

MA Response to the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee's Culture in Communities Consultation

About the MA

The Museums Association (MA) is a membership organisation representing and supporting museums and people who work with them throughout the UK. Our network includes 10,000 individual members working in all types of roles, from directors to trainees, and we represent 1,500 institutional members ranging from small volunteer-run local museums to large national institutions. Founded in 1889, the MA was the world's first professional body for museums. We lead thinking in UK museums with initiatives such as Museums Change Lives and the Learning & Engagement Manifesto, and we provide £1.4m per year of funding for museum projects via our Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund and other grants. The Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund supports museums to improve their inclusive collections and participatory practice with, and sometimes led by, community partners. For more information about the MA, see our website: <http://www.museumsassociation.org/home>

How do national and local layers of government, along with the third sector, complement each other to ensure that communities have opportunities to take part in cultural activities?

The MA's code of ethics sets out the ethical standards to which museums should comply. It states that museums should work in partnership with communities, audiences, potential audiences and supporters of the museum and ensure that everyone has the opportunity for meaningful participation in the work of the museum.

Article 27 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community. The MA's Learning & Engagement Manifesto recognises that access to and participation in culture is a basic human right. It, therefore, sets out that everyone has a right to representation and agency in museums, and communities should have the power to decide how they engage.

However, the cost-of-living crisis means local government is facing acute financial challenges and many local authorities across the country are cutting culture funding. These cuts will result in some local authorities limiting cultural provision or removing free access to culture which will have a detrimental impact on the rights of communities to access culture. Therefore, investment is needed from national government to ensure that there is consistent culture provision so communities can access culture in their local area. It is essential that national governments work closely with local government and

third sector organisations to ensure that each local authority in Scotland has a strong cultural offering to avoid access to culture becoming a postcode lottery. Many local museums deliver transformational and engaging experiences working with their local communities and they need investment and support from their local authorities to do that. We need a fair funding settlement from national governments to local government to enable local authorities to support and invest in their museums.

Local authority or arms-length provided services are crucial parts of a wider cultural ecosystem. Councils should explore how civic services can better support, and benefit from, increased collaboration and shared services with the independent sector, national organisations and neighbouring local authorities.

National government can also play a role in ensuring there is good infrastructure to allow communities to travel to cultural offerings. This is particularly important for rural communities.

It is important that communities have a variety of cultural offerings in their local area so they have a choice of what to engage with and how to engage.

Museums use their spaces, collections and expertise to enhance people's quality of life, improve educational outcomes and create culture-led regeneration projects for our towns and cities. However, many museums have been forced to scale back their ambitions in these areas because of the pressure on public funding over the past decade. Substantial new investment would enable museums to deliver outcomes that meet local priorities, informed by local communities. This investment should also be used to enable museums to work in partnership with third sector organisations and businesses in order to increase their local impact.

Free entry to national museums delivers a huge range of cultural, learning and economic benefits. As museums act as warm and welcoming spaces during the cost of living crisis, it is even more pertinent that national museums maintain free entry. We know that admission charges create barriers to accessing museums, disproportionately affecting those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

How is unmet cultural need determined? And who decides this?

Cultural institutions should serve their communities; therefore, local communities should be empowered to decide and communicate when cultural need is not being met.

However, there is also a responsibility on national and local government to ensure that communities in neighbourhoods across Scotland have the opportunities to participate in culture and heritage.

The cultural and heritage sectors are determined to be inclusive of all communities living within Scotland – providing physical spaces and digital access for people of all backgrounds to express themselves, reflect on their heritage and enjoy arts and creative activity.

Anti-racism, inclusion and work to overcome poverty and inequality are important parts of the work of many within the cultural and heritage sectors. Museums, libraries, archives, and other cultural organisations have been at the forefront of challenging inaccurate and incomplete representations of the past on issues such as slavery. This is not only the right thing to do, but helps these cultural organisations develop new audiences and reduce barriers so that people of all backgrounds feel able to take part in cultural life.

What does good ‘place-based’ cultural policy look like in practice?

Culture and heritage create a sense of belonging, encourage community engagement and support active participation in decision-making. It is our shared culture and heritage that makes our communities what they are.

Good “place based” cultural policy involves empowering the local community to create a cultural offering that caters to their specific needs. It requires co-production, where cultural institutions and communities work together as equal partners, so that communities have ownership over the cultural offering. Place based cultural policy needs to be adequately resourced and funding needs to be consistent across local areas.

Culture and heritage should be considered essential amenities under the “20 minute neighbourhood” approach to planning. Following the publication of the National Planning Framework 4, local authorities should set out how they will embed culture and heritage in local neighbourhoods.

An important part of creating 20-minute neighbourhoods will be ensuring that places are easily accessible on foot or by wheel. Local authorities should use cultural infrastructure to support active travel through, for example, providing bike racks, as well as ensuring that active travel schemes link the places people live with the places they wish to visit, including cultural venues.