

## **MA Response to the Scottish Government International Culture Strategy Consultation**

### **Question 1: What current international activity do you undertake?**

#### **About the MA**

The Museums Association (MA) is a membership organisation representing and supporting museums and people who work with them throughout the UK. Our network includes 10,000 individual members working in all types of roles, from directors to trainees, and we represent 1,500 institutional members ranging from small volunteer-run local museums to large national institutions. Founded in 1889, the MA was the world's first professional body for museums. We lead thinking in UK museums with initiatives such as Museums Change Lives and the Learning & Engagement Manifesto, and we provide £1.4m per year of funding for museum projects via our Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund and other grants. The Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund supports museums to improve their inclusive collections and participatory practice with, and sometimes led by, community partners. For more information about the MA, see our website: <http://www.museumsassociation.org/home>

Museums in the UK undertake a range of international activity including object loans, touring exhibitions, restitution and repatriation, and working with communities of origin. Museums are an important part of Scotland's cultural offering and attract international visitors from all over the world. Museums play a key role in communicating Scotland's stories internationally as well as engaging audiences in Scotland with cultural heritage from around the globe.

### **Question 2: What impact does cultural activity have on your business/organisation?**

As a membership organisation, the MA campaigns and advocates for the museum sector in all four nations of the UK. We want museums to thrive so they can have a positive social impact on the communities they serve.

### **Question 3: What are your motivations for working internationally?**

There are a variety of reasons a museum might want to work internationally. Some museums will have objects acquired from other countries, therefore, working internationally may strengthen our understanding of objects by allowing the museum to work with the communities of origin. As some museums in Scotland were founded as a result of empire and transatlantic slavery, they may have objects they wish to repatriate to countries or communities they were wrongfully taken from.

Another reason for working internationally is knowledge exchange. Working with communities of origin and researchers will allow a museum to develop a greater understanding of its objects. Additionally, sharing learning, case studies and best practices can also be facilitated by working with international partners.

Many museums work internationally to loan objects and tour exhibitions. This practice allows international audiences to access and benefit from objects in Scottish museums. Additionally, museums around the world loan objects to museums in Scotland which can help with their storytelling.

Museums may also work internationally to attract visitors from around the world and increase visitor numbers. As museums struggle with the financial pressures caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis, many are turning to more commercial models in order to keep their doors open, attract visitors from around the world and increase tourism in Scotland. International visitors can provide museums with an opportunity to generate income as they may be more willing to spend in the museum café or gift shop if they are on holiday.

**Question 4: What, if any, are the main barriers to developing your international activity?**

Cost and resource are the main barriers to museums developing international activity. In particular, small independent and civic museums may wish to develop their international activity but may not have the money, staff or confidence to do so.

**Question 5: What are your views on the rationale set out for an International Culture Strategy?**

We agree with the rationale of the International Culture Strategy to take a coherent and strategic approach to international activity and to seek to achieve cultural and economic outcomes. In the case of museums, international activity can also achieve social outcomes particularly through decolonisation and repatriation.

**Question 6: What are your views on the vision outlined above?**

The vision is clear and concise. However, it does not take into account what Scotland can learn from other countries internationally. International knowledge exchange would greatly enrich museum work in Scotland, helping to provide a greater understanding of object provenance.

**Question 7: We have identified 4 themes (cultural connections, economic impact, diplomacy and reputation). How does your work connect with each of these areas?**

## **Cultural Connections**

Scotland's museums and heritage sectors provide cultural connections by attracting visitors from around the world to learn about Scotland's history and see internationally significant collections. Scotland's museums care for objects from around the world so creating international cultural connections can add to our understanding of collections.

## **Economic impact**

Scotland's museums have an economic impact as they form an important part of its visitor economy, attracting international visitors who in turn will spend money on hotels and in restaurants.

## **Diplomacy**

Museums tell Scotland's stories and communicate Scotland's culture and history to international audiences. Repatriating objects to the countries from which they were taken can be a powerful and symbolic act. Loans to other countries of museum objects that hold cultural value can also strengthen cultural links.

## **Reputation**

Scotland's national collections are of international significance; therefore, museums can boost Scotland's reputation on the world stage. Museums contribute to Scotland's rich cultural offering, making Scotland an appealing destination to visit, live and work.

### **Question 8: Are there aspects of your work that would not be captured by these themes, but you feel the strategy should recognise?**

The strategy should recognise the importance of understanding other cultures and the role of the culture sector in fostering that understanding.

