

CANDIDATE BRIEF FOR THE POSITION OF CHAIR, SOMERSET HOUSE

MAY 2021

SOMERSET
HOUSE



ODGERS BERNDTSON
Executive Search



ABOUT SOMERSET HOUSE

Somerset House is one of the London's foremost cultural institutions, built on historic foundations and situated in the very heart of the capital. We are a dynamic working arts centre and home to the UK's largest creative community.

Dedicated to backing progress, championing openness, nurturing creativity and empowering ideas, our cultural programme is ambitious in scope.

We insist on relevance, but are not afraid of irreverence, and are as keen on entertainment as enrichment. We embrace the biggest issues of current times but are equally committed to the delicate task of oxygenating new work by emerging artists.

It is this creative tension – the way in which we harness our heritage, put the too-often overlooked on the central stage and use the neo-classical backdrop to showcase ground-breaking contemporary culture – that inspires our programme.

Old and new, history and disruption, art and entertainment, high-tech and homemade, combined with the fact that Somerset House is home to a constantly shape-shifting working creative community: this is its point of difference.

It is what we are proud of. And it is what makes the experience of visiting or working in Somerset House inspiring and energising, urgent, exciting, and original, because there is nowhere else quite like it.

By embedding an extraordinary community of artists, makers and creative organisations inside Somerset House, we are establishing a radical new approach where our residents form part of our creative engine, driving and shaping our cultural programme and fuelling interdisciplinary, intergenerational collaboration. This means that Somerset House is constantly overflowing with new ideas and fresh perspectives, forming a blueprint for today's changing world.



Cultural Programme

At Somerset House we believe in seeing things differently and inspiring others to do the same. This is reflected across our cultural programme, recent highlights of which include:



Get Up, Stand Up Now! Generations of Black Creative Pioneers

'What distinguishes Zak (Ove, curator)'s show from others on Black artists is how he unifies the artists' disparate messages without watering them down and, in turn, gives them their own agency' – gal-dem



Mary Sibande: I Came Apart at the Seams*

'A short, sharp shock from one of South Africa's most talented contemporary artists' – City AM



Kaleidoscope: Immigration & Modern Britain*

'Ekow Eshun's show reflects not just a breadth of cultures but the creative possibilities of photography and video' – Evening Standard



24/7: A Wake-Up Call For Our Non-Stop World

'A clever, thought-provoking show... sending us stimuli from all sides. It is important. Make time to see it' – Financial Times

Photo credits: Get Up, Stand Up Now © Peter Macdiarmid | Kaleidoscope © Tim Bowditch | I Came Apart at the Seams © Anne Tetzlaff | 24/7 Tekja, Awake © Stephen Chung

*Part of the Charles Russell Speechlys Terrace Room Series



Mushrooms: The Art, Design & Future of Fungi*

'The highlight of my London culture cram was a small and mushroom-shaped exhibition at Somerset House... simply fantastic' – The Times

*Part of the Charles Russell Speechlys Terrace Room Series

Aïda Muluneh: Water Life

'The renowned Ethiopian artist has taken a series of striking images to depict the harsh life of many women in rural areas' – BBC News



Photo credits: Mushrooms © Mark Blowe | Water Life © Anne Tetzlaff

Despite continuing uncertainties and planning challenges as we emerge from the pandemic, we should still have an exciting and busy season ahead. Our [cultural programme for 2021](#) is likely to be:

- **London Design Biennale** – 1-27 June, with Es Devlin's courtyard installation, called Forest for Change
- **No Comply: Skateboarding & The Community** – exhibition, mid-July to mid-Sept in the Terrace Rooms
- **Dodge**, a specially created musical adaptation of fairground Dodgems (replaces our usual summer gigs and films)
- **Photo London** – September
- **We are History** – October 21 – March 22 in the Terrace Rooms – curated by Ekow Eshun, on race and climate change (with sponsorship confirmed from Morgan Stanley)
- **1:54 African Art Fair** – October 2021
- **Beano – The Art of Breaking the Rules** – October 21 – March 22 in the Embankment Galleries
- **Skate** – November/December/January

History



Built in the 1770s Somerset House was where the Royal Academy of Arts was first established and was also the home of the Royal Society, the Society of Antiquaries, the headquarters of the Navy Board and from the late 1780s what was to become the Inland Revenue. In 2021 we appointed two historians to look at the history of the site and buildings from the

perspective of its links to the UK's colonial history and this work will be completed later in the year.

