Mid-term Review of Museums, Galleries and Collections Grant

Issue date: 1 November 2016

Reference: SFC/AN/13/2016

Summary: This mid-term review of the Museums, Galleries and Collections Grant includes background information on the grant and a summary of the review panel’s assessment of the grant’s outcomes. It sets out recommendations to University Museums in Scotland (UMIS) and the recipients of the grant for the remaining two years of the grant.

FAQ: Principals and directors of Scotland’s universities

Further information: Contact: Nick Stansfeld  
Job title: Policy/Analysis Officer  
Department: Access, Skills and Outcome Agreements  
Tel: 0131 313 6539  
Email: nstansfeld@sfc.ac.uk
Contents

Mid-term Review of Museums, Galleries and Collections Grant 3
  Introduction 3
  Review process 3
  Summary of the panel's assessment of outcomes 4
  Additional Panel observations 5
Panel recommendations 6
  1. Greater leadership from UMIS 6
  2. Enhanced profile within their own institution 6
  3. Stronger links with academic colleagues 7
  4. Better exploitation of digital technology 7
  5. Stronger links with their institution’s widening access teams 7
  6. Greater public engagement 8
  7. Strengthen international links 8
  Conclusion 9
Annex A 10
  MGC Grant recipients 2012-13 to 2017-18 10
Annex B 11
  Review Panel 11
  UMIS attendees on 11 April 2016 11
Mid-term Review of Museums, Galleries and Collections Grant

Introduction

The SFC Museums, Galleries and Collections (MGC) grant is worth £6 million over a five year period until 2017-18. The grant supports the activities of university museums at nine Scottish Higher Education Institutions, see Annex A. In 2012, the number of museums supported by the grant increased from five to nine, to include all accredited university museums in Scotland.

Outcomes agreed by SFC for the current grant were for Scottish university museums to deliver:

- Appropriate level of collections care and management.
- A service to the wider research community.
- A high quality of learning and teaching experience for learners.
- Promoting and providing opportunities to everyone who can benefit from it.

Overall, SFC expects the outcomes of the grant to contribute to the delivery of priorities in its current Strategic Plan 2015-18, in particular ‘to support and help develop the role that colleges and universities play in enriching the cultural and civic life of Scotland, and in maintaining important cultural assets, including museum and art collections, archives and collections, and their estates and buildings’.

Review process

At the award of the current funding period SFC committed to an external mid-term review during AY 2015-16.

The main objectives of the Review of the MGC grant were to:

- Assess the effectiveness of the grant in terms of progress and outcomes.
- Outline scope for enhancement during the remaining funding period.

In addition, SFC took the opportunity afforded by the review to consider the longer term impact of the grant for the five institutions which have been in receipt of funding for over 20 years.

A Review Panel consisting of experts from the UK wide museums sector, independent of Scottish university museums was set up (Annex B). The panel asked University Museums in Scotland (UMIS), who represent the nine institutions, to prepare a response to the SFC MGC grant review. The panel helped shape the questions for the review and met on 11 April 2016 to assess the UMIS response, discuss findings, and agree recommendations for SFC’s Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee (RKEC).

RKEC at its meeting in September 2016 noted the recommendations, offered some helpful additional observations, and supported the continuation of the grant for the remainder of the funding period.
Summary of the panel’s assessment of outcomes

The panel’s assessment of the progress towards delivering the four key outcomes for the grant is summarised below:

Appropriate level of collections care and management

All collections of UMIS members continue to have Full Accreditation with the exception of Glasgow School of Art which has Provisional Accreditation due to exceptional circumstance of the fire in May 2014. The Panel noted that good evidence existed of continuing strong commitment to care and preservation and the embracing of innovative documentation and conservation programmes.

A service to the wider research community

Scottish university museums hold over 2.1 million items, the size, range and significance of these attract researchers from around the world and support world-leading research. The Panel noted the 88% increase in research enquiries and visits to collections between 2012 and 2015, and rising number of collaborations in the UK and European museums sector.

A high quality of learning and teaching experience for learners

Teaching activity has grown significantly and improved in terms of range and quality of provision since 2012, with the collections being used in a wide range of university subjects at different levels of study. The Panel also noted the increased volunteering opportunities created for students in the university museums sector in Scotland.

Promoting and providing opportunities to everyone who can benefit from it

The panel noted the 11% increase in visitor numbers and 70% increase in the number of participants from schools and outreach activities across all UMIS members since 2012.

