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# Advisory Committee on the Government Art Collection

Quinquennial Review  
November 2001



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## Summary of conclusions

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1. Future reviews, whether carried out as part of the quinquennial review programme (NDPBs) or the Better Quality Services review programme (DCMS's own services and functions) should cover the GAC and the Advisory Committee together: a joint review should be carried out no later than 2006/07. (Paragraph 1.5)
2. The Advisory Committee should continue as an Advisory NDPB. (Paragraph 3.19)
3. While the existing structures remain in place, the GAC Director's job specification should continue to state that experience of operating under similar arrangements is highly desirable. (Paragraph 3.20)
4. The Advisory Committee's terms of reference should not be amended unless or until the constitution of the GAC changes. (Paragraph 4.2)
5. The number of Committee members should be increased from a Chairman and 5 members to a Chairman and 7 members. (Paragraph 4.4)
6. The Committee should continue to include ex-officio members. (Paragraph 4.5)
7. Ex-officio members from Tate and the National Portrait Gallery should continue to serve on the Advisory Committee. (Paragraph 4.7)
8. The National Gallery should continue to fill a third ex-officio place on the Advisory Committee. (Paragraph 4.10)
9. Ex-officio membership should continue to be at Director level. (Paragraph 4.11)
10. Unless or until existing structures change, GAC clients should not be members of the Advisory Committee. (Paragraph 4.12)
11. Of the 4 independent members of the Committee, at least one should be based well outside London. (Paragraph 4.14)
12. Independent members should serve a term of 4 years. (Paragraph 4.16)
13. The review endorses the existing commitment to place all Advisory Committee matters in the hands of a Grade B at the GAC. (Paragraph 5.1)
14. An early task for the new Grade B should be to develop a written constitution for the Advisory Committee. (Paragraph 5.2)

15. If the Advisory Committee is increased to a Chairman, 3 ex-officio members and 4 independent members, then the quorum should be 4 and should include one ex-officio member. (Paragraph 5.5)
16. As the GAC acquires enhanced ICT (e.g. digital cameras) it should consider how it could best use these technologies to facilitate the Advisory Committee's work and act on any opportunities offered. (Paragraph 5.10)
17. The GAC should ensure that it adds a distinct Advisory Committee area to the website plus a copy of the acquisitions and disposal policy. (Paragraph 5.11)

## Section 1: The Review

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### Quinquennial reviews

- 1.1 It is government policy that departments should undertake quinquennial reviews of their agencies and of their executive, advisory and tribunal NDPBs. This report presents the results of the quinquennial review of the Advisory Committee on the Government Art Collection ("the Advisory Committee"), an advisory NDPB sponsored by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport ("DCMS" or "the Department").
- 1.2 Quinquennial reviews are usually carried out in two distinct stages, in accordance with guidance issued by the Cabinet Office in 2000 (*How to review agencies and non-departmental public bodies to improve the quality and effectiveness of public services*). Stage One looks at the need for the services provided by the NDPB or agency and examines whether there is a better delivery channel for those services. If current agency/NDPB status is confirmed, Stage Two looks at ways in which the services can be delivered more effectively.

### Terms of reference

- 1.3 The terms of reference for the review were.

#### Aim

To determine whether:

- There is a continuing need for the service provided by the Advisory Committee;
- The service is best delivered by an NDPB; and (subject to continuation as an advisory NDPB)
- improvements can be made in efficiency and effectiveness.

#### Issues for consideration during the review

- The need for an Advisory Committee and the extent to which it contributes to the delivery of DCMS and Government objectives;
- Whether the existing organisational arrangements represent the best way to provide the service or whether there are other options for delivery;
- The extent of the Advisory Committee's sensitivity to its stakeholders;
- Whether any amendments are needed to the Advisory Committee's terms of reference;
- The scope for increased efficiency and effectiveness;
- The extent to which guidance and codes of practice on member

- conduct are followed; and
- Whether the Advisory Committee operates in an open and transparent fashion in accordance with the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

### Review scope

- 1.4 The reviewer was asked to confine her study to the Advisory Committee and not to review the Government Art Collection ("the GAC") itself. This scoping decision was based on the fact that the GAC was thoroughly examined in the 1997/98 spending review, when it was concluded that it should remain part of DCMS and that its aims and objectives should remain unaltered. The key arguments from that review are given at Appendix A.
- 1.5 Given, however, that there is a direct relationship between the GAC's aims and objectives and the services required of and provided by the Advisory Committee, any distinction between the two can be regarded as artificial. For this reason future reviews, whether carried out as part of the quinquennial review programme (NDPBs) or the Better Quality Services review programme (DCMS's own services and functions) should cover the GAC and the Advisory Committee together: a joint review should be carried out no later than 2006/07.

