

**Report of the National Art Library Review**  
**Sarah Thomas and Anna Jobson**  
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## **1 Executive Summary and summary of recommendations**

In Spring 2021, the V&A commissioned a review of the National Art Library (NAL) from independent consultants Sarah Thomas and Anna Jobson. This followed a restructuring proposal of the library team that was made as part of the V&A's Recovery Programme. A decision was taken to remove the Library from the broader Collections Division restructure and to make use of the continuation of the Government furlough scheme to create space for a more detailed and thorough review. This was undertaken through a mixed methods approach as outlined below.

The review focused principally on the NAL, but it also considered a number of outstanding questions that had been left unresolved by the Recovery Programme; these related to the future resourcing of the Archives team and the Prints and Drawings Study Room (P&DSR). This report is the output of the review and it covers the process, research findings and recommendations. A separate Business Case focuses on the body of revised restructuring proposals that have also emerged from the Review, and is accompanied by detailed work on structures, skills, role descriptions and the impact of the proposal.

The recommendations of this review are that:

- The Library and Archives are jewels of the V&A, possessing unique collections and expertise, while underpinning cutting-edge scholarship within and beyond the museum
- They have great potential to enhance the future strategy of the V&A and extend the V&A's global reach
- In order to realise this potential, they need to pivot their activity, shifting priority from providing onsite service for a relative few to an expanded and diverse universe of users able to access services across multiple locations and online
- To accomplish this pivot, the V&A needs to restructure the NAL and Archives organisation, invest in visionary leadership and an expanded body of skills and commit to a multi-year transformation programme. Among other aims, this should:
  - Lay the foundations for the rationalisation of collections according to a contemporary policy that includes strategies for providing access to information through resource sharing and on-demand requests
  - Accelerate the development of digital content and services
  - Focus on the user and the user experience, streamlining processes and enabling users better to help themselves, including and in particular online users
  - Develop services and programmes that extend the Library and Archives value beyond the provision of information, offering more opportunities for users to be surprised and delighted and to learn with the support of expert librarians and archivists
  - Revitalise the NAL's spaces, showcasing both its historic architecture and adapting them to meet the diverse needs of a wide audience; set out and progress a strategy for the rationalisation of collections storage
  - Enhance the profile and visibility of NAL within and beyond the V&A, setting out a strategy and the mechanisms for regular communication with users in a variety of forms
  - Assess priorities for fundraising and achieve new investment to support innovation and the sustainability of the NAL and Archives into the future
- The transformation programme should be crystallised in a plan for 2022-25, which aligns the work of the NAL and Archives to the future ambitions of the V&A Research Institute (VARI) and the V&A, and

which includes a body of objectives and performance indicators which can allow for an assessment of progress against plan.

## 2 Background to the National Art Library

The NAL traces its origin to 1837, when the Government School of Design opened in Somerset House with a reference collection that included books. By 1852, Henry Cole, then General Superintendent of the School of Practical Art, and subsequently Director of the South Kensington Museum, had hired a full-time librarian<sup>1</sup>. In 1865, in keeping with Cole's ambitions for the Museum, the library was styled "National Art Library" although it had no charter for that role<sup>2</sup>. Its aspirations were expansive. Not only did it embrace a spirit of openness, with an expectation that the public would be welcome, but it advanced an ideal of a "universal catalogue of books on art" that would be an index to the published literature, in all languages, as reflected in the collections of the Art Library, Libraries of the British Museum, the Bodleian Library, and other British and foreign institutions<sup>3</sup>.

Over the past 150 years, the NAL has hewed to these two principles; one, of serving a broad public, and two, of building a collection that has been seen as a *primus inter pares* in the world of art and design. Its collection of over 1 million books, and the kindred archival, prints, and photographic holdings in the V&A's repositories (some originally collected by the NAL and since moved to other curatorial collections), have drawn researchers, students, general readers, and the curious public to its capacious and inspiring reading rooms, into which the National Art Library settled in 1884<sup>4</sup>.

Even in 1870, however, when the first proofs of the **Universal Catalogue of Books on Art** were published, Henry Cole acknowledged that the ideal would forever remain out of his grasp. There were imperfections and constant change, engendered through bountiful new publications. And such has been the story of the NAL. If, a century and a half ago, the challenge of acquiring books on art and design was daunting to the impressive new museum in South Kensington, today the goal seems even more elusive.

The collection of printed books and periodicals in the NAL has grown from a few thousand to over 1 million in 2021<sup>5</sup>. New publications in art and design abound. Cumulative impact of purchased volumes and donations has created both a valuable asset attracting readers to use a focused resource in the ambience of an historic environment, and an administrative burden for the NAL. Burgeoning collections have encroached opportunistically on nooks and crannies, office bookshelves, and even stairs when conventional stores are exhausted. Retrieval from dispersed locations is more difficult, slower, and consequently more expensive than obtaining materials from efficiently shelved consolidated stores. The drive by administrators to maximize scarce space by shelving books by size, an efficiency, reduces access to collections for browsing and self-service, with the consequence of savings in the cost of space increasing the cost of retrieval and limiting the ability to take full advantage of shared cataloguing.

When the NAL occupied its new quarters overlooking the Museum courtyard in 1884, it had a much smaller collection, but approximately the same number of reader seats as today, plus a third reading room.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry\\_Cole](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Cole)

<sup>2</sup> Rowan Watson, Elizabeth James and Julius Bryant, **Word and Image, Art, Books and Design from the National Art Library** (London: V&A Publishing, 2015), p. 17

<sup>3</sup> [https://archive.org/details/firstproofsofuni01nati\\_0/page/n7/mode/2up?ref=ol&view=theater](https://archive.org/details/firstproofsofuni01nati_0/page/n7/mode/2up?ref=ol&view=theater)

<sup>4</sup> Watson et al, *Word and Image*, p. 18

<sup>5</sup> In 2019, the NAL collection numbered 940,000 items; collections from the Royal Photographic Society add a further 40,000 items; Theatre and Performance 108,000 items and the eleven departmental libraries within the V&A a further 65,000 items

Whilst the core value of welcoming all and not being a service only for the elite remains steadfast today, nonetheless, there can be no doubt that a larger population of actual and potential readers exists in the twenty-first century, placing pressure on both staff and space<sup>6</sup>. Even as the NAL has colonized basements and attics for its collections, so has the V&A annexed space for exhibitions, requisitioning a portion of the 1884 complement of reading rooms.

These, and other evolutions, are part of the inevitable cycle of change and renewal in organizations. In the history of the V&A and the NAL, one has seen spurts of growth with dynamic leadership and favourable conditions. Information technologies and the internet have enabled new ways of working<sup>7</sup>. Social change and educational opportunities have brought new perspectives and understanding about diverse learning styles. Periods of retrenchment and even crisis during troubled times, wars, depressions, and recessions have also had a profound effect.

In 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic opened a new chapter for the NAL as the V&A announced a review that would inform the anticipated changes necessary to balance the V&A's strong commitment to the NAL in the face of unrelenting budgetary pressures (see section below). In March 2021 Tristram Hunt, Director of the V&A, proposed "a comprehensive review of the NAL services and the visitor experience we offer, to help realise our ambition to broaden access to the NAL and archival collections and to bolster our research portfolio, including the support we offer staff, students, academics, sector professionals and research bodies"<sup>8</sup>. Over the six months envisaged for the review, the NAL would undergo refurbishment and would continue to employ staff, although the NAL would remain closed until December 2021 except for a limited number of in-person research appointments.

### **3 Background to the V&A Recovery Programme**

2020 was one of the most difficult years in the history of the V&A. For the first time since its founding, the museum was closed to the public for more days than it was open as the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic was felt across the world.

Even when the museum was open, physical access was reduced to support social distancing, accommodating significantly fewer visitors as a result. This, and the collapse of the tourism market which previously had accounted for 50% of the V&A's audience, led to a sizeable decrease in the number of visitors and associated secondary spend. Visitors to the museum in South Kensington in 2020/21 numbered just 130,000, compared with over 3.7m the previous year.

The effects of Covid-19 are expected to continue to affect the V&A's visitation and commercial activities into coming years; it will take a number of years before the museum returns to pre-pandemic levels of income generation. In response, the V&A implemented a Recovery Programme, taking a wide range of measures to reduce costs.

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<sup>6</sup> Registered users currently number 27,032, with 11,301 users added annually. In the year before the pandemic, there were 31,618 external users of the library, and 3,185 staff users

<sup>7</sup> In the year before the pandemic, there were 142,680 page views of the NAL's portion of the V&A's website

<sup>8</sup> [https://vanda-production-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/2021/03/17/13/57/02/adafd988-06dd-4cc9-8ac0-fbf677a637e/Media%20Statement\\_Update%20On%20National%20Art%20Library%20Proposals.pdf](https://vanda-production-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/2021/03/17/13/57/02/adafd988-06dd-4cc9-8ac0-fbf677a637e/Media%20Statement_Update%20On%20National%20Art%20Library%20Proposals.pdf)

These included cancelling and postponing large sections of the public programme, reducing opening hours to five days per week, reopening the museum in phases and cutting operational budgets. In addition, the museum implemented a recruitment and pay freeze, cancelled staff bonuses, cut operational budgets and reviewed and reconfigured operations across the museum.

Phases 4 and 5 of the Recovery Programme looked at the structures and staffing levels in the Collections Division. These difficult processes aimed to contribute to the museum's overall effort to absorb the financial impact of a post-Covid world, while providing a flexible and agile operation to meet the challenges of the new landscape. They also took into account an altered five-year strategic plan, which will see some FuturePlan projects deferred, the V&A staging fewer temporary exhibitions into the medium term and the scale and complexity of these exhibitions changing to reflect reduced budgets.

Although Phase 5 encompassed the NAL, the short-term proposals related to this area generated immediate and considerable feedback and concern. As a significant rethinking of the Library's offer was signalled, there was much comment on how it seemed premature to remodel the team before this rethinking had been completed; there was also concern that cuts proposed in this area were disproportionate. The combination of these factors led to a decision to take the NAL and Archives out of Phase 5, and to make use of the continuation of the Government furlough scheme to create space and time for a more detailed and thorough review before taking a decision about future structures. The focus of this was to be the NAL, although the Review also absorbed a number of other unsolved challenges from the Recovery Programme, as set out in the section below.

To conduct the review of the NAL, the V&A selected Sarah Thomas and Anna Jobson as strategic consultants, initiating a four-part review process in June 2021 (see below). Thomas previously served as Bodley's Librarian, overseeing university libraries at Oxford from 2007 to 2013, leaving to head the Harvard University Library, a post from which she retired in 2019. Her lengthy career also included leadership of the Cornell University Library and executive roles at the Library of Congress. A Board member of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation until 2021, she is also a Trustee of London's Natural History Museum, OCLC, and the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, Maryland. Anna Jobson brings two decades of experience in the arts and cultural sector, having worked at Tate, Arts Council England and University of the Arts London as well as consulting with numerous organisations on strategy, policy and organisation development. She has been working with the V&A on its Recovery Programme since late 2020.

