

Historic Towns Forum

DCMS Business Plan Transparency Consultation

General

The Historic Towns Forum is pleased to respond to the DCMS Business Plan 2011-2015: Transparency Consultation. We support the aim to 'improve the quality of life for all through cultural and sporting activities' and recognise the need to 'support the pursuit of excellence' while championing 'the tourism, creative and leisure industries'.

We agree on the importance of regular publication of transparent indicators, but feel in some instances that these indicators are too general and need further delineation between the sub-sectors that make up the broader sector descriptor 'culture'. In addition, where it is noted in the actual DCMS Business Plan that all DCMS arm's length bodies have been asked to publish similar data, we feel it would be useful to know exactly what this data will be; which organisations will publish it; and how it will be regulated.

As we are qualified only to comment in detail on measures affecting Heritage and Tourism specifically, we will not comment on all indicators in all areas, but only on those listed below.

p. 5 Input Indicators

- While we understand the value of measuring inputs in terms of unit cost it is very important to use such measures carefully and they may only be of value at a point in time and not for indicating trends and shaping policy. If a unit has an input cost (subsidy) of £x per annum an increase in the number of units or a fall in the total subsidy for a fixed number of units would show a reduced unit input cost. The change in the unit input cost would tell us nothing about efficiency or social value for money. Unit input costs are only informative over time if accompanied by all of the contextual information and could be very misleading as headline figures.

pp. 7-8 The Olympic and Paralympic Games 2012

- We feel there is a link to be made between pre-Games and post-Games legacy in terms of tourism, culture and heritage. Measures around this would be useful in determining the economic impact of the Games on Culture and its sub-sectors.

p. 8 Culture

- Proposed input indicator third bullet: this measure of subsidy covers only part of EH's remit, and does not cover its historic environment policy, advice or training roles. It could be difficult to construct a unit cost indicator, but the cost of these services or proportion of total EH budget spent on them would afford them some recognition. There are also clear links here to tourism which should be made within the context of the tourism measures. Cultural tourism is a sub-sector in its own right. In addition there should be measures that include arm's length bodies related to Heritage.
- The proposed impact indicator is too crude because cultural activities cover too wide a range – it need to be broken down by type of cultural activity. At the very least there is a need to identify visits to historic buildings and other parts of the historic environment. These are not the same as visit to museums, art galleries and so on. Again, there are clear links here to tourism which need also to be made in context of the tourism measures. Cultural tourism is a sub-sector in its own right.

- We agree that the English Heritage at risk list (to including buildings, other sites and Conservation Areas) is an important source of other data. In addition there should be further robust quantitative data that shows more discriminating evidence of the economic impact of Heritage, but also better qualitative data that shows how the 'Big Society' is working across these areas.

p. 9 Tourism

- Input indicators appear to ignore the domestic market completely. This could be because there is no direct subsidy for domestic tourism, but if this is the case it should be made explicit. DCMS should acknowledge this issue.
- The proportion of people employed in tourism seems to be a dubious impact indicator. The proportion will depend not only on the number employed in tourism but also on the total number of jobs in the economy. The absolute number would be better. There is an important link with the preceding point in that job creation in tourism is not due solely to the overseas market; the domestic market plays a key part, so there is likely to be a major discontinuity between input and impact. In addition it should be noted that many tourism positions are seasonal; this would complicate the measure and should be noted. The spend per foreign visitor might be helpful as a measure of quality, but a fall in visitor numbers accompanied by a rise in per head spend could see overall revenue fall with the true impact on the country's earnings from tourism masked. The per capita figure needs to be accompanied by one for total overseas earnings.
- We note that domestic tourism is included as an impact indicator, but feel strongly that there is a need for more robust national and local tourism data to allow accurate assessments of impacts.
- Again there should be links to cultural tourism, heritage, and Games legacy tourism.

p. 9 Giving: philanthropy and volunteering

- What resources is DCMS going to put into supporting volunteering and building the Big Society? It is curious that there is no proposed input indicator for this section and it would seem to us vital that a measure is established. Particularly if the impact indicator is to be of value.
- The proposed impact indicator needs to be more clearly delineated across the sectors. As it stands it is too vague.

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