

Collective response to the Collections Review

Arts Council England, British Council, Department for Culture, Media and Sport

This Review was commissioned to explore how three of the UK's major public collections might operate with greater efficiency and effectiveness in order to increase the benefit they offer to the public. The Review also provides an analysis of recent recommendations on public collections from the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee as part of their inquiry into arts funding in England.

We are pleased that the Review recognises the distinctive purpose and function of each collection and suggests ways in which the collections, particularly those of the Arts Council and British Council, can collaborate more closely. Some of the suggestions build on existing partnerships and collaborations; others offer new ideas that we will take forward as we develop a sustainable, long-term future for our collections.

We want to act on the Review's recommendations by doing the following things:

Premises: the three collections will form a working group to explore the viability of co-locating all three collections. The appraisal will also take into account the desire for a dedicated public exhibition space for the collections. We believe sharing would need to take into account the individual needs of each collection and should represent good value for money. We believe that should co-location prove feasible, this could drive further efficiencies in terms of staffing and storage.

Governance: The Heads or Directors of the three Collections meet regularly. We will formalise the remit of this group so that it includes all of the potential areas for the collections to share knowledge, collaborate and work more efficiently.

Acquisitions: The Collections work closely to share knowledge so there is little or no duplication of acquisitions. We are confident our current working practices prevent unnecessary duplication. Loans between the three collections already occur and we will continue to encourage this, where it is appropriate. There are occasionally circumstances where duplication of acquisitions is necessary, such as when works in each collection are in regular use and when the distinctive role and purpose of each collection is taken into account. The formal meetings between each Collection will discuss potential acquisitions to reduce the potential for duplication while ensuring that the plurality and diversity of British art continues to be represented across the three Collections.

Digital: as part of our commitment to closer collaboration and greater public access, we will ensure that our online resources are as effective as possible in increasing the impact and public accessibility of each collection, both individually and collectively.

Arts Council England's agreement with Southbank Centre: Southbank Centre currently holds responsibility for the day to day management of the Arts Council Collection and is actively involved in discussions about potential collaborations between the three collections. Any changes to the way that the collections are held and exhibited will be agreed with Southbank Centre as part of their funding agreement. The Arts Council will continue to explore a range of future options for the Arts Council Collection.

Further collaboration: the Memorandum of Understanding between the Arts Council and the British Council sets out the intention for the organisations to develop closer intellectual ties and to consider how the holdings of both collections could become a joint resource that meets the needs of artists and audiences both at home and abroad.

Conclusion

We believe the three Collections are invaluable assets that deliver great benefit to the public, each serving very different audiences and needs. We are committed to working together more closely wherever appropriate, in order that the three Collections represent the greatest possible value for money and provide the greatest possible public benefit.

We recognise that practical improvements can be made to improve how we work together and are committed to bringing these changes about. We believe collaboration between the collections and the testing of new ideas will be crucial to ensuring our shared collections offer the greatest possible value for money and reach the widest possible audience.

We'd like to thank Loveday Shewell for all her work on the review and look forward to exploring how her recommendations could help the collections work as effectively as possible.

Quotes

Alan Davey, Chief Executive, Arts Council England:

“The Arts Council Collection has a fantastic record in both supporting emerging British artists and giving audiences across the country the chance to experience the best in modern and contemporary art.

“We’re always looking for ways to make sure our collection continues to increase its audiences and its efficiency and are delighted that the review has provided ideas for how we can work with other public collections. We look forward to working with the British Council and DCMS to turn the recommendations of the review into reality.”

Graham Sheffield, Director Arts, British Council said:

“We are delighted that the Review recognises the value of each Collection, and at the same time provides a stimulus for the Arts Council and British Council Collections, in particular, to work much more closely together. We are committed to working with energy towards realising this ambition.”

Ed Vaizey, Minister for Culture said:

“These three important collections of British art, each with a distinctive history and purpose, achieve so much for the cultural life in the UK and across the world. I support efforts of managing these Collections in the most efficient way, to encourage the maximum exposure to the widest possible audience and to promote our cultural heritage to the world. That is why I welcome this review which includes helpful suggestions for how the Collections can work together to enhance public benefit, and to do so in a way that makes the most efficient use of public resources.”