

MA Response to the Scottish Parliament Budget Scrutiny 2024-25: Funding for Culture

1. In our [pre-budget report](#) last year, the Committee described the operating environment of the culture sector as facing a “perfect storm” of long-term budget pressures, reduced income generation, and increased operating costs. How has this evolved over the last 12 months? What impact has the Budget for 2023-24 had on the culture sector?

About the Museums Association

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>

The lack of investment in the museum sector is impacting the ability of museums to deliver against Scottish Government priorities.

Museums contribute to the visitor economy, attracting international visitors from around the globe. Museums also contribute widely to a range of Scottish Government policy priorities from increasing health and wellbeing, raising awareness of the climate crisis, fostering a sense of place in local communities and addressing legacies of colonialism and empire.

The Scottish Government Culture Strategy for Scotland aims to place culture as a central consideration across all policy areas, including health and wellbeing, economy, education, reducing inequality and realising a greener and more innovative future. However, there is a real disconnect between this ambition and the lack investment in the culture sector, including museums. We are pleased that the Culture Strategy recognises that culture has the potential to enhance work across these policy areas and

enrich the lives of the people of Scotland but without adequate funding these ambitions cannot be realised.

Museums continue to face long-term budget pressures.

While measures such as the extension of the Energy Bill Relief Scheme for museums have helped to mitigate some of the impacts of rising energy costs, the museum sector still facing severe financial challenges.

Over the last twelve months many museums have begun to use their reserves due to declining budgets and increased costs. Some museums are unable to use reserves so are having to make cuts to their workforce or take other cost saving measures such as reducing opening hours or cutting back on community engagement and public programming.

While some museums have seen a return to pre-Covid visitor numbers, others are still experiencing significantly lower levels. In some cases, the lack of budget to invest in community engagement activities to engage new audiences is impacting visitor numbers. We have heard from some museums that they are focusing their limited resources on running activities that will encourage high engagement such as LEGO activities and Warhammer painting. Whilst these are valuable ways of building audiences and revenue, it can mean moving away from public programming that engages audiences with the stories of their collections.

Local authority museums are experiencing cuts to their services. Due to rising inflation and reducing local authority budgets, councils are having to make difficult decisions about which services to reduce and stop. As a result, civic museums across the country are under pressure, with the threat of closures and redundancies becoming increasingly common. When specialised staff are made redundant, it reduces the services the museum can deliver and has a direct impact on communities.

Independent museums are also facing acute financial challenges as many are unable to generate enough revenue to fund their operational costs, preserve their collections and run community engagement activities. Cuts to local authority funding will also impact independent museums as it will increase competition for already oversubscribed grant funding.

It is clear that museums need investment to support their operational running costs and to ensure that communities across Scotland have access to a high-quality museum service. Without this, there is a risk of managed decline in museum services across Scotland and an inconsistency in service between local areas resulting in a postcode

lottery of access to collections. In many cases, those living in areas of greater social deprivation will be the most likely to be impacted by cuts to services.

Another risk lack of investment poses is that museums may introduce admission charges to keep their doors open and lights on. Admission charges are likely to further inequality by making museum visits a luxury that only some can afford. This is a real concern at a time when there is a cost-of-living crisis and many people are already having to cut back on spending. Last winter, many museums in Scotland transformed into “warm and welcoming spaces” for people who could not afford to heat their homes. Museums were in a unique position to do this as many are free to enter and are a hub in their community. It is likely there will be a similar need this winter but with continued cuts to museum funding, fewer museums will be in a position to offer this service.

Museums need urgent investment in buildings and maintenance to support the ambition to reach net zero by 2045.

The majority of museums in Scotland are in historic and vitally important listed buildings. Many museums now face daily battles against leaks, crumbling buildings and creaking infrastructure. There is a huge backlog in repairs and maintenance and urgent investment is needed to resolve these issues as museums do not have the budget to fund this essential work. MGS data shows that organisations are experiencing an increase between 1% and 20% of capital costs, with some experiencing costs over 50% for urgent capital works.

