

Empire, Slavery & Scotland's Museums
Summary Minutes of Steering Group Meeting

Monday, 11 January 10am-12noon on Zoom

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

MGS CEO Lucy Casot welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked the Steering Group for their time and expertise. She thanked Sir Geoff Palmer for agreeing to be Chair of the Steering Group. She reminded everyone that MGS had been commissioned by the Scottish Government to manage this essential piece of work, and in doing so was mindful of the huge amount of work that had been done in the past in looking at Empire, Colonialism and Slavery in the Scottish context. LC noted that MGS was very pleased to have appointed Sheila Asante as Project Manager. She explained that whilst the next meeting was scheduled to take place soon (on 10 February), over time meetings would be less frequent.

GP welcomed everyone to the meeting and recorded apologies from Steering Group members Elena Trimarchi (Learning Manager, David Livingstone Trust) and Foyso Choudhury (Chair, Edinburgh and Lothians Regional Equalities Council), and from Duncan Dornan (Head of Museums, Glasgow Life) from the Project Team.

GP invited Steering Group members to introduce themselves.

Steering Group members present included:

- Sir Geoff Palmer (GP), Chair
- Silence Chihuri (SC), CEO, Fair Justice System for Scotland Group
- Abeer Eladany (AE), Curatorial Assistant, University of Aberdeen
- Jatin Haria (JH), Executive Director, Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights
- Lewis Hou (LH), Founder, Science Ceilidh; Member, The Anti-Racist Educator
- Churnjeet Mahn (CM), Reader (English); Strathclyde University
- Steph Scholten (SS), Trustee, Museums Galleries Scotland; Member, ICOM Ethics Panel; Director, The Hunterian at Glasgow University
- Lisa Williams (LW), Founder, Edinburgh Caribbean Association; Honorary Fellow, Edinburgh University
- Zandra Yeaman (ZY), Curator of Discomfort, The Hunterian at Glasgow University

Throughout their introductions, Steering Group members noted that:

- Whilst the work related to the museum sector specifically, the impacts extended far beyond museums and heritage, to society and social justice as a whole.
- In looking at Empire, Slavery and Scotland's Museums it was essential to recognise that there was no one single issue.
- Structures needed to be embedded within institutions to support the sector to reflect the impacts of colonialism, empire and slavery. Whilst recognising existing work,

there continues to be an essential need for Scotland to learn about and acknowledge its colonial, empire and slavery history.

GP thanked the Steering Group members for their introductions, noting that the strength and depth of expertise and experience was appropriate to the work in hand.

There were no conflicts of interest recorded.

MGS Staff and Project Team present included:

- Sheila Asante (SA), ESSM Project Manager, Museums Galleries Scotland
- Lucy Casot (LC), CEO, Museums Galleries Scotland
- Miles Greenwood (MG), Curator, Legacies of Empire, Glasgow Life
- Rosie King (RK), Communications Officer, Museums Galleries Scotland
- Devon McHugh (DM), Senior Partnerships Manager, Museums Galleries Scotland
- Eithne Ní Chonghaile (ENC), Senior Communications Manager, Museums Galleries Scotland
- Robyn Evans (RE), Corporate Assistant, Museums Galleries Scotland
- Gillian Shaw (GSh), Executive Assistant, Museums Galleries Scotland

CALL FOR EVIDENCE (MUSEUMS)

SA gave a presentation on responses received to the recent call for evidence which closed on 6 January. 24 responses from 21 institutions had been received and SA explained that the data would be analysed and presented to the next Steering Group Meeting. The intention of this survey was to understand how existing museum programming is looking at themes of colonial legacies and the history and impact of slavery. This intention was realised.

PRESENTATION OF THE NATIONAL CONSULTATION REMIT AND PROJECT OVERVIEW

SA delivered her presentation on the draft document. It was noted that the final document would be made public.

Steering Group members commented on the need to be explicit around who the communities involved are and whose lived experience is being considered. It was agreed that the Steering Group meetings provided the forum to iron out these issues and to clarify the remit of the work, its reach and range.

The importance of respecting the historical perspective was stressed – eg in terms of recognising the links between Empire, Colonialism and Slavery, and their links to, and impact on, the lived experience for people today.

There was discussion around the scope of consultation(s) – both institutional and public, the timescales for the consultation (especially in the context of current lockdowns), and the costs involved.

There was discussion around the timescale allowed for and questions as to whether it might restrict consultation. Group members cautioned against engaging too much with existing 'gatekeepers' in case this prevented the consultation from reaching new and accurate data.

It was also agreed that a timescale for the Steering Group programme which ran to November of this year would not be long enough to enable the paradigm shift required. It was agreed that it was essential to be clear from the outset that the Steering Group's work would result in a starting point – recommendations for work going forward. It was agreed that the Steering Committee's role was to create a process and to make recommendations, and that it was essential to manage expectations and be transparent around the scope of the work.

Steering Group members stressed the importance of terminology – ie empire and slavery (not just slavery). It was agreed that a glossary of terms would be drawn up.

The group discussed the need to consider other migration histories alongside the history of Slavery and the impact of both on current lived experience.

There was discussion as to the scope of consultation and selection of participants and it was agreed the Steering Group should be aware of other national initiatives and be clear about whose and what histories were involved in the study.

GP pointed out that whilst the remit reflected what the Scottish Government was asking for, what would be produced would have value for others – eg in education.

Throughout this discussion the Steering Group highlighted issues including, project timescale, gatekeepers, learning from failures and engagement with national and international initiatives.

TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE STEERING GROUP

GP invited Steering Group members with comments on the TORs to send these to SA in writing.

It was noted that the Steering Group will investigate the proposal for the establishment of a museum of empire and slavery by considering the best mechanism of delivery of our shared past to the full diversity of the Scottish population without racial, gender-based, or geographical bias.

There was also discussion about the capacity of existing museums to address the legacies versus the discussions around having a new museum space.

The Steering Group agreed that it would engage additional expertise in the form of an Advisory Panel, including historians, human rights experts, other museum representatives, community representatives and others yet to be identified, to participate in sub-groups and make presentations when required.

It was noted that the Steering Group was independent of the Scottish Government and that the remit did not set out the extent of its powers. Whilst it was up to the Scottish Government how it received the Steering Group's recommendations, there was a responsibility on the Steering Group to seek to ensure that the sector was empowered to present the history of slavery and colonialism over the long term.

STEERING GROUP MEMBERSHIP

It was noted that the Steering Group needed to be limited in size but needed the scope to involve additional expertise as required.

It was agreed a younger person's perspective could be useful and JH, LH and ZY agreed to send their suggestions to LC. There was discussion as to whether additional representation from outwith the central belt should be sought, in particular a representative from the Highlands and Islands.

AOB AND DATE OF NEXT MEETING

LC confirmed that there was provision within the budget to cover loss of earnings for Steering Group members and other individuals involved throughout the process, including participants in the consultation if cost proved to be a barrier to participation.

Date of next meeting: Wednesday 10 February 2021, 10am – 12 noon