The Recovery Programme established a number of fundamental parameters that the review has considered to be fixed, in part due to having reviewed the detailed feedback to the Phase 5 proposals. These include the dissolution of the former Word and Image Department (WID), separating the NAL and Archives from the curators of Prints, Drawings and Paintings, to allow for a new Department of Art and Architecture, Photography and Design (AAPD) while the NAL and Archives would come together under the V&A Research Institute (VARI). The Recovery Programme also established the financial parameters of the review. Formal consultation on the Phase 5 Proposals ran from February to April 2021, yielding a large body of internal and external feedback; this included emails, letters, petitions, other individual and group written responses and individual and group verbal feedback collected in consultation briefings and meetings. There were over 100 detailed, thoughtful and constructive written responses. Feedback themes were summarised and circulated with the final structures in May; some had been addressed in the course of the process,

other themes were responded to as part of the final decisions, while a third body of feedback was fed into ongoing work, notably but not limited to, the NAL Review.

Early in the NAL Review, a compilation of the consultation responses relevant to the review was created and shared with the Review's Working Group. In summary, feedback revealed:

1. Support for the bringing together of VARI, the NAL and the V&A Archives in general
2. That the proposed 'root and branch' review of NAL was welcomed, although the timing of the review and its relationship to the structure was questioned, resulting in the postponement of any changes to the structure of the NAL team pending the outcome of the review
3. That the scope of the review should not be limited to NAL, as is discussed below
4. Some concern about extended closure of NAL
5. Considerable concern about the perception of a disproportionate cut to library team
6. Concern about reconciling the future ambitions for the NAL with the current financial reality and proposed staffing structure
7. Questions about balancing audience inclusion and care for collections
8. Appetite for taking a holistic view of library collections, including the departmental libraries and the Royal Photographic Society library
9. Some concern about the challenges to the cohesion of the Theatre & Performance (T&P) collection in a scenario where the library and archives would be administered from a different department to the curatorial collections
10. Considerable concern about the future of the T&P library and archive staff and potential loss of expertise
11. Detailed comments on proposed Archive role descriptions and some comments on library staff roles and responsibilities
12. Questions about the separation of responsibilities that were previously integrated in WID – the operation of study rooms being integrated with operation of NAL and the separation of framing from retrievals and how Service Assistant roles would work in future
13. Questions about the integration of curatorial staff in the NAL and the appropriate quantum of curators (two posts were ultimately created, and staff matched over into them)
14. Concern about administrative support for this department as a whole; several suggestions that there should be an Operations Coordinator equivalent to this new role created in curatorial departments
15. Views about the need to engage key external stakeholders in the review (eg, The National Archives, Royal Institute of British Architects) and ensure that V&A's statutory responsibilities can continue to be fulfilled, as well as there being no risk to professional accreditation.

#### **4 Summary of the review process**

The main body of the review took place from June-September 2021. A brief for the review had formed the basis of a competitive tender process.

The purpose of the review was originally written as follows:

*In scope of this specialist review are the National Art Library, its associated Study Rooms, the Print Room, the V&A Registry and Archives, including Museum of Childhood and Theatre and Performance holdings. The review of these functions is intended to flesh out the proposal to merge them with the V&A Research Institute in more detail. The review will:*

- *Take stock of these functions as they currently stand in terms of assets, services and programmes of activity (including curatorial research and the Factory Project, a large-scale collections digitisation programme)*
- *Review and assess the needs of current users, including through a body of consultation, taking into account the impact of the pandemic on user expectations and satisfaction and what has and has not worked well with remote services*
- *Draw on best practice from around the world, including through a body of benchmarking, again taking into account how research libraries have risen to the challenges presented by the pandemic*
- *Consider how to maximise the potential future role of these functions, working with a group of internal staff to articulate a future vision*
- *Develop a blueprint for a future service in person and online, including any recommended changes to the physical set up, storage of collections and materials and preservation and sharing of content, associated systems and processes, programmes and activities (including a consideration of the scope for off-site storage and retrieval services)*
- *Assess the staffing and other resources required to deliver the transformed service, progressing an organization design and developing a business plan for its implementation*
- *Develop a route map for working towards this future service, including building consensus behind the transformation.*

In the earliest meetings of the Working Group (see below), discussions about the review's purpose acknowledged that the scope differed for each of the different teams mentioned in scope. The terms of reference for the review were adjusted as follows:

*For the National Art Library, the scope was agreed as above.*

*For the Prints and Drawings Study Room (P&DSR), the scope was to consider the future of the management of service delivery within the P&DSR, and specifically whether functions shared between the NAL and the P&DSR should remain shared given the separation of these two teams under the new arrangements. Related to this, it would be useful to consider how the V&A can build consistency and quality of public access across Study Rooms as an input to the development of service design at the V&A East Storehouse.*

*For the combined Archives, the scope was to:*

- *take stock of staff's views of:*
  - *strengths and areas for development in archive services*
  - *opportunities and challenges of combining organizationally the Archive of Art and Design (AAD) and the V&A Archive and Registry (VAAR) with T&P and Museum of Childhood (MoC) archive collections*
  - *additional opportunities inherent in the merger with VARI*



- *consider the relationship between the AAD and VAAR and how this will evolve when they separate across sites*
- *consider how the MoC archive collections sit alongside the AAD, the VAAR and the T&P archives*

*For the T&P library and archives, the scope was to consider how best to manage the integration of the T&P library and archives with NAL and the archives from a service and organizational design perspective. This would determine the question of how to best to retain T&P expertise while creating an archive team able to work across all the archives in the V&A's care.*

*Finally, for the Factory Project, the scope was to determine the future of the remaining two part-time cataloguers.*

In terms of process, the review involved these stages:

Justification and set up	Clarifying the brief and the consultants' approach to the brief, planning the work streams, agreeing inputs and outputs in each case, setting up the project team and any advisory structure and establishing a wider stakeholder map and engagement plan
Research and analysis	Understanding the NAL, its assets, operation and activities; understanding users and their needs (including undertaking body of consultation); benchmarking global best practice
Strategic direction setting	Articulating a vision for the future and testing this with key stakeholders through a series of focus groups or round tables
Delivery design	Developing a future blueprint and service design for NAL activity and operation; developing a future organisation design; developing a business plan and implementation plan

Finally, in terms of governance, the review was supported by a Steering Group and a Working Group. Essentially the Steering Group acted as the 'client' for the project, ensuring that it proceeded to programme and produced the expected outputs; it held accountability for the project. By contrast, the Working Group acted as the 'engine room' of the review, contributing to the research and analysis, shaping the future vision and helping support the development of service and organisation design. As such, it met fortnightly from June through to August, standing down at the point when the review started to consider organisation design, on the basis that the Group included directly affected members of staff.

This report has been produced at the end of the delivery design phase, and includes recommendations about future vision, future service and future organisation design. It brings together the findings of the research and analysis and the strategic direction setting phases and makes a series of recommendations about future services and organisation design. Subject to feedback from the Steering Group, it will then form the basis for the final outputs of the review, namely a business plan and body of future organisation charts and role descriptions, which will then form the basis for consultation.

## **5 Summary of the research and analysis**

A plan for the research and analysis stage for the review was discussed and agreed at the Working Group on 21 June. Objectives of the research stage were set out as follows, along with these methods for realizing the objective:

1	Understand, and lay out clearly, NAL and its services and associated activities and how they have functioned; staff's perceptions of strengths and weaknesses and aspirations for the future	This objective was achieved through a combination of desk research and consultation. Conversations with the affected staff and other key internal stakeholders were prioritised in the first instance. These conversations yielded a body of interview notes and many of those participating also submitted written responses to the interview questions, which were compiled. Some also sent further documents, which were also compiled.
2	Understand NAL's users, how they have used the NAL in the past, and how this has changed over the recent past	An online user survey was developed and disseminated to 16137 emails. The survey ran from 29 July to 15 August and yielded 1430 responses. The review team also had access to the results of a NAL Reader Survey of 2014 and a V&A Staff NAL Survey of 2016.
3	Look at a small number of comparators in detail, gathering quantitative and qualitative data to benchmark the NAL and help inform future direction setting	This objective was achieved through a combination of desk research and consultation. A small number of comparators were approached with the hope of compiling a body of comparative qualitative and quantitative data, with partial success. A larger list of comparators was assembled by the Working Group and supplemented in the conversations with staff as people gave examples of best practice elsewhere. In addition, the user survey invited participants to give examples of other study rooms that they would recommend to others and the reasons why. Over 250 other study facilities were cited with users providing feedback on what they liked and disliked about them.
4	Scan relevant literature to establish a wider view of context and changing practice, again to help inform future direction setting	The review team assembled a body of literature at the start of the process, and this was supplemented by texts suggested by the staff in their conversations and written submissions.

### 5.1 Staff conversations

Focusing in the first instance on the National Art Library, a list of affected staff and other internal stakeholders was agreed by the Working Group. These people were invited to participate in a series of semi-structured interviews, with the questions circulated in advance. Six questions were posed to everyone who was interviewed, and a further eight questions to NAL staff only. Staff were also invited to provide written answers to the questions. This first wave of conversations involved the following:

	<i>Name</i>	<i>Conversations</i>	<i>Written submissions</i>
Individuals and groups	Impacted staff	Yes, with one exception	Yes
Other internal stakeholders	Director of Collections, Keeper WID, Director of V&A, Deputy Director of V&A, Director of VARI, Keepers, Chief Curators, Director of Conservation, Collections Care and Access and Head of Conservation.	Yes	Largely not
Subsequent suggestions	Individuals from across the museum	Yes	Yes

A second wave of conversations focused on the archives. These people were provided with a longer list of questions and invited to select and respond to questions relevant to them. The questions covered a variety of topics intended to solicit views on the strengths and weaknesses of the archive services, the relationship between the AAD and the VAAR, the MoC archives and the T&P library and archives. This second wave of conversations involved the following:

Individuals and groups	Impacted staff	Yes	Yes
Other internal stakeholders	Director, Finance and Resources, Director of Learning, Senior Curators	Yes	Yes

There was a high level of engagement in the process. Most people not able to participate in the first and second waves of conversations participated in other ways (via Steering Group or a meeting with Keepers). Notes of the conversations were compiled, as were the written submissions. These two documents yielded over 200 pages of rich, nuanced and sometimes contradictory input. A detailed analysis by question was undertaken and shared with the Working Group, as was a presentation of findings, which was given to the Working Group on 2 August. A summary of this was subsequently presented to all affected staff and Steering Group later in August.