### Review process

- 1.6 Cabinet Office guidance notes that, for the majority of Advisory NDPBs, a full quinquennial review is not necessary given that most are very small, incur little expenditure and do not employ their own staff. The resources devoted to such reviews need to be proportionate to the nature of the body being reviewed and the extent of its stakeholder profile. Consequently, this review has covered both Stages in one process and has been organised in such a way as to consume minimal resources consistent with the review's needs.
- 1.7 The review was announced by Parliamentary Question in March 2001 and was carried out by the quinquennial reviews adviser in DCMS's Finance and Planning Division during June-October. The review client was the Director of Museums, Galleries, Libraries and Heritage Group. The reviewer collected documentary evidence, interviewed all present members and one past member of the Advisory Committee and spoke to key personnel in the GAC and DCMS - the Advisory Committee's primary stakeholders. External challenge was provided by the Cabinet Office and HM Treasury who commented on this report in draft.
- 1.8 The list of people consulted is at Appendix B and the discussion document used to structure interviews at Appendix C.

## Section 2: Background

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### The Government Art Collection

- 2.1 The Government Art Collection (GAC) places works of art from the Collection in major Government buildings in the United Kingdom and around the world. The GAC plays a significant role in promoting Britain and its history, culture and art across diverse and international environments by:
- a. Developing the Collection through the purchase and commissioning of British art;
  - b. Maintaining the Collection to professional standards;
  - c. Cataloguing, researching and interpreting works of art in the Collection in order to increase visitors' understanding and appreciation of the art on display in Government buildings;
  - d. Providing advice on the acquisition, commission, display and care of works of art, which are in public ownership but not part of the collection; and
  - e. Lending works of art from the Collection to public exhibitions in the UK and abroad.
- 2.2 A team of 13 is responsible for the care and display of a core Collection of about 11,500 works of mainly British art from the sixteenth century to the present day. Approximately 80% of the Collection is out on display at any one time, at 150 locations in the UK and 300 locations abroad; the remaining works of art are at GAC premises either for conservation or awaiting re-selection. The Collection has been funded since its inception in 1898 through various parent departments including the Department of the Environment and the Office of Arts and Libraries. The GAC is now part of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Other options for managing the GAC were considered in 1997/98 as part of the departmental spending review, when it was determined that the GAC should remain part of the Department (Appendix A).

### The Advisory Committee

- 2.3 The Advisory Committee was formed in 1935 but became inactive during and immediately after the Second World War. It was reconstituted in 1946, and again in 1956, since when it has been in continuous existence. It has no statutory status and there is no formal requirement that it should exist. The Advisory Committee has never undergone a quinquennial review.

- 2.4 The Committee's terms of reference are:
- a. To advise on the purchase and commissioning of works of art for display in Government buildings in the UK and abroad;
  - b. To advise on the development of the collection in order to promote the image of Britain and reflect British culture, history and creativity in the visual arts; and
  - c. To advise on policy matters regarding the stewardship of the Government Art Collection.
- 2.5 The Advisory Committee is not a board of trustees. It offers advice to the GAC Director who, having taken account of the advice offered, is responsible for making final decisions on all matters embraced by the Advisory Committee's terms of reference.
- 2.6 The Advisory Committee comprises the following members:
- |  |             |
|--|-------------|
| John Tusa  | Chairman    |
| Margot Heller  | Independent |
| Richard Dorment  | Independent |
| Neil MacGregor (Director, National Gallery)                  | Ex-Officio  |
| Charles Saumarez-Smith (Director, National Portrait Gallery) | Ex-Officio  |
| Sir Nicholas Serota (Director, Tate)                         | Ex-Officio  |
- 2.7 The Committee meets formally three times a year. No quorum has been formally established though custom and practice have dictated that meetings do not take place unless at least one ex-officio member can attend. The Advisory Committee devotes much of its time in meetings to discussing the acquisition, commissioning and placing of works of art in government buildings. However, it does discuss other, strategic, matters and in the past three years such discussions have covered:
- a. An updated acquisitions and disposal policy for the GAC;
  - b. Relationships, both formal (e.g. the Memorandum of Operation) and informal with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office ("the FCO");
  - c. How to ensure committee membership reflects the GAC's UK-wide remit;
  - d. Difficult conservation issues;
  - e. Outreach, including GAC publications, opening up the GAC's premises to group visits and developing the GAC website;
  - f. Complaints procedures;

- g. Review of GAC staffing and roles; and
- h. The Code of practice for members of public bodies.

2.8 The Advisory Committee's input is not, however, restricted to meetings. Between meetings, members:

- a. Respond to requests for advice from the GAC Director and staff;
- b. Bring relevant issues and potential acquisitions to the GAC Director's attention;
- c. Accompany the GAC Director to exhibitions and other events; and
- d. Provide support for GAC staff at meetings with GAC clients such as the FCO.

#### **Advisory Committee Stakeholders**

2.9 The GAC is the Committee's primary stakeholder, followed closely by DCMS (as the GAC is part of the Department). The decisions made by the GAC Director, having regard to the Advisory Committee's advice, help to shape the Collection so there is an indirect stakeholder relationship between the Committee and GAC clients - in particular the FCO and 10 Downing Street. It was suggested that the reviewer should speak to these secondary stakeholders but she judged:

- a. That such consultation would inevitably cross the review boundary and cover the GAC as secondary stakeholders could not be expected fully to appreciate the distinction between the GAC and its Advisory Committee; and
- b. That consulting high-powered and busy individuals such as ambassadors would be more appropriately carried out as part of a larger scale review covering both the GAC and the Advisory Committee.

