



## Education and Culture Committee

### Scotland's Educational and Cultural Future

#### Saltire Society

**March 2014**

The Saltire Society is:

- An apolitical membership organisation open to all
- An international supporter and patron of the arts and cultural heritage of Scotland
- A champion of free speech on the issues that matter to the cultural life of every Scot
- A promoter of the best of what we are culturally, now and in the future
- A catalyst to ensure new ideas are considered and the best of them are made real

As members of the Literature Forum of Scotland our views accord with the comments in that body's submission regarding the three general themes of the enquiry. This submission is specifically in response to Theme 3 and the following issue in particular:

- The benefits that could derive to Scotland if its cultural and creative output were promoted more widely;

As the debate on Scotland's constitutional future progresses the Saltire Society is concerned that relatively little has been said about how we can sustain and grow the widest civic commitment for the arts and culture. We welcome the opportunity to highlight that concern in this enquiry.

The economic, social and educational benefits that follow from deep and wide engagement with the arts and creativity, apply as much within the country as they do in terms of our profile in the wider world. But there are looming concerns.

The fraught debate over the legitimacy of spending public money on the arts and culture is increasingly evident and causing real concern in the 32 town halls across Scotland. Because the single biggest public investor in our arts and culture are of course our local authorities. There is no statutory requirement for local authorities to provide arts and cultural services. In England Equity and BECTU's TUC motion to make the arts a statutory requirement follows on reports that local authority support for culture in England will fall by a further £124 million in 2013/14. In their motion, the unions claimed that "local authorities, traditionally major supporters of the arts, face cuts of up to 50% in central government grants by 2018". They cited local councils that have had to make severe cuts to their arts budgets or remove them completely, including Westminster City Council and Somerset. Could it happen here? Is it happening here? We have already seen controversies over

libraries and arts in Moray and in Dumfries and Galloway where funding for Wigtown Library has been cut despite the crucial presence of Wigtown Book Festival.

Hard pressed councillors making hard decisions will understandably consider their priorities, and everything will be on that table.

The issue here we believe is to think imaginatively about how to promote the benefits of arts and culture across the whole country and find a means of how to encourage and support those involved.

Over 20 years ago a powerful collaboration between the Scottish Arts Council, the Scottish Museums Council, the Scottish Film Council and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities came together to produce The Charter for the Arts<sup>i</sup>. The Charter powerfully described culture as ‘the key component in defining human identity at individual, community and national level.’

Now would be a good time, the right time, to have those responsible for the support and development of our cultural lives, to come together with their local authority partners, and find a way of expressing their mutual support for and commitment to that aspect of the human condition that inspires wonder and offers meaning. Whether a Charter or some other means, we believe that a collective conversation and clearly expressed common commitment to maintaining and developing the conditions that allow culture and creativity to thrive is not beyond the scope and imagination of a small well connected nation such as Scotland.

Some of the ideas that could make a difference may be within reach. For example the well-intentioned but largely over-looked Culture Commission in 2005 proposed a menu including a call for four cultural rights ensuring that every person in Scotland can share in any publicly funded cultural activity, entitlement schemes for schoolchildren, such as Culture Vouchers, to be piloted in Scottish schools, a scheme of tax support for creative individuals promoted to the UK government by the Scottish Government, a national council for creative individuals and more funding for public libraries to buy quality books and recordings by publishers and labels, and by writers and musicians living in Scotland. Looking back at that list there is much to commend it.

This is not about the institutional landscape. It is about a fundamental belief in the idea that a vibrant and valued cultural life helps Scotland and its people to thrive.

We want to see the encouragement of private and public enterprises to recognise, value and collaborate with arts and cultural bodies. And to see that value and respect reciprocated.

We want to see support and encouragement for the executives and elected members in local authorities in their evident and vital commitment to arts and culture in their communities.

We want to maximise engagement and participation in culture and the arts throughout our communities so that the tangible contribution they can make to quality of life is felt across Scotland.

***Jim Tough***

***Executive Director***

***5<sup>th</sup> March 2014***

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## <sup>i</sup> Charter for the Arts (1994)

### **The Vision**

Culture is the key component in defining human identity at individual, community and national level. Through our culture we seek fulfilment and pleasure and the sense of being a whole person and a whole people.

Scotland's distinctive cultural identity enriches and enhances the United Kingdom and its place in the wider world. As individuals, as a Government, as funding agencies, as public and private sector we are all custodians of our culture. It is incumbent on us to ensure that it is maintained and developed.

### **Principles**

The principles which follow have emerged throughout the Charter process as being central to the future wellbeing of the arts in Scotland.

1. The Arts are an essential element of our national life, contributing to its spiritual, social and economic vitality, and are legitimate activities for public investment.
2. Everyone has a right to enjoy and participate in the arts.
3. The vision and creativity of artists is the mainspring of artistic achievement and should be affirmed and supported at all times.
4. Freedom of expression is essential to creativity and should be defined.
5. A close and discerning relationship between artists and their intended audiences is crucial to both.
6. Scotland's distinctive cultural identities, including those of minority ethnic communities, should be recognised and encouraged.
7. Education is fundamental not only in shaping the future artists but also in building the confident, informed and concerned public essential to a dynamic culture.
8. Scotland's cultural life should be developed in ways that take full account of the increasing significance of international co-operation and exchange.
9. Scotland's cultural heritage in all its forms should be preserved, augmented and made accessible to the public.
10. Cultural achievement must be assessed on the basis of quality of work not on traditional assumptions about the relative value of different art forms or about the status of the artist.
11. Public decision-making in the arts should be made at the most appropriate level – whether it be local, regional or national.
12. Public decision-making in the arts should be open and accountable.
13. It should be the aim of all those engaged in the arts to ensure that appropriate provision is made across regions, constituencies and art forms.

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