



Introducing Phase 2
National Collecting Scheme for Scotland (NCSS)

Meeting convened by Scottish Arts Council
Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow
Thursday, 27 September 2007



Summary

On 27th September 2007, the Scottish Arts Council convened a meeting to initiate Phase 2 of the National Collecting Scheme Scotland, to introduce Dr Tina Fiske, holder of new NCSS Research post at the University of Glasgow, and to provide a context for articulation, discussion and alignment vis-à-vis strategic approaches to the collecting of contemporary art.

The stakeholders invited around the table included representatives from the NCSS member institutions, the national collections, DCA, as well as strategic bodies such the SMC, ACE, MA, VAGA, and from the key agencies.

Chaired by Philip Long, evaluation of NCSS Phase 1 and the priorities as laid out for Phase 2 catalysed discussion more broadly on current issues, agendas and initiatives re. the collecting of contemporary art across the museums and visual arts sector.

These notes summarise and reflect upon the following key points:

- The achievements of NCSS Phase 1 2003- March 2006
- Interim period March 2006-June 2007; Scottish Arts Council developments
- NCSS Phase 2, and agenda for future
- The priorities, agendas and activities of other agencies in the interim and into future

NCSS: Phase 1 2003- March 2006 Achievements

The Scottish Arts Council embarked on the NCSS alongside the Contemporary Art Society with many ambitions, the majority of which were met. It was broadly recognised that the aim of NCSS (and its sister project SCS in England) was not just about providing funding, but about building a relevant programme that is embedded in what museums do.

'Each institution has made significant progress, but as a country, we have also been hugely successful and there has been a lot achieved in recent years.'

Strategic benefits delivered by Phase 1 of the NCSS:

- Acquisitions made: over 122 works of art into the collections of NCSS participants
- CPD programme: was invaluable – the travel and research opportunities
- Commissioning: this also became an important point of focus and received attention. The Newhailes commission is one example of that. Institutions sharing works.

In terms of curatorial practice, the curators involved in Phase 1 reported, 'the museums participation in the NCSS has been extremely beneficial.' Participation in Phase 1 initiated and produced:

- a refocusing on artists practice and on the collections themselves
- an endorsement for international travel
- a validation of acquisitions-focused research and travel
- an ability to work innovatively
- an extremely positive impact on 'curatorial moral'
- an impact on museum visitor numbers
- a renewed confidence in exhibition programmes, and supporting those programmes with lunch time talks etc

'Unless you can go to your senior management with total confidence that the work is important and validate the artist and the need for international travel, your chances are slim. There is a significant difference between going to an exhibition and going to look at a piece of art with the intention of buying then going just to simply look at the work. This can make substantial difference.'

'We have to get executive approval a year in advance in order to travel. We also have a fixed acquisitions budget, which means that when the money is spent we don't know what will happen next. Funding is critical. It is necessary in this case that you know the artists and that you are convinced that those artists are the best before you look for funding.'

NCSS: Interim period March 2006-June 2007; SAC developments

As reported in the meeting, with the completion of NCSS Phase 1 (and of SCS in England), there was an anxiety about sustainability and the possibility of hiatus, leading to a retroactive slide - of feeling back in the same position again; with no budget, no infrastructure, and no potential for continuation.

It was agreed that sustainable support continues to be a highly problematic area affecting art institutions.

The following were identified as essential:

- More marketing concentration
- Bringing political figures into discussion
- A principle network to facilitate liaison between exhibition curators and permanent collection curators, bringing two kinds of curators together
- Embedding a new ethos for collecting
- The development of a debate or forum

In Scotland, the SAC has taken steps in three key areas

- The provision of a CPD programme – open to collections as well as exhibitions curators
- The securing of a small pot for acquisitions
- The creation of a strategic development post, in partnership with the History of Art Department, University of Glasgow

NCSS: Phase 2 June 2007 onwards, and agenda for future

'The curatorial ambition is definitely there. What is at stake is a structural issue - across the board'

The creation of a strategic development post, in partnership with the History of Art Department, University of Glasgow was announced, and the holder of the post identified as Dr Tina Fiske.

Key discussion points were as follows:

- Sustain and develop legacies of Phase 1: collecting model and network
- Museums / HEI partnerships
- International working

- Extending NCSS membership

Legacies of Phase 1: collecting model and network

- *Identify* a clear model of the collecting scheme: to identify through discussion what the recent curators/participants in the first phase of collecting scheme individual ideas/feelings about what the legacy of collecting has been
- *Sustain* the strong sense of network amongst the NCSS: to give this a context, a structure, and look for funding to establish
- *Develop* collecting that is strategic, and avoids feast or famine approach, and the variable collections/ gaps that this can create
**How to decrease peaks and fill the troughs
- *Sustain* direct contact between NCSS curators and gallerists, and also with artists
- *Develop* the importance of contact and travel, and the interface between exhibitions curators and collections curators

Extending NCSS membership

- *Broaden* the networking opportunities of NCSS group to a wider level of participation

Museums and Higher Education

- *Develop* research as a priority in Phase 2
- *Advocate* for research culture amongst M&Gs, in line with AHRC recent strategic funding for M&Gs and the consultation that took place prior to that
- Look at research as a priority and at research priorities amongst sector
- *Promote* the development of partnerships and programmes
- Bring curators into the HE research network

'Trying to match research and higher education projects and schemes with museums is really difficult, as there is a time issue for management just as there is a curatorial time issue, which is hard to work around.'

