

Budget scrutiny 2023-24: Funding for culture

Response from University Museums in Scotland (UMIS)

18/08/22

How are budgetary decisions supporting the recovery of the sector from COVID and what should be the Scottish Government's priorities in supporting recovery through Budget 2023-24;

There is 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 – both Higher Education funding streams – and occasional project funding through research grants and grants through Museums Galleries Scotland and other cultural bodies. Given the results of the SFC's review of their funding provision and their settlement through the Resource Spending Review, UMIS members are still awaiting a decision on ongoing funding, which is looking increasingly likely to – in a best case scenario – be at a flat cash level and only a single year settlement (see further detail on single/multi year settlements in point 5). This funding has remained static since 2012-13, despite an acknowledged increase in the ambition of the university museums and collections, including some notable growth in activity and contribution. Many university museums are already facing significant in-year and longer-term budget cuts and have lost staff due to recruitment freezes, non-renewal of contracts and continued uncertainty around funding. In short, university museums are not seeing substantial support from the budgetary decisions that have been made to date.

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, and are publishing the findings of a joint research project (funded through the AHRC) into improving the quality and uptake of digital and hybrid teaching with collections in tertiary education settings. They offer employment opportunities including internships, volunteering, work placements, and apprenticeships, upskilling students, providing opportunities to traditionally under-represented groups, 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.

- ***Given the central consideration culture should have across policy areas, UMIS would like to see an understanding within the Scottish Government of the dual role of university museums, and a shared commitment to support and ongoing liaison between the culture and Higher Education portfolio areas to advocate for and champion culture within the Higher Education environment.***
- ***A commitment from Government to ensure ongoing core funding specifically of university museums through Higher Education institutions, and grant funding through the Scottish Funding Council, will be essential going forwards, and underpin the ethos of 'embedding' culture across portfolios.***

The emergency funding provided by the Scottish Government during the acute phase of the pandemic was hugely beneficial - particularly the £100,000 ringfenced specifically for university museums in December 2020. Key to the success of this funding was 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, particularly in the support for core funding to enable museums to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic.

Coupled with continued recovery, museums maintain and continue to grow their contribution to broader Scottish Government priorities – specifically around Net Zero targets, Health and Wellbeing (outlined in point 2), education, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, digital, widening access and engagement, and widening the employability prospects of broader audiences. In addition, as outlined, university museums contribute to the research agenda and to international relations and cultural diplomacy. These activities can take considerable resource and often incur additional costs for the museums involved – particularly around decolonisation and repatriation.

- ***Provision of ring-fenced cross portfolio funding to undertake activities that underpin the aspirations of the Scottish Government will become increasingly important, as will more implicit recognition of the inclusion of culture more broadly within planning and strategy across portfolios (also see point 2).***

Given the overall increased competition for culture funding created by Covid and continuing pressures on central government and local authority budgets, the funding environment will continue to be incredibly challenging for the foreseeable future. Couple this with the increased cost of living and compounding rises in inflation, and in real terms income across culture continues to be eroded. There is ongoing uncertainty around the sustainability of services and indeed many museums are still having to have to adapt their business models to accommodate increasing costs.

Despite an increasing recognition of the established health and wellbeing benefits of culture, the Committee has previously heard that this had not led to transformational change in terms of both a cross-cutting approach within Government and increased budgetary support for culture across a number of spending areas - what needs to change to embed culture and health and wellbeing across government and the public sector;

Cross-portfolio communication channels within the Scottish Government are limited and rely on Ministers and ministerial offices to instigate dialogue with colleagues from other departments. However, in order that cultural organisations can more effectively make a case for their contribution to not only the Health and Wellbeing agenda, but also to broader areas of impact, a more inclusive and open approach to communication needs to be embedded, with cultural organisations given more agency to open discussion with other portfolio areas.

- ***A dedicated cross-portfolio forum, incorporating (in this specific case) health and wellbeing representatives, those from the cultural sector and Scottish Government colleagues and Ministers would be beneficial to take these conversations, and any future funding, forward.***

In addition, to ensure that these important and ongoing areas of focus are not tied to any particular administration, cross-party representation within the Scottish Government will be essential.

As previously mentioned, there is also currently no infrastructure within which the wide-reaching outputs and initiatives from cultural organisations can gain recognition, and consequently many of the outputs go unacknowledged. Although there is an emerging picture of the beneficial health and wellbeing impacts of culture – and its place in both prevention and treatment within this area – it is still not viewed as a ‘mainstream’ option in front line health or social care. In addition to limited options for cross-portfolio communication, this is partly due to a lack of cohesion in the way that social and health impacts are measured, with cultural agencies lacking insight into the reporting criteria used by health and wellbeing professionals, and vice versa.

