Cultural policy and Australia’s national cultural heritage: Issues and challenges in the GLAM* landscape

*Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums

Wendy Davis and Katherine Howard

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Abstract

In 2012 the Australian Commonwealth government was scheduled to release the first dedicated policy for culture and the arts since the Keating government’s Creative Nation (1994). Investing in a Creative Australia was to appear after a lengthy period of consultation between the Commonwealth government and all interested cultural sectors and organisations. When it eventuates, the policy will be of particular interest to those information professionals working in the GLAM environment. GLAM is a cross-institutional field which seeks to find points of commonality among various cultural heritage institutions, while still recognizing their points of difference. Digitisation, collaboration and convergence are key themes and characteristics of the GLAM sector and its associated theoretical discipline. The GLAM movement has seen many institutions seeking to work together and create networks of practice, which are beneficial to the cultural heritage industry and sector. With a new Australian cultural policy imminent, it is timely to reflect on the issues and challenges the GLAM principles present to national cultural heritage institutions by discussing their current practices. In doing so, it is possible to suggest productive ways forward for these institutions which could then be supported at a policy level by the Commonwealth government. Specifically, this paper examines four institutions: the National Gallery of Australia, the National Library of Australia, the National Archives of Australia and the National Museum of Australia. The paper reflects on their responses to the Commonwealth’s Cultural Policy Discussion Paper (2011). It argues, that by encouraging and supporting collecting institutions to participate more fully in GLAM practices, the Commonwealth government’s cultural policy would enable far greater public access to, and, participation in, Australia’s cultural heritage. Furthermore, by considering these four institutions, the paper presents a discussion of the challenges and the opportunities that GLAM theoretical and disciplinary principles present to the cultural heritage sector.

Implications for Best Practice

- GLAM is a developing field of theory and practice that encompasses many issues and challenges for practitioners in this area
- GLAM principles and practices are increasingly influencing the cultural heritage sector
- Cultural policy is a key element in shaping the future of Australia’s cultural heritage sector and needs to incorporate GLAM principles
Introduction

The release of the Commonwealth government’s Cultural Policy Discussion Paper late in 2011 raised many pertinent questions regarding the function of collecting institutions and the policy-led construction of Australia’s cultural heritage sector. This paper examines Commonwealth cultural policy with regard to four institutions – the National Gallery of Australia (NGA), the National Library of Australia (NLA), the National Archives of Australia (NAA), and the National Museum of Australia (NMA). The paper situates its discussion in the context of the GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums) landscape, suggesting that the practices of digitisation, collaboration and convergence discussed in GLAM literature might be seen as guiding features or ‘principles’ of GLAM as a disciplinary field. In turn, the GLAM disciplinary field has ramifications for institutional strategies, policies and practices. That is, GLAM institutions are operating in a changing environment of cultural heritage and collecting practices. Considering these institutions’ responses to the Cultural Policy Discussion Paper highlights both their points of commonality and difference. By considering these institutional responses, together with another response to the Cultural Policy Discussion Paper, the Digital Culture Public Sphere Discussion Paper (2011), one suggestion for shaping a GLAM future in Australia through practices of collaboration and convergence is presented and discussed.

GLAM: Context and Challenges

As a discipline, GLAM has diverse, yet connected, threads and points of interest for researchers and practitioners. As a relatively recent field of inquiry, GLAM has many issues and challenges that need careful consideration, the first of which is the name used to describe it. Some GLAM literature refers to ‘LAM’, distinguishing which institutions should be included in its scope by seeming to omit ‘Galleries’. However, it should be noted that ‘museum’ in North America incorporates the ‘art museum’, which in both Australia and Great Britain is more commonly known as an ‘art gallery. An ‘art gallery’ in North America is where one goes to purchase artworks. Hence, the omission in some literature of the word ‘gallery’ is in name only.