In short, the reviewer felt that putting resource into consulting GAC clients would not be proportionate to the needs of this review as scoped.

#### **Advisory Committee costs**

2.10 The Advisory Committee employs no staff and manages no premises. Membership of the Committee carries no remuneration and members are not reimbursed for any travelling expenses they incur on Advisory Committee business. Consequently the costs of running the Committee are marginal, comprising in the main staff time on secretariat, administrative support functions and on inducting new Committee members. Time spent by members of GAC staff viewing potential acquisitions in the company of an Advisory

Committee member would be spent on such business whether or not an Advisory Committee member was present.

- 2.11 Since Advisory Committee work is absorbed into the GAC's day to day activities, there are no formal records of time spent purely on Advisory Committee business. Rough estimates suggest that over a year it currently averages out at around 1 day a month of a Grade D (c.£1000 p.a.).

## Section 3: Why the GAC needs an Advisory Committee

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### Why does the GAC need access to external advice?

- 3.1 The GAC needs access to external advice because:
- a. It is a small organisation with a wide remit;
  - b. It has limited resources for acquisitions; and
  - c. It operates within the structure of a government department.
- 3.2 The GAC has only 8 curatorial posts (including the Director) and 2 specialist technicians, which is low considering the scope and importance of the Collection and in comparison with other national collections. Consequently, it is very difficult for the GAC on its own to keep abreast of developments in all the fields of interest or relevance to it. This is particularly true in the contemporary field (where the GAC has been increasingly active in recent years) in which the number of quality British artists has expanded greatly. If the GAC operated in a vacuum, without access to external advice and challenge, the range and quality of the collection could decline as acquisitions increasingly reflected individual curatorial preference rather than the GAC's broader aims and objectives. The external challenge function is particularly crucial; all other national collections have boards of trustees who can challenge curatorial judgement.
- 3.3 The GAC has a finite acquisitions budget which comes from the money voted by Parliament to the Department. The GAC's recent and projected acquisitions budget is given in the table below:

| 1999/00  | 2000/01 actual | 2001/02 budget | 2002/03 budget |
|----------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| £179,000 | £147,000       | £130,000       | £230,000       |

- 3.4 Although there will be a significant increase in budget in 2002/03, even £230,000 will not stretch very far, so it is essential that the GAC invests wisely. Investing in works of art can be a risky business and the art market is extremely competitive; in this environment the GAC Director would be unable to make the best possible use of the funding available without access to external knowledge and expertise.
- 3.5 As a collection run from within a government department, access to external expertise on matters relating to professional collections management and conservation is essential to ensure that the collection is managed and maintained to the highest museum standards.

- 3.6 The existing delivery channel for external advice is currently provided by the Advisory Committee. The key question is whether this model provides the GAC with the most effective service.

#### **Benefits of the existing model**

- 3.7 The main benefits of using an Advisory NDPB are:
- a. Transparency and accountability;
  - b. Continuity;
  - c. Commitment;
  - d. Authority;
  - e. A broad range of knowledge, skills and experience; and
  - f. Value for money.
- 3.8 The GAC is accountable for its expenditure, in particular on acquisitions. Good governance demands that decision-making processes leading to the spending of public money must be robust and transparent. A formally constituted committee at arms length from the Department helps to provide assurance that due process has been followed, that the GAC Director has not been inappropriately influenced by lobbying (e.g. by artists or politicians) and that public money has been appropriately spent.
- 3.9 Members of the Advisory Committee through their length of service build up a deep knowledge of the GAC, its acquisitions policy and the way in which the collection is used. This enhances the quality of the advice the GAC Director receives. Ex-officio members help to ensure continuity when independent members reach the end of their service on the Advisory Committee.
- 3.10 The formal link between the GAC and Advisory Committee members helps foster a commitment to the work of the GAC that perhaps would not exist otherwise and Advisory Committee members have always been very generous with their time and expertise. Although Advisory Committee members as individuals would, in the normal course of their ordinary business, respond to requests for advice from the GAC as from other Museums and galleries, the formal link means that GAC requests are given priority. This can be vital, for example when items come up for auction at short notice.
- 3.11 The Advisory Committee provides a high-powered and authoritative point of reference, at arms length from the Department, that the GAC can use to meet pressure from ministers and ambassadors to depart from its purpose and standards and to support difficult ethical decisions. For example, the Advisory Committee Chairman intervened on behalf of the GAC at a difficult stage in the Berlin Embassy project when it appeared that the FCO would not provide the funding for works that had been commissioned.

