

MA Response to the Scottish Parliament Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee Pre-Budget Scrutiny 2025-26

Planned budget increases

The Scottish Government committed to increasing its investment in arts and culture by £100 million by 2028-29. In doing so, it said it will—

- Increase opportunities for participation in creative pursuits;
- Support the production of new works; and
- Ensure that Scotland’s cultural output has platforms at home and abroad.

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture indicated that £25 million is intended to be added to the culture budget for 2025-26.

1. How should planned budget increases for the culture portfolio in Budget 2025-26 be prioritised to support improved cultural outcomes?

Culture Strategy Action Plan

The Scottish Government published its refreshed [Culture Strategy Action Plan](#) in December 2023.

The Cabinet Secretary [told](#) the Committee last year that “the priorities” for the “increased investment through to 2028-29 will be taken forward in line with our Culture Strategy Action Plan Refresh.”

The Museums Association (MA) welcomes the Scottish Government commitment to invest at least £100m more annually in the arts and culture by 2028-29.

Budgetary pressures are being felt across the museum sector. Despite Scottish Government committing to increased investment in culture, funding for museums has continued to decline.

The Scottish Budget 2024-25 cut capital funding available to non-national museums by 15.1%.

These cuts will have a detrimental impact on museum services in Scotland and will have a direct impact on communities who rely on these services. Cuts to funding will be a significant barrier to museums being able to deliver the aims in the Museums and Galleries Strategy 2023 – 2030 and the Culture Strategy Action Plan.

A survey by Museums Galleries Scotland (MGS) found that 11% of museums report their organisation is at risk of closure in the next 12 months. In addition to this, 14% report they have only up to one month of reserves and 28% report they have reserves of three months or less.

Investment is needed in museum infrastructure to support the inspiring and exciting work that museums can deliver. Project funding is welcome but funding that covers core organisational costs is vital for museums to be able to keep their doors open. We are aware that some museums have had to stop applying for project funding as they do not have the capacity or resources to deliver projects on top of the day-to-day running of the museum.

Many museums are housed in old and leaky historic buildings which are expensive to run. The historic environment – including historic buildings and infrastructure – has an important wider role to play in the transition to Net Zero. Museums need dedicated funding to ensure that their buildings and collections are sustainable and so they can continue to support communities to be more sustainable and take action for climate justice. An equivalent to the Museum Estates and Development (MEND) fund in England is needed and it should be geared towards supporting sustainable buildings.

The unique nature of Scotland's industrial museums, which care for collections of large machinery and complex heritage buildings, means that the sharp rise in utility bills and maintenance costs has had a magnified impact. Industrial museums are also experiencing lower visitor numbers than pre-pandemic levels. The combination of the impacts of covid-19 and rising costs means that some industrial museums in Scotland fear they may become insolvent by the end of the year.

Auchindrain is a unique site that is central to Scotland's history with Category A listed buildings, Recognised Collections and in a conservation area. There is a strong likelihood that it will not reopen next year after its HES grant finishes. We are calling for an independent review and feasibility study to save the site.

University museums are experiencing significant financial challenges due to recent cuts the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) introducing a 26% cut to the Museums, Galleries and Collections grant. Five museums have faced a 20% reduction in the grants they receive in 2024/25, while four museums have had their funding cut completely.

Local museums deliver transformational and engaging experiences working with their communities and they need investment and support from their local authorities to do that. This means a fair, long-term funding settlement for local government to enable local authorities to support and invest in their museums. The financial pressures on local authorities mean that they are having to make difficult decisions about which

services to cut. As non-statutory services, museum services are often the first to be cut which has put local museums in a state of managed decline. This undermines their ability to care for collections and engage with local communities. In some cases, museums are at risk of closure. For example, Dundee City Council made almost £20m in cuts, and came close to closing several venues this year, including Broughty Castle. We urgently need a strategic approach to funding from government to provide a sustainable and positive future for the sector.

The Campaign for the Arts and the University of Warwick recently published a [State of the Arts report](#) which found that the UK has the lowest levels of government spending on culture among European nations. The research showed that local government revenue funding of culture and related services had decreased by 29% in Scotland, alongside rising costs and demand pressures on statutory services.