What is more easily agreed upon is that the landscape in which galleries, libraries, archives and museums operate has been gradually and irrevocably changing with the introduction and expansion of digital technologies. Aside from the impact of digital technologies, GLAM is a multi-faceted discipline encompassing many issues including:

- an appropriate GLAM curriculum in higher education qualifications for future information professionals (Howard 2010);
- metadata and systems distinctions and how to overcome these to allow collaboration and convergence (Elings and Waibel 2007);
- best practice for collaboration (Zorich, Waibel and Erway 2008);
- defining curation, preservation, archiving, exhibition, documentation and other key terms associated with collecting institutions in the changed digital terrain (Cunningham 2008);
• a theoretical framework in which to ground GLAM as a discipline (Myburgh 2011);
• historical precedents for collaborative institutions (Waibel and Erway 2009);
• policies governing GLAM institutions, the search for funding to support collaborative and convergence initiatives and the potential of open source Web 2.0 technologies (Kalfatovic, Kapsalis, Spiess, van Camp and Edson 2009).

While there are numerous issues that are yet to be resolved in the GLAM disciplinary environment, they do not exist in isolation from the practices of the sector, or, from each other. One of GLAM’s challenges then is its continuing change and growth as a disciplinary field. While this lack of clear disciplinary definition could be seen as a problem, however, by its very nature GLAM also offers potentially rich, yet to be explored, areas for exploring the cultural heritage sector. The GLAM focus in this paper is cultural policy.

GLAM: Disciplinary principles

In terms of an underlying ethos or theory, GLAM is challenging to define because of its multidisciplinary character noted above. However, it is possible to identify common characteristics and features that can be suggested as guiding GLAM ‘principles’. As some authors have noted, GLAM is distinguished by the blurring of traditional institutional boundaries, through the introduction and use of digital technologies. However, at the same time, GLAM recognizes that some institutional distinctions will remain and necessarily so (Brown 2011; Katre 2011; Marty 2011). The practices of digital collections across GLAM institutions potentially remove some (but not all) of the distinctions that characterised their traditional contexts. Two further connected guiding principles are collaboration that may then lead to institutional convergence (Zorich, Waibel and Erway 2008; Waibel and Erway 2009; Myburgh 2011). Some GLAM literature suggests there is capacity for degrees of collaboration that could actually enhance the ability of GLAM institutions to continue their vital roles in the cultural heritage sector. One way of doing this would be to establish a peak governing body would fall within the discussion of convergence that emerges from some of the key GLAM literature (Zorich, Waibel and Erway 2008; Waibel and Erway 2009). Another form of convergence would be a cross-institutional cultural heritage platform that would increase access to digital culture for its users. These are points discussed further in this paper with particular reference to Australian cultural policy and the cultural heritage sector.

GLAM offers collaborative and convergence opportunities for its constitutive institutions because of the features they share. For example, all GLAM institutions collect: art, records, documents, objects. Of course each institution treats its collection differently. It might exhibit it; it might preserve it and either store or display it; it might document it for easy retrieval; it might place its items in historical context so they can be connected to similar records in order to identify cultural themes. Yet, each institution collects; so, they can be grouped together under the banner of collecting institutions. What they do with that collection is what distinguishes the role of each institution in the cultural
heritage sector. Thus, digital technological practices offer the potential for GLAM institutions to collaborate in spite of their differences, producing shared cultural heritage that can be searched and used online, providing greater (and different) kinds of user access and participation. If effective, such collaborations in the cultural heritage sector have the potential to create a GLAM sector that in turn may enrich the nation’s cultural life. While there are various technical and practical complexities involved in the digitisation of particular collections, this discussion is outside the scope of this paper. In principle, digitisation offers great potential for increasing user access and participation across institutional boundaries.

With this in mind, this paper suggests that Australian cultural heritage institutions might shape their future operations in accordance with the GLAM field. As this paper will discuss, collecting institutions have begun to recognize the potential for digital practices to transform the way cultural heritage is shaped and produced for their users. As a disciplinary field, GLAM seeks points of commonality, envisioning collaborative projects, as well as ways that GLAM institutions might converge – not only with specific projects but at the level of institutional management as well. This paper is not suggesting such projects would be simple to implement. Indeed, the layers of complexity are many. As Holley (2012) outlines, there are numerous challenges facing the GLAM sector in Australia, and it will be necessary to have adequate funding and policy support to continue to move forward in a positive way. For GLAM disciplinary principles to further shape Australia’s cultural heritage sector, substantial policy and funding commitments from the Commonwealth government, particularly supporting collaboration and convergence across the constitutive GLAM institutions, would be required. However, without a clearly outlined policy vision, it may be particularly challenging for the cultural heritage sector to undertake any projects of collaboration or convergence that would mark Australia as a GLAM nation.