#### 5.1.1 Feedback on the National Art Library – all staff

There was a high degree of consensus on the mission and role of the NAL. Most people discussed the NAL in terms of being the UK's leading art, design and performance library, while also serving as the library of the V&A and the curatorial department of the art of the book. Many also discussed how the NAL supports the

mission of the museum. There was some reflection on the name 'National Art Library' with some seeing it as a valuable brand which shouldn't be lost, while others feeling that it was a misnomer that created expectations that couldn't be met. There was more consensus about NAL's international status, with agreement that V&A should protect NAL's position as one of the world's leading art libraries, resourcing NAL appropriately to maintain this standing.

In terms of what and whose needs the NAL meets, staff emphasized how NAL meets the needs of the staff and students of the V&A as well as external scholars, both on subjects covered by the museum's collections and some subjects outside of this. The main theme in response to this question was the diversity of users – people listed students of all kinds, art market professionals, artists, designers and art historians, as well as general visitors, and the need for the NAL to meet the needs of this diverse group: "personally, one of the most satisfying aspects of working in the Library is that in any day I can be collaborating with a colleague from any section in the Museum; I can be assisting an A-level or PhD student, a professional researcher or someone pursuing an interest just for interest's sake". One or two critical voices worried that the NAL might be serving niche audiences at the expense of the wider public, lamenting the intimidating barriers to entry that might put newcomers off. More voices were keen to stress the wider role the NAL plays in the life of the museum, contributing to displays and exhibitions, group visits and talks and other projects.

The trend towards greater openness and accessibility also came up as one of the three main themes under strengths. The second theme related to collection development and providing access to collections and the third the staff's own skills and expertise, which many stressed as fundamental to activating collections. Other strengths mentioned included onsite services and the environment, the burgeoning body of online services and NAL's work on outreach and programming. One or two people felt that they didn't know enough to offer a clear, evidenced-based response to a question about strengths, while one or two others felt that this was for users to determine.

Under areas for development, the majority of responses related to digital content and services, with many reflecting on rare, unique or frequently requested collections that could be digitized, and others reflecting on the need for a digital infrastructure that supports the NAL. Other suggested areas for development included the need to look again at collection retention and disposals, the continuing need for collaboration across the development of departmental libraries, improvements in collections management, the need to make physical changes to improve the welcome, facilitate self-service and different forms of scholarship and the refinement of online services. Finally, many of those consulted discussed the lack of visibility of the NAL, and how it could do more to improve its profile within the museum physically and online. More use could be made of user research and management information, a more appropriate distribution of work within the team could be achieved and some missing skills addressed. There was a message that the NAL team's ambitions have been limited by the resources available, which have been pared back over recent years.

Most of those consulted were positive about the merger with VARI and saw this move as an opportunity to participate in additional research-led projects, as well to ensure that NAL could serve the research community more systematically and effectively. A significant number of people answering this question commented that they didn't know enough about VARI and find its work opaque. Likewise, some respondents were concerned to ensure that the merger with VARI did not come at the expense of widening audiences or seeking collaboration with other V&A Departments, such as the V&A Academy. Finally, there

was some reflection on staff, and how this was an opportunity to develop new skills while allowing VARI to learn from some of the skills within the NAL team; leadership was seen as important, as was more effective internal advocacy.

In response to a final open question, most conversations reiterated and summed up previous themes. A series of contradictions emerged from this picture:

- Staff see the NAL as one of the V&A's greatest treasures, providing an excellent service that they believe is highly valued, but they lament a lack of internal profile and diminishing resources inside the museum.
- Staff are proud of how the NAL has opened up access and the diversity of users and they would like to go further to widen audiences and think more flexibly about the use of space and technology so that this is possible... without this, the conversations revealed a certain level of concern that a Reading Room for the Arts may not be feasible.
- Staff see the potential for service improvements and efficiency, but the digital infrastructure isn't there to support these ambitions and needs investment.
- Staff are very anxious about the level of savings that need to be made and felt that a number of functions were not factored into the previous proposal. At the same time, there is enthusiasm about the opportunities for new, dynamic leadership, new capacity and skills and opportunities for progression in a team in which the Library, Archives and research staff are genuinely integrated.
- Finally, staff raised a number of questions about the process, its scope and timetable, while stressing that the conversation is welcome, staff want to help, and there is a great desire for transparency.

#### **5.1.2 Feedback on the National Art Library – Library staff**

Library staff were asked additional questions about how they were using their time, where was the principal focus of their work and what services they felt were most highly valued by users (collections, other resources, staff expertise). They were also asked to propose other innovations and there was a wide variety of detailed responses, with few overall themes.

#### **5.1.3 Feedback on the Prints and Drawings Study Room**

NAL staff were also asked to comment on the integration of public services supporting the NAL and the P&DSR under the former WID, and whether these arrangements should continue. Feedback on these questions was also offered from some of the wider stakeholders, mostly in response to 'do you have anything else to say?'

On the benefits of the previous arrangements, these were felt to extend to users and to staff in the seamless service across study rooms and the increased knowledge across collections, which in turn helps the user. The sharing of resources was also felt to be a positive, ensuring that the people with the right skills were assigned to different responsibilities. There was less consensus about whether or not these

arrangements should continue, with some people expressing strong views that access to all the study rooms should be combined under one service, and some feeling that NAL's involvement in the P&DSR is no longer necessary given that the NAL and PDP collections have been demerged. The Service Assistants moving to Collections Care and Access (CCA) welcomed this move, and some of the NAL staff reflected on the different processes across study facilities and the practical difficulties that sometimes arose in providing services there; from the curatorial side, it was seen as essential for curatorial staff to interface with the public in the study room, and the importance of the study room to the curatorial team's educational work was also emphasized.

Long-term, a single approach to access across study rooms was seen as important by most people, as was the adoption of similar approaches to process.

Some felt that this would take time to achieve, and suggested project mechanisms for approaching the challenge. One person underlined that all study facilities should be part of this process, while others pointed to work happening to develop the V&A East Storehouse Order an Object service.

#### **5.1.4 Feedback on the Archives**

As is discussed above, there were more questions in the second wave of conversations and fewer people involved. Staff self-selected the questions they felt were relevant to them, so not everyone covered every question. As such, it was more difficult to draw conclusions about trends in thinking from the feedback.

Cited strengths of the archive services until now included outstanding collections, enquiry services and relationships with users. Despite diminishing staff, the team had established an integrated service, delivered funded project work and achieved Accreditation. Most frequently cited weaknesses included deficiencies in collections management work that had been revealed by the Decant project, the rudimentary online catalogue, lack of visibility internally and good practice around records management and weaknesses in the management of digital archives. Grappling with day-to-day activity left little space for proactive prioritization and strategic work and staff also pointed to a need to make the most of staff skills and expertise at all levels.

A similar profile of users to the NAL was identified for the archives. Staff felt that the VAAR is mostly used by internal users, while the AAD is mostly used by external users. All services were seen as valued and in demand and were used heavily. Diminishing staff over recent years had resulted in diminished opening hours. The practice of running parallel, but not integrated, public access across archives had enabled consistent approaches to cataloguing and collections management and some shared access processes, although expertise in the relevant archive was still essential to providing user support. It was noted that there was still more to do to establish consistent mechanisms of access across archives – researchers encountering different hours, procedures and standards of service in the same reading room is not ideal. Staff noted that the AAD/VAAR has operated quite separately from T&P library and archive and some orientation in each other's collections and practices was needed.

There was positive feedback about the integration of combining all of the different archives in one section in future. It would enable all the staff to work together under one umbrella, enabling better coordination, resource distribution and most importantly, a coherent service for users. Staff had some concerns about the challenges, especially related to the increased workload, small team, and difficulty of establishing

knowledge across the collections as well as specialist knowledge of some collections. There was consensus that subject expertise remains important.

There was positive feedback about a future closer relationship with NAL and VARI. Staff welcomed the opportunity to establish stronger relationships with researchers in the context of a holistic service that spans collections and better reflects the fluidity of research practices. They also felt there was an opportunity to consider what service looks like across study facilities and to address some of the challenges related to the discoverability of collections through research funding.

There were mixed views about information compliance and how it could operate effectively. There are alternatives to the proposed structure in that a compliance team could be formed, and some felt that this should be considered, while others felt that there were no compelling reasons to change the current set up. It was noted that the new integrated archives section has been conceived with a focus on collections management; a major institution-wide push on records management would require either additional staff or a project team.

Staff offered lots of views on priorities during the transitional period prior to the opening of the V&A East Storehouse. In the short-term, VAAR needed to move to South Kensington and establish processes there, while the wider team needed to continue to support the Decant and the reconciliation of material emerging from the project. There was also work to do to prepare for the V&A East Storehouse, including with external stakeholders. Views were offered on how the services could work at the V&A East Storehouse, and while staff agreed new thinking is needed for non-academic audiences, there is lots of experience for the V&A East Storehouse team to draw on from staff who have been offering study room access for years. Innovations proposed for the archives section mostly related to digital content and services.

Finally, there was uncertainty as to the future of the MoC archive given the changing focus of the museum in Bethnal Green; it was suggested that agreement as to the future development of this archive needs to be resolved. There was less consensus about how the T&P archives could function within the new integrated section – some respondents felt that it was important to maintain a discrete T&P unit within the section, while others felt that this was not feasible given such limited staff resources. There was greater consensus around the continuing need for specialist expertise, the continuing need for close collaboration with curators and the benefits of establishing common practice in cataloguing, collections management and public access.

While both the T&P archives and library are moving to the V&A East Storehouse, it was suggested that a closer relationship between the library and the NAL would be beneficial, perhaps delivered through a named member of the NAL team with a special interest in, and responsibility for, the T&P library. Finally, it was noted by several staff that many well-used T&P collections remain uncatalogued, and until this is remedied, expert staff remain essential to helping users navigate collections.

#### **5.1.5 Feedback on the Factory Project**

Finally, a body of spontaneous feedback was offered on the Factory Project, as there were no specific questions on this topic. Staff stressed how important the work of the two part-time cataloguers is to the museum's wider digitization project, and how their experience and practice enabled them to tackle cataloguing at speed, which meant their productivity was remarkable. It was underlined that no one else in

the museum is focused on cataloguing in the way that these staff are, and that they are also playing an important role in relation to uncovering and addressing problematic terminology. It was the view of those consulted that the project should be scaled up, working as a centre of excellence across the curatorial teams as a cross-museum endeavour.

## 5.2 User survey

An online user survey was developed and disseminated to 16137 emails. 96.6% of these emails were delivered, revealing a high accuracy rate of the mailing list, which comprised registered users of the NAL and study rooms, as well as those users who had joined in the last six months and not yet had a chance to visit in person. The survey ran from 29 July to 15 August 2021 and yielded 1430 responses. The review team also had access to the results of a NAL Reader Survey of 2014 and a V&A Staff NAL Survey of 2016.

A separate report detailing the survey findings is available. A summary of findings is as follows:

Two thirds of respondents defined themselves as art, design or performance historians or students. Other significant groups of respondents included creative industry professionals and art or antique dealers. There were 38 responses from members of V&A staff. Forty per cent of respondents were over the age of 55. The third biggest group of respondents were in the age bracket 25-34.