Somerset House Trust was established in 1997 by an Act of Parliament to conserve and develop Somerset House and the open spaces around it for the public, as an arts centre.

Business Model

The Trust, a registered charity, has developed a unique business model in which we generate almost all our income ourselves. This includes **office space rental, venue hire, hospitality, location filming, and cultural events**.

The largest of our tenants are the Courtauld and King's College. We also have 100 creative enterprises which include 20 arts organisations and creative start-ups.

Somerset House Studios is now operating with 25 artist studios covering over 15,000 sq ft of space and supporting up to 100 artists in residence. One of our largest tenants, **Makerversity**, is Europe's most exciting community of emergent maker businesses supporting 350 individuals with incredibly diverse expertise in creativity, design, materials, manufacturing, and production.

In 2019, we completed the twenty-year transformation of the site from government offices to a new kind of arts institution, and we are now home to many

of the brightest and most innovative artists, makers, freelancers, and creative businesses in London, forming the unofficial HQ for the creative industries. This dynamic community helps power our cultural programme as well as underpinning our business model through paying rent.

The Trust has a lease with DCMS that runs until 2125 and we are responsible for upkeep and maintenance. We receive no regular public funding and to date have undertaken relatively little fundraising.

Annual income pre-Covid was in the region of £19m. Rent and other income from residents, including from onsite food and drink operators made up about 60% of revenues and the balance came from cultural and commercial events activity and fundraising. We set out below the financial effects of Covid, which although severe, still support our belief that Somerset House's business model is sustainable.

2020 and Covid

Although Somerset House looks like a venerable institution that has been around for a long time, the Trust itself is still relatively young, full of untapped potential, more like a teenager in grandparents' clothing. 2020 began on a wave of positivity following one of our most successful years both financially and in terms of our cultural programme and public benefit. We had also selected an architect to do the feasibility for a new very large space, that could be used as an auditorium, with a major new public area, linking Waterloo Bridge to the courtyard. The proposed design for what is called the West Street project, took a radical approach of creating a new building almost entirely out of wood, thus promising the most sustainable arts building in London.

Since then, this project and every aspect of our operations has been drastically affected by COVID-19 and the self-sustaining financial model that we have developed, and the wellbeing of our carefully nurtured creative community have been significantly tested. With most of our income self-generated and with no regular public funding, the change in circumstances was very rapid.

We took the decision early to cancel unfunded programmes for 2020/21 and to reduce maintenance of our Grade 1 site to emergencies only. We cut staff pay, furloughed more than 80% of staff and with some redundancies and natural wastage we now have a wage bill that is 80% of pre-Covid.

With these measures, furlough, and Cultural Recovery Fund support from Arts Council England, we will record a small surplus for the year 2020/21 and reserves will remain. With the dropping off in Covid-related support, and the impact of rising voids in our rental operation,

we now expect that the major financial impact will be in 2021/22 and 22/23. With careful financial management and a CBILS loan, our ongoing liquidity is strong and cautious forward financial projections estimate that we will break-even again in 23/24. Our ambition is that we will not need to use the loan to fund day to day operations.

We enter April 2021 with rental voids at around 30% of space but we have refreshed the office space offering, creating more flexible options, and are already receiving new enquiries from prospective residents.

Despite the challenges, we have responded with agility to new ways of working, many of which will continue post-Covid and there have been positive lessons.