Overall, the panel considered that the Scottish university museum recipients of the MGC grant were on track to deliver the requirements of the grant. It also considered that there was scope for greater ambition in the remaining two years of the grant. These are outlined in the Panel’s recommendations.
Additional panel observations

From the UMIS response and discussions at the review meeting the panel noted the following aspects about Scottish university museums:

Scottish university museums are very diverse in terms of scale and content of collections and remit. While some museums are at the centre of their institution’s academic community, others occupy a more peripheral position.

UMIS has created a university museum community in Scotland which provides a supportive environment and an infrastructure for sharing information and best practice. The longer term recipients of the grant, those designated as having recognised\textsuperscript{1} collections, were reported as having provided advice and support to the smaller, newer institutions in areas of accreditation, collections care and documentation, and development of public engagement activities.

The grant has been beneficial in facilitating many university museums to have a higher and more strategic and visible profile within their own institution. There was evidence that the existence of grant funding has been influential in encouraging further investment and has leveraged further funding from external sources.

‘Revealing the Hidden Collections’ project, funded by SFC in AY 2008-09, was reported as world-leading and successfully raised the visibility of Scottish universities’ collections through an on-line portal resulting in more enquiries and requests from home and abroad.

University museums are well placed to encourage engagement opportunities and bind public and academic communities. They have acted as a bridge between diverse cultural audiences.

With access to the resources of a world-leading university, university museums have a unique remit compared to other publicly funded museums and have the potential to play a significant part in the national museums’ sector.

The longer term recipients of the grant are well established and in some cases have a higher profile within their institution which has led to further investment in facilities and resources in support of the collections.

\textsuperscript{1} The Recognition Scheme is administered by Museums, Galleries Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Government to showcase the collections of national importance.
Panel recommendations

With two more academic years left to run on the current grant funding period, the panel recommended that Scottish university museums should focus on being more strategic to generate added value for their institution and longer term sustainability, and identified some areas for focused action:

1. Greater leadership from UMIS

The panel commented that Scottish university museums are generally better funded compared to many other museums and could, with the resources and skills available to them, offer ideas and share cutting edge museum best practice for the benefit of the broader community. UMIS has an opportunity to be more strategic, and to exploit the international interest in their specialist and popular collections. The panel were of the view that UMIS could have a stronger voice to influence stakeholders, particularly leadership at their own institutions, through providing advocacy, and at a national level through representing the HE sector in support of the Scottish Government’s priorities in the area of culture and heritage.

The panel felt that though some collections were well positioned within their institution, others were less well placed, often due to a lack of understanding of how the university collections can help to achieve the institution’s strategic goals. The panel felt there was an opportunity for UMIS to promote best practice across its members (for example not all university collections are registered to be eligible to reclaim VAT), and to collate data from all members to publicise their achievements as a collective and further raise their profiles within and outside academia.

Recommendation: UMIS to enhance their advocacy role and develop a strategic vision for Scottish university museums and to better represent their members on the national stage.

2. Enhanced profile within their own institution

The panel noted that some university museums had secured a more significant role internally in their institution, largely due to having increased the visibility of their activities. The panel thought that it was important that all university museums should review and potentially strengthen their governance to ensure that it is embedded within their institution’s learning and teaching, research and public engagement activities. The relationship between every museum and its senior management is crucial to ongoing sustainability. The panel stressed the importance of every museum being able to demonstrate their value to the institution and to link their institution’s strategies and ambitions with their own.

Recommendation: Scottish university museums to demonstrate good governance and be proactive in ensuring their strategies match their institutions.
3. Stronger links with academic colleagues

The panel noted the collections are used for teaching in a range of university subjects and there were some examples of collaboration with research colleagues. The collections can be effective communicators for research output and further engagement between the institutions’ research activities and the collections should be encouraged. For example a new generation of students could serve to further their vocational skills and use their skills in market research to measure the impact of exhibitions something which the sector, as a whole, could develop. Museum staff should also explore opportunities to work with academic colleagues on REF-related projects to enhance their research status.

**Recommendation:** Scottish university museums should look to strengthen their engagement with their academic colleagues, particularly researchers and students.

4. Better exploitation of digital technology

The panel commented that ‘Revealing the Hidden Collections’ project, funded in 2008-09 was the only example of a digital project in the UMIS response. The panel was supportive of the review of the online portal, refining descriptions and ensuring its content is easily found via search engines like Google. The panel felt that Hidden Collections were a valuable resource which had the potential to be better used by UMIS members in order to reach a wider audience.

