

Scottish Government: Call for Evidence

Funding for Culture

Response from University Museums in Scotland (UMIS)

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

The immediate priority of the university museums in Scotland – as with the rest of the museums sector – is financial support to ensure that museums not only survive but are able to thrive and play their part in the social and financial recovery of Scotland. The museums sector needs continued investment to ensure we can reopen and stay open, mitigate job losses, improve care of collections and continue to provide access to our collections.

UMIS and its members appreciate the support that the Scottish Government offered throughout the pandemic – particularly the £100,000 ringfenced specifically for university museums in December 2020. Likewise, the UK Government's furlough scheme has ensured that many university museums were able to retain core staff during lockdown.

Core support

During the pandemic, almost all budgets and recruitment within university museums were frozen, including the extension/mainstreaming of fixed term staff and maternity cover. At the same time, universities were prioritising core aims of teaching, student recruitment and continuing research. Access to premises was also strictly limited.

The longer-term implications of this have been impacts on sustainability and growth, gaps in delivery in the short and longer term stemming from budget cuts, fewer staff, an increased focus on the universities' specific priorities, and in some cases longer term implications for the condition and care of collections and premises.

Ensuring that museums are supported to re-build their core infrastructure will help mitigate the risk of any longer-term impacts.

Given the overall increased competition for culture funding created by Covid and continuing pressures on local authority budgets and the income of independent museums, the funding environment will continue to be incredibly challenging for the foreseeable future.

Flexibility of funding

Taking into account the complexity of the museums sector in Scotland with - museums being run independently, by Local Authorities, or by universities - we believe that the key to the success of any future funding to museums lies in its flexibility. Historically, grant funding has been awarded on the basis of additionality – projects that are to achieve impacts over and above core operations. However, the adaptability of the support given during the pandemic allowed all museums to deploy this emergency funding where it was needed most relating to their individual circumstances.

University museums are in a unique position to be funded both via the Higher and Further Education and Culture portfolios (see 'Cross portfolio endorsement'). Given the ongoing uncertainty around the continued implications of the pandemic to universities' incomes, our

parent institutions remain (justifiably) cautious around budgets and staff recruitment. Funding through culture will therefore continue to be hugely important to ensure resilience and to continue to build on wider programming.

Cross portfolio endorsement

One of the main aims of *A Culture Strategy for Scotland* is to: “Place culture as a central consideration across all policy areas, including: health and wellbeing, economy, education, reducing inequality and realising a greener and more innovative future”.

UMIS members contribute to our universities’ core areas of learning and teaching (university museums provided over 4,700 hours of teaching in the 2019/20 academic year, with over 7,500 students on courses involving our collections) and are recognised as valued international research assets (we received over 4,600 research visits and enquiries and had over 166,000 visits to our online databases in the last academic year).

However, university museums have an essential role to play in public engagement and in breaking down perceived barriers to higher education. Our museums and exhibitions attracted over 205,000 physical visitors in the 2019/20, with almost 22,000 participants in public events over this time. By providing non-academic engagement opportunities, as well as using our collections for learning, teaching and research, we are able to span academic purpose and public cultural provision.

As mentioned, university museums rely on the support of two major portfolio areas for their survival – Higher and Further Education, and Culture. The core support university museums receive from their institutions, as well as the grant funding we receive from the Scottish Funding Council (which is currently under review) are vital to the continued operations and success of our organisations. With the financial uncertainties facing universities and with a heightened prioritisation of learning, teaching and research (and therefore potentially a reduced focus on community engagement and outreach), museums and their activities are in danger of being overlooked and losing investment in favour of more ‘core’ budgets. Further, the reliance on ‘non-core grant’ funding from the Scottish Funding Council puts university museums in a precarious financial position.

Given the central consideration culture should have across policy areas, UMIS would like to see an understanding within the Scottish Government of this dual role, and a shared commitment to support and ongoing liaison between these two portfolio areas to advocate for and champion culture within the Higher Education environment.