This includes crystallising our digital strategy and ambitions, having extended our online programme and experimenting with new formats in response to the first lockdown. From April to July last summer our digital programme had 51,000 live views, compared to 41,000 exhibition visitors over the same period in 2019.

Our **Engagement & Skills** activity exists to remove barriers and increase representation within the creative sector, our own workforce and amongst our audiences. This has also been drastically reworked because of Covid. We introduced regular online insight sessions with Studio's artists and other creative practitioners sharing their career journeys and tips. These sessions have reached online audiences of 88,000 since last April, compared to 800 young people through in person workshops, placements, and careers events in previous years.

MISSION, STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES & PRIORITIES

Mission

Somerset House seeks to be an inspirational creative community where contemporary culture is imagined, created, and experienced.

Somerset House Strategic Objectives

A centre for contemporary culture

To be a dynamic and relevant space for the arts and culture in the 21st century, providing a centre for debate and exploration of contemporary practice and the creative process.

Inclusion and participation

To have a cultural and learning programme that fully reflects our society, integrating development and learning as part of cultural programme.

Audiences and visitors

Offer audiences excellent, original cultural experiences exploring new formats, access to the site ensuring it is accessible, inspirational, safe and provides an excellent visitor experience.

Heritage, estate, and sustainability

To protect and promote the architectural heritage and history of the site and to restore and maintain the buildings and public realm to a high standard.

Our community and the creative sector

To offer a nurturing and accessible environment that inspires and supports the brightest creative talents of all generations in today's changing creative landscape and digital age, promoting the arts and creative industries as a vital and central part of our society and playing an active role in our neighbourhood.

Financial resilience

To ensure the Trust is financially viable with sufficient funding to optimise the delivery of its charitable impact and purposes over the long term.

Key Strategic Priorities for 2021-26

1. Ensuring we emerge post Covid with a strategy that includes a strong, sustainable financial model (including rebuilding income and supporting our creative community), whilst maximising public benefit.
2. Ongoing change agenda, increasing efficiency through streamlining processes, new ways of working, continuing digital transformation.
3. Continued development and growth of cultural programme, onsite and online.
4. Future capital development strategy.
5. Improving representation in the arts and creative industries.

Other information

[Impact Report](#)

[Annual Report](#)

[Blog](#)

[Trustees](#)

[Cultural Programme](#)

Somerset House's commitment to Anti-Racism, Diversity & Inclusion

Somerset House is open to all and we value the unique skills of everyone. Somerset House Trust is an equal opportunities employer and is committed to championing equality, diversity and inclusion in our workplace, so if you're a suitably qualified applicant we encourage your application whatever your age, disability, gender, gender identity, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation or socio-economic background.

Somerset House is actively anti-racist, you can read about its Anti-Racism Pledge and the action we're taking here:

www.somerset.org.uk/anti-racism-pledge

The Future

2020 was an unprecedented year for all of us. Yet we feel positive about our future and our role in the renewal of the cultural sector more broadly. We have positioned SH as a forward-facing organisation. We have encouraged interdisciplinarity, embraced arts, technology and entrepreneurship, built an environment for our residents that is creative and inspiring, nurtured a young and relatively diverse audience and our building is full of disruptors.

With significant past investment in the site (building maintenance is up to date), a strong cultural track record from recent years and a relatively lean and agile organisation, we start the post Covid recovery in a very good place. We are also a lead partner

in the **pedestrianisation of the Strand/Aldwych area** outside Somerset House which will have a very positive impact on Somerset House's connection to the neighbourhood.

We are not pretending that there are not big challenges but as a creative organisation we embrace problem solving and change, and we feel our creative model as London's working arts centre is more relevant than ever. The interplay between our creative and commercial model inevitably means more adjustments and fresh thinking are needed but with the strong team of staff and trustees in place, this challenge excites and energises us.