When asked to identify which study facility respondents use, many selected multiple study facilities. The largest groups of users included users of the NAL, users of the P&DSR, users of the Archive of Art and Design, users of the Theatre and Performance collections and users of online services. 76% of respondents selected the NAL when asked to specify which facility they use most frequently. Most users said that they frequent the study facilities once or twice per month or a few times per year.

In response to a multiple-choice question asking about the purpose of respondents' use of study facilities or online services, large numbers selected 'consulting physical collections' (1248), 'searching the catalogue' (627), and 'consulting a member of staff' (410). 565 respondents also selected 'place to work or study'. Respondents were asked to rank different elements of the service and their responses revealed a high level of satisfaction for many of the areas being probed (access to physical collections, access to expertise, requesting items, speed of delivery, the environment), as well as some areas that are clearly less well known (larger numbers of 'don't know's recorded for library induction, displays, events, teaching sessions and tours, some online services). The most equivocal feedback related to hours of access. Many of these responses were echoed in the free text questions, as below.

In the first of four free text questions, users were asked to describe how access to the V&A's study facilities had benefited them or had an impact on their work. There were 1177 responses to this question, with respondents referring to the following impacts (in order of the volume of responses):

- Access to material that is not available elsewhere
- Positive impact on the respondent's studies (BA, MA, PhD)
- Impact on the respondent's research (post-doc)
- Contribution to a single or multiple publication(s)
- Contribution to peer-reviewed articles and other publications, in print and online
- The qualities of V&A's study facilities as a place to work



- Access to expertise that is not available elsewhere
- The use of the collections to support the respondent's job (mainly, but not limited to, curatorship and interpretation)
- Creative inspiration for practitioners (designers, artists, musicians)
- Contribution to curatorial outputs (exhibitions, displays etc)
- Contribution to the development of teaching resources
- Contribution to the development of presentations and papers
- The use of the collections to support commercial activities in the art market and elsewhere
- A sense of contentment, happiness or joy.

The second free text question invited respondents to reflect on ways in which their use might change as a result of the pandemic. There were 1163 responses, almost half of which argued that the respondents' needs were unaffected by the pandemic, imploring V&A to reopen the facilities and services, or describing how they need access or are looking forward to returning. Some respondents argued that their needs were now greater than before and would visit more frequently.

Some reflected on the difficulties of travelling and access and said that they would visit less. Some said that their visits would need greater planning, or that they would be likely to have fewer but more concentrated visits; a few argued that visiting hours should be adjusted to allow for this. A significant number of respondents reflected on the need for greater online services and content in future. Many of these went on to underline how physical access remained fundamental, with digital access being a poor substitute.

Significant groups reflected on the importance of staff expertise or expressed their worries about the potential loss of expertise. A larger group reflected on measures that V&A could take to ensure users' safety (distancing, masks, enhanced cleaning etc); with a few exceptions, most respondents indicated they would be happy to operate within such measures. Finally, there were a handful of responses reflecting on the move of the facilities at Blythe House to the Storehouse at V&A East, with some suggesting that this would impede access and some that it would improve access.

The third free text question invited respondents to suggest improvements, and there were 946 responses. Almost half of these underlined respondents' views that they liked things as they were or implored V&A to reopen or protect and retain the existing staff. Other significant themes related to improving digital content and services and extending opening hours to include early mornings, evenings and weekends.

The final free text question invited respondents to signpost other libraries and study facilities that they value and to give the reasons why. There were 989 responses to this question. Some 250 specific institutions were listed in this section from around the world, including:

- The British Library, The National Archives and other equivalent 'nationals' in the UK and beyond
- Other museum libraries and archives in London, regionally and internationally
- University libraries, including the most frequently cited libraries connected with Oxford and Cambridge Universities, the Courtauld Institute, and the University of London's Senate House
- Specialist research institute and centre libraries, including the Warburg Institute, the Paul Mellon Centre and the Wellcome Library

- Many local public libraries and archives in London and elsewhere (some of which were described in loving terms by users)
- Private libraries, including the London Library which was frequently mentioned for its services during the pandemic, its loans and its cost
- V&A’s study rooms, which many people discussed under this question on the basis that they deemed no other facilities to be comparable.

Many of the individual exemplars suggested in this question were raised by just one person. Conversely, the British Library (BL) was discussed by 639 people, for positive and negative reasons. Besides the BL, a further ten institutions were discussed by more than 40 respondents: British Museum, Cambridge University Libraries, the Courtauld Institute’s Libraries, the London Library, Oxford University Libraries, Senate House University of London, Tate, the National Archives, the Warburg Institute and V&A’s study facilities.

### 5.3 Benchmarking

The objective of this work stream was to look at a small number of comparators in detail, gathering quantitative and qualitative data to benchmark the NAL and help inform future direction setting. A small number of comparators was approached with the hope of compiling a body of comparative qualitative and quantitative data, with partial success.

A larger list of comparators was assembled by the Working Group and supplemented in the conversations with staff as people gave examples of best practice elsewhere. In addition, the user survey invited participants to give examples of other study rooms that they would recommend to others and the reasons why. Over 250 other study facilities were cited with users providing feedback on what they liked and disliked about them.

In terms of the detailed benchmarks, six organisations were approached and five participated in interviews. Few provided the quantitative data that the team was hoping for, although one or two were generous in providing strategy documents. A summary of the information gained from desk research and the interviews can be provided. A comparative summary of mission, collections, audiences, staff and funding sources is below.

	<b>Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, USA</b>	<b>Thomas J Watson Library (Metropolitan Museum of Art), NY, USA</b>	<b>NGA, Washington, US</b>	<b>INHA, Paris, France</b>	<b>Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, Netherlands</b>	<b>National Art Library</b>
Mission	An international center for the study of visual culture	To support the research activities of the Museum staff and to offer access and outstanding services to an international community of students and scholars	A major national art research center, serving the Gallery’s curatorial, educational, and conservation staff, CASVA members, interns, visiting scholars, and researchers in	The advancement of scholarly research and international cooperation in the field of art history and heritage studies	Main goals are the provision of factual information to support the Rijksmuseum’s mission, and the expansion of the library’s position as an academic art history library of national significance	The foremost British research and reference library on art and design and one of the world’s top libraries in its field

	<b>Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, USA</b>	<b>Thomas J Watson Library (Metropolitan Museum of Art), NY, USA</b>	<b>NGA, Washington, US</b>	<b>INHA, Paris, France</b>	<b>Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, Netherlands</b>	<b>National Art Library</b>
			the Washington art community			
Collection	General library collections include over one million volumes of books, periodicals, and auction catalogs, with conservation collection adding more than 45k titles and 60k volumes. Special collections contain rare and unique materials, including rare books, prints and photographs. The Photo Archive contains 2m study photographs of art and architecture. GRI is also home to the Getty Institutional Archives.	Contains over 1,020,000 volumes, including monographs and exhibition catalogs; over 21,000 periodical titles; and more than 140,000 auction and sale catalogs. Also provides access to an extensive collection of electronic resources, autograph letters, and ephemera files relating to individual artists and to the history of the Museum.	Collection numbers 526,187 items. The library acquires 8000 items per year has 5482 electronic subscriptions	1.7 million documents including 30,000 drawings and prints, 750,000 photographs, and 1,800 ancient manuscripts	Contains approx. 450,000 volumes, including around 60,000 auction catalogues, over 500 current periodicals and annual reports and approx. 3,500 discontinued periodicals. The collection attains an average yearly growth of 10,000 books, auction catalogues, and periodicals	NAL Collection numbers 940,000 items; RPS collection numbers 40,000 items; Theatre & Performance library and archive numbers 108.000 items; V&A departmental libraries number 65,000 items; plus AAD, VAAR
Audiences	Number of users unknown; due to the pandemic, access to the Library is currently limited to staff, residential scholars and docents, as well as to Research Grant Recipients whose 2020 visits were deferred	12000 visitors in 2020 (19000 in 2019); 125 users per day across 60 seats. 200 new users register each month	3000 registered users (1000 museum staff and 2000 public); 100 new users added annually	Numbers of users unknown; users are mainly researchers: students (only from MA up), art market ie not academics plus members of the public if they can justify need	Number of users unknown	27,032 users. 11,301 new users added annually. 34,803 visitors per year

	<b>Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, USA</b>	<b>Thomas J Watson Library (Metropolitan Museum of Art), NY, USA</b>	<b>NGA, Washington, US</b>	<b>INHA, Paris, France</b>	<b>Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, Netherlands</b>	<b>National Art Library</b>
Staff	Detailed numbers not known. At August 2020, Library and Archives were led by an Associate Director of Collections and Discovery under which there sat a Chief Librarian and a Head of Institutional Records and Archives. 11 functions under Chief Librarian. A current re-org is centralizing digital content and services across the Getty	32 people are currently on the staff list (includes 5 staff dedicated to preservation and conservation); current dashboard says there are 33 staff. The staff body was reduced by 5 as a result of the pandemic; the library also lost 5 positions in 2008/9	45 staff and typically 3 volunteers. Staff divided into 3 teams: Technical Services, Reader Services and Library Image Collections. An in-house digital projects coordinator and Library Systems Specialist work across the three teams	Detailed numbers not known. INHA has 3 divisions supported by a body of corporate services. One of the three is Library and Archives, which benchmarking conversation suggested has 115 staff	Detailed numbers not known. Library sits in Research Services as one department within Collections division	30.25 staff in March 2020 (down from 41.78 in October 2010).
Funding	The Getty Research Institute is an operating program of the J. Paul Getty Trust, a tax-exempt private operating foundation. It spent \$74.5m on the GRI in 2020 (compared with \$67.5 in 2019); \$41m of this was on salaries, benefits and taxes.	Integrated with finances of Museum. Spend on staff and acquisitions has been reducing, although in the case of the latter due to greater investment in digital and resource sharing. Acquisitions now entirely funded by endowment/gifts.	Integrated with finances of Museum. Spend on acquisitions varies – some \$457k is provided by the museum for monographs, serials and images, and \$1m+ is donated for acquisitions (\$1.4m in 20/21). Staff cost is \$4.6m annually.	Not known; annual budget in 2012 was 16m Euros. Funded principally by Ministry of Culture and Ministry of HE and Innovation. Some funds contributed by private donors and Friends, but a small % of total.	Detail not known. Funded directly by Government, with some funds contributed by private donors and Trusts and Foundations.	Integrated with finances of Museum. Spend on acquisitions decreasing and stood at £165k pre-pandemic. Spend on staff £1.1m.

A publicly accessible dashboard maintained by the Thomas J Watson Library, as part of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, was felt to offer a brilliant model of transparency related to management information<sup>9</sup>.