This has put museums in Scotland in an extremely precarious position with many at risk of cuts and closure. All parts of the culture sector need to be considered in relation to the planned budget increases. We would urge the Scottish government to invest some of the £100 million committed to the arts and culture sector by 2028/29 in the museum sector.

2. To what extent does the Culture Strategy Action Plan deliver the Committee’s recommendation that it should “provide a clear and strategic sense of how the Scottish Government is working to ensure a more sustainable future for the sector”?

The Museums Association (MA) welcomes the Culture Strategy Action Plan, A culture strategy is important as it creates ambition and a strategic vision for the culture sector to drive it forward.

However, there is a discrepancy between the ambitions and the resources available in the culture sector. Without funding, the ambitions in the Culture Strategy Action Plan cannot be realised.

A recent survey of Scotland’s museums and galleries by MGS has highlighted a sector in crisis. There is an urgent need to invest in museums and galleries to avoid further closures, depletion of the workforce, and loss of community enriching programming. Collections management roles have halved from 6% to 3% and education, learning and participation roles are down from 7% to 4%. This demonstrates that there is a hollowing out of skills and expertise in the sector.

3. How should the Culture Strategy Action Plan inform the budgetary decisions of the Scottish Government, and the priorities and spending decisions of other partners in the culture sector?

We think it is a sensible approach for the Culture Strategy Action Plan to inform the budgetary decisions of the Scottish Government. We would also like to see the actions in the Museums and Galleries Strategy 2023-2030 used to inform spending decisions.

We would like to see continued funding for the delivery of the Empire Slavery and Scotland's Museums (ESSM) recommendations. We are delighted that the Scottish Government has provided funding of £200,000 so that this work can begin but more investment is needed to create a dedicated space to address Scotland's role in empire, colonialism and historic slavery. The ESSM steering group suggested £5 million would be required to deliver the recommendations.

The MA believes everyone should have the right to engage with and participate in museums and have access to a high-quality museum service near to where they live. Museums should be properly funded to allow people to participate in the cultural life of their community.

We would like to see core funding provided to museums as this would provide museums with the essential resources to take forward the actions in the culture and museum strategies.

The museum sector delivers excellent value for money so it is worth the Scottish Government investing in. Economic impact research published by MGS in 2023 found that for every £1 of core funding provided to museums, the economic output generated is more than double this at £2.67.

Progress on innovative funding solutions

In our report last year, the Committee expressed concern that there had been—

- No indication of progress made by the Scottish Government on our recommendations on mainstreaming culture across portfolios and developing cross-portfolio funding for culture;
- No indication of progress made by the Scottish Government on its 2021 Programme for Government commitment to “begin work on establishing a ‘Percentage for the Arts’ scheme”; and
- Limited progress on the Scottish Government’s 2021 Programme for Government commitment to “invest in much-needed stability for the cultural organisations

that we provide regular funding for, by agreeing 3-year funding settlements, to allow them to plan for a sustainable recovery”.

The Committee’s view was that there is a need for much greater urgency and a clear pathway to make tangible progress on these innovative funding solutions.

4. What progress has been made in the last 12 months on taking forward innovative funding solutions?

We welcome the action to mainstream culture across portfolios and developing cross-portfolio funding for culture but we are unaware of what progress has been made on this action. Many museums are doing innovative cross-portfolio work such as social prescribing, engaging audiences with climate justice, and providing educational opportunities to schoolchildren. We would like to see this work recognised and investment provided to museums that are delivering on cross-departmental policy priorities.

Whilst we welcome ambitions to promote philanthropy, public investment is key to unlocking philanthropy. There are also reputational risks and ethical considerations that come with museums accepting private sponsorship.

In addition, new, ambitious and time-bound initiatives are more appealing to funders which can make it harder to sustain initiatives and create real lasting change. Project funding means that many roles in the sector are short-term contracts. This risks knowledge and relationships being lost when the funding stops and contracts ends. In order to do meaningful work, museums need to be supported to form trusted and long-lasting partnerships with communities.

We would like the percentage for the arts scheme to be developed to include the whole of the culture sector. Further to this, we call on the Committee to support setting a target of at least 1% of overall Scottish Government investment in culture, which the Committee has supported in the past.