THE ROLE & THE PERSON

William Sieghart will step down as Chair this summer having completed two terms. Under William's leadership, Somerset House has continued to evolve and strengthen its cultural identity. As we thank William for his incredible commitment and contribution, we now look to his successor. We are looking for an exceptional and dynamic candidate to lead the Somerset House Board and work in partnership with the Director and senior leadership team on our strategic, artistic and financial objectives during this exciting next chapter. This is a unique opportunity to help shape the future of Somerset House and harness its immense national and international potential.

Somerset House has been on an incredible journey over the past twenty years, but we still feel we are only really at the starting line. We are seeking an entrepreneurially minded individual with a truly international perspective and a passion for contemporary culture. Alongside the Director, you will harness the extensive skills and networks of the Executive and Board to drive cultural innovation, embrace technology and thereby help us achieve our ambition to be one of the most exciting contemporary cultural centres in the world. We believe this is one of the most exciting cultural Board leadership roles and we hope you share our excitement.

Main activities and responsibilities

- Play a key role in guiding Somerset House's future strategic direction to enable delivery of our mission and objectives
- In the context of global challenges – biological, social, economic, racial inequality, digital, climate – support the Director and senior leadership team, bring an external perspective, acting as an effective sounding board in how we respond
- Act as an effective ambassador, committed to developing and strengthening relationships with supporters, major donors, sponsors, and stakeholders across the private & public sector
- Champion Somerset House's approach to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion – within the organisation, at Board level and across the sector and society
- Work effectively with, and offer constructive challenge to, the Director and senior leadership team, and (as appropriate) the wider staff, building relationships of trust and unity amongst the Board, and between the Board and Executive

- Support the capital development strategy, the protection of the heritage and any new developments (including possible auditorium)
- Through effective governance and oversight, ensure Somerset House maintains its organisational resilience through the ongoing development of robust policies, risk management, charitable accounting practices and internal controls – ensuring these are reviewed in line with all regulatory and legal requirements on a regular basis
- Review the performance of the Director, the Board, and individual Trustees on a regular basis
- Lead on future Trustee recruitment

Terms & Conditions

The initial term of this unpaid appointment is three years with the expectation that this would be renewed for a second term. The Board currently meets six times a year. As referenced above, additional attendance will be required to support the cultural programme, Patron / fundraising events and other meetings or events as appropriate.

HOW TO APPLY

The closing date for applications is: **9th June**

To apply, please submit a comprehensive CV along with a covering letter which sets out your interest in the role and encapsulates the aspects of your experience relevant to the required criteria.

The preferred method of application is online at:
www.odgers.com/82578

If you are unable to apply online, please email:
82578@odgersberndtson.com

All applications will receive an automated response.

All candidates are requested to complete an online Equal Opportunities Monitoring Form which will be found at the end of the application process. This will assist Somerset House in monitoring selection decisions to assess whether equality of opportunity is being achieved. Any information collated from the Equal Opportunities Monitoring Forms will not be used as part of the selection process and will be treated as strictly confidential.

Personal data

In line with GDPR, we ask that you do NOT send us any information that can identify children or any of your Sensitive Personal Data (racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, data concerning health or sex life and sexual orientation, genetic and / or biometric data) in your CV and application documentation. Following this notice, any inclusion of your Sensitive Personal Data in your CV / application documentation will be understood by us as your express consent to process this information going forward. Please also remember to not mention anyone's information or details (e.g.: referees) who have not previously agreed to their inclusion.

Contact details

For a conversation in confidence, please contact:

Samantha Colt Partner & Head, Arts, Culture & Heritage Practice
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James Bailey Johnson Senior Researcher, Arts, Culture & Heritage Practice
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We are committed to ensuring everyone can access our website and application processes. This includes people with sight loss, hearing, mobility and cognitive impairments. Should you require access to these documents in alternative formats, please contact
Victoria.Mayes@odgersberndtson.com

Also, if you have any comments and/or suggestions about improving access to our application processes please do not hesitate to contact us
response.manager@odgersberndtson.com



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