The MEND (Museum Estate and Development) Fund delivered by Arts Council England has been a welcomed initiative in England to address some of these issues but there is no equivalent scheme available in Scotland.

Addressing urgent repairs and maintenance is also important to support museums with their transition to net zero. Financial support to adapt old historic building to make them more energy efficient is a necessary step to tackle the climate crisis and would in turn support museums with their running costs.

Without urgent investment, there is a risk that museum buildings will be left to fall into disrepair. Earlier this year Falkirk Council announced its [Strategic Property Review](#) to close some of its buildings as it is faced with financial deficit, ageing buildings and pressure to achieve climate targets. Two of the buildings at risk of closure are museums stores that hold locally and nationally significant museum collections.

If urgent action is not taken to address the backlog of repairs and maintenance, we will continue to see museum buildings and stores put at risk.

Low pay and low morale are affecting the museum workforce

The MA supports the Scottish Government's real Living Wage conditionality for public sector grants as we actively advocate for fair pay and fair work in the sector. In our [Salary Research and Recommendations 2022](#), we recommended that all museum workers, regardless of contract type or hours of work, should as a minimum be paid the Real Living Wage set by the Living Wage Foundation.

While we believe that real Living Wage conditionality is a positive and necessary step to achieve fair work, we are concerned that some museums in Scotland cannot afford to implement these changes and will instead be left without access public sector funding. We would like to see a managed strategy to support all museums in Scotland to adopt the real Living Wage.

We recognise there is an issue with low pay in the sector and the impact of this is that staff, particularly Front of House staff, are leaving for other sectors.

In addition, we are hearing from our members that volunteer recruitment is also an issue. Many museums experienced a decline in volunteer numbers during the pandemic and many volunteers have not returned post-pandemic. The cost-of-living crisis has contributed to the challenge of volunteer recruitment with many people no longer able to afford to give their time for free.

- 2. Our report also concluded that that this crisis provides an opportunity to accelerate innovative solutions to the budgetary pressures within the sector. What progress has been made on this in the last 12 months? And at a time of limited resources, what other innovative approaches could the Scottish Government take forward to support the culture sector?*

Mainstreaming culture: A whole system approach

There is an opportunity to realise the potential of culture to bring about transformational change across Scottish Government policy areas including the economy, health, education and climate change. Museums are already doing innovative work in these areas but more progress needs to be made to formalise cross-departmental working in Scottish Government to truly embed culture across policy areas.

Where culture can bring about transformational change across other policy areas, funding needs to be made available to support this. An example of this is the [Climate](#)

[Engagement Fund](#) which is open to cultural organisation, including museums. However, there are limitations in this fund as the funding cannot go towards the core costs of an organisation. Additionally, museum buildings and collections provide a unique infrastructure to work collaboratively with partners and communities to drive transformational change in society. Investment in the core infrastructure of museums is an important first step to unlocking the potential of what museums can achieve across policy areas.

In order for cultural organisations to be able to deliver against cross-departmental policy priorities in a strategic and impactful way, they need to be given adequate core funding to be able to dedicate the time of permanent staff to this work. Grant funded fixed-term posts are likely to result in a loss of knowledge, contacts and momentum when the post finishes.

3. [The Committee called for](#) the forthcoming refreshed Culture Strategy Action Plan to provide a clear and strategic sense of how the Scottish Government is working to ensure a more sustainable future for the sector. How should the refreshed Culture Strategy Action Plan help to inform future budgetary decisions within the culture sector?

As the refreshed Culture Strategy Action Plan has not been published, we cannot comment on this fully.

However, any actions for the sector must be supported with funding for them to be achieved. While the museum sector is ambitious and keen to deliver against the strategy, the lack of resources and capacity in the sector means this cannot be done realistically without investment.