Many of the UMIS institutions have innovative digital departments and the panel thought that more could be achieved to exploit the potential of digital technology for the museum sector through further collaboration with their relevant university departments. Examples identified by the panel were in utilising and refreshing exhibit displays, development of apps or downloads, and making the most of social media. Museums generally find it difficult to attract 16-24 year olds to exhibitions and the panel felt there was an opportunity to use students to inspire their peer group through digital media.

**Recommendation:** Scottish university museums to use and embed digital technologies.

5. Stronger links with their institution’s widening access teams

The panel noted that a Scottish Government priority is to ensure culture and heritage is preserved and that the national collections are made more accessible, particularly to school groups so that they can have more opportunities to visit Scotland’s museums and galleries. Strides have been made in the past few years in widening participation in university museums which are ideally placed at bridging the gap between school and university. The panel thought that enhanced coordination with the institution’s widening access teams could maximise PI targets in the institution’s outcome agreements.

**Recommendation:** Scottish university museums to collaborate with widening access teams.
6. Greater public engagement

The UMIS response and discussion demonstrated clearly that Scottish university museums provide a key public interface with the university and welcome both prospective students and the wider community to the university environment. A university museum is a skills hub which offers a friendlier and easier method of engaging with the university than a direct approach to the academic community, and has much potential for increasing the universities engagement with the wider public. University museums are also part of Scotland’s national museums sector and could take more of a leadership role as they have key expertise and access to additional resources, research knowledge and expertise. Furthermore, university museums could learn from the good practice taking place in other museums in their own region and beyond. The panel also thought that more consideration should be given to whether university museums could engage more volunteers and mentor more staff at local museums in order to further raise visibility, gain influence and increase expertise within their local communities.

**Recommendation:** Scottish university museums should work to strengthen relationships with external stakeholders in their region.

7. Strengthen international links

As institutions look increasingly at developing their international activities, university museums should take the opportunity to exploit the potential of their collections to be ambassadors for Scottish culture, especially those of national significance, and to link their own strategies to their institution’s ambitions as it has an international presence. The university museums’ specialised collections are assets to their university and to Scotland. The UMIS response demonstrated that some university museums are becoming more outward facing and the panel thought there was scope for all universities to develop this area of activity and consider whether existing effective connections with stakeholders, like the Scottish Government and British Council, could be further developed. For example, joint exhibitions with museums from abroad could attract a new stream of potential students, and using the collections in collaboration with Scottish Government could increase Scotland’s profile and attract further investment into Scotland.

**Recommendation:** Scottish university museums should look for opportunities to strengthen and support their institution, the wider HE sector and Scotland’s international activity.
Conclusion

The panel agreed, based on the UMIS response and the discussion at the Panel meeting with UMIS representatives, that the agreed outcomes/objectives for SFC’s current MGC grant were broadly on track for delivery and that many successful achievements had been demonstrated to date. The panel also highlighted some areas where there was scope for augmenting activity over the remaining period of funding to strengthen delivery of the agreed outcomes and enhance impact. Overall, the panel concluded that Scottish university museums have a significant and increasingly important role within their own institution and have the opportunity to play a wider role in the national museums sector and to represent Scotland on the international stage, particularly with more co-ordinated, proactive leadership from UMIS.

Further information

Please contact Nick Stansfeld, Policy/Analysis Officer for further information, telephone: 0131 313 6539, email: nstansfeld@sfc.ac.uk.

Dr Stuart Fancey
Director of Research and Innovation
Annex A

Museum Galleries and Collection Grant recipients 2012-13 to 2017-18

Glasgow School of Art
Heriot-Watt University*
Robert Gordon University*
University of Aberdeen
University of Dundee*
University of Edinburgh
University of Glasgow
University of St Andrews
University of Stirling*

* Denotes new recipient of the grant from 2012-13
SFC Review of Museums, Galleries and Collections Grant 2015-16

Review Panel

Dr Stuart Fancey, SFC (Chair)
Kate Arnold-Forster, UK University Museums Group
Michael Jackson, Scottish Government
Dr Xerxes Mazda, National Museums Scotland
Gillian Simison, Museums and Galleries Scotland
Dr Suzanne Bardgett, Art and Humanities Research Council (not able to attend meeting)
Ann Millar, SFC
Nick Stansfeld, SFC

UMIS attendees on 11 April 2016

Neil Curtis, Chair of UMIS, University of Aberdeen
Jane Cameron, University of Stirling
Matthew Jarron, University of Dundee
Dr Helen Rawson, University of St Andrews