The British Museum Board of Trustees

Minutes of the meeting, 22 November 2012
Held at the British Museum

Present

Mr Niall FitzGerald KBE (Chairman)
Ms Karen Armstrong
Professor Sir Christopher Bayly
Sir Ronald Cohen
Mr Francis Finlay
Dame Liz Forgan
Professor Clive Gamble
Mr Antony Gormley
Ms Bonnie Greer
Ms Penny Hughes
Mr James Lupton
Mr John Micklethwait
Sir Paul Nurse
Mr Gavin Patterson
Professor Amartya Sen
Ms Ahdaf Soueif
Lord Stern
Lord Turner
Baroness Wheatcroft

In Attendance

Neil MacGregor            Director
Andrew Burnett            Deputy Director
Joanna Mackle             Director of Public Engagement
Justin Morris             Director of Operations and Projects
Jonathan Williams        Director of Collections
Christopher Yates        Director of Administration
Mark Bates                Governance and Planning Manager (Secretary)
Caroline Usher            Director of Development (Item 9)
Philip Attwood            Keeper of Coins and Medals (Item 11)
Vicky Hill-Patrick        Project Manager (Item 11)
Xerxes Mazda              Head of Learning, Volunteers and Audiences (Item 11)
Lissant Bolton            Keeper of Africa, Oceania and the Americas (Item 13)
Baroness Kennedy of the Shaws (Item 13)

1. **In camera session**

   1.1 The Board held an in camera session with the Director.

2. **Apologies**

   2.1 Apologies had been received from Chief Anyaoku, Sir George Iacobescu and Sir Martin Sorrell.

3. **Minutes of last meeting**

   3.1 The minutes of the Board meetings held on 28 and 29 September 2012 were approved and the Chairman was authorised to sign them as a true record.
3.2 Matters arising from the minutes:

3.2.1 Item 3.2.2, Turkey: the Director advised that there was nothing further to report since the last meeting.

3.2.2 Item 3.2.3, Research Committee: Nick Stern reported that the inaugural meeting of the Research Committee held in October had been very productive. The Committee would be considering the criteria for assessing the quality of the Museum’s research, along with a three-year plan at its next meeting.

4. Declaration of Interests

4.1 No interests were declared.

5. Chairman’s Report

5.1 The Chairman informed the Board that he had established a British Museum Chairman’s Advisory Group made up of business leaders, which would meet informally about twice a year.

5.2 A recommendation had been made to DCMS Ministers and the Prime Minister for the legally qualified Trustee appointment. The Chairman advised that another recruitment exercise for up to four Trustees would be run shortly.

6. Committee Reports

6.1 The Chairs of the Standing Committee, Nominations and Governance Committee and the Audit Committee reported on committee business since the last Board meeting (see Annex to minutes).

7. Management Report

7.1 The Director reported on the successful opening of Mummy: the inside story at the CSMVS, Mumbai which he had attended. He also reported that the Museum’s proposal to run as second Leadership Training Programme in 2013 was being considered by Indian Ministers.

7.2 Andrew Burnett provided an update on BMCo and on benugo’s trading position.

7.3 The Board noted the Management Report. Jonathan Williams, Joanna Mackle, Justin Morris and Christopher Yates highlighted the key issues arising from the Management Report:

- Bonnie Greer and Jonathan Williams had attended the opening of a new suite of permanent galleries at the Art Institute Chicago including late Roman and early Byzantine objects lent by the British Museum. It was hoped that this would lead to a long-term relationship of loans from the Museum to the Art Institute.
- A major review of the museum assistant resource was underway, led by the Keeper of Greece and Rome and the Head of Loans.
- Visits to Shakespeare: staging the world had been fewer than forecast, partly explained by the impact of the Olympics visitors.
- The anti-BP protest that had been held in the Great Court on 17 November had been managed well by Museum staff and there was no risk to the collection or members of the public.
- There was a further risk of industrial action arising from the decision to contract with Carillion Services Ltd to deliver facilities management.
- The line management responsibilities for BMCo functions had been successfully transferred to the Museum.
- The Investment Committee would be procuring an investment manager through the OJEU process.

8. **World Conservation and Exhibitions Centre**

8.1 Andrew Burnett presented some pictures of the building site showing that good progress was being made on the above-ground steelworks. He reported that the project was running to timetable and budget.

9. **Fundraising**

9.1 Caroline Usher gave a presentation on the Development Strategy and WCEC fundraising packages. Points made in discussion were noted and the Chairman encouraged all Trustees to find time to meet Caroline Usher to discuss how they might contribute to the delivery of the strategy. The Board approved the strategy.

*Action: Trustees to meet Caroline Usher*

9.2 Caroline Usher reported that the Development Department’s database had been successfully merged with the Membership database, and an exercise to clean the data had begun.

10. **Loans**

10.1 The Board approved loans to the Hong Kong Museum of History and the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto for *The Wonders of Ancient Mesopotamia*, and to the Western Australian Museum, Perth for *Journey through the Afterlife: Book of the Dead*.

