

Coordinated culture

The Scottish Arts Council launched an Executive-funded initiative in 2002 called "Championing Culture in Schools". The aim was to establish Cultural Coordinator posts within local authority areas and help schools work across and beyond the curriculum with museums, galleries, the arts and heritage sectors. Over 80 Coordinators are now in place across Scotland, and the Scottish Museums Council has been working to encourage them to make use of local heritage resources.

With over twelve million museums objects, historic properties and 6,000 ancient monuments to choose from, Scotland's heritage resources offer infinite educational opportunities. They can appeal to young people from diverse backgrounds and with a range of learning styles. But museums and heritage sites remain underused by cultural coordinators, whose activities tend to emphasise visual arts work.

So in September 2003, in collaboration with the Heritage Education Officers Group, the Scottish Museums Council (SMC) ran a series of training days to guide cultural coordinators and teachers in using Scotland's heritage sector and museums as collaborators in children's learning. The training days introduced *Lasting Impressions*, a publication to help teachers and Cultural Coordinators make inspired and creative links between heritage resources and the schools curriculum. SMC also established a £21,000 grant for Cultural Coordinators to undertake projects for young people in partnership with SMC member museums. There will be more training in March 2005.

Behind all this work is the belief that access to "real things" – artefacts, archaeological sites, historic monuments and stately houses – and to the ideas they inspire can elicit a range of learning outcomes.

The "Museum for a Day" project in Orkney (pictured above) is a good example of the work that can be done. This outreach programme targeted the most geographically remote schools in the Orkney islands, inviting children, together with partners such as local heritage groups, to turn their classrooms into museums for a day.

The children, their families and teachers find local artefacts, document and research them, then label, display and guide visitors around them. This hands-on initiative stimulates learning and promotes informed attitudes to the communities' pasts. "Hands On Orkney's Past", The Orkney Museum's 2004 summer exhibition, built on the enterprise and initiative of the Museum for a Day participants.

In a rather different environment, Paisley Museum and Art Galleries recognised an opportunity to celebrate Renfrewshire's cultural diversity and build new audiences among groups under-represented among in the museum's visitors. Working with the Scottish Interfaith Council and Reid Kerr College Spiritual Care Team, they came up with a series of exhibitions, events and workshops inspired by the community's faith groups. For the school workshops, the museums service worked with their local Cultural Coordinators to source funding to provide transport and educational activities

for 20 classes. The project has promoted Renfrewshire Museums as a learning resource, and established creative partnerships. It allows previously excluded community groups to visit, value and enjoy learning at the museum, and to see themselves represented there. The project also links directly with strands in the Environmental Studies and People and Society areas of the 5-14 curriculum.

From these examples, it is clear that cultural coordinators can cover a number of important roles. They can:

- Encourage and facilitate cultural participation by children, including visits, production and performance
- Liaise with artists and cultural bodies, and their education officers, locally and nationally
- Develop awareness of the contribution of culture to children's learning and development – both within and outwith the curriculum
- Advise on ways of developing young people's creativity across the curriculum.

The links they can make between children and their heritage add creative, imaginative and inspirational depth to young people's formal education. By working in partnership with Cultural Coordinators, museums can develop learning programmes that are inclusive, cater for differing learning styles, respond inspirationally to pupil needs, and foster a sense of cultural identity and self-knowledge. Collaboration between young people and their shared heritage builds benefits for all participants: museums enhance their role as innovative learning organisations, and young people's growing self-confidence, which encourages their ongoing engagement in the country's cultural and creative life, builds the sustainable community benefit of social cohesion.

Emma Talbot, formerly Learning and Access Advisor; Clare Watson, Senior Policy Officer, Scottish Museums Council clarew@scottishmuseums.org.uk

For a copy of Lasting Impressions, or for more information about Cultural Coordinators, contact the Information and Learning Team, Scottish Museums Council (0131 476 8591) or visit www.scottishmuseums.org.uk

You can tell whether a man is clever by his answers. You can tell whether a man is wise by his questions.

Naguib Mahfouz