**Cultural Policy in Australia: From Creative Nation to GLAM Nation**

This paper now focuses its exploration of GLAM in relation to cultural policy, firstly, by considering the 1994 cultural policy, *Creative Nation*, created under Paul Keating’s Labor government. Secondly, it examines possible changes in policy governing cultural heritage institutions, expressed most recently in the 2011 *Cultural Policy Discussion Paper*. Examining responses to the *Cultural Policy Discussion Paper* provides a glimpse of current thoughts that might influence the Australian GLAM sector. Furthermore, such discussions outline each institution’s vision of their future. Placing these four institutions in the context of emerging GLAM practices, the paper suggests possibilities for shaping a stronger Australian GLAM landscape. In particular, the paper supports establishing a Commonwealth government GLAM organization which would provide strategic leadership for the cultural heritage sector, enabling Australia to become a leading GLAM nation. Although the paper is aligned with the benefits of a GLAM shaped future for Australia’s cultural heritage institutions, issues are also acknowledged as challenges requiring consideration.
Given that it has been barely a century since the 1901 formation of the Commonwealth government, we should perhaps be a little forgiving that it took until 1994 for the first coherent statement of cultural policy, *Creative Nation*, to appear. *Creative Nation* is seen by many as a watershed moment in the history of Commonwealth cultural policy. As Craik (2006, 5) notes it was the ‘first enunciated federal cultural policy’. Radbourne (1997, 2) describes *Creative Nation* as ‘outward thinking’, a policy that ‘identified a shift in cultural policy from supply to demand’. Regan and Ryan (2004, 3) saw that the Keating government’s policy recognized the ‘new services environment created by the convergence of communication, information and entertainment’. These comments provide a sense of the significance of *Creative Nation* as a cultural policy.

Turning to the document itself provides a more complete understanding of this cultural policy vision and its resonances with GLAM principles. *Creative Nation*’s notions of cultural heritage, the place and importance of national collecting institutions associated with the current GLAM movement, and the connection between cultural activity, user access and information technology are still remarkably current. *Creative Nation* defines culture’s importance to Australia. For example, one key function of culture is that it ‘transmits the heritage of the past and creates the heritage of the future’ (1994, 2). Similarly, early in *Creative Nation* a Charter of Cultural Rights is proposed, a central point of which is ‘the right of access to our intellectual and cultural heritage’ (1994, 2). Furthermore, the potential for information technology to transform our relationship with culture is also articulated. It states: ‘we must address the information revolution and the new media not with fear and loathing, but with imagination and wit’ (1994, 7). Also, a vision for the future is recognized by the policy makers in terms of information technology when they note that, ‘It can generate new realms of creative opportunity’ (1994, 7).

In terms of GLAM principles, *Creative Nation* also supports increased institutional collaboration which is very similar to what this paper suggests is now one way forward for Australia to become a GLAM nation. Indeed, *Creative Nation* set out a vision for cultural engagement with technology where the final step is the advent of interactive broadband services allowing cultural heritage institutions to offer greater access and services to all Australians (1994, 56). Eighteen years since the publication of *Creative Nation* it seems we are finally venturing into this final stage, with the National Broadband Network (NBN) making *Creative Nation* appear resoundingly prophetic. *Creative Nation* also states, ‘Commonwealth strategy is based on the concept of a Distributed National Collection of library and other cultural materials, built through collaboration between Commonwealth, State and local government libraries, museums and galleries’ (1994, 89). Through new communication technologies, *Creative Nation* notes that, ‘it will become easier to see discrete and separate collections as forming one national cultural and heritage collection’ (1994, 89). Also significant then, is this vision of the shared practice, collaboration and convergence that is now central to GLAM, even though at the time of *Creative Nation*, GLAM was yet to emerge as a disciplinary discourse for cultural heritage institutions. In this way, *Creative Nation* provides a glimpse into a GLAM future of collaboration and
convergence – one that might yet be realized in the forthcoming Commonwealth cultural policy.

