

Museums Association Written Submission to Inquiry into Budget Scrutiny **2023-24**

The Museums Association (MA) believes the immediate budgetary priority for museums and galleries is the need for continued support to manage the financial impact of the pandemic, and the ongoing impact of the cost-of-living crisis. Museums across Scotland are still recovering audiences and finances from Covid, and are now faced with huge increases to fixed costs in areas such as energy and salaries. They are also preparing to play a greater role in supporting communities that are struggling with the cost-of-living crisis.

As the Scottish Government prepares a new budget, it must make resources available to help museums through this period. This includes a long-term commitment to multi-year funding settlements for local authorities to enable them to plan their cultural programmes; one-off funding to councils and ALEOs to enable museums and other public buildings to meet rapidly increasing energy costs; and a joined-up approach between VisitScotland and the country's museums to grow the visitor economy and recover from the collapse in visitor numbers due to Covid.

In addition, we support the Scottish Government's investment in the Legacy of Slavery and Empire work. This should be followed up with investment following the recommendations set out by the independent advisory body, and support for museums to develop their work on decolonisation. Another priority area is the contribution that museums can make to combating the climate crisis. Museums were a key part of the public engagement strategy for COP26 – for example, via the MGS-supported Climate Beacons project which produced creative responses to the climate crisis in seven areas of Scotland, engaging thousands of people with climate issues and the COP26 process. We want to see continued investment in public engagement, community action and energy efficiency measures in museums.

Delivering the health and wellbeing benefits of culture requires serious buy-in from the NHS, local authority services and charitable organisations. There are numerous examples of the positive impact of social prescribing, such as the Edinburgh University's Prescribe Culture initiative. However, government needs to use its leadership position, funding role and convening power to ensure that organisations across the health and wellbeing space are truly invested in social prescribing and understand the contribution that museums and cultural organisations can make.

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 public 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, the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis, 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.

Private Investment

Private investment in museums and galleries tends to occur in the form of philanthropic donations rather than to generate a direct return on investment. Recent schemes in England to create loans for cultural organisations have had very mixed results and are likely not the best option for museums and galleries in Scotland. Nevertheless, there are options to increase philanthropy in Scotland. The Scottish Government could do more to target cultural giving – particularly with schemes directed towards diaspora communities, major private companies with a presence in Scotland, and High Net Worth Individuals residing in or with close links to Scotland. For example, the Scottish Government could do more to promote the UK Cultural Gifts Scheme – which provides tax relief in return for the donation of culturally significant works to museums and galleries – to the benefit of Scottish institutions.

See Q3 above for the Museums Association's views on system-wide approaches to investment in the museums sector.

Multi-year funding settlements are hugely important in allowing museums and galleries to plan ahead and make the most of their resources. Many museums are planning exhibitions and work streams several years in advance, so having clarity on available budget is vital for efficient decision-making.

The Museums Association welcomed the increased clarity on multi-year budgeting for local government in the latest budget, and supports the ambition to create a new deal for local government before the next financial year. This must create the conditions for museums and galleries, including local authority-operated, ALEOs and independent museums, to benefit from multi-year settlements that allow them to plan appropriately. National museums should also benefit from the same level of clarity in their own settlements with government.

Museums and galleries across Scotland made a rapid and successful shift to digital delivery during Covid lockdowns. This enabled museums and galleries to support at-home education, provide support to those dealing with loneliness and isolation, and improve wider health and wellbeing. Many of these impacts were observed by the Centre for Cultural Value's Culture in Crisis report (<https://www.culturehive.co.uk/CVI/resources/culture-in-crisis-impacts-of-covid-19/>). The Museums Association is also conducting research on digital programmes during the pandemic and will be able to share further information soon.

Following the lockdowns, museums and galleries have been understandably focused on rebuilding in-person audiences. Nevertheless, many museums and galleries have adopted many aspects of their Covid digital delivery into their normal work – for example, museums have adopted more digital access for talk and events, and have been able to continue using educational materials for digital delivery. Schools have been a particular success story for digital delivery, and this is an area where further investment and sharing of best practice could help to consolidate the improvements made in this area.