More generally, key learnings from the benchmarking included:

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/libraries-and-research-centers/thomas-j-watson-library/dashboard>  
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- It is difficult to compare across the group, as every library is unique
- Benchmarks varied in terms of size of budget, staff, collections and audience served, as well as in their relationship to the parent institution (where applicable)
- However, there were some characteristics of the benchmarks when taken as a group that are relevant to this review; as a whole group, it was evident that peer libraries are:
  - Moving towards a single consolidated library resource supporting institutions and communities
  - Reducing physical acquisitions and collections in favour of digital content
  - Changing emphasis from ownership to the provision of access
  - Adjusting collecting policies to reflect diversity, equity and inclusion values and a global perspective
  - Reassessing cataloguing to ensure timely access and use of linked data
  - Developing user services that increase user research capability and convenience, such as scan and deliver or serving materials from different units in a single, reconfigured, space
  - Providing digital access to support a wider user base
  - Expanding outreach and programming to enliven study facilities and extend audiences
  - Rethinking priorities and focus because of staff downsizing
  - Employing data to support decision-making
  - Using workflow analysis to streamline processes
  - Increasing collaborative activity
  - Fundraising to increase revenue
  - Relying on the agency of an expert leader (usually a Chief Librarian) who is positioned to advocate for the library at the highest level of the organization and represent the library in professional venues; and
  - Adopting a culture of ‘yes’ and being flexible with strategic exemptions.

Finally, within the benchmarking workstream, a small number of conversations were conducted with key stakeholders, such as peer libraries not selected for benchmarking or key institutional partners like the Royal Institute for British Architects. Trends highlighted in these conversations included: how the libraries are opening up to diverse audiences and the challenges of working across this spectrum of users; working in partnership across the country to exercise national remits; the focus on digitization and the pressures of resourcing digitization programmes; and the discoverability of collections across different cataloguing systems.

All of those consulted were positive about the opportunities for NAL and how the V&A’s move East represents a rare opportunity to work across facilities and open up audiences. Stakeholders underlined the strong external support for the NAL and hoped that this sentiment could find traction internally through the review process; many felt that there were fundraising sources exclusive to libraries that V&A could tap into in order to realise some of the ambitions for the library and archive services that the review crystallises.

#### 5.4 Literature review

The review team assembled a body of literature at the start of the process, and this was supplemented by texts suggested by the staff in their conversations and written submissions. The sources reviewed fell into the following categories:

1. Information about the National Art Library: this included published and unpublished material about the history of the library and its collections, management information generated by V&A staff and

external parties (such as an Internal Audit report of 2015), and documents about the future strategy of aspects of the NAL, such as a recently updated Collection Development Policy and a strategy for Advancing Research in Cultural Heritage through Interoperable Environments

2. Quantitative and qualitative data about NAL users, including previous user survey data, user statistics, staff research papers on how to develop users, and opinion pieces and editorials in various publications, mostly underlining the importance of V&A's study facilities to scholarship in the fields of art, design and performance history. The many direct submissions to V&A during the phase 5 recovery programme were also reviewed
3. Quantitative and qualitative information about comparators, including comparator websites and a range of documents provided directly during the benchmarking conversations
4. A body of general literature about:
  - a. The changing research practice of art historians
  - b. Trends and issues facing academic art libraries and art museum libraries
  - c. How some libraries are working collaboratively to reinforce a shared mission, remove unneeded redundancy and leverage the distinctive characteristics of their collections across wider audiences
  - d. Challenges and opportunities that libraries have faced during the covid-19 pandemic, and how some research libraries have responded by creating Virtual Reading Rooms and Virtual Teaching Rooms
5. Finally, a body of literature about how other libraries have gone about similar transformations.

In general, the literature pointed to libraries undergoing journeys:

- From Library centred to user centred
- From focusing on collections and cataloguing to focusing on connections and collaboration; from carrier to content; from scarcity to abundance
- Shifting highest interest from easily discovered secondary sources to unmediated primary sources
- From monocultural or principally Western perspectives to multicultural perspectives
- Offering services in person to offering services online, anytime, anywhere
- From restricted access, with gatekeepers and rules, to open and freely accessible access
- From mediated to self-service
- From elite to inclusive: from hushed sanctuary to community centre for learning, doing and making.

Especially pertinent sources included ARLIS' *State of Art Museum Libraries of 2016*<sup>10</sup>, which offered seven key strategies for art museum libraries to deal with the pressing challenges they face:

- Underling the intrinsic role that they play in a museum's curatorial responsibilities and educational mission
- Considering collaboration and networked thinking as essential to problem solving
- Participating in research initiatives to enhance access to, and deepen knowledge about, collections
- Working with local institutions to enhance places and benefit all parties

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.arlisna.org/news/state-of-art-museum-libraries-2016-white-paper>

- Enabling library and archive staff to support their parent institution in the development of scholarship and skill in digital curation, preservation and conservation
- Fostering internal and external collaboration
- Fortifying all of these strategies with solid data.

## **6 Context for change**

The brief of the review of the National Art Library and Archives was to reconcile two potentially irreconcilable goals: to reduce the budget of the NAL significantly while establishing a course of recommendations that will enable: the NAL to be a viable resource for the future for those seeking information about art, design, and performance; an integral part of VARI with the opportunity to make a substantial contribution to its research initiatives; and a steward of an artistic collection in its own right that is an equal to the V&A's other material culture collections.

This section summarizes the future context of the National Art Library, including situating the National Art Library in relation to the mission and vision of the V&A and trends in the 21st century library. Section 7 goes on to set forth a vision for the NAL and Archives, noting the strengths of the NAL and the challenges it faces. It concludes with options for the future of the NAL and Archives based on a pragmatic assessment of what it is feasible to accomplish within the scope of resources available to it. Laying out a potential three-year strategy to build the NAL and Archives progressively to a level that is commensurate to meet the aspirations of the V&A and to contribute to a successful research programme through VARI, it strives to balance resources with expectations. Section 8 presents a detailed list of specific recommendations for steps to be taken to achieve positive outcomes. Finally, section 9 summarises the approach to implementation taken by the review team.

### **6.1 The transformation of the V&A**

The V&A is the world's leading museum for art, design, and performance with collections unrivalled in their scope and diversity. The Museum champions design and creativity in all its forms and for everyone. In the coming years it will bring this mission to new audiences, locally and globally, of all ages and all backgrounds, virtually and face-to-face, shaping an innovative future as a 21st century museum.

The V&A seeks to broaden its audience and consequent impact through building collections, community and services that are not bounded by age, geography, ethnicity, or other conventional limits. The Museum's future reaches out to youth particularly through the creation of new programmes that invite exploration and discovery of the V&A by children and young people, and the redevelopment of Young V&A (formerly the V&A Museum of Childhood), reopening with a new child-centred mission in 2023. The V&A is pioneering new approaches to engaging with objects in its innovative V&A East Storehouse, opening in 2024. Opportunities to open up the riches of the V&A through digital transformation offer gains both locally and globally. New and diverse perspectives offer fruitful reinterpretation of cultural history. And a more concerted emphasis on research on collections and their use brings the deep expertise of the V&A staff to the fore.

The Museum, noted for its world-class collections, historic South Kensington architecture, and its brilliant and knowledgeable professionals, has broken new ground in sustained redevelopment and reimagining galleries. It is inventively combining fundamental strengths with a creative shift of focus to the world

beyond the fourth wall, which is dissolving, inviting the audience to become actors in animating the objects, spaces, and narratives of the V&A, bringing fresh and diverse perspectives, and introducing new questions.

The National Art Library and Archives are a sustaining pillar of the V&A and a critical contributor to the successful attainment of the Museum's strategies.

The National Art Library and Archives:

- possess artifacts and assets that are valuable in their own right, joining other material objects and expressions of art, design, and performance in the V&A
- Serve as essential keys for V&A curators and staff in decoding and contextualizing objects, artistic trends, and historical developments. They underpin cutting-edge scholarship and interpretation of material culture and visual images
- Convey important information in both form and content of collections and through the professional expertise of library and archives staff that feeds a global knowledge economy and inspires and delights a curious public
- Enhance the V&A's reputation in the UK and around the world, strengthening research and innovation, and consequently, the Museum's ability to secure grants and support
- Extend the V&A's global reach through the provision of digital and onsite access to deep expertise and unique and distinctive collections.

## 6.2 **The transformation of Libraries**

The 21st century library has seen dramatic shifts in line with technological and society change.

### 6.2.1 **Collections**

Collections and catalogues are now part of a networked universe of information available in an array of media. Library spaces support manifold functions, including building community, engaging in interactive discovery, researching using special collections and primary source materials, and teaching and learning. In line with the increasing availability of digitized and born digital information, the ability to support new lines of research using data is an important librarian competency.

The aspiration of maintaining a local comprehensive collection has become unsustainable for many institutions, with growth in publications and the cost of storing and processing them causing libraries to develop new approaches that favor access over ownership, collaboration over independence, and, in some cases, digital over print. With secondary sources more easily discoverable and available, librarians have placed increasing emphasis on unique and distinctive collections, including archives, ephemera, and rare books.

### 6.2.2 **Access to information**

Strategies for increasing access to information, and at the same time, developing a more economical approach to knowledge management, include offsite storage in high-density stores, the design of collaborative models that include shared or coordinated collections, and agreements to share resources using efficient, purpose-built technologies for expedited delivery.



There are numerous examples of forward-thinking enterprises that libraries in the UK and the US have advanced to increase access and reduce costs, including the UK Research Reserve, enabling the deduplication of print journals.

Through the British Library's 'On Demand' service, libraries can obtain digital or print copies of material for consultation by readers. In the US, the Ivy Plus Libraries Confederation (13 top ranked private institutions) offers a wildly successful 'Borrow Direct' service, in which their members can borrow books from each other's collections, receiving them swiftly. In the past decade consortia of art libraries, including the V&A, have begun exploring opportunities of sharing resources more freely, using the Art Discovery Group Catalogue. Leading funders, among them UKRI/AHRC, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and Kress have provided seed funding. OCLC, a major vendor of library services to 31,000 libraries world-wide, is undertaking a research project "Operationalizing the Art Research Collection."

### **6.2.3 Librarians and Users: A Flexible Structure Integrating a Variety of Service Models**

The key to a world-class library that meets the information needs that advance the V&A's strategies is a flexible structure that incorporates unique and distinctive collections held locally; a firm foundation of core materials in the areas of art, design, and performance; a network of trusted partners and commercial suppliers to provide publications not owned by the Library; and a digital library of open access and copyrighted titles. Library staff focus on discovery of any requested item located across the world and are ingenious at applying their knowledge of sources and processes to connect users with desired information rapidly, conveniently, and efficiently.

### **6.3 Silver linings and Strategic Shifts**

The V&A's Review of the NAL, and by extension the Archives and other areas affected by potential changes in the NAL, was triggered by the impact of the pandemic on the Museum and the economic repercussions that have engulfed enterprises in the UK and around the world. Yet, as sometimes happens in the aftermath of crisis, the calamity has become an occasion to reflect and to rethink how a beloved and well-regarded institution can carry forward with renewed purpose in a changed landscape.