International working

- Promote priority for international working, where it is arising as such across a range of agency agendas
- International Exhibition touring, and the criss-cross of activity and exhibitions sharing international works

'Is there an international touring strategy out there and available?' 'Are such things still possible and should they be argued for?' Or are they becoming obsolete?

'International touring is something that we would really like to get involved with, but as we do not have an international collecting profile and currently we don't really have an international exhibiting profile. We have also found that international touring exhibitions can be extremely expensive, far more so than even funding an international artist to come create a commission.'

'The international element of the collecting scheme is fundamental in the building of our collections.'

Other agencies: priorities, agendas and activities in the interim and into future

Arts Council England

- Discussed development of the visual arts through a strategic corporate plan: *Turning Point* as a 10 year strategy, in particular the issue of investment in art organizations and the importance of arts organizations/institutions as meeting points for artists to engage with new audiences and in new settings.
- Collecting is a small fragment of the overall picture, but recognised that it fuses into many other aspects. Vivienne Bennett referred to 'strategic interventions' – supporting artists in mid-career and looking for recognition before artists are priced out.
- It is important that continued support is given to art institutions to ensure that collecting continues in order to promote continued engagement with new audiences and visitors, which in turn supports artists and indirectly influences the art market.
- 'We have also commissioned Contemporary Art Society to do a quick audit of what there is in contemporary public collections 1970 onward, as it is very important that we are familiar with what we have.'

Art Fund

- Their *Small Grants Giving* continues, although, in some areas of acquisition, applications from Scottish museums are down. Also this may appear to be the case in so far as the figures gathered for *The Collecting Challenge* report may have been slightly skewed.
- *Art Fund International* – will open up £1million pounds over 5 years to 5 institution clusters to make international purchases or

commissions. The Initiative will necessitate a research process/strategy on the part of the successful institution clusters, but the money provided will be for the acquisition of artworks, or to meet commissions costs only – not to fund the research/travel of curators.

- Art Fund has been lobbying on tax concessions, and referred to the French corporate tax concession initiative. Earlier lobbying of Treasury by Art Fund on subject of tax concessions for individuals was rebuffed, but they feel there may be scope to advocate for a French style corporate concession – a concession worth up to 90%, with an additional 5% in kind (hospitality etc),

Contemporary Art Society

- New structure for collecting- three central areas which comprise the new scheme: 1) the Professional Development programme, 2) Programme of Acquisitions and then 3) a Programme of Commissions.
- Restructuring membership scheme in response to consultation within the sector, and in order to build up knowledge and skill of curators.
- Professional Development programme will require an additional subscription, the terms of which still be fleshed out. The programme is already formed (first event, Lyon, has taken place): six prearranged events each year,- two international, two 'national', two London-based. There will also be an annual symposium.
- Plans for the Programmes of Acquisition and Commission still in development, but a Head of Acquisitions would hopefully be in post soon.

Scottish Museums Council

- Issues do fit within the priorities of SMC's accreditation programme, development of grants programmes and sector strategies,
- Recognition scheme funded by the Scottish Executive. 'People working within non-national collections have an important role to play in stimulating their sectors and raising profile and to push forward tourism and encourage greater visitor expectations. Improving knowledge and shaping collections through learning and development is paramount in this strategy.
- Small funding for Recognition via the Scottish Executive has been rolled out. One recent application was for international travel.
- Funding from the Scottish Executive will be the first grouping of money distributed to non-Nationals. There is a leadership

knowledge transfer role to play. Utilize profile to create new opportunities.

- Small amounts available through the SMC's collections-focused Travel and Research grants – which draw on the SMC's Collections and Workforce strategies.
- Creation of a new post which will endeavour to promote CRP Curatorial development and break boundaries within learning culture.

Museums Association

- *Effective Collections*. The MA's forthcoming initiative worth over £1 million pounds over 5 years (funded by Esmee Fairburn, following *Collections for the Future* report 2005)
- To enable long term loans, sustainability and mobility of collections, and to aid in disposal or decommissioning.
- So that institutions have the support they need in order to deal with these issues for which there will be amounts of money available
- There will be a pilot phase mid-2008, with partners – Tate and MLA South East, once Tate have finished an audit of works not loaned for twenty years.
- The scheme will be facilitated by 'brokers' – noted the Crafts Council's 'Matchmaking website.'

Scottish Arts Council

- The re-organisation of Scottish Arts Council and Scottish Screen as Creative Scotland in 2009 – what will be the position on collecting? It will have a leading role in this. Support for artists will be a priority.
- NCSS – there is willing participation on the part of current members, but needs other partners to participate as well. 'We need a sense of common cause'
- 'We are here to support artists, here to engage the public about the arts and to promote learning. Collections development meets all of these aims.'

Participants

Iliyana Nedkova, Vivienne Bennett, Lucy Bayley, Mark O'Neill
Victoria Hollows, Ben Harman, Sean McGlashan, Mungo Campbell, Anna
Robertson, Philip Long, Andrea Kusel, Neil Firth, Andrew Parkinson, Amanda
Catto, Michelle Jordan, Stephen Palmer, Wendy Law, Fiona Wilson, Jane
Robinson, Fiona McDougall, Rachael Browning, Alison Yarrington, Tina Fiske,
Hilary Gresty, Ben Spencer, Bo Hanley, Judith Winter, Ian O'Riordan