### **Question 9: Have you accessed Scottish public sector support for your international activity and if so which sources?**

No

### **Question 10: What has been the impact of this support on your work?**

N/A

### **Question 11: Have you accessed any other forms of support for your international activity and if so which sources?**

No

**Question 12: Is current support for international cultural activity appropriate? Are there gaps in provision in terms of focus?**

Yes

Current support for international cultural activity is appreciated. It would be helpful if current support could go further to allow more museums to begin working internationally if they are interested in doing so. Having a mechanism to make museums and other culture organisations aware of the opportunities to work internationally would be valuable.

**Question 13: Are you aware of international examples that Scotland might learn from in its support for international cultural activity?**

Museums in Scotland have forged relationships with countries ranging from China to Ireland and have used this for knowledge exchange and to promote tourism and collaboration.

**Question 14: In what ways can international activity help to mitigate current challenges? (e.g Brexit, pandemic, cost crisis)**

International activity can help with forming strong relationships, creating Memorandums of Understanding, and partnership working between institutions. This can help to mitigate against current challenges such as Brexit, the cost-of-living crisis and covid recovery.

**Question 15: Are there particular challenges that leaving the EU has caused to your international activity?**

EU exit has made it harder for museums to loan objects and tour exhibitions. It has also made museums in the UK ineligible for EU funding schemes such as Creative Europe Programme and the European Regional Development Fund.

**Question 16: If so, in what ways might this strategy seek to address those challenges?**

Targeted funding for museums for working internationally with EU partners would support collaborative working to address these challenges.

**Question 17: Are there new ways that you have begun to engage internationally or ways in which you wish to do so?**

Yes, I have begun to engage internationally in new ways

**Please could you explain your choice.**

The Museums Association works with the European Museum Forum which runs the European Museum of the Year Awards and supports Scottish museums to enter the annual competition. We also work with the Network of European Museums to ensure that we share best practice internationally.

**Question 18: What are your views on how this strategy should consider the impact of international activities on climate change?**

The International Culture Strategy should consider the impact of international activities on climate change as it is a global issue. Culture has a role to play in tackling climate change and Culture at COP at COP26 was a great example of how culture can engage with international conversations around climate change while taking a local approach. For example, as part of the Climate Beacons project for COP26, the National Mining Museum Scotland collaborated with the British Geological Survey to create a transformative journey following the carbon cycle, from Scotland's past legacy of fossil fuels towards a future of decarbonisation, connecting local and international cultures through art and science.

Culture also has a role to play in conveying to the public the devastating impacts of the climate crisis and how people can take action against it.

While the Global North produces higher levels of climate emissions, the impacts of climate change are experienced most by the Global South. The MA's [Museums for Climate Justice](#) campaign recognises this injustice and supports museums to tackle it through raising awareness, championing change and being the change.

As well as considering the impact of international activities on climate change, it would be valuable to consider the opportunities that international working offers for tackling the climate crisis. For example, Stromness Museum is working in partnership with Arctic nations on knowledge exchange projects tied to climate.

**Question 19: How would you like this strategy to further the aspiration of handling historic injustices responsibly?**

Some of Scotland's museums were founded as a result of empire and transatlantic slavery. The MA has published guidance called [Supporting Decolonisation in Museums](#) that aims to empower more people to take action and lead change as museums address the legacy of British colonialism.

When we speak about decolonising museums, it is not just about repatriation, it is a long-term process that seeks to recognise the integral role of empire in museums from their creation to the present day.

The international culture strategy should further the aspiration to handle historic injustices responsibly. We would like the international culture strategy to consider the [Empire, Slavery and Scotland's Museums Steering Group recommendations](#) and how it could support the delivery of these recommendations. For example, one of the recommendations is that the Scottish Government, building on the expertise of international and national experts, should voice support for the return of unethically acquired collections.

**Question 20: Are there particular geographies that are of greater importance to you, your organisation, or the wider sector, than others? If so, why are they of particular importance?**

Yes, there are particular geographies of greater importance to me

**If yes, please list which geographies are of greater importance.**

Yes, those countries that Scotland has a link to from empire and where some objects and collections originate.

**Question 21: Do you think an International Culture Strategy should prioritise particular geographies?**

Yes

**If yes, state why you believe certain geographies should be prioritised.**

Yes – those countries that have links through empire and have been previously excluded from partnership and collaborations.

**Question 22: Are there aspects of engaging in international cultural activity that affect equalities groups differently? (in your response please reflect on both positive and negative effects)**

The disparity in income and power between the Global North and the Global South makes inequality of opportunity inevitable.

**Question 23: If you identified any negative effects, what do you think could be done in the future to try and prevent this from happening?**

Focussing time and resources on those countries that have been excluded from partnership opportunities.

**Question 24: Are there any other comments you would like to make on the strategy as a whole at this time?**



A strong strategy could help forge new relationships and cultural connections however it will take funding and dedicated resources to make this meaningful and sustainable.