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Acknowledged. 
B1275258**Matthews B (Barry)**

From: Christine Russell [editor@scotiareview.org]
Sent: 29 March 2007 20:23
To: Cultural Bill Consultation
Subject: Draft Culture (Scotland) Bill

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Dear Barry Matthews

As a small voluntary arts organisation based in Caithness, I wish to register some thoughts on the proposed Culture Bill. I am happy for my name, website address and e-mail address to be made public, along with the text of my response.

The review of the arts infrastructure is welcome, but there are key issues which are of concern to smaller organisations, like ourselves.

The Bill makes no specific reference to a key recommendation for the fulfilment of this pledge, made in the **Final Report of the Cultural Commission**, chaired by James Boyle. The Cultural Commission's wide-ranging report concluded that a much greater financial commitment would be required from Government to support the pledge. To me this is one of the main problems about the proposals for how the Bill will impact on local authorities.

Resources

There is huge emphasis within the Draft on how much responsibility for community cultural provision will rest on local authorities. The financial implications of this are huge, especially when local authorities also face increased demands across other services. However, as someone who works within the cultural sector, both privately, and part-time for my local authority, it strikes me that money is not the only resource which will be required to meet proposed demands. The Guidance Document for local authorities that accompanies the Draft Bill does – at the end – makes mention of the need for training and skills development for local authority staff to deliver these extended cultural responsibilities. I think there is a danger that the Executive is over-estimating current provision within current staffing of cultural services, especially in rural areas like Caithness. It's a big ask that staff unfamiliar with the arts in particular – who might indeed have little interest in the arts – can deliver the extent of cultural entitlement, access and participation laid out in the Bill. Also, there is a major loop-hole for local authorities in relation to delivery of 'cultural entitlements': In Section 2.8 the Draft suggests that, although authorities might make new facilities or services available, *'they may also provide entitlements through existing provision'*. A good excuse to stick with the status quo.

Inclusion

Whereas the cultural infrastructure in the Central Belt is fairly extensive, it is more patchy beyond this. Highland is a huge region. Restructure notwithstanding, the tendency for Inverness to dominate is continually frustrating, and communication from the centre to the perceived 'periphery' is not always good. It seems unrealistic to expect that this situation will magically disappear because of the Bill. The likelihood is that already overstretched officers and subordinate staff in rural areas will be prevailed on to deliver more for the same or less, without adequate briefing and staffing. It is important that the inclusive principle implicit in the document is made explicit to allow even provision across all the areas of Highland.

Partnerships

The emphasis on developing cultural partnerships with the private and voluntary sectors, and embedding cultural provision within Community Planning is also sensible, but – again – will require investment and enthusiasm to make it work. Simply demanding that local authorities deliver will not be welcome, and the necessary time needed for such complex knitting together of cross-community services will be substantial.

Quality Assurance, etc.

Much is made of how local authorities will be accountable to the Executive as well as to their communities regarding their cultural planning, provision, evaluation and reporting. In practice, it is easy to imagine how this could deteriorate, becoming a series of box-ticking exercises. The time needed to amass and report this data in a meaningful way makes even more demands in terms of available staffing. Without the right creative staff in place, there will be a tendency to settle for what is easy and/or already in place, rather than developing original, culturally relevant and long-lasting creative activity.

Terminology

The term 'Culture' itself is an umbrella term that is bound to create confusion within authorities about setting priorities. Creative Scotland, as well as the Scottish Executive, will have to offer guidance to authorities about the boundaries between 'Art' and 'Heritage', and ensure there is provision for some 'purity' when it comes to arts activity. Not absolutely everything can – or should – be delivered only in terms of obvious community benefit, and there is potential for imbalance where art, heritage, sport, etc. are all competing for funding under the same banner. By their very nature, professional arts will often demand subjective reaction; it is important that local authorities, while providing important services, are not expected – or encouraged – to make significant judgements in these areas.

Yours sincerely

Christine Russell
Chair, Scotia Review
14 Henderson Court
Thurso
Caithness

13/04/2007

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01847 892599

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