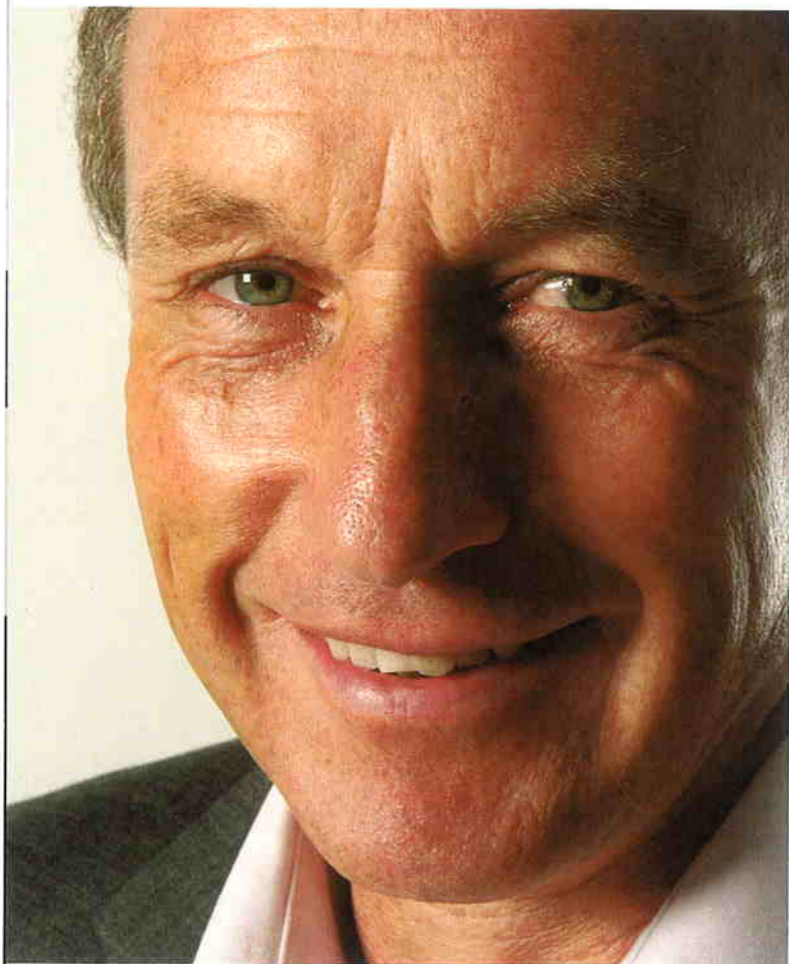


Roy Clare, MLA chief executive, talks to **Simon Tait** about the biggest challenge facing museums and galleries – their boards

Male, pale and stale: the unacceptable face of museums



Roy Clare, chief executive of the Museum Libraries and Archives Council, makes no bones about it: the boards of museums and galleries are generically “male, pale and stale” – white middle-aged men – “and it just isn’t good enough”.

The difference, he says, is not so much between the heritage sector and the visual and performing arts, as between the public and private sector, and the crucial factor is Nolan – specifically, the rules about appointments to boards following the Nolan Committee report on standards in public life.

Nolan was concerned to eradicate the “tap on the shoulder” process of recruiting to the boards of public bodies, to ensure appointments on merit. But what is happening is that the “pool” from which board members, particularly for national museums and galleries, is drawn has solidified. “So the inherent problem in the public sector of self-generating ruling class maintaining this ‘male-pale-stale’ environment in governance” he says, meaning that too few women, too few young people, and many too few from the black, Asian and multi-ethnic sectors on boards (BAME).

The effect is that the many different stories a museum collection can tell that would appeal to the growingly diverse sectors of modern British society are not drawn out, because of the boards’ un-diverse make up. “We’ve got collections really with huge potential to represent diverse stories, but the

governance board does not reflect that” he says. “That’s the key starting point for me”.

It is changing, however. DCMS has an advisory board comprising the likes of Clare, Carole Souter of the HLF, Mark Jones of the V&A and National Museums Directors’ Conference, and English Heritage CEO Simon Thurley, which recently presented a key paper to the head civil servant in the department, Jonathan Stephens. Among other things it recommended ways should be found to encourage applications from among the less obviously experienced and from non-traditional backgrounds. “He has reacted positively” Clare says, and in April the first ever networking session involving chairs and chief executives from the sector will take place at the instigation of DCMS.

“The private sector has got more freedom in terms of how to appoint trustees, and that freedom when used well can extend to bringing onto a board people who can make difference for you in one sector or another. Private sector charities have brought in imaginative people who wouldn’t compete under Nolan for public sector jobs” Clare says.

The pool has to be widened, and Clare hopes too that the current rebuilding of the MLA board will set an example of having more women, young people and trustees from BAME backgrounds – but the problem remains, he admits, that the team appointed by DCMS to select likely candidates are three white middle-aged males.

Governance Now - the Cultural Leadership Programme conference

The issue of governance is one that arises time and again as we explore the challenges of leadership in the cultural and creative industries. How best can we create/sustain healthy and stable organisations? What are the essential roles of the board, trustees, chairs and directors? How do we individually and collectively mobilise for positive change and sustainable leadership?

Today the Cultural Leadership Programme is conducting a one-day conference, Governance Now, at King’s Place in London to highlight key issues of governance across the cultural sector and targeted at both chairs and chief executives.

Speakers include

- Baroness Genista McIntosh, who is chairing the conference
- Baroness Usha Prashar CBE, former First Civil Service Commissioner
- Michael Day, chief executive, and Charles Mackay, chair, Historic Royal Palaces
- Peter Kyle, deputy chief executive, Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations
- John McGrath, former chief executive and Wylie Longmore, former chair, Contact Theatre
- Prue Skene, chair, Rambert Dance and governance associate, Clore Leadership Programme
- Sue Hoyle, director, Clore Leadership Programme
- Serge Dorny, general director, Lyon Opera House, and former chief executive and artistic director, London Philharmonic Orchestra
- Carol Lake, managing director for Europe, Middle East and Africa, JP Morgan
- Michael Lynch, chief executive, Southbank Centre
- Russell Willis Taylor, president and CEO, National Arts Strategies and formerly executive director, English National Opera

And running technical workshops will be: Graham Devlin, independent consultant; Eleanor Pinfield, corporate governance manager, Tate; Nicola Thorold, independent consultant; Caroline Barnett, general counsel, Royal Shakespeare Company; Caroline Felton, independent consultant; Susan Royce, independent consultant.



Giving the keynote speech at the conference is Baroness Usha Prashar CBE. Michael Lynch (left), chief executive of the Southbank Centre, underlines the importance of good governance in arts.