[Art Fund’s Museum Directors Research](#) found that while museums across the UK have made the case against further cuts and been entrepreneurial in finding ways to generate more income with 49% increasing their self-generated income in the last year. However, it is not enough to and the ability of museums to commercialise to generate income varies widely depending on the assets they have and the demographics of the area.

Due to the acute financial pressures on local authority funding for museums across Scotland, we are jointly calling for a review of funding solutions for museums in Scotland alongside leading sector organisations. This review should articulate the

operating context for museums at all scales across Scotland, what museums deliver, and a new framework for success alongside costings.

Creative Scotland's Multi-Year Funding Programme

A significant change in the culture funding landscape moving forward will be the implementation of Creative Scotland's new Multi-Year Funding Programme. It will offer funding for creative and cultural organisations, supporting core costs and their programmes of work for the initial period of April 2025 to March 2028.

5. How successful has the process of implementing Creative Scotland's Multi-Year Funding Programme been thus far in delivering longer-term clarity and confidence for the culture sector?

Museums in Scotland have no access to core funding in the way that other parts of the culture sector do through Creative Scotland. The MA would like to see multi-year funding distributed to the museum sector through MGS to give museums the ability to plan ahead. This would provide longer-term clarity and confidence to museums.

Another issue is that currently non-accredited museums in Scotland do not have access to funding. Non-accredited museums make up 40% of the museum sector in Scotland, therefore, this is a significant proportion of museums excluded from funding.

Fair work

The Scottish Government has [said](#) it will “continue to work on making the culture and heritage sector part of Scotland as a Fair Work Nation by 2025”.

A Culture Sector Fair Work Task Force has been established to provide recommendations on priority actions that Scottish Government and partners can take to further Fair Work across the culture sector in support of the creative and cultural workforce.

Fair Work is also one of Creative Scotland's three strategic priorities and one of their funding criteria.

6. What progress has been made in delivering fair work across the culture sector and what should be the priorities for further progress?

The MA campaigns for inclusive and diverse museums that deliver fair working conditions and workforce wellbeing. We believe that all workers, regardless of contract type or hours of work, should at a minimum be paid the Real Living Wage set by the Living Wage Foundation, which is calculated annually based on what people need to live. In 2022, the MA published its salary guidelines and recommendations for museums to provide clear and accurate data on the current state of pay levels in the museum sector: <https://www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/workforce/pay-in-museums/>

The pandemic and now the cost-of-living crisis have taken a toll on wellbeing and pay. Low pay and employment insecurity means talented and experienced staff are leaving the sector and we are facing a recruitment crisis. This has an impact on the diversity of the sector, with low pay and poor terms and conditions likely to put off people from ethnically diverse or lower income backgrounds.

The MA supports the Scottish Government's ambition to become a Fair Work Nation by 2025. Fair Work conditionality for grants has helped to drive forward the implementation of the living wage in the sector. However, it has caused some museums to be locked out of applying for grants because they are unable to afford to pay the living wage. In other cases, some museums are paying the living wage to the lowest paid staff but they cannot afford to implement pay increases across the rest of the pay scale. While living wage conditionality is a positive step forward, it has further increased financial pressures on museums at a time when they are experiencing funding cuts. Many museums have implemented the real living wage so it is important that there is investment in the sector to support these museums to continue to provide fair work.

Some workers in the museum sector fear that their job is not secure or are worried that their job role is changing. This is having an impact on the mental health of workers in museums.

In summer 2022 we conducted research into workforce wellbeing in the museum sector. The research found that the key factors at work affecting wellbeing related to excessive demands (53%), not feeling recognised (48%) and not feeling valued (44%). A third of respondents didn't feel cared for and felt that workforce wellbeing was not prioritised in their organisation. We recommend that all museum activities should be sufficiently resourced to deliver successfully without excessive demands and negative impacts on wellbeing. Wellbeing should be proactively centred in all planning, budgeting, risk assessment and decision-making.

<https://www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/workforce/wellbeing-research/>

About the MA

The Museums Association (MA) is a dynamic membership organisation representing and supporting museums and people who work with them throughout the UK. Our network includes over 10,000 individual members working in all types of roles, from directors to trainees, and we represent more than 1,500 institutional members ranging from small volunteer run local museums to large national institutions. The MA campaigns for socially engaged museums and a representative workforce. We work ethically and sustainably and collaborate with partners where we have common aims and values.