- 3.12 The GAC requires access to a formidable range of knowledge, skills and experience and a standing committee provides the most effective means of access. The skills set required of the Advisory Committee includes:
- a. Portraiture;
  - b. Contemporary art;
  - c. Photography, video and new media;
  - d. Historical paintings;
  - e. How the art market operates;
  - f. Commercial galleries;
  - g. Up-and-coming artists;
  - f. How government works;
  - g. Building collections through purchasing and commissioning works of art;
  - h. Public service (particularly in a public museum or gallery);
  - i. Service on the board of a museum or gallery; and
  - j. Using working collections such as the GAC.
- 3.13 The GAC (and indeed anyone with an interest in ensuring that the GAC spends public money appropriately) can be confident that, by having access to a body with the skills set described above, its proposals and decisions are subjected to a robust challenge. On the rare occasions when the Committee cannot provide detailed expertise from within its own ranks, the GAC will carry out the necessary research before an Advisory Committee meeting or experts can be invited to attend a meeting for the relevant agenda item.
- 3.14 The Advisory Committee offers exceptional value for money:
- a. The costs of running the NDPB are minimal (the only real cost to the GAC is that of providing the secretariat - see 2.11);
  - b. The GAC saves on staff time: it is less labour intensive for GAC staff to work with a standing body than it would be to access expertise on an ad hoc basis; and
  - c. The Advisory Committee's advice enables the GAC to invest wisely, making the most of the public funds allocated to commissioning and purchase of works of art.

#### **Other delivery options**

- 3.15 It would be difficult to propose a delivery mechanism for external advice that would be as effective for the GAC and the Department as the existing Advisory Committee. The possible alternatives are:
- a. Ad hoc arrangements; or
  - b. Retaining an independent consultant.

- 3.16 Ad hoc arrangements would work less well for the GAC as:
- a. They would be labour intensive for GAC staff (particularly the Director) to operate;
  - b. The advantages of an informed debating forum bringing together a range of perspectives would be lost;
  - c. The quality of advice would be questionable as the adviser could be working in a vacuum without sufficient knowledge of the GAC; and
  - d. It would be difficult to ensure that confidential issues were not leaked.
- 3.17 A further option could be to retain an independent consultant but the disadvantages of this approach would be:
- a. Cost - an independent consultant would require payment;
  - b. Lack of transparency;
  - c. The GAC would have access only to a narrow range of ideas and expertise and could be inappropriately influenced by a single adviser.
- 3.18 While the GAC remains constituted as part of a division within DCMS, it would be inappropriate for the Advisory Committee to become a trustee body analogous to those of the national museums and galleries.

### Conclusions

- 3.19 The GAC and the Department recognise and value the loyalty and commitment of Committee members. As the primary stakeholders, they feel that the Advisory Committee works effectively, delivering high-quality, timely advice at minimal cost to the Department. They are satisfied that an NDPB is the most appropriate mechanism for providing the services required and it is difficult to conceive of a model that would work as well. The GAC must have access to external expertise if it is to operate effectively and be fully accountable for its use of public money. That external expertise is best delivered through the existing advisory NDPB framework so **the Advisory Committee should continue as an Advisory NDPB.**
- 3.20 It is worth noting in this context that, as a purely advisory body, the Committee's effectiveness depends to a great extent on the use the GAC Director makes of it and relationships between the Advisory Committee and the present and previous Directors are and were excellent. **While the existing structures remain in place, the GAC Director's job specification should continue to state that experience of operating under similar arrangements is highly desirable.**

## Section 4: Advisory Committee terms of reference and membership

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### Terms of reference

- 4.1 The GAC's primary purpose is to serve the government and to represent its philosophy and style. The Advisory Committee's terms of reference are entirely focussed on supporting the work of the GAC so by extension, therefore, the Advisory Committee contributes to government objectives.
- 4.2 None of the consultees indicated that there was any need to amend the Advisory Committee's terms of reference (see 2.4 above). **The Advisory Committee's terms of reference should not be amended unless or until the constitution of the GAC changes.**

### Committee membership

- 4.3 Members of the Advisory Committee should, and currently do, between them provide access to the knowledge, skills and experience required by the GAC (see 3.12). It is, however, appropriate in this review to ask questions about the numbers on and composition of the Advisory Committee:
- a. How large should the Advisory Committee be?
  - b. Is there a need for ex-officio members?
  - c. If so, what proportion of the Advisory Committee should they comprise?
  - d. Is it essential that ex-officio members should be Directors?
  - e. Should GAC clients be represented on the Advisory Committee?
  - f. Is it appropriate for the Advisory Committee to be 100% London-based?
  - g. What should the term of office be?
- 4.4 If the Advisory Committee is to fulfil its role (particularly its function of challenging the GAC Director) it has to be large enough to offer a range of perspectives but not so large that individual members are unable to contribute effectively in debate. An over-large committee could fall prey to two or three vociferous members who might dominate proceedings and exert a disproportionate influence. The consensus of opinion is that the Advisory Committee's dynamic would change for the worst if it increased much beyond 8 members (including the Chairman). The high profile of Committee members means that it is often difficult for all 6 to attend meetings so, to ensure that the range of perspectives is maintained, **the number of Committee members should be increased from a Chairman and 5 members to a Chairman and 7 members.**