While a government discussion paper cannot be expected to present the specific detail that will emerge in a final policy, the 2011 discussion paper provides some idea of the current Commonwealth government’s thinking around cultural policy and cultural heritage. The Discussion Paper focuses its attention on one of the current government’s key policies – the NBN. It proposes that the rollout of the NBN will ‘improve development and delivery of content’ (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2011, 3). So, as with Creative Nation, the connection between culture and new technology is central to the current government’s policy platform. The Discussion Paper notes that the scope of the forthcoming cultural policy will be 10 years (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2011, 4). Disappointingly, in terms of GLAM institutions, there is very little discussion of their place in the world of this new cultural policy. Perhaps the clearest reference to them and their role in the discussion paper is the mention of ‘collecting institutions’ which will shift their focus on collections management to a focus on digitization and improved access for users (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2011, 6). This point was not overlooked in institutional responses to the Discussion Paper. To varying degrees, those responses highlight practices of digitisation, collaboration and in some instances, convergence, in the GLAM sector. Considering some of these submissions against the cultural policy background and GLAM principles, a path towards a GLAM future for Australia’s cultural heritage sector starts to take shape.

Visions for a GLAM future

This paper focuses its discussion on four national cultural heritage institutions for reasons of space and clarity; yet, in doing so, it presents general principles and issues surrounding GLAM’s potential for Australia that might also be applicable to the other Commonwealth funded institutions, not to mention state, local and private collecting institutions. In particular, with regard to the GLAM principles of digitization and institutional collaboration and convergence, it is instructive to compare the visions for the future they articulate in the responses to the in-process cultural policy. With the exception of the National Gallery of Australia (NGA), each of the four major collecting institutions provided a formal public response to the Cultural Policy Discussion Paper. In different ways the institutional responses articulate GLAM-type principles and projects that could shape the future of Australia’s cultural heritage sector. Considering them together highlights the vision for the future GLAM offers in terms of a more coherent approach to Australia’s cultural heritage through the digitization practices and movements towards collaboration among these institutions. However, ultimately what is significant is that, in spite of collaboration within their sectors, there is little explicit articulation of a ‘true’ GLAM vision where multi-institutional collaboration and convergence in terms of management and long-term projects would be the norm. This paper suggests that convergence as it has been defined by Zorich, Waibel and
Erway (2008) and others, (Waibel and Erway 2009; Myburgh 2011) is the key to a functioning GLAM environment and needs to be part of any future cultural policy. It seems that this is still a step that needs to be taken, and may as yet be some time away, even if it were to appear as clearly articulated in the upcoming cultural policy.

**National Gallery of Australia**

The NGA has a collecting focus on Australian art (including Indigenous art) as well as the art of Australia’s geographical neighbours (National Gallery of Australia 2006a). Rather than attempting to reproduce the collections of great European Masters, of which there are many around the world, its mission is to maximize a sense of place and national cultural heritage and identity (National Gallery of Australia 2012). It is this strategic vision that is likely to shape future GLAM activity in terms of collaboration and convergence with other collecting, cultural heritage institutions.

Unfortunately, the NGA appears not to have submitted a public response to the *Discussion Paper*. Nevertheless, other NGA documents and policies point to the fact that it is making some steps towards occupying a place in a GLAM environment (National Gallery of Australia 2006b; National Gallery of Australia 2007). However, it would be useful to hear or read something more current on the NGA’s direction in this regard. As well gaining an insight into the way the NGA might be moving towards digitizing parts of its collection and improving user access and participation through various digital technologies, it would be interesting to gain an understanding of the NGA’s attitude, willingness and capacity to collaborate with other institutions in the GLAM sector. In turn, this would provide further clarity regarding the place and role of the NGA in the ongoing development of Australia’s collecting institutions, as well as the way in which cultural heritage strategies and practices may be changing according to GLAM principles.

**National Library of Australia**

The NLA is already putting some GLAM principles into practice through its active digitization program (National Library of Australia 2012b). Through its newspaper digitization project, and with its online discovery service, Trove, as its central access point to nearly 200 million resources, the NLA encourages active participation in its operation through the opportunities digital technology offers for building a community of users (National Library of Australia 2012c). Not surprisingly then, the GLAM principles of digitization, collaboration and convergence strongly colour the NLA’s response to the *National Cultural Policy Discussion Paper*. For example, with regard to GLAM, the NLA specifically responds to the *Discussion Paper’s* second goal which is ‘to encourage the use of emerging technologies’ (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2011). Here, the NLA response focuses on Trove noting that Trove connects material from approximately 1100 Australian collections including libraries, archives, university repositories and major online collections such as biographical databases, digitised book collections and
digitised newspaper collections (Cathroe 2010). This is an impressive and substantial feat in terms of collaborative activity.

