

The Keir Hardie Society

Submission to the Scottish Labour Party First Stage Policy Consultation

1. The Keir Hardie Society was formed on 15 August 2010 and aims to keep alive the ideas and promote the life and work of Keir Hardie. We are pleased to respond to the Scottish Policy Forum's First Stage consultation. Our submission primarily covers the issues raised in the Education paper section on culture, arts and the creative industries.
2. We would start by making a case for the Scottish Government and local authorities to support on our shared history in all its forms. Not just to remember the past, but also for what it can tell us about the issues of today. Earlier this year the historian Rutger Bregman challenged the Davros elite over tax dodging. He is also the [author](#) of 'Utopia for Realists', which argues that throughout history, it is utopian visions that have driven humanity forward. His case for historians is summed up regarding the financial crash:

"I thought that we needed historians to take the stage and explain what's going on. When I watched the crisis on TV, the only people being interviewed were economists, and these were the guys that didn't see it coming. I thought that we needed some historians there, so I left academia,"

3. The Spanish/American philosopher George Santayana put it another way when he famously said; *"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it"*. You might also argue that those who study history can successfully repeat it. Economists like Thomas Piketty have also effectively used history to make new economic arguments against inequality.
4. The teaching of history in our schools has come in for some criticism. Professor Tom Devine [argued](#) some years ago that pupils are leaving school with little knowledge of their nation's past because history is being squeezed out of the curriculum. This also plays into concerns that there has been a narrowing of subject choice in Scotland's schools. The Scottish Parliament's Education and Skills Committee is conducting an [inquiry](#) into that very issue. Lindsay Paterson also makes a case for a broad curriculum in an article in the [Sunday Times](#).
5. We have a strong heritage sector in Scotland, with excellent museums that strengthen our understanding of the past. However, some historical sites are not so well preserved. Even those that have excellent resources on-site, like Culloden, is threatened by development. There are similar concerns at Prestonpans, and Transport Scotland are planning to do further damage to the [Killiecrankie](#) battle site.
6. Other sites need information boards and better local and online resources. Societies like ours have helped to develop resources and are in discussion with local authorities about doing more. However, there are limited resources, and this should not be left solely to charitable endeavour.

7. Our industrial [museums](#) operate on very modest funding levels. Local government cuts have added to the pressure on local historical facilities, and the Museums Association has compiled a [map](#) of museum closures across the UK, including a number in Scotland. Even more common are reduced hours, staff cuts or tax dodging by moving services into trusts. The People's Palace in Glasgow was only saved after a local campaign. It has just [reopened](#) after a £350k refurbishment, but the Winter Gardens remain closed.
8. The Scottish Government [consulted](#) last year on a draft culture strategy. The [responses](#) generally support the ambition and approach while emphasising the need to support the capacity financially. Extra funding can be levered in, but stable government funding is crucial.
9. Neither should we be parochial. The responses emphasised the importance of an international focus. Not just in promoting Scotland's diverse cultural assets, but in enriching and renewing our culture at home through meaningful contact and exchange with cultural policy and best practice from around the world.
10. Local government cuts have also impacted on our local library services. Some libraries have closed, and others have reduced opening times and decreases in professional and other staff. Most public libraries have essential collections of resources on local history and are often the first point of call for people of all ages who wish to learn more about local history.
11. There is similar pressure on archivist services with local staff reporting that their services face staff cuts, mergers, wage freezes, shorter opening hours and seemingly never-ending rounds of having to justify the value of what they do to people who don't understand the sector. There should also be increased funding for the digitisation of archives, to make them more widely available.
12. Archivists are also crucial staff in the ongoing debate over Freedom of Information legislation. We would urge Scottish Labour to support submissions by the Scottish Campaign for Freedom of Information and others to strengthen, not weaken the current law.
13. In conclusion, we would urge Scottish Labour to support a statutory duty on the Scottish Government and local authorities to maintain historical resources in all their many forms. This duty must include proper funding levels and should be backed up by a responsibility to produce an annual report on action taken. We have a wealth of historic sites and resources in Scotland – it is our duty to preserve these for posterity, for generations to come.

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