10.2 The Board also approved the loan of the Cyrus Cylinder and related objects for the *Cyrus Cylinder and Ancient Persia* exhibition to five venues in the USA: the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC; the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Asian Art Museum, San Francisco, California; and the Getty Villa, J Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, California.

11. **Great Court+ Project**

11.1 Andrew Burnett gave a presentation on the Great Court+ Project which focussed on improvements to the public spaces and facilities in and around the Great Court; maximising income generation; and on the future use of the Old Reading Room.

11.2 The Board gave broad assent to the plans and the proposed concept for the Old Reading Room. There would be a further discussion at the next Board meeting before wider consultation.

*Action: The Director*

12. **Committee minutes**

12.1 The Board noted the minutes of the meetings of the Standing Committee on 6 September, the Audit Committee on 5 July and the WCEC Committee on 30 July and 24 September.
13. **Torres Strait Human Remains Claim**

13.1 The Chairman welcomed Helena Kennedy and thanked her for agreeing to advise the Board in her capacity as a former Trustee who had led on human remains issues whilst on the Board.

13.2 The Board discussed the claim from the Torres Straits Islanders for two skulls in the Museum’s collection, having regard to the Trustees’ power under s.47 Human Tissue Act 2004 and their policy on human remains. The Trustees’ policy, which established a presumption in favour of retention unless this was outweighed by other matters, had been approved on 6 October 2006. It was subsequently published on the Museum’s website, and since then has been the policy which has guided the Trustees in approaching all claims for the repatriation of human remains, such as the previous claims from Australia and New Zealand, which had led to the return of some human remains to the communities in those countries which had made the claims.

13.3 The Board had held its initial consideration of the claim at its meeting on 30 June 2011. The Board had noted that several other items in the Museum’s collection were not the subject of the claim, since, although they were made of human material, they had clearly been modified for a purpose other than mortuary disposal (cf. policy 5.11 and 5.13.1). Following that meeting a dossier of relevant material, including two independent reports, had been assembled. The dossier had been submitted to the claimants for their comment and had subsequently been published on the Museum’s website.

13.4 A substantive discussion of the claim was held at the Board meeting on 22 March 2012. At that meeting the Board decided that it did not feel in a position to make a determination, and asked if it might be possible to find any further information or advice on the likely history of the care of human skulls in the Torres Straits Islands, such as the ones under discussion, beyond the initial mortuary process and use. However, neither the claimants nor the Museum were able to find any further information on the point.

13.5 A meeting was held between representatives of the claimants and 5 Trustees on 8 October 2012, and a note of the meeting had been circulated to the Board, and to the claimants.

13.6 The Board agreed to consider the claim because it had been made with the authority of a community having cultural continuity with the remains; it was supported by the community’s national government (policy 5.12 and 5.14.3); and there was no reasonable likelihood that further useful information or advice could be obtained by further delay.

13.7 The Board agreed that the remains were human, between 100 and 200 years old (cf. policy 5.16.2), and that they had been modified by decoration after death. The Board recognised that the remains have significance for Torres Straits Islanders.

13.8 The Board noted that the information available about the circumstances of the transfer of these skulls to Haddon is consistent with ethnographic evidence that skulls were traded as objects of power by Torres Straits Islanders, and served in their negotiations with Europeans.

13.9 On the information and advice before them, including that obtained from the meeting with the claimants on 8 October 2012, the Board agreed that it had not been shown that, on balance of probabilities, the sequence of events by which the two skulls had eventually come to form part of the Museum’s collection represented an interruption in the Torres Strait Islanders’ pre-modern mortuary disposal practices.
13.10 Therefore, after considering the issues put to it by the claimants in the dossier and at the meeting on 8 October, the Board concluded that the evidence presented to it was not sufficient to outweigh the presumption of retention, as set out in the policy.

14. Any other business

14.1 The Chairman thanked Sir Ronald Cohen for his contribution to the Board, and in particular his generous support for the Michael Cohen Gallery.

Date of next Board meeting: 21 March 2013, 15.00-17.30

______________________________Chairman
Item 6: Committee Reports

Standing Committee

The Standing Committee last met on 25 October. The key items considered were:

- The Security Strategy was presented and approved.
- The Committee agreed with the recommendation to contract with Carillion Services Ltd to deliver facilities management.
- The Great Court+ project was presented.

Nominations & Governance Committee

The Nominations & Governance Committee met on 7 November. The key items considered were:

- The outcome of the recent Trustee recruitment exercise.
- A review of the skills matrix and Board diversity.
- Consideration of a longlist of potential Trustees, and identification of those who might be suitable for the next recruitment round.
- Consideration of potential replacements for Emeka Anyaoku.
- Agreement to proceed with a recruitment exercise for four Prime Ministerial Trustees with fundraising, business or culture/media experience.

Audit Committee

The Audit Committee last met on 25 October. The key items considered were:

- The Security Strategy was approved (as approved earlier in the day by the Standing Committee).
- A presentation about the building which would require capital investment.
- An Internal Audit review of the process for identifying missing objects.