Connecting Scotland - how the Scottish government and its agencies engage internationally

Museums Galleries Scotland

*Museums Galleries Scotland* is the National Development Body for the museum and gallery sector in Scotland. One of the 6 strategic aims under *Going Further: the National Strategy for Scotland’s Museums and Galleries* is to ‘Develop a global perspective using Scotland’s collections and culture’


In the area of cultural diplomacy there has been much engagement through the medium of the festivals and the arts agenda but one of the most active but little acknowledged area is through museums. While Scotland’s International Framework mentions Culture, the focus is largely on trade and direct economic benefits and relationships – we believe that there is potentially a missed opportunity to realise the international relationships which can be developed through museums.

In a recent report by VisitBritain, *How the World Views Britain*, museums were identified as the most commonly associated cultural product with the UK, ranked higher than music, films and sport. (source p.10


It is accepted that museums are among the world’s most trusted brands. (source: http://www.museumsassociation.org/download?id=954534)

Touring

Scotland has some of the finest museum collections in the world, which is evidenced by the high number of Recognised Collections in the Recognition scheme which is administered by Museums Galleries Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Government. Our museum’s collections are frequently in demand for touring and this has been encouraged by Scottish Government and the British Council who are partners in this type of engagement. There is however an expectation that this type of touring, which is an unprecedented platform on which to showcase Scotland’s culture, is expected to take place at neutral cost or at a cost to the Scottish museum organisation. The larger institutions such as National Galleries Scotland or National Museums Scotland are well established in this field and usually make a charge to cover all costs. Smaller museums, which still have important, and sometimes nationally Recognised collections, are not established in this area. They could find themselves considering to undertake this activity at a loss if they agree to loans which only cover transport costs or direct conservation costs, and do not factor in the overheads and management costs of administering this type of loan.

To maximise the potential benefits of using Scotland’s cultural assets of museum collections to raise the profile of Scotland and to further develop relationships that could turn into economic and trade relationships, it is suggested that an international touring fund be established to be administered by Museums Galleries Scotland. This
would also align with the National Strategy Aim 6 that aspires to drive international engagement and understanding.

**Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)**

Museums Galleries Scotland (MGS) engages internationally in the areas of both tangible and intangible culture we are an accredited NGO expert advisor to UNESCO in the area of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in the context of the 2003 World Convention. We sit on the steering committee for the NGO Forum which runs at every UNESCO Inter Governmental Committee meeting for the 2003 Convention and now actively contributes to global policy making in this area of culture.

As experts we are frequently asked to speak about our work on the international circuit and we use that as an opportunity to showcase the work of museums and Scotland’s culture.

**European funding and links**

MGS is actively exploring opportunities to access European funding for the benefit of the sector, both through partnerships with academic institutions and through other routes. We have recently established a partnership as a legal entity with Mechelen Heritage Unit and Rotterdam City Museum in order to apply for Culture Europe funding in 2016, which would see us build the partnership to 15 international partners to access structural funding over 6 years to support active participation of communities with their museums.

The UK is the recognised world leader for museum development and expertise, for which there is a growing global market, a market that is often dominated by London based national museums. There is a real opportunity to export the museums expertise that can be found in Scotland right across the sector. MGS is now the only dedicated national development body specifically for museums and galleries in the UK, and we are now scoping the international market for potential opportunities for the museum sector in Scotland.

It would be helpful to see cultural diplomacy being factored into the international strategy for the Scottish Government in ways that encourage it to develop and flourish. Knowledge and awareness of where cultural institutions are engaging internationally, particularly with priority countries would be very useful to share.

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Chief Executive Officer

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