

Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee pre-budget scrutiny 27-28

Scotland's museums and galleries are among the nation's most significant civic assets. They care for the collections, stories and places that define Scotland's past and help shape its future. They are valued public spaces that support learning, wellbeing, community participation, local economies and place-based development. Across urban, rural and island communities, they provide infrastructure that is cultural in purpose but social, economic and civic in impact.

They are part of Scotland's essential civic infrastructure. Every day, they demonstrate significant public value extending well beyond their doors. We believe that **investing in museums is an investment in the public interest.**

But success should not be mistaken for security. This activity is being delivered against a backdrop of sustained financial pressure. Years of constrained funding, alongside depleted reserves, workforce pressures, ageing buildings and infrastructure. All of which are reducing the capacity of museums to plan, invest and respond to future challenges.

We are nearing the point where the resilience built up by museums themselves cannot compensate for the structural pressures outwith their control. Without stable revenue funding, a resilient workforce and investment in buildings and infrastructure, museums will need to devote their scarce resources to delivering core roles at the expense of the social value and opportunities they currently provide for Scotland's people and places.

With increased culture funding available, it is time that Scotland's museums and galleries received their fair share. Multi-year funding of the type available to arts organisations would help protect and strengthen the sector, giving museums stability to plan for the future and do more of what Scotland needs from them: supporting thriving communities, strengthening local economies, boosting learning and skills, preventing poor health and promoting wellbeing, and building a stronger sense of place and belonging.

Scotland's Museums deliver public value every day

Our most recent economic impact assessment found that every £1 of core grant generates £2.67 in direct, indirect and induced economic output, with the sector supporting £221 million in total economic output and £115.1 million in GVA. Museums also contribute significantly to the visitor economy, with visitors generating an estimated £831 million in spending outside museums. This demonstrates the wider economic value of investing in a sustainable museum sector and its potential to support thriving local economies and Scotland's wider economic ambitions.

But this is just a part of the story. Across Scotland, museums and galleries provide accessible spaces where people learn, connect, volunteer, participate, and engage with their local communities.



The [Strategy for Scotland's Museums and Galleries](#) recognises the sector as contributors to education, health and wellbeing, place-making, social inclusion, skills development and economic growth.

The breadth of this work can be seen in the responses to our most recent sector survey

- **63% of museums are actively delivering targeted health and wellbeing activity**
- **92% of those museums work with older people**
- **68% work with people experiencing loneliness and isolation**
- **80% work with people living in socio-economically deprived communities**
- **83% actively engage with primary schools. 82% with secondary schools**
- **70% work with universities. 60% with colleges**

These figures illustrate that museums are often delivering outcomes that sit well beyond traditional culture budgets. If properly supported this national network of museums could be well-placed to support place-based approaches to preventative approaches to addressing Scotland's social challenges.

A sector delivering despite long-term underinvestment

The public value delivered by museums stands in contrast to the financial challenges facing much of the sector. Evidence collected by MGS highlights significant financial fragility:

- **17% of organisations believe a museum they operate could be at risk of closure within 12 months**
- **40% hold three months or less of reserves**

While rising costs continue to place pressure on staffing, programming and collections care, the museum workforce has seen specialist collections, curatorial and learning roles reducing over time. These skills are difficult to replace once lost and are vital to the stewardship of Scotland's collections.

Despite delivering substantial public benefit, museums continue to operate within a funding landscape that compares unfavourably with other parts of Scotland's cultural sector. Of the around £70 million in additional culture funding announced in recent years, just £4 million has been directed to our non-national museums through Museum Futures. The lack the multi-year funding settlements, available in other parts of the cultural sector, is making it harder for museums to plan strategically, retain staff, invest in their buildings and deliver sustained public benefit. **We cannot expect museums to deliver more public value while narrowing their capacity to do so.**

Compounding this, Scotland's museums are further disadvantaged when it comes to capital investment. There is no equivalent Scottish capital programme comparable to the UK Government [Museum Estate and Development Fund](#) (MEND).



The MEND scheme has allocated £112 million between 2021 and 2025 to support vital infrastructure, maintenance and capital projects across England's museums. In 2026, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport announced a new £160 million cultural infrastructure package, which will continue to support museum infrastructure through MEND.

Without a similar, dedicated mechanism, to address the significant investment required across museum buildings and infrastructure Scotland's museums are being forced to defer works, increasing the risk to their building and collections that will only become more significant and costly challenges over the longer term.

Caring for collections on behalf of the public is a substantial responsibility and comes with similar substantial costs for conservation, storage and building maintenance.

Our recent sector survey tells us about the physical condition of Scotland's museum estate. Many museum buildings are ageing and face increasing pressures from climate change, rising energy costs and deteriorating infrastructure. Collections can only be protected if the buildings housing them remain fit for purpose.

The risks are clear:

- **Deteriorating buildings increase long-term costs. 52% of museums report not being on top of their regular maintenance, 38% are caring for a building whose condition is graded as being poor or bad**
- **Collections face greater threats from environmental conditions and climate impacts**
- **Opportunities to improve public access and community use are lost**

Strategic capital investment now represents good public value. Preventative investment to improve buildings, climate resilience and collections infrastructure is considerably more cost-effective than dealing with major failures later. **The sector needs a more ambitious capital investment approach recognising these buildings as part of the nation's civic and cultural infrastructure.**

Museum Futures: Investing in what works

The clearest example of strategic investment working in practice is the [Museum Futures](#) programme.

Museum Futures is a pioneering journey towards long-term sustainability, backed by £4 million Scottish Government investment delivered by MGS in partnership with the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The programme represents a holistic approach to strengthening organisational resilience, leadership, innovation and sustainability across Scotland's museums.



In its first year:

- **104 museum organisations engaged with the programme**
- **58 organisations received support through 94 separate awards**
- **£3.5 million was distributed**

Most importantly, Museum Futures is changing the conditions that enable museums to thrive. Participating museums reported clearer priorities, stronger leadership capacity and renewed organisational planning. More than nine in ten supported museums reported that the Organisational Health Check helped clarify priorities, while around four in five said it had led to actions they would not otherwise have taken.

Organisations receiving Leadership Capacity Fund support report leadership time being freed for strategic work. This matters because transformation cannot happen when organisations are forced to operate entirely in survival mode. **The benefits of Museum Futures are dependent on continuation.** The programme has established foundations for long-term change, but those outcomes require sustained investment and a supportive policy environment.

For that reason, **MGS is urging the Scottish Government to move beyond short-term programme funding and establish a multi-year commitment to Museum Futures. Doing so would allow the programme to build on proven foundations, deepen its reach and provide the conditions necessary for genuine long-term transformation.**

Recognise the challenge and enable the opportunity Museums represent

Museums are essential civic infrastructure and should be considered partners in delivering outcomes across Government portfolios, not solely within culture. To realise this potential, the sector needs a strong development body with the capacity to support museums to build resilience, respond to local needs and deliver against national priorities.

Museums are not a luxury or a discretionary add-on. They are part of the infrastructure that helps communities thrive and public services deliver.

The challenge is clear, but so is the opportunity. Museums are already doing more with less, adapting, innovating and working in partnership across their communities. But goodwill alone cannot sustain this contribution indefinitely. Long-term challenges require long-term commitment.

Sustained investment in MGS will enable museums to do more for Scotland's communities, economy and public services, helping to build a stronger, more resilient Scotland.