- ***More implicit and explicit recognition of the inclusion of culture within planning and strategy across portfolios, as well as guidance on impact reporting within other portfolio***

areas, would serve to increase cohesion and recognition of the importance of culture more broadly, leveraging funding and investment.

The Scottish Government's independent Advisory Group on Economic Recovery in the wake of COVID-19 recommended that Ministers should in relation to the creative sector seek "ways to increase public and private investment across the sector to allow it to recover and compete" – can you provide examples of where this is happening or ways in which it should happen;

University museums, as previously mentioned, receive funding primarily through the Higher Education portfolio, including grant funding through the Scottish Funding Council and core funding through their host universities. In addition, UMIS members have leveraged funding through the AHRC and worked with SGSAH and other Scottish Graduate schools. This is in addition to the discrete project funding we receive through cultural agencies including Museums Galleries Scotland.

However, UMIS feels there must be an acknowledgement of the ongoing (and in some ways emerging) financial crisis currently happening across Scotland, the UK and beyond. Both the public and private purse are experiencing austerity that hasn't been seen for the past 40 years which is leading to greater competition from charities and public sector organisations for the diminishing funds that are still available. The (understandably) cautious approach taken by the Scottish Government in this year's Resource Spending Review has also had a knock-on effect on existing funding provided through NDPBs and grant giving organisations, increasing this competition further.

With Brexit having come into effect, university museums and other cultural agencies are now no longer able to access EU funding or take part in EU led projects, which is not only having an effect on international partnerships, but also has removed another stream of funding that could previously be accessed.

- ***An acknowledgement from the Scottish Government that although further public and private funding can be sought, this can be particularly resource-heavy (difficult when staffing and resources are at a premium) and availability of this funding is severely limited would be welcomed. Scottish Government budgetary decisions will have the greatest impact on culture and ultimately will dictate the rate of recovery.***

There also needs to be an acknowledgement that fundraising and sponsorship activities are both skilled and resource heavy. Given the diminished capacity of many cultural organisations due to lack of staff, absences or an overall reduction in resource, these activities can be outwith the capability of many museums.

- ***Brokering and facilitation of partnerships between potential private funders or businesses from the Scottish Government or supporting organisations, based on the personal or Corporate Social Responsibility interests of these funders would help to leverage increased investment in the sector.***

The Committee has previously agreed with COSLA that a 'whole system' approach is essential to the spending review and that this is consistent with an outcomes-focused and collaborative approach; our view is that it is only through such an approach that the necessary funding can be freed up to ensure that sufficient cultural services are available to meet the increased demand arising from cultural prescribing – what progress has been made in moving towards a whole system approach, what are the main barriers and how do we overcome them;

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 the pandemic, and in our recovery, has

provided tangible knowledge exchange, mutual support, and an amplification of impact of our museums.

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.

- ***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.***

Specifically within the sphere of Health & Wellbeing, the University of Edinburgh Museums *Prescribe Culture* project, the first cultural prescription programme offered by a university and initially for students and staff, has now been adopted by university museums internationally and is signposted by various health and wellbeing partners as a non-clinical alternative to tackling mental health issues. Evaluation of this programme found that although the benefits of arts and sports work for wellbeing and mental ill health intervention are finally being acknowledged, that currently heritage benefits are not as well or widely recognised.

- ***As previously referenced, more implicit and explicit recognition of the inclusion of culture within planning and strategy across portfolios, as well as guidance on impact reporting within other portfolio areas, would serve to increase cohesion and recognition of the importance of culture more broadly, leveraging funding and investment and enabling growth of capacity.***

The Committee's view is that it is essential that, wherever practical, multi-year funding for the cultural organisations the Scottish Government supports is passed on to the groups and individuals being funded who should, where appropriate, also receive a multi-year settlement – what progress has been made in moving towards multi-year funding, what are the main barriers and how do we overcome them.

Multi-year budgets 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 reduces the number of annual or short-term contracts offered to project-specific staff.