The NLA’s second focus is on the ongoing work of digitizing collections. The NLA response ‘recommends that the National Cultural Policy recognize the transformative impact of digitizing on access, research, participation and creation of new knowledge’ (Schwirtlich 2011, 6). The issue of funding is key here and the NLA response also observes that any future cultural policy needs to invest more in what this paper has identified as a GLAM principle of digitized collections, particularly ‘digital born content’ (Schwirtlich 2011, 8). As the submission notes, with cultural heritage becoming increasing digital, ‘The Library must collect a selection of this content to ensure that it will not be lost to future generations of Australians’ (Schwirtlich 2011, 7). And lastly, the NLA response also notes that cultural heritage cannot easily be absorbed under the umbrella term of the ‘arts’ (Schwirtlich 2011, 1) a point it has in common with the responses from the NAA and the NMA. As with other GLAM institutions, the NLA documents and preserves the past so that it can be accessible for the future. If the future of the cultural heritage sector appears to be changing, present practices must adapt so that access for users remains both coherent and comprehensive.

National Archives of Australia

While it continues its service to the government, the NAA has developed into a cultural heritage institution that also has opened its services to a public community of users. As an institution it works towards ‘helping Australians better understand their heritage and democracy’ (National Archives of Australia 2012b). With this as its goal, the NAA is a potentially rich contributor to an Australian GLAM landscape.

The NAA submission to the National Cultural Policy Discussion Paper is brief in comparison to the NLA response, yet equally valuable to consider in the context of this paper. Once again the point is made that cultural policy should make a clear distinction between creative arts and cultural heritage institutions and practices (Ellis 2011, 1). Although succinct, the submission highlights the NAA’s shift towards the GLAM principles in terms of both digitization and collaboration. As with the NLA response, the point is made that this institution has an important role to play in the preservation of the records of Australian culture for future generations and that it will do this through the use of ‘innovative technologies’ (Ellis 2011, 1). This will ensure that the stories of Australia’s history remain accessible. Indeed, the point here is that accessibility to cultural records actually increases through employing practices of digitization.

The NAA’s submission also addresses the question of collaboration, a central GLAM principle. Like Australia’s libraries, there is collaboration within the sector whereby ‘The Archives is working closely with State and Territory archival services to establish efficient and cost effective co-located regional services’ (Ellis 2011, 1). While it is beyond the scope of this paper, further examination of the extent and nature of this collaboration would provide
contextual detail for this particular area of the GLAM sector in the Australian landscape. The submission also notes that the NAA is seeking to use technology to extend public access to heritage and culture (Ellis 2011, 1). In this way there is another resonance with GLAM principles in using technology to increase user access. The NBN is mentioned as a service that will assist the NAA in meeting these future goals. Collaboration with other cultural agencies and institutions is also mentioned as a possibility although the submission is not specific as to which ones would be involved (Ellis 2011, 2). However, once again, it would seem that the goal in any form of collaboration is to improve access for the users of the NAA’s resources. It appears, from this submission, that there is further work needed in terms of specific strategies and practices that the NAA would need to implement should they wish to follow the GLAM disciplinary principles and take part in the cultural heritage sector accordingly. However, the submission can also be interpreted as suggesting that such work is not beyond the realms of possibility, despite technological and funding obstacles that might prevent such practical change occurring.

National Museum of Australia

The NMA is the youngest of the four collection institutions considered in this paper. It aims to employ practices of digitisation to increase its users’ access to its collections. This is outlined in its 2011-2016 Strategic Plan which states it will ‘reach and involve people whoever and wherever they are’, requiring that the NMA ‘maximize our opportunities in the digital realm’ (National Museum of Australia 2011).