- 4.5 Views on ex-officio members range from “it’s undesirable in principle to have ex-officio members on any committee” to “it’s essential that we have the existing three”. There are undoubted advantages from the GAC’s point of view in having ex-officio members; it needs ready access to advice from other national collections that share many of the practical problems it faces, and having ex-officio positions on the Advisory Committee is the most effective way of ensuring this. **The Committee should continue to include ex-officio members.**
- 4.6 Ex-officio members inevitably restrict the amount of new blood coming on to the Advisory Committee and it is, therefore, undesirable that they should account for over 50% of the membership (though it should be noted that no significant problem with this profile has come to light-except, perhaps, difficulties in getting a quorum for Advisory Committee meetings). For this reason, the two new members proposed in paragraph 4.4 should be independent members. The question remains whether the existing three ex-officio members should be retained.
- 4.7 The case for ex-officio Advisory Committee members from Tate and the National Portrait Gallery is extremely strong, given that their collecting remits are entirely consonant with that of the GAC. It would be difficult to think of appropriate replacements and the Advisory Committee’s authority would be compromised were these institutions not to be represented. Consequently, **ex-officio members from Tate and the National Portrait Gallery should continue to serve on the Advisory Committee.**
- 4.8 The case for an ex-officio member from the National Gallery is, perhaps, less strong in the current climate where the acquisitions focus is on contemporary British art but it would be shortsighted to assume that the focus might not, or should not, change in the future. However, there are other national and regional public institutions whose collecting remits embrace historical paintings and it has been suggested that the third ex-officio slot could be subject to rotation between the National Gallery and those bodies. The advantages of such a move would be:
- a. Increasing the flow of fresh blood on the Advisory Committee; and
  - b. Addressing the Advisory Committee’s perceived London bias (see paragraph 4.13).
- 4.9 The case against moving the National Gallery into a rotating pool rests on:
- a. The GAC’s need to have ready access to ex-officio members in London covering all three key areas of interest (close proximity to the main auction houses and commercial galleries is crucial if the GAC is to act quickly when items come up for purchase); and
  - b. The fact that the GAC has access to the National Gallery’s expertise, which covers a greater range than other potential members of any

rotating pool of public galleries.

- 4.10 Taking into account the GAC's needs, the recommendation to increase the number of Advisory Committee members by two, and the proposal made in 4.14 for a 'regional' member, the case for moving the National Gallery into a rotating pool looks less strong. Consequently **the National Gallery should continue to fill a third ex-officio place on the Advisory Committee.**
- 4.11 The Advisory Committee is very high-powered, not least because of the presence of three national gallery directors as ex-officio members. While, at a practical level, a curator immediately below the level of director would possess the required knowledge, skills and experience to fill the ex-officio role, the Advisory Committee has to possess high-profile members if it is to carry weight with the government and GAC's clients, in particular FCO. The current ex-officio members also have a high profile in the media and travel widely, acting as ambassadors for the GAC. It is recognised that the ex-officio members have difficulty attending every meeting but it is important for the GAC that the ex-officio members are of sufficient status to have the necessary impact on clients, senior ministers and artists. A trade-off between status and availability has to be accepted in these circumstances. **Ex-officio membership should continue to be at Director level.**
- 4.12 It has been suggested that the FCO, as the GAC's main client, should have a representative on the Advisory Committee: either a serving ambassador currently based in London or a retired ex-ambassador or someone from FCO estates. An advantage would be that the FCO view on a projected purchase could be taken into account at a much earlier stage. However if the FCO was represented on the Advisory Committee, other client government departments such as No 10 could legitimately claim a position and the Committee's dynamic would be upset. If FCO was represented at a high level, there would be a risk that including a powerful client could compromise the Advisory Committee's objectivity and inhibit open discussion. There is nothing to prevent representatives from the FCO (or indeed other departments) attending Advisory Committee meetings for particular agenda items and precedents already exist for this. **Unless or until existing structures change, GAC clients should not be members of the Advisory Committee.**
- 4.13 The Advisory Committee's London bias has been queried on the basis of a fear that artists from the English regions and the home countries will not be represented in the GAC. In fact, this is not what the 'regional issue' is about. The GAC collects the best of British art and any artist who comes from outside London will, if they are producing work of sufficient quality to be considered for the Collection, be showing and selling in London - the centre of the UK art market. The question is more about whether there is a need for Advisory Committee membership to reflect the fact that the GAC represents the whole of the UK, particularly when placing works of art in FCO buildings abroad. This is an issue that the Advisory Committee is well aware of, which it has debated and which it has tried to tackle for over a year by seeking a 'regional' independent member, currently without success.