The V&A itself is expanding its presence and perspective in several salient ways. Its initiative to build V&A East and Young V&A speaks to a compelling interest in widening participation in the activities of the museum, reaching both new generations and a more diverse demographic than in the past century. Its programmes and offerings, such as Order an Object, still under development, embody a new concept for the contemporary museum, featuring interactive and user-driven exploration of objects for discovery and learning.

The V&A not only is the keeper of objects of ingenuity, but it is also the kindler of creativity. The platforms for this engagement are both its magnificent heritage buildings and its newly designed spaces that flip visible and invisible by surrounding visitors with transparent stores where they can conjure the magic of exhibition with their own wands, creating an infinite number of bespoke learning experiences. Augmenting and amplifying the real life, real time physical experiences are the digital manifestations.

Through a robust infrastructure and capacious repository of digital assets, the Museum will have the foundation, which when coupled with applications and services to support new approaches in exploration such as Explore the Collections and use of the V&A's stunning resources, will spark global creativity and

fortify the V&A's reputation as the world's leading museum in art, design, and performance. These efforts to broaden the V&A's focus will have reciprocal value.

Museumgoers, both onsite visitors and digital explorers, will contribute to the shaping of content and collections through their global perspective. At the same time, the shift in outlook will highlight new aspects of existing holdings. The V&A will be, in effect, a potent convener in the national and international dialogue about issues such as decolonization, race, social justice, and gender.

And, in another vein to be mined, the V&A's stewardship and expertise in the arts and the culture of making art will bolster the creative economy. Those who derive value from the V&A collections, research, and services range from scholars to advertising mavens, from publishers to auction houses, from filmmakers to video-game producers, from educators to electronic artists. Importantly, VARI, building on 30 years of a dedicated research department (the first in a national museum) and experience of leading research-led teaching with collections, is poised with new leadership and an expanded portfolio to increase both the generation of new knowledge and innovative methodologies for managing collections and objects. With both a research-grounded analysis and bold application of ideas, VARI is a leading exponent of a museum that is agile, evidence-based, and inventive.

In the crucible of the first quarter of the 21st century, there are many forces driving change. A strong institution is self-reflective and draws on its past even as it looks ahead to the future. Such is the case with the larger museum, and within it, a microcosm of the V&A, the NAL.

#### 6.4 Reframing the Library's and Archives' Priorities: the Promise and Purpose of VARI

As part of the V&A's emerging strategy to be a highly relevant, agile, and inclusive museum that is a wellspring of creativity, VARI now will incorporate the NAL and V&A Archive Collections. This partnership puts the NAL and Archives at the heart of the changing enterprise, with an extraordinary opportunity to contribute to the V&A's mission. To embrace, anticipate, and respond to a changing world, one in which information is a highly prized commodity, abundant, and ubiquitous, available in multiple formats, and which the producers and consumers of information have vastly expanded and diversified, the NAL and the V&A Archive Collections must develop new strategies for successful alignment with the V&A's goals and objectives. Keen awareness of trends within the information ecosystem will provide the framework for the NAL's and Archives' priorities.

#### 6.5 NAL: strengths and challenges

##### 6.5.1 **Strengths**

The review of the NAL ascertained key positive attributes, including a large collection of circa 1 million volumes on the topic of art and design, an historic Grade II listed reading room, and a core staff that combines both expertise and loyalty. The Apprentice programme was a bright light in the infusion of library trainees who radiated energy, enthusiasm, and fresh perspectives. A new library management system, OCLC's WMS, or WorldShare Management System, introduced in 2017, brought a level of sophistication and integration to the online catalogue previously unattainable. A survey of users reinforced the sense of passionate lovers of the library for the convenience of accessing such an extensive collection on the arts in an inspiring space, stewarded by knowledgeable and helpful experts. Curators expressed gratitude for the expert assistance they received, a valuable timesaver that conserved their curatorial resources.

##### 6.5.2 **Challenges**

## Collections and Access

The review found that staff were insightful about many aspects of the library that would benefit from change, and readers took off their rose-coloured glasses when asked to advise on areas for improvements. Behind the scenes, the collections spilled over into every nook and cranny, occupying some eighteen separate stores, challenging retrievals, frustrating browsing, its opportunistic needs squeezing out other uses of elegant interiors and prime central South Kensington space. Declining budgets were insufficient to encompass the burgeoning range of publications issued, the deepening focus on arts globally, new formats such as digital, emerging areas of contemporary design practice, such as digital art and design, and above average inflationary price rises. The independence of departmental libraries led to duplication of effort and collections and conflicting approaches. Even with declining revenues and purchases, however, the NAL struggled to provide intellectual access to content, and backlogs accumulated.

## Staff

The staff, diminished by budget reductions over the years, had stretched themselves and fragmented their duties, leaving them increasingly demoralized and without the bandwidth to manage strategically. A casualty of a budget cut earlier in the decade was the position of Chief Librarian. Within the Word and Image Department, without a leader dedicated to the NAL, staff felt invisible, lacking advocacy, receding more and more into a backwater, vulnerable to loss of resources, whether the gallery adjacent to the central reading room that was repurposed for the 20th and 21st Century Gallery or acquisitions budgets that were diverted to support requirements elsewhere. A shrinking workforce made it more difficult to recruit staff who would help build a more diverse organization or to hire talent with specialization in the fields so critical to modern libraries and archives: data analysis and assessment; creation and management of digital assets; teaching and other outreach activities; collaboration, negotiation, and partnerships; and project management.

## Space

As referenced above, the collections space was woefully inadequate and inefficient. Rolling racks in the Crypt represented a good faith effort to store collections in a compact manner, but the pressure to house as many materials as possible without the substantial reconfiguration of existing stores led to a storage that is neither efficient as a whole nor cohesive and suitable for browsing or self-service. Security of valuable assets may be compromised. As a previous audit report advised, the general collections hold many items that would be recognized as rare or special collections.

Staff spaces were cluttered and crammed. In the context of the pandemic, they appeared forlorn and abandoned. They had the sense of being used to house material that needed to be moved elsewhere, but where there was perhaps no decent alternative workspace, and offices, being little used whilst an “all hands on deck” approach was followed, owing to the scarcity of staffing for front-line operations, were a neglected environment, rather than a productive workspace.

The Grade II Listed Reading Room and Central Reading Room with their book-lined walls, gallery walkways, and large windows overlooking the Madejski Garden courtyard earn the admiration of visitors and staff alike for their inspiring character and the world-apart feeling they invoke. Readers cherish the quiet atmosphere amidst the bustling museum, the free Wi-Fi, and the ability to scan documents. Still, even the most fervent fan wishes that the chairs were more comfortable, that winter temperatures were a bit warmer, or that

they could refresh themselves with a sip of water. With only 104 seats assignable, the existing space is heavily used.

Among the features that the NAL lacks in space that are now standard in contemporary libraries are a space for group interaction - be it group study, consultation with a librarian or archivist, casual conversation in informal seating, accompanied by beverages such as tea, water, or coffee in an approved container; a secure space for consulting special collections; dedicated spaces for teaching and induction; spaces for pop-up events and author talks; maker-spaces for developing ideas using a suite of technological tools; and a welcoming and intuitive entrance and exit. The present configuration, with its intimidating formal doors, security personnel perched behind an imposing wooden fortress with a wall of periodicals consulted less and less frequently, privileges the initiated and the bold, but turns the curious who venture a metre into the room into uncertain intruders, despite the NAL's stated objective of welcoming all. A small exhibition space at the top of the stairs to the first floor, just outside the entrance, receives steady traffic, but the space is coveted by others and is seen as vulnerable to takeover.

### Services

Staff, users, and peers at other art and special libraries noted desiderata for the NAL or cited services that were increasingly standard at other institutions. Users were thankful for the ability to submit 8 items for retrieval in advance and to submit multiple retrieval requests in a day. They wished, however, for the ability to browse the collection, to borrow, to have more access to information about the library and to find more collections online. Staff and users looked forward to the ability to search across the collections, adding the NAL and Archives records to the Explore the Collections service. Users sought more induction assistance, and staff were hungry to share more about the collections and services through activities and through social media. At "peer" institutions, there were a number of collaborative initiatives underway; management tracked activities using dashboards which recorded not only investments, but impacts; there was more transparency with regard to inputs and outputs; staff were identified personally online with a brief description of their roles or relevant background and encouraged to develop strong contacts with curators; social media and an internet presence were essential aspects of disseminating information about the library's holdings and activities, building a brand and expanding an international following.

As examples:

- The Rijksmuseum Library described its efforts as the datafication of the library, emphasizing how important data was for the Museum
- The Metropolitan Museum of Art captured its key indicators in a dynamic dashboard that was freely available on the web
- The Getty Research Institute and the National Gallery of Art are active collaborators in Pharos, a multi-institutional, multi-national project to put 25 million photographic images online.

## **7 The Transformation of the National Art Library and Archives**

### **7.1 The Bottom Line**

The financial parameters that were set for the review demanded a reduction in costs across the library and archive teams. While it was proposed that the archive team should have a slight uplift in resources to reflect a bigger remit and the aggregation of various previously fragmented archive collections, for the library the

financial targets assumed a minimal staffing model to maintain a skeleton service during a period of closure. It was not intended to allow for the transformation of the library beyond the closure period. However, the review parameters were also clear that the library could not be maintained at the pre-pandemic level of resourcing, just as operations across the V&A have been subject to reduction.

And if the NAL were to continue with its priorities unchanged, but its budget reduced, it became apparent to the review team that the Reading Room would be dark more than it was open, going from a five-day a week operation, as it was in the pre-pandemic era, to a three-day a week shift. It might be possible to tinker with the staffing to thin coverage, by no longer staffing the enquiries desk, for example, or to reduce customer service by lowering the number and frequency of requests permitted to be submitted. One could eliminate other functions (decrease acquisitions, cease programming and outreach), and channel all resources to the Reading Room, although without new materials coming into the pipeline, the value of access would decline daily. One could open half days, spreading out access.

But shuttering the historic reading room for much of the week would be reputationally damaging for the V&A, with visitors in the courtyard gazing up at its darkened windows, wondering at the mystery of such precious space going unused. And for the 10,000 petitioners who pleaded for the opening of the NAL and the 1430 users who responded to the review's User Survey that the most important thing to do would be for the National Art Library to reopen, unchanged, there would be deep disappointment.

