

The Rt Hon Lisa Nandy MP
Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport
House of Commons
London
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December 17 2025

Dear Secretary of State

Arts Council England Review

As organisations representing public libraries across England, we are surprised and dismayed by the Hodge Review's recommendation that DCMS should consider transferring the library development role from Arts Council England to the British Library. This does not reflect the discussions we had with Baroness Hodge, or the written evidence we submitted to the Review.

We do not recognise Baroness Hodge's assertion that the "clear and overwhelming view of stakeholders is that ACE, as a development agency for libraries, has not proven successful over the last fourteen years". After extensive consultation with our members, we are confident the opposite is true: those leading and working in public library services overwhelmingly believe that ACE should continue its development role for the library sector.

As we outlined in our submissions to the Review and in discussions with Baroness Hodge, there are clear opportunities to strengthen ACE's support for libraries - through greater investment, deeper integration with other artforms, and a stronger role in research and advocacy. But these enhancements should build on the existing structure, not replace it.

Since libraries joined ACE's remit in 2011, they have been successfully integrated into national cultural strategy, with ACE providing strong leadership and advocacy. Through the Libraries Improvement Fund, National Lottery Project Grants and its own Investment Programme, ACE has invested millions to modernise library spaces, enabled the sector to think innovatively about its future services, and expanded access to the public. It has also taken forward a number of key initiatives, including the Libraries Development Framework and the library data programme, that will have a transformative impact on the sector. These achievements demonstrate ACE's unique ability to combine funding, expertise and strategic leadership.

Moving these functions to the British Library would incur significant resource and opportunity costs, creating a lengthy and disruptive transition at a time when the sector

needs clarity and stability. This would be particularly challenging for the 18 library sector organisations currently within ACE's Investment Programme.

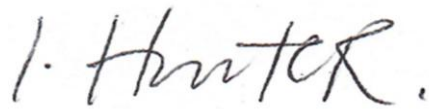
The move would do nothing to address the fragmented structure surrounding libraries or the funding challenges faced by the sector – on the contrary, it is likely to reduce the total amount of funding available to libraries.

While the British Library is a highly valued partner, it operates in a very different environment and its focus is national and global, rather than local. There is also a question of how quickly the British Library, as a non-departmental public body, can respond to emerging opportunities and challenges facing local public libraries.

We are pleased that the Review recognises the need to establish consensus. We would be pleased to contribute to that process but our firm view is that public libraries – and the many millions of people who use them every day – are best served at this time by remaining within the ACE family.

As you prepare your response to the Review, we urge you to consider these points and confirm ACE's continuing role. We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss these issues further.

Yours sincerely



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cc: Baroness Twycross, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Culture, Media and Sport