- 4.14 The proposal to increase the independent members by 2 offers an opportunity to address the Advisory Committee's geographical profile. However, given that the Advisory Committee has already found it difficult to appoint a suitable independent member with a 'regional' remit the reviewer is reluctant to close down options by prescribing what sort of person (e.g. a director of a regional public gallery) should be appointed or from where they should come other than to say that **of the 4 independent members of the Committee, at least one should be based well outside London.**
- 4.15 If this recommendation is implemented, it will result in increased costs to the Department, though these are not easy to quantify without knowing what profile the an expanded Committee might have. An Advisory Committee member travelling to meetings in London would, understandably, expect expenses to be paid. Paying travelling expenses would then have to be extended to existing Advisory Committee members for the sake of consistency and fairness. This would be a price worth paying for the sake of appointing one or more members from outside London.
- 4.16 Currently, the Chairman is appointed for 5 years and the independent members for 3 years. The Chairman and independent members may be appointed for a second term. Given the need for continuity and the fact that it takes some time to become fully au fait with the GAC (which, as a working collection is totally unlike any other national collection), there is a case to be made for increasing the term of office of independent members. **Independent members should serve a term of 4 years.**

## Section 5: Governance and administrative support

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### Secretariat

- 5.1 Committee Secretary duties are split between two GAC staff: a Grade C (governance and appointments) and a Grade D(U) (minutes, arrangements for meetings and correspondence). The system works well as far as the Committee is concerned: members are impressed by the quality of the support and the timeliness and thoroughness of the papers they receive. However, this system of split responsibilities is difficult to administer from the GAC's point of view and it would make sense for all Advisory Committee work to be in the hands of one administrator. The GAC has already recognised this and intends to recruit to a new Grade B post which will, amongst other things, handle all Advisory Committee matters. **This review endorses the existing commitment to place all Advisory Committee matters in the hands of a new Grade B at the GAC.**
- 5.2 The Advisory Council has no statutory status, and has evolved over the years since 1956 without a written constitution. **An early task for the new Grade B should, therefore, be to develop a written constitution for the Advisory Committee.**
- 5.3 The need to recruit an official with responsibility for Advisory Committee matters will grow more pressing should the Advisory Committee's membership expand in accordance with the review's recommendations. Although the latest member to be appointed to the Advisory Committee was satisfied with her induction programme, appointing and inducting new members is an onerous task.

### Meetings

- 5.4 The advisory Committee meets on GAC premises 3 times a year. This is a sufficient number of meetings given current levels of expenditure on acquisitions and the crowded diaries of Committee members. However, should there be increased acquisitions/commissioning activity, it might be necessary to increase the number of meetings. Any consideration of an increase in the number of meetings would need to take into account the potential adverse impact the added burden might have on attendance levels, though this might be mitigated if the overall committee membership was increased from 6 to 8 as recommended.
- 5.5 There is currently no formal requirement for a quorum: a formal requirement should be set. **If the Advisory Committee is increased to a Chairman, 3 ex-officio members and 4 independent members, then the quorum should be 4 and should include one ex-officio member.**

## Appointments

- 5.6 The chairman and the independent Advisory Committee members are appointed following the procedures that DCMS has put in place to meet the requirements of the Office for the Commissioner for Public Appointments. These procedures are designed to assist in finding the best people for appointment, taking into account the mix of skills required by each public body.
- 5.7 The Committee has adopted the appropriate sections of the Code of practice for boards of public bodies. Minutes of Committee meetings are not currently made publicly available, but the development of the GAC website (see below) offers the opportunity to publicise the Advisory Committee's work more widely.

## Use of information and communication technologies (ICT)

- 5.8 The review considered ways in which the Committee's activities might be enhanced by using ICT, covering:
- a. video conferencing;
  - b. greater use of e-mail and digitised images; and
  - c. establishing a distinct Advisory Committee presence on the GAC website.
- 5.9 The Advisory Committee's members are extremely busy. This can make it difficult for them all to attend each meeting, even though they are all currently London-based. This suggests it could be difficult to attract a high-profile independent member from outside London. One way round the problem might be to consider using web or video conferencing as a time-saving measure. However, while this technology is a useful way of bringing together people who are geographically dispersed for a discussion, it would be extremely difficult to come to a decision about a proposed acquisition without having the physical item to hand: the virtual is no substitute for the reality as far as works of art are concerned. For this reason alone, irrespective of any cost considerations, video/web conferencing cannot for the present be regarded as a practical option.
- 5.10 It was suggested by some Committee members that it would be useful prior to a meeting to receive digitised images of art works for discussion (though not as a substitute for seeing the original). The GAC is not yet in a position to provide digital images but will move in that direction as it develops its website. At that point it can use any technology it acquires to support Advisory Committee work. **As the GAC acquires enhanced ICT (e.g. digital cameras) it should consider how it could best use these technologies to facilitate the Advisory Committee's work and act on any opportunities offered.**

- 5.11 The GAC website ([www.gac.culture.gov.uk](http://www.gac.culture.gov.uk)) went live in May 2001. Phase one of the site's development has covered a catalogue of the collection. In subsequent phases, the GAC should set up a distinct Advisory Committee area as part of the GAC site. This area should include summaries of meetings minutes (subject to confidentiality requirements), information about members, and a copy of the acquisitions and disposal policy once it has been approved. This would make transparent how the Advisory Committee works and the criteria against which it assesses proposed acquisitions. **The GAC should ensure that it adds a distinct Advisory Committee area to the website plus a copy of the acquisitions and disposal policy.**

## Appendix A: 1997/98 Spending Review

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EXTRACT FROM THE DCMS DEPARTMENTAL SPENDING REVIEW FILES, SEPTEMBER 1997, COVERING THE GOVERNMENT ART COLLECTION

### WHY DOES THE GOVERNMENT OWN THE GAC?

Because the primary purpose of the GAC is to serve the Government in its role of promoting and enhancing the image and international profile of Britain, with its culture, history and achievements, through the display of works of art in major Government buildings at home and abroad. Works of art have an immediate impact, transcending language barriers, and therefore play an essential part in transmitting and reinforcing the image of Britain.