## 7.2 The Conundrum

The V&A wishes to revolutionise access and use of its assets as a public resource, becoming a more inclusive cultural centre, expanding its connections both locally and globally through an integrated digital and physical experience. Yet if the NAL and Archives are only able to support a shadow of a service, a limited reading room operation, they will fall far short of this goal. Instead of providing access to a diverse user base and opening up the wealth of their collections and expertise, the NAL will serve a privileged few, a few hundred people physically able to arrange their time to come to South Kensington. Average daily use of the NAL by the public in 2019 was 132 visits. Staff use, on average, was 265 visits per month. Readers requested approximately 1000 books per week, or 52,000 items in 2019, of which almost 5000 were designated as special collections.

During the pandemic, many libraries changed their service model, shifting to increased scan and deliver services to provide access to their users, and highlighting digital collections, both local holdings, licensed materials, and collectively built repositories. They have recorded significantly higher use of services, with access to online materials rising dramatically, FAQs and library tutorials being used at much higher rates, and an accelerated adoption of new technologies. Prior experience with digital collections has provided evidence of increased global reach.

Research Libraries UK has published a research paper on virtual reading rooms and virtual teaching spaces that demonstrates the capacity, stimulated by the pandemic conditions, to pivot from onsite activities to virtual in a way that unlocks the door to access for remote readers. The announcement of their research notes: "Through the use of live streaming via visualisers located within physical reading rooms and learning spaces, scholars, teachers or members of the public can view and digitally engage with an institution's

heritage and cultural collections, asking for these to be positioned and interrogated by a member of staff, to enable their research or learning”<sup>11</sup>.

What if the National Art Library and Archives were to reinvent itself, shifting its priority from providing onsite service for a relatively few readers to an expanded and diverse universe of visitors comprising both local individuals and other groups who would be able to use the services of the NAL, perhaps in multiple locations, including the soaring double height galleries of the National Art Library in South Kensington, the modern repository and visitor space at V&A East, V&A Dundee, the reading room at Young V&A and other partner libraries to be identified? Not that the NAL would become responsible for answering all the global public’s questions, but rather that it define its services in a way that distinguishes its V&A commitments, local, national, and international responsibilities in a policy that reflects the way in which its services prioritise its unique features. This would mean strengthening and clarifying NAL’s place in the library landscape, making more of its unique and distinctive collections and making these resources available globally, principally through digitised collections or online guides that enable distant users to conduct unmediated research and exploration.

To accomplish this bold pivot, the V&A would need to restructure the NAL and Archives organisation, have visionary leadership, and commit to a multi-year strategy to create a library and archives worthy of the V&A’s own ambitions. If the V&A is redefining its role as a 21st century museum, it needs information services that can not only keep pace with its transformation, but also contribute to and help drive forward its excellence.

### 7.3 Ingredients for a Successful Transformation of the NAL and Archives

#### 7.3.1 **Staffing**

The NAL and Archives needs a chief librarian who is a visionary, but also an experienced administrator. They should function as an advocate for library and archival needs and issues, but also be a collaborative team member of the VARI senior management team.

Other talent required for success would be the possession of competencies in understanding and applying emerging and existing information technologies, including effective and appropriate digitization practices, artificial intelligence, and data management and analysis. Staff should be trained in workflow analysis, project management, and strategic and operational planning. They should be excellent communicators, able to produce multimedia web and social media information that provides concise, clear, and alluring description of services and activities. Teaching and outreach – strategically targeted - will be a larger part of their duties, and consequently they should be skilled in pedagogy, narrative, and even performance.

Collaboration will be another essential element of their responsibilities, and thus they should understand and show evidence of successful partnership development and management, including the ability to identify common goals, to compromise, and to negotiate. As revenue is an important consideration for the V&A, they should be competent fundraisers, able to write, submit, and execute grants, capable of serving as ambassadors for the V&A at events and development activities, and they should show an entrepreneurial spirit, with the ability to identify ideas that might enhance revenue and to work with others to assess the

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<sup>11</sup> (<https://www.rluk.ac.uk/libraries-archives-and-museums-enable-new-forms-of-remote-access-in-response-to-covid-19-pandemic/>)  
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feasibility of advancing them. Understanding budgeting and making efficient use of resources are also important tools in their kit.

In addition to these qualifications, part of the modern librarian and archivist's arsenal, they need a firm grounding in the traditional information management skills, including an understanding of the array of publishing options, copyright issues, metadata, preservation, ethics, and public service. Many NAL staff have this grounding, but the allocation of their time has been fragmented in a way that has lessened their ability to have as much impact as desirable.

A summary of the universe of the skills needed to underpin the future vision for the NAL and Archives is included in the restructuring business case.

### **7.3.2 Services (Information Provision) and Users**

The NAL has prided itself on its role as a national library, open to all, and providing access to a comprehensive collection of publications in the fields of art, design, and performance. As the number of publications issued has risen and the scope of interest has widened and diversified, libraries have turned to new approaches to meet reader needs.

Collaboration and partnerships are forging new ways of building shared collections, and online systems facilitate access to these distributed holdings, permitting intellectual integration. Libraries are ramping up resource-sharing services in which readers from one library can easily request items from another collection. In addition, by focusing on access to information at the global, rather than the local level, libraries are shifting from "just in case" selecting to "just in time" access. This entails the use of large-scale online union catalogues, the modern-day equivalent of the universal catalogue (envisaged by Henry Cole 150 years ago), trusted relationships with other institutions, and the adroit use of scanning and digital access to expedite delivery of select requested items in a rapid and convenient manner.

Yet accomplishing this vision and transformation is likely not feasible in the immediate future for the NAL, given budgetary constraints. As a first order of business, the V&A will need to decide if it can continue to fulfil the ambitious role of "National" Art Library, a role which creates expectations, but which is essentially an unfunded mandate. In the Review's User Survey, readers identified numerous other repositories and libraries that they accessed. What they prized in the NAL was the convenience of consulting an impressively large collection in historic surroundings. Yet the NAL has struggled, in its pre-pandemic structure and funding, to develop more contemporary services, and it serves a large local user base with fewer resources than the libraries that served as benchmarks.

### **7.4 Future priorities**

Traditional library services were centred around print collections, with the catalogue providing the chief access point. Now more information is distributed, exists in a variety of formats, and it is sought and consumed by a diverse user population. The growth of information, both formal and informal, that users seek and employ in their activities, which range from education and research to enjoyment and entrepreneurship, has become unsustainable for individual libraries to manage.

The NAL must undertake a multi-pronged approach to the service that many of its current users perceive as its most essential, access to collections. Its strategy must be to increase access to knowledge whilst reducing cost. To accomplish this, the NAL needs to focus on providing access to digital resources, whether through purchase, openly accessible publications, or materials it converts itself. For items not available or appropriate to access in digital form, the NAL should pursue a combination of targeted purchase, resource-sharing, and on-demand acquisition.

To understand the strength of the NAL's existing holdings, the Library should commission an overlap study with other institutions, using GreenGlass or another such collections analytics tool, an activity that would reveal the titles in the NAL that were unique or rare. The objectives of such a study would guide which titles might be a contribution to the knowledge base if they were digitized, to identify candidates to be treated as special collections, and to learn where other strong art and design holdings were located, enabling potential collaborative agreements to share collections.

A second study might look at which items were most heavily requested over a five-year period. The results of this study could inform which titles might be moved to browsable space and which might be suitable for digitization.

During the pandemic, many users became more comfortable with digital access than they had previously. By helping readers learn how to locate online resources in such large repositories as the Internet Archive, Google Books, or Hathi Trust, readers could fulfil more of their research needs independently, freeing up Library staff time for instruction, outreach, and other activities that would reach a wider audience, such as creation of LibGuides or FAQs. By always considering how to maximize the number of people who could benefit from access to NAL's collections and expertise as well as how to have the greatest impact, the NAL would be furthering the mission and goals of the V&A.

The following recommendations illustrate a plan for the strategic reconceptualization of the National Art Library whilst reducing its cost base. This provides some continuity with the NAL's past, but essentially transforms the services into an organization that relies more on the knowledge and ingenuity of staff than exclusively on its local collections. It is an acknowledgment that growing comprehensive holdings is not sustainable financially.

It presents a way in which, by capitalizing on its unique and distinctive collections and pivoting to a new model of collaborative access to contemporary publications, the V&A can support its research endeavours and serve the wider public. It suggests that reduced hours of access to the physical collections might provide an opportunity to experiment with new arrangements in the Main Reading Room that could broaden access and spark creativity.

In addition to improving the functionality of the public spaces, the Library, through its collection analysis, can lay the foundation for the use of the footprint to store holdings, ideally achieving a plan to free up valuable space in South Kensington for other library priorities (such as those mentioned above) through withdrawing items superseded, not in scope, twinned with digital texts, or by transferring very low use items to remote storage.

As the Library recalibrates and becomes more analytical about its resources, it has the potential to develop revenue-generating opportunities to support extension of its services. For example, out-of-copyright titles in



its collections might be profitably reissued under the V&A imprint. Collections of publications on various topics could be digitized and sold through vendors as a package. Some libraries have negotiated deals that offer free onsite access, royalties for sales to other institutions, and an open access release date five to seven years hence.

There is no doubt that the National Art Library is a jewel of the V&A. The pandemic era has cast a shadow over it, but with vibrant leadership, strategic planning, the courage to reinvent, and a strong alignment with the mission and vision of the V&A, its ability to support research, discovery, and creativity around the world will make a major contribution to the Museum's success.

#### 7.5 A three-year transformation programme

To calibrate towards this future vision for the NAL and Archives, it is recommended that V&A explicitly adopts a three-year transformation programme in which the following practical recommendations are adopted:

##### **Year One**

1. Recruit and hire a chief librarian to develop strategic priorities and train and assign staff to focus on developing services with an eye to increasing inclusivity and benefiting more people
2. Ensure that NAL and Archives staff are strong participants on VARI research initiatives
3. Reconceive the library as a leaner and more agile enterprise which moves away from a predominantly local-collection-centric model to one that encompasses a range of information sources, including purchased and open access online materials, expedited resource sharing, and on demand purchase, rather than just-in-case acquisition
4. Increase the reader's ability to work independently by providing information-rich web pages, improved online registration, online tutorials in search and discovery of distributed information sources, access to browsable collections, steady increases in digitisation of high demand public domain publications and selectively purchased digital documents, and a sustainable scan and deliver service
5. Begin to reduce the footprint of collections and reconfigure the main reading room and other spaces to develop opportunities for group study and library programming
6. Free up staff time to work on strategic projects. Help readers locate items they need elsewhere by providing them with tutorials to discover digital and print copies elsewhere
7. Communicate strategy to users as a multi-year goal of developing a sustainable, inclusive, and superior information service that will be more inclusive and serve more people nationally and internationally than had been possible in the former, unsustainable model.