Digital skills and infrastructure

The museum sector pivoted rapidly during the initial Covid lockdown to providing digital and online content as an alternative to wider audiences having access to museum venues. In addition, university museums started to provide expertise and materials for online teaching to their universities. There is now universal acknowledgement that, going forwards, a blended or hybrid model of delivery for both teaching and engagement will be the standard.

To this end, support in digital skills and infrastructure within the museum sector is essential to ensure that the work undertaken during the pandemic can be developed, improved and mainstreamed, and to ensure a continuity of offer.

- **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?**

It is inevitable, given the implications of the pandemic, that the landscape will be different. UMIS has found that its ethos of partnership working throughout this time has provided tangible knowledge exchange, mutual support, and an amplification of impact of our museums.

We therefore believe that providing an infrastructure which allows collaboration across types of museums to share resources would be invaluable. Further, providing pathways and models for museums to work with other cultural institutions, charities, and businesses to offer a combined cultural offer would strengthen cultural provision within Scotland.

During the pandemic, the museums sector has worked together extremely effectively to provide a single, strong voice, articulating the funding and support required, advocating for the role of museums in recovery, and reporting on delivery of projects and programmes over this time. This enhanced collaboration across the sector has built a strong foundation on which to develop a shared strategic direction for museums in future, but one which will need investment and resource to flourish.

Finally, we suggest ensuring all people have access to museums through identifying what levels of museum provision should be available to every person and providing strategic investment to ensure an equity of provision is available to communities in Scotland.

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

Museums consistently ‘punch above their weight’ in terms of delivery across a variety of agendas including health and wellbeing, social justice, diversity and inclusion, community engagement and training and employability, to name a few.

University museums are recognised globally as highly important and valued research assets, and integral to the international research infrastructure, due to the collections and knowledge they hold. They contribute extensively to learning and teaching in the Higher Education setting, currently carrying out a joint research project (funded through the AHRC) into improving the quality and uptake of digital and hybrid teaching with collections. They offer employment opportunities including internships, volunteering, work placements, and apprenticeships, upskilling students and improving employability prospects. The recent work by the University of Edinburgh and others into social and cultural prescribing is a model now being adopted internationally, and work at The Hunterian, University of Glasgow, the University of Aberdeen Museums and Special Collections, and the Museums of the University of St Andrews are leading sector practice in decolonisation and repatriation.

However, there is currently no infrastructure within which these wide-reaching outputs and initiatives from cultural organisations can gain recognition, and consequently many of the outputs go unacknowledged.

Given the extensive impacts of museums (of all types), more implicit recognition of their value across policy areas, and therefore inclusion of culture more broadly within planning

and strategy across portfolios, as well as resourcing to support this, would be hugely impactful.

Likewise, and as mentioned earlier, the university museums span both the Culture and Higher Education portfolios, relying (financially) more heavily on the latter. There is, however, no statutory provision of funding to university museums. Instead, they are reliant on grant funding from the Scottish Funding Council and discretionary funding from the host institutions.

UMIS believes that closer liaison between these Scottish Government portfolios will lead to greater recognition of the role and importance of museums within the Higher Education sector. Further, a commitment from Government to ensure ongoing core funding specifically of Local Authority/ALEO and university museums from their governing bodies/parent organisations would be essential, and once again underpin the ethos of 'embedding' culture across portfolios.

- **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?**

As already mentioned, museums deliver projects and programmes which deliver across the National Performance Framework (NPF) and Culture Strategy aims. UMIS's strategic plan maps all our activity to the NPF as well as the strategic aims of our institutions and other key stakeholders.

A multi-year budget would enable more effective forward planning, helping prevent the 'short-termism' created by annual or bi-annual project funding driving investment rather than anything more concrete. In addition, it would reduce the number of annual short-term contracts offered to project-specific staff. However, this would rely on multi-year budgets equating to longer-term project funding through grants – a more viable prospect were central budgets to follow a longer-term cycle.