Works of art also have an important role in representing the philosophy and style of the British Government. Works of art do not only send out a particular image of Britain and its Government, they can also for example be used as visual acknowledgement of sensitive political situations on which the British Government wishes to be seen to be taking a policy of rapprochement or of reconciliation.

So that the Government does not have to borrow large numbers of works from national collections, thus removing them from display in the galleries and from public access for which they were acquired.

The purpose of the GAC is best achieved economically as well as politically when responsibility for its implementation is vested in one organisation within Central Government for the following reasons:

- As part of Central Government, the GAC is directly accountable to the Secretary of state and not a third party.
- The GAC provides impartial curatorial expertise and advice to the DCMS and other Government departments on a range of matters relating to the visual arts. By operating within Central Government the GAC is able to benefit from the impartial advice from Central Government necessary to conduct its business in what is often a sensitive political arena.
- The GAC is solely interested in the objectives and safeguarding of the Collection - rather than having an additional, possibly conflicting, incentive of promoting a private enterprise.
- GAC work involves the use of a wide range of diplomatic and political skills in dealing with requests from Ministers, senior civil servants and

Ambassadors, sensitive Government material and personnel in high-security locations. GAC staff are employed and vetted by Central Government, thus eliminating the security risk in these situations, and have built up a relationship of continuity and trust with these bodies.

### ARE THERE ANY OTHER OPTIONS FOR OWNERSHIP?

#### *Option (a): Privatisation*

**The Collection could be sold to a commercial body and the Government could then lease back as much of the Collection as it wished.**

As the Collection is not actively traded or insured, it has no current valuation. Before being sold in this manner, an accurate valuation would be required. 80% of the Collection is on display in 470 buildings (300 locations of which are abroad), making the undertaking of the valuation by an accredited valuer extremely time-consuming and expensive.

Although privatisation may seem an attractive option, the following factors should be taken into account:

- A private company would have to service its capital outlay, make a reasonable profit and cover the ongoing cost of running the Collection. Given that the GAC is able to benefit from the existing infrastructure of Central Government (for example the Finance and Personnel Divisions, the Facilities Management Branch, the Press Office and the Government Indemnity Scheme) it is unlikely that a commercial body could offer the same level of service at the same price.
- If the Collection were run by a private company purely for profit, the question would have to be asked whether such a company would have the same long-term, impartial, curatorial commitment to the well-being, safeguarding and long-term survival of the collection in the public interest. In addition, a private company would pay little attention to looking after items which have an intrinsic rather than financial value.
- The cost of running the GAC by a private company, met by imposing charges, would be higher than the present cost to Government of running the GAC. The new owners could only make a profit if they sold works from the collection or made substantial charges to Government for borrowing them back. That is to say the Government would undoubtedly be charged a sizeable fee on a regular basis for borrowing works of art it had originally owned. This would have serious implications and repercussions for all government Departments, especially the FCO, to who the GAC provides a valuable service, particularly in relation to the proportional efforts in British diplomatic posts overseas.

*Effects on the FCO*

Some 50% of the GAC's holdings are on display in British missions abroad, in public reception rooms in the residences and offices of heads of missions - Ambassadors, High Commissioners, Consuls-General - and these works of art have been selected with regard to their appropriateness and merit. If, because of privatisation, works of art were removed from these areas, the FCO would have little alternative but to replace them, either through a lease arrangement with a new company or by purchasing. There are considerable costs attached to either option, in particular the latter (e.g. acquisition, transport, installation and administration).

There is also evidence that indiscriminate purchasing by Government Departments, without any overall policy and direction, leads to a decline in aesthetic standards and audit control, reflecting badly on the Government's ability to appreciate its own property.

*Option (b): Private Trust*

**The Government could put money into a 'GAC Trust' for an initial period in order, after a certain time, to allow the GAC to be able to generate sufficient income to be completely self-funding.**

After the removal of central funding the GAC would almost certainly not be able to be self-funding for the reasons given in (a). In addition the GAC believes that it is too small an organisation to function as a trust or an agency as it would lose the benefits of the infrastructure of Central Government and could not carry its own overheads.

*Option (c): Transfer to an NDPB or another art organisation*

The transfer of the GAC to another similar organisation is considered by looking at the Tate Gallery (the NDPB also has a collection of British art) and the British Council and Arts Council.

**The Arts Council, British Council, Tate Gallery and GAC collections are different collections operating with different purposes in different ways.**

The four collections work on markedly different programmes, different lead-in times, different constraints of conservation and different purchasing criteria.