##### **Years Two to Three**

1. Implement new collection policy to reduce footprint and work with V&A facilities to reconfigure storage accordingly
2. Develop collaborative agreements for shared collections and resource sharing
3. Work with V&A staff to include library and archives collections in Explore the Collections
4. Continue to experiment with Main Reading room to create a more welcoming and interactive space, tracking numbers and impact
5. Expand communication via social media and aim to increase use of targeted NAL and archive services and enhance V&A reputation globally

6. Add to library and archives capacity (staffing or funding for increased opening hours, increased digitization, improved services, research fellowships, new programs) through seeking new funding from V&A, through donor support, through grants, or through revenue generation (such as working with V&A Publishing to identify books in the collection that would make popular and profitable reprints).

## **8 Conclusion and detailed recommendations**

To succeed in a transformation of the V&A Library and Archives enterprise, the V&A should progress the following strategic moves:

- Focus on the user and the user experience, streamlining processes and offering opportunities to surprise, delight, and learn in engagement with librarians, archivists, collections, and technology, with an enhanced focus on digital users
- Appoint a chief librarian with vision and leadership to inspire and advocate for the NAL and information services
- Curate collections according to a contemporary policy that includes, alongside the preservation of its unique and distinctive holdings and its core holdings, strategies for providing access through resource-sharing and on-demand requests
- Develop services and programmes that extend the NAL's value beyond the provision of information, expanding access for enjoyment and learning for all, on a global scale.
- Revitalize the NAL's spaces, showcasing both its historic architecture and adapting them to meet the diverse needs of a wide audience. As a core element of VARI, create approaches to conceiving ways to use NAL spaces to share research and collectively work to increase visibility and engagement.

The following detailed recommendations support this strategy.

### National Art Library organisation

- The Director of VARI should recruit and appoint a chief librarian to head the National Art Library and to serve as a member of her management team
- An extended body of skills and competencies should be developed within the library team, as described above; capacity and competence should be expanded in the creation and management of assessment, digital materials, data, development of partnerships, outreach, and project management, aligning with and supported by VARI
- The structure proposed in Phase 5 should be replaced by a new proposal that looks to achieve this extended body of skills, with two principal teams, one focused on collection development, documentation, digitisation, programming and outreach, and the other focused on systems, services, evaluation, and future planning for a multi-site operation
- The Apprentice programme should be recast and enhanced into a two-year training and work experience initiative (subject to possibility) to bring talent into the NAL and to influence the development of future generations of professionals
- An NAL and Archives Operations Coordinator role should be created, similar to equivalent roles in the curatorial teams, with a focus on collections management and storage, and object-based administration; this role will have a Departmental wide remit, also supporting the Archives team, and

will manage a retrievals team that works across a number of study facilities, including the Prints and Drawings Study Room.

#### Archives organisation

- The NAL, AAD, T&P Library and Archives, and the V&AAR should work together to support the research initiatives of VARI and to support each other, sharing services and expertise as appropriate
- All V&A Archives should be integrated, while clarifying scope and future development ambitions of each
- The T&P Archive and Library staff should join the staff of the AAD and assist in an integrated service operation, whilst maintaining a core responsibility for processing the T&P collections and assisting internal and external users through their expert knowledge
- Over three years' time, work toward an integrated archival team that benefits from shared practices and cross training, led by the Senior Archivist, with two sections allocated over:
  - South Kensington (VAAR, covering institutional records, historic and contemporary (including those relating to museum history from the MOC)
  - V&A East (AAD, including MOC manufacturer/designer archives, T&P, and RPS)

#### Organisation of retrieval across study facilities

- As is outlined above, the Retrieval Service should operate as a single unit managed by the NAL and Archives Operations Coordinator, serving both the NAL Reading Rooms and the P&DSR (including provision of public service to V&A Archive and Registry materials), with cross training in the handling, retrieval, and shelving of P&DSR materials for all staff, consistent practices across all reading rooms, insofar as appropriate for the format and objects. NAL will endeavour to provide retrievers with familiarity with P&DSR operations and handling as the principal retrieval staff for P&DSR
- P&DSR enquiries, invigilation, and desk service will be the responsibility of AAPD curators
- NAL enquiries, invigilation, and desk service will be the responsibility of Librarians
- In recognition of the V&A's future multi-site presence and expectation of a seamless digital front entrance, its constituent parts should collaborate on developing a common user experience, and its staff will, as designated, spend time at various sites, ensuring consistency and harmony.

#### Factory Project

- The remaining part-time Factory Project cataloguers should become members of the VARI team and function as a shared service working on VARI priority digitization and cataloguing initiatives.

#### NAL Transformation planning

- NAL should prepare a transformation plan outlining objectives for 2022-25, aligning its work with VARI and the V&A's mission and vision and develop a dashboard with metrics to share with staff and the public.

#### NAL Collections

- NAL should commission an overlap study of its collections (using a tool such as GreenGlass) with selected local libraries and UK peers to determine which of its holdings are unique and which are more

commonly held. The study would serve as a foundation for collaborative collection development and resource sharing initiatives

- NAL should survey the landscape in the UK and among art libraries to become familiar with collaborative initiatives such as shared storage, resource sharing, and shared collection development as the first step in assessing opportunities that will enable the NAL to be a sustainable organization, able to meet the goals of meeting the V&A mission and vision and serving the public in accessing information resources in the fields of art and performance
- NAL should develop a digitisation policy (what should be digitised, what the standards are, whether it is to be done locally or in house, how to evaluate costs and negotiate contracts, what the digital preservation standards and operations are) and develop a plan and budget, including the use of grant and acquisitions funds to support the reformatting and processing of collections.
- NAL should review its existing collections to identify
  - a. special collections within the general collections and to relocate them to appropriately secure storage;
  - b. frequently requested items that could be relocated to a self-service or browsing location;
  - c. items that would be strong candidates for digitization, based on demand or topic;
  - d. items that could potentially be republished and generate revenue;
  - e. items no longer in scope; and
  - f. items that could be transferred to remote storage to reduce local space demands
- NAL should update its collections policy to profile
  - a. which areas are to be collected in print
  - b. where digital is to be preferred,
  - c. when gifts are accepted and under which terms,
  - d. how resource sharing and shared collections are integrated as a suite of options that provide access to knowledge and uphold the V&A's material culture collection of art and design.
- NAL should inventory unprocessed material and devise a pragmatic processing plan to make materials accessible to the public within three years for items already onsite and within 1 year for current acquisitions.

#### NAL and Archives Services and Programmes

- The NAL and Archives should update webpages, blogs, and FAQs, expanding the information available about the library and archives
- NAL should investigate the provision of a robust scan and deliver service, either free (for a limited number of requests) or for a fee, that could satisfy more requests
- NAL should review the process of registration, ordering and accessing materials, and making enquiries from the user's perspective, finding ways through workflow analysis and interviews to streamline the activities
- NAL should develop its resource-sharing capacity, allocating funds for expedited delivery of online or print copies of requested materials
- Working with VARI, NAL should examine ways to facilitate discovery of open access digital information by its users and implement the ones that are the most feasible and offer the greatest impact
- All Library and Archival collections should be discoverable through Explore the collections

- The Library should host online and local events featuring items from the collections, authors, staff experts, research forums, and interactive activities that highlight research potential and the place of the NAL within VARI, widen the participation and use of NAL and the V&A.

#### Space

- Once collection analysis and review has been completed, NAL should develop a plan for consolidating and rearranging collections that creates a secure and functional onsite repository with the concomitant opportunity for repurposing elegantly designed 19th century spaces now used as stores to areas that can be used and enjoyed more appropriately by people
- NAL should deploy offsite storage such as British Library high density space as an economical alternative to storing collections in more valuable South Kensington space, but ensure that funding for offsite is built into the NAL budget
- V&A should rethink the organization and function of the Main Reading Room, Central Reading Room, and spaces behind the Central Reading Room occupied by staff offices and other NAL activities and assess the feasibility of utilizing the spaces for the following: welcoming, induction for initial visit, quiet research, consultations with staff, events such as author talks or interactive learning opportunities, secure use of special collections, seminars, learning, training and collaborative research activities, processing of collections, and other staff requirements
- The proposed changes should respect the Grade II Listed status of the architecture but allow flexibility and informality in addition to partial retention of some elements of the furnishing.
- With programme function and space harmonized, the proposed plan should be implemented incrementally, based on what can be accomplished expeditiously and with a modest investment, whilst a more ambitious reconfiguration could be an opportunity for fundraising.

#### Communications and Assessment

- VARI, the NAL and Archives should collectively develop a stronger social media presence to increase access and use of their collections, highlight research activity and resources and to assess their impact globally
- The Department should communicate regularly with users in a variety of forms, such as 1:1 conversations, focus groups, and formal and informal surveys to understand their needs and to assess how well the NAL and Archives are meeting them and communicating about the evolving library services.

#### Fundraising

- V&A should assess priorities for fundraising to support innovation and the sustainability of the NAL and Archives such as the renewal and reconceptualization of library spaces to increase outreach and functionality, the endowment of the Chief Librarian's position, multi-year support for the Apprentices, or fellowships for researchers to use the collections
- V&A's leadership should advocate for the NAL and Archives' inclusion in fundraising campaigns and opportunities.

### **9 Towards implementation**

As is discussed above, there was a central conundrum at the heart of this review of the NAL – to reconcile the ambition to transform services and increase access for all, while also delivering on budget reductions. The review team's approach has been to argue that the NAL needs to change its service model, shifting

priority from onsite service at South Kensington to the development of an expanded body of services for a more diverse audience able to access collections across multiple locations and online. To achieve this, the NAL team needs renewed and visionary leadership, some new skills and support from the V&A. In the short-term, the only way to create the space for a smaller team to achieve this strategic shift is to reduce service hours from pre-pandemic levels. But this can only work in the short-term.

As agreed with the Steering Group at its first meeting, the review team prepared three options for a staffing structure. All three options attempted to address the recommendations in section 8, the first option establishing a foundational level of resource, the second option adding in a number of supplementary roles to this core staff, with a particular focus on some new skills, and the third option adding project roles to drive capacity for key strategic priorities. None of the three options delivered on the savings targets established for the review, but Steering Group considered the arguments being put forward and agreed that it was achievable to implement a hybrid of options 1 and 2.

The implementation option is intended to drive the first year of the transformation programme and is the foundation for the further growth of the team once a Chief Librarian is in place to develop the future vision, the fundraising for the NAL gains traction, generating investment in innovation and future sustainability, and the V&A's finances stabilize. The final recommendation of this review, therefore, is that this implementation structure is a further staging point on the NAL's continuing journey and that options 2 and 3, or versions of them developed by the incoming Chief Librarian, are implemented as soon as is feasible.

It is the belief of the review team that the NAL and Archives, and their associated study facilities, have great potential at the heart of the V&A's research ecology, but also more widely to enhance the future strategy of the V&A and to extend the museum's global reach. It is our hope that, as a result of the review, there can be no doubt that the National Art Library is a jewel of the V&A. With vibrant leadership, focused strategic planning, the courage to reinvent, and a strong alignment with the mission and vision of the V&A, its ability to support research, discovery, and creativity around the world can make a major contribution to the museum's future success.