Historically, UMIS's funding from the Scottish Funding Council (through the Museums, Galleries and Collections grant) has been a multi-year settlement – initially for the duration of five years and more recently for three years - with reviews carried out at the end of each of these funding cycles. This has allowed the recipients to plan ahead, providing certainty over their budget and resulting in an increase in productivity. Due to the results of the SFC's review of their funding provision and their settlement through the Resource Spending Review, UMIS members are still awaiting a decision on ongoing funding, which is looking increasingly likely to – in a best case scenario – be at a flat cash level and only a single year settlement. UMIS has identified that the risks associated with single year funding cycles will be:

- reduction in financial and planning certainty
- inability to sufficiently plan ahead therefore a drop in visibility/contribution to host institutions
- challenges to budget setting

- disproportionate level of reporting and application time vs. activity, outputs and outcomes
- reduction in activity/short-termism
- possible drop in funding from host institutions due to uncertainty over ongoing external income when considering overall institutional budgets
- reduction in the museums' ability to attract other sources of funding
- problems attracting staff for funded projects
- job losses/lack of job security/ staff having to embark on the redundancy process unnecessarily for those working on funded projects

Although UMIS believes that Creative Scotland and other such agencies are committed to continuing multi-year settlements for RFOs, other grant giving bodies (including, in our case, the Scottish Funding Council) are having to re-assess their commitments given the uncertainty around their funding settlements from the Scottish Government.

- ***It will be essential that, as far as possible, future Resource or Comprehensive Spending Reviews to NDPBs and centrally-funded organisations provide sufficient information and security to ensure multi-year budgeting and therefore multi-year funding or grant giving.***
- ***It would be beneficial if the Scottish Government introduces policies to ensure that NDPBs (including those funded from other portfolios involved with cultural organisations) wherever possible, provide multi-year funding to grant recipients.***

The Committee has previously stated that the collaborative learning from managing the response to COVID should be harnessed and built upon; for example, in exploring how innovative ways of working such as the shift to digital platforms can enhance the accessibility of cultural activities while at the same time improving health and wellbeing – what progress has been made in embedding the collaborative learning from managing the response to COVID, what are the main barriers and how do we overcome this

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.

UMIS and its members have proven their agility to meet changing priorities including during the Covid pandemic and its subsequent restrictions, working together and collaborating with wider organisations, maintaining (and in some cases increasing) their impact and showing a consistency of activity and output. The practical value of knowledge exchange within the UMIS partnership continued to help the members, as did knowledge exchange with the entire museums sector.

Examples from UMIS of projects trialled during lockdown which now have broader impact have been:

- Given the restrictions on physical visits throughout Covid, digital engagement became increasingly important to the university museums and across the cultural sector. Despite the lifting of restrictions, the UMIS members have continued to provide, and have further developed, opportunities for audiences to engage with activities, exhibitions and experiences online. In addition, university museums have provided digital alternatives for researchers to access collections – activity that is continuing to be developed.
- The University of Edinburgh Museums have been providing their *Prescribe Culture* workshops for a broader audience via T30TV (Take 30 Together Virtually), including virtual visits and guided tours of cultural venues worldwide. Other UMIS members have now

developed cultural prescription programming as a complementary resource for healthcare professionals and the university community and inclusive wellbeing activity within their spaces and using their collections. The *Prescribe Culture* programme has now developed to include an offering for those living with health and social inequalities for whom digital is not a solution to accessing the benefits of heritage engagement, has been adopted by mental health and wellbeing professionals as a trusted resource, and is now being used as a model by university museums and collections internationally.

- The University of Stirling Art Collection and the University of Edinburgh Museums are continuing a partnership to run programming resulting in Arts Award qualifications for 11-18 year olds – particularly those with Widening Participation backgrounds. Starting as a programme for participants to achieve an Arts Award Explore qualification, this has now developed to incorporate the Arts Award Gold award and become embedded in programming.
- Given the pivot to hybrid and online teaching caused by the pandemic, UMIS members have been central in providing online teaching resources and expertise to students and academic colleagues. UMIS collaboratively received funding through the AHRC's Covid-19 Urgency Call for a project to track and evaluate the capacity, capabilities and best practice in digital teaching with collections. The report is due this summer and has been shared with colleagues internationally.

Digital work and additional engagement activities developed during the pandemic may be continuing, but the resource required to maintain this work while also prioritising recovery cannot be underestimated. Often grant funding is only given to new or innovative projects. However, to ensure this work continues and develops, investment is needed in existing activities and practices embedded through and after lockdown.

- ***Additional resource – through project funding or grants – to be made available to museums to further embed offerings that have been piloted or that have proved successful during Covid.***