**The GAC** is the only art collection which promotes and enhances the image of Britain and the philosophy and style of the Government. This is achieved by acquiring for its collection British works of art from c.1600 to the present day for display to visitors to British Government buildings at home and abroad.

**The Arts Council Collection** is the only art collection which collects and supports by means of temporary exhibitions the work of up-and-coming British artists in order to encourage the appreciation of contemporary art among the general public in the UK. The works are shown in touring exhibitions mostly in regional galleries but also in public London galleries and other locations throughout the UK.

**The British Council Collection** is the only art collection which promotes through public exhibition abroad the achievements of twentieth-century and contemporary British art. Works are (specifically) acquired for touring exhibitions and displays in gallery venues around the world, but not in the UK.

**The Tate Gallery** is the only national art collection which acquires major examples of an artist's work (historic, modern and contemporary) for research, exhibition and display to the public in the Tate's own galleries with continual, round-the-clock environmental and curatorial monitoring.

The GAC has a unique function and operates in a unique way. It is the only collection which acquires works of art which can be readily and pragmatically displayed in non-museum/ gallery environments all over the world. Consequently the works have to be of a scale, construction and robustness to permit their installation in domestic and office settings in Government buildings world wide. The GAC's acquisition policy must also be alive to the political and religious sensitivities in the countries where GAC works of art may be displayed.

Housing any of these diverse operations and collections under the same roof would create unnecessary confusion and disharmony. Given the fundamental differences these collections need to be managed separately and there is no benefit in transferring the GAC to another organisation. The difficulties indicated above are generic to the transfer of the GAC to any other organisation, not just the three cited here.

It should be noted that the GAC already has good relationships with the three other organisations and also when appropriate makes requests for loans. The GAC tends to have closer contact with the Tate gallery as their works are more readily available for loan to such locations as 10 Downing Street. The GAC has also made occasional loans of works to temporary exhibitions at the Tate Gallery. The GAC believes that at present, given the diversity of operations described, the most successful and effective way of operating is to continue to work with these organisations on a co-operative, flexible and pragmatic basis.

## Appendix B: Consultation

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The reviewer held interviews with the following, based on the interview structure at Annex C:

### **Current members of the Advisory Committee**

John Tusa  
Margot Heller  
Richard Dorment  
Neil MacGregor  
Charles Saumarez-Smith  
Sir Nicholas Serota

### **Past member of the Advisory Committee**

Mary Rose Beaumont

### **DCMS**

Alex Stewart, Director, Museums Galleries Libraries and Heritage (MGLH) Group  
Roger Stratton-Smith, Head of the Review Management Team, MGLH Group

### **GAC**

Penny Johnson  
David Law  
Lidia Plintschev

The reviewer was also given a thorough tour of GAC premises and had access to GAC project files.

## Appendix C: Discussion structure

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### ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE GOVERNMENT ART COLLECTION: QUINQUENNIAL REVIEW ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION WITH ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

#### Advisory Committee terms of reference

*The Advisory Committee's terms of reference are:*

- *To advise on the purchase and commissioning of works of art for display in Government buildings in the UK and abroad;*
- *To advise on the development of the Collection in order to promote the image of Britain and reflect British culture, history and creativity in the visual arts; and*
- *To advise on policy matters regarding the stewardship of the Government Art Collection .*

1. Why does the GAC need to have access to external expert advice? What would be the impact on the GAC if it operated without such advice?
2. Is a standing committee the best way of providing such advice? What other models are there? Could the GAC rely on advice just from one institution? Could the GAC just call on advice as and when, without there being an AC?
3. Are the terms of reference still relevant? Is anything missing? Should anything be dropped?

#### Performance against terms of reference

4. How well do you feel the Committee performs against its terms of reference? Are there any ways in which the Committee could become more effective?

#### Advisory Committee membership

*The Advisory Committee comprises three ex-officio members, a chairman and two independent members. The ex-officio members are:*

- *Director, National Gallery*
- *Director, National Portrait Gallery*
- *Director, Tate*

5. Are the numbers about right? At what point would the Advisory Committee become unwieldy? How can we ensure the correct balance between numbers and skills mix?

6. Is the composition right? Should there be more independent members? Is the bias too heavily weighted towards London institutions? Should any proportion of the membership be ex-officio and, if so, why?
7. Do specialist skills (e.g. conservation) need to be brought into the AC?
8. Are there circumstances in which it would be useful to bring in additional expertise on an ad-hoc basis?

### **Stakeholders**

*The AC's primary stakeholders are:*

- *the GAC itself;*
- *DCMS; and*
- *Government departments who make use of the GAC's services (and therefore have an interest in the scope, quality and stewardship of the Collection).*

*We propose to focus stakeholder consultation in these areas.*

9. Are there any other key stakeholders we should consult?
10. Are there any individuals that we should consult?

### **Administrative support**

*The AC has no staff of its own. Administrative support is provided by the staff of the GAC.*

11. Does administrative support meet desired standards? Are there any changes in working practices that could make the AC more efficient? Could ICT have a greater role to play in the AC's work?

### **Other issues**

12. Are there any other issues you would like to raise in the context of this review?

