

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Title of paper: NMeM Collections - Photography

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To the Board for: Consultation Briefing Report Decision

The Board is asked to note the attached paper and give feedback at the meeting on proposed approach.

Summary/key points

The last meeting received a paper that included a proposal for rationalising the photography held at the museum, with the recommendation that the *science & technology* collection remain in Bradford and that the *artistic & cultural* photography element should move to London. It was proposed that the these collection could be held/presented in a (new) reading room/study centre whose creation could complement that exhibition programme in Media Space and add 'critical mass' to the photography offer.

The Board was supportive of these proposals and asked to be briefed on the outcome of a feasibility study on the costs of creating a new reading room. The Board needed clarity on the financial implications before making a final decision to proceed with the new space. This paper *does* provide that information. *However*, it also acknowledges that the wider financial landscape has been become much tougher in recent months and that this might be an opportunity to ask some more fundamental questions. Indeed, we want the Board to consider a new set of proposals: rather than proceed with expanding photography operations in London; would there be significant public access and financial benefits in radically reappraising the role of the 'artistic' photography collections?

The alternative proposal is that in a time of tough priority decisions there is a strong case for phasing out the Media Space programme and donating the 'artistic' collections to a better home. The collection concerned includes significant collections of photographic material such as the Royal Photographic Society; The Fox Talbot Museum Collection; the Herschel Collection and others. These are important historic collections, detailing the development of photography in British history, including photographs (contact sheets, daguerreotypes, negatives and glass plates), 3D objects (cameras and lens), libraries and archives.

Current situation with Media Space

The Media Space budget for 2015/16 and the subsequent four years costs SMG £650,000 (net of ticket income); additionally there is an annual cost of £70,000 to transfer the exhibitions to NMeM, and a further annual cost of £150,000 for employees based at NMeM that work on Media Space exhibitions and these collections. The entire cost of the Media Space programme is £870,000.

Five year financial projection

£000's

| | 2015-16 | 2016-17 | 2017-18 | 2018-19 | 2019-20 |
|------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Admission Income | 270 | 502 | 636 | 500 | 500 |
| Operating costs | 296 | 305 | 304 | 300 | 300 |
| Project costs | 639 | 861 | 936 | 850 | 850 |
| | (665) | (664) | (604) | (650) | (650) |

Feasibility Study for Collection Relocation/Reading Room

The feasibility study assumes that the facility/store would be built within the Science Museum replacing the Listening Post gallery with a conditioned store and the redundant telecommunications space becoming the reading room.

The basis for the move is to improve the collections accessibility to the public, and therefore the collections would also need considerable cataloguing, in addition to purpose built facilities. The key cost elements are as follows:

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Build. | The cost for the build to transform these spaces into the proposed spaces with all associated equipment is £967,600. |
| Move. | Moving the collections to the Science Museum in the correct acceptable conditions by a fine art handling company is £175,000. |
| Cataloguing. acceptable | It is estimated that to ensure that the collections are catalogued with acceptable photographic supporting material will take three years by a mix of employees and volunteers, at a total Cost £1,078,770. |

The annual operating cost of the reading room (access, on-going collections growth and opening to the public) would be £145,000.

Total cost for build, move and cataloguing would be circa £2.2m, plus £145,000 to operate the reading room.

As this is clearly a significant investment at a time when finances are constrained, it must be considered if this programme and collections (although important it is very small in comparison to our science based collections) is a good use of the considerable initial and then on-going investment.

As a result, the Group Director has instigated some initial conversations with other appropriate institutions to investigate the possibility of permanent transfer of the artistic and cultural photographic collections. Initial discussions with the V&A and Tate have shown that there is genuine interest in a potential transfer. Discussions are further advanced with the V&A and have shown there are synergies with the transfer (see final section).

Criteria

If the Board were to decide to donate the relevant collections then it ought to do so on the basis of some core criteria. These might include the following:

1. Physical ability to care for the collections in the best facilities.
2. Enable access to the collections (including 3D objects and archives) for scholars and the public through reading room facilities and exhibition programmes.
3. Major gains in the cataloguing quality and digital accessibility of the collection
4. Alignment with existing collection, exhibitions programming and scholarship of the new institution
5. A serious intent to further develop the collections through acquisition.

All criteria will also be matched with the necessary timetable to deliver the elements; consideration will also be given to the logistics (resources and programme) to physically move the collection and the willingness to support the cost of the move.

Next steps

Further discussions with interested institutions will take place over the summer, to understand how each will meet the criteria.

A recommendation will be brought back to the October Board of Trustee meeting.

The Group Director is also keen to work with a small working Group that would include the Chairman of CORE and the Chairman of NMeM.

Some Background Notes

Discussions with the V&A are much more advanced than those with the Tate. Therefore, at this stage we have more information on the V&A 'vision' for the photography collections.

(a) Victoria and Albert Museum

The Science Museum and the V&A were established from the South Kensington Museum, which had been introduced following the Great Exhibition in 1851; as a consequence of this common origin there is a logic to the V&A being a suitable home of these collections.

The V&A has future development plans to build a 'National Centre for Photography' (*working title*) at their South Kensington site (c. 2022). However, they could offer earlier open access through space at Blythe House and opening a temporary display within the main building in the next 2 to 3 years. Currently 259pa people visit NMeM for access to these collections; the V&A has developed their Blythe Housed textile research centre to receive 5,000pa visitors, it is anticipated similar growth could be seen for the photography collection whilst housed there prior to moving to the permanent home in South Kensington. The V&A has a curatorial team dedicated to the photography collections that is responsible for around 500,000 images.

(b) Tate

Tate has been proactively developing its photography collections over the last five years and since 2010 has acquired work by over 160 photographers from around the world, building on a collection of about 30,000 images. This follows the appointment of the Tate's first curator dedicated to photography in 2009 and the formation of a Photographic Acquisitions Committee in 2010.

The Tate has a very significant collection of 19thC British art which would the 19thC photography collections would strengthen and complement greatly.