our Museums Change Lives Scotland document (<https://www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/museums-change-lives/in-the-nations/>). This approach strongly chimes with the principles established by the Scottish Government's Culture Strategy – including the centrality of culture to national wellbeing and prosperity; the celebration of diversity; the right to participate in the cultural life of the community; and the importance of place. We believe that strategic investment in museums and museum services is vital to achieving positive social outcomes, and outline further ideas about supporting the sector below.

Given the challenges facing the sector due to austerity and the pandemic, the Scottish Government could consider the following options:

- Establish a minimum acceptable level of museum provision as a national standard that local authorities were required to report and deliver against, while recognising that cultural provision will vary in scale and business models across the country. One aspect of this could be a duty to ensure a high standard of public access to collections held by local government, which could be delivered through partnership with independent museums and other organisations as well as through civic museums and other civic buildings. This arrangement would allow for a mix of local and national investment to ensure that all areas meet the agreed standard.

Alternatively, the below suggestions would involve a more radical departures from the present model of museum provision:

- Identify, and provide core funding for, strategically important museums across Scotland, similar to the National Portfolio Organisation scheme operated by Arts Council England.
- Core fund regional ‘hubs’ in order to improve standards in collections care curatorial provision while benefitting from the efficiencies of shared services.
- Adopt an approach similar to Creative Scotland’s Regularly Funded Organisations model.
- Increase the number of museums using shared services, such as shared storage sites for collections.

The MA believes that all of the above ideas are worth investigating more closely and would support a review to determine the best outcome for museums of all types in Scotland.

In addition to the core funding issues discussed above, the MA also believes that museums should be able to access cross-portfolio resourcing to enable museums to deliver against a wide range of government priorities, such as tackling the education attainment gap, community cohesion, and rural development.

Rates relief

There is a discrepancy in the business rates bills faced by museums, with the availability of charitable reliefs has been a major driver in the expansion of ALEOs.

This point is of particular concern for local government museums as recent court cases in England have found that museums were being overcharged business rates due to being calculated on the ‘contractors method’ rather than on income. While business rates are of course devolved, Scottish assessors take a similar approach which leads to museums facing higher rateable values than, for example, historic houses with art collections.

An extension of rates relief to local government-run museums and galleries would considerably simplify this system.

- **Specifically, are there opportunities to develop a more strategic approach through, for example, the medium-term financial strategy, a multi-year spending review and the National Performance Framework?**

The MA agrees with the principle of multi-year budget setting which would allow organisations to plan with more certainty and would respond to the Fair Work agenda by reducing the prevalence of short-term contracts. This would also enable organisations to embed new ways of working including cultivating partnerships with other museums, cultural organisations and community groups.

For this approach to be achieved all funding for museums including national and civic museums would need to be delivered on a multi-year agreements, potentially through geographical hubs, which are models worth exploring. The MA has set out a set of strategic priorities in its Scottish Museums Manifesto 2021. These priorities are summarised below:

Securing the future of our museums

- Identification of ‘core’ museum provision that should be made available to and for every person across Scotland
- Strategic national investment in core museum provision across local authority areas, with recognition this will be made up of different types of museums in different areas
- Implementation via national and local government of a new museum infrastructure that delivers greater collaboration across types of museums and local authority boundaries to share services, generate efficiencies and maximise the collective public value of museums
- Support for Museums Galleries Scotland as a strong national development body that works with sector partners to support museums of all types across Scotland.

Supporting partnerships

- Create a deeper strategic partnership with VisitScotland to revive domestic and international tourist visits to our museums, including in rural and island areas
- Support museums to create powerful partnerships and engagement on climate change and sustainability issues, particularly working towards Cop26
- Support collaboration and partnership between Scottish museums and international partners, particularly in the context of Brexit.

Representation for all

- Museums should be supported to be inclusive, participatory and democratic spaces where people from all backgrounds feel welcome and represented as visitors, contributors and in the workforce and at board level
- Museums should be supported to decolonise their practice and collections, building on the substantial, sector-leading work that is already happening in Scotland. Museums across Scotland should work to increase research and public

engagement to recognise and come to terms with Scotland's colonial past, legacy of slavery and racism.

Access for all

- The next Scottish Government should continue the current commitment to free entry to national museums and support local authorities to make the same commitment
- Every primary school pupil should visit a museum at least once per year, with government support for transport and programme costs. Visits should be further supported in the classroom through the use of museum digital tools
- Further support should be made available to museums to improve their digital and online offerings – including to those suffering digital poverty – following the substantial increase in interest in digital cultural consumption during Covid-19.

The full manifesto can be read here:

<https://www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/advocacy/a-manifesto-for-museums-in-scotland/>