

Challenging partnerships

The Scottish Executive has been keen to build the capacity of Scotland's museums to care for and present their collections. In 2004 they set up the Regional Development Challenge Fund, with a budget of £3 million, to support innovative projects. Fiona McOwan describes how it's been used...

The aim of the Fund has been to develop the capacity and sustainability of the museum sector through active partnerships. Administered on behalf of the Executive by the Scottish Museums Council, it has enabled museums to work across local authority boundaries, and to build links between local authority, independent and national museums. Ten projects were awarded funding, and all of them are now fully operational with many exciting developments, including interpreting collections in new and innovative ways.

One example is the Scotland and Medicine: Collections and Connections partnership led by the Edinburgh-based Royal College of Surgeons. It drew in a wide range of museum and non-museum partners, all of whom had strong links with Scottish medical history. You can find a full list and more details about the scheme at www.scotlandandmedicine.com

The partnership's potential has been fully realized in the ground-breaking touring exhibition Anatomy Acts. This presented a wide range of objects from Scottish medical collections, with over 20 contributors providing almost 200 objects representing over 500 years of creative development. Showing at venues from Thurso to Glasgow it has been the largest touring exhibition in Scotland, and recognizes the international importance of the country's medical and science collections. Local partners in each area developed learning programmes associated with the exhibitions, ranging from drawing classes to talks on the latest scientific and medical developments, writers' workshops and living history events. New commissioned work by artists Christine Borland, Joel Fisher, Claude Heath and the poet Kathleen Jamie provided 'added value' and interest. An online exhibition www.anatomyacts.co.uk was launched in May 2006.

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For more information about the Fund, visit <http://www.scottishmuseums.org.uk>