The NMA’s submission to the National Cultural Policy Discussion Paper has a number of points in common with the other institutional responses considered here. In particular, it emphasizes the point that ‘culture’ is not only about the ‘arts’ but rather encompasses collecting and cultural heritage institutions, such as, in this case, museums (National Museum of Australia 2011). However, the majority of the submission focuses on the museum’s potential to enhance the nation’s cultural literacy, with less focus on the NMA’s status as a cultural heritage institution (National Museum of Australia 2011). This is further emphasized as the submission defines museums as ‘collecting and educational institutions’ (National Museum of Australia 2011, 2), a distinction that was not made so explicitly in submissions from other GLAM institutions considered in this paper. However, the NMA’s submission still resonates with the GLAM principle of employing digital technology to improve access to its collections. The submission observes that:

A National Cultural Policy should include measures allowing the maximum accessibility of Australia’s collections to the widest possible audience through new technologies. It is essential that, in order for collecting institutions to engage in the online world, copyright legislation and limitations that hamper access be addressed at a national level to establish consistent and workable systems. (National Museum of Australia 2011, 3)
Furthermore, the submission explicitly states that ‘Australia’s collections need to be available online for all Australians’ (National Museum of Australia 2011, 3); however, the submission does not suggest a converged, cross-institutional collection.

Reflecting on the responses to the Cultural Policy Discussion Paper by these cultural heritage institutions highlights points they have in common that resonate with some of GLAM principles outlined earlier in the paper. For instance, it seems that each institution is working towards the digitization of its collection. The reasons for this can be the preservation of fragile or at-risk material to (more commonly) the potential a digitized collection offers the institution to better fulfil its goal of making its collection accessible to its users. Similarly, the institutions all make a common point of ensuring that collecting institutions are distinguished from other art forms (such as performing arts). They also emphasise the contribution they make to maintaining Australia’s cultural heritage. Finally, each institutional response indicates a willingness to further investigate the potential of collaborative cultural heritage practices, although these submissions do not clearly articulate the GLAM strategy of cross-institutional convergence noted in the literature earlier in this paper.

If the Commonwealth cultural policy was to recognize the vitality that the GLAM convergence principle could provide to Australia’s cultural heritage by constructing a cross-institutional vision for the future, Australia’s cultural heritage institutions could begin to explore the potential benefits this could have for the sector. While of course at this time, the details of establishing something like a peak governing body for cultural heritage institutions in Australia would require further thought, consideration and planning in terms of issues like governance models, legislative status, administration, funding and terms of reference. Clearly, these issues are outside of the scope of this paper. However, if the government wants to preserve and increase the importance of its national collecting institutions in continuing to build and preserve Australia’s cultural heritage, then a clear, initial and coherent policy response and approach to the work of these institutions that acknowledges the changing practices brought about by GLAM principles could be a useful starting point.

Cross-Institutional Collaboration in Australia: Looking for a GLAM future

At the time of writing this paper, a complete Commonwealth cultural policy has not been released. Whether it will also see it as essential that the GLAM sector is recognized at a policy level and adequately funded and supported remains to be seen. However, this would assist in the development of the cross-institutional collaboration and convergence that might enable the GLAM institutions to more fully explore the capacity digital technology provides for unifying the collecting institutions responsible for shaping the future terrain of Australia’s cultural heritage.

As already indicated in this paper, a GLAM landscape can move beyond collaboration and into the realm of ‘convergence’. When this happens it will invariably produce new practices that can transform the operations of the
converged institutions. As Waibel, Zorich and Erway (2008, 13) observe: ‘The ubiquity of online access inspires a vision of a single search across all collections, without regard for where the assets are housed or what institutional unit oversees them’. Such a vision is not explicitly expressed in the responses to the 2011 discussion paper considered so far. However, it is a theme that emerges in another key response to the Cultural Policy Discussion Paper facilitated by Senator Kate Lundy. The Digital Culture Public Sphere Submission Paper (2011) contains a section devoted solely to Australia’s cultural heritage, specifically outlining the development of a coherent, converged GLAM sector, outlining the benefits this would have for Australia’s cultural heritage future.

In light of GLAM principles discussed in this paper, there are two significant points among the many made in the Digital Culture Sphere Submission Paper. Firstly, there is a call for a Distributed National Collection which is conceived as a ‘free and reusable open access archive of Australia’s cultural heritage’ (2011, 93). If we recall this was also proposed in Creative Nation. It appears that everything old is new again in this case; yet, this does not make such a strategy any less vital for Australia’s GLAM future. This proposal is envisaged as a way of tying together ‘collections from all cultural institutions and organisations across Australia’ (2011, 93). And although, responses to this proposal note there have been projects in place that already perform a similar function (including Trove and Picture Australia), once again these remain very much ‘in-house’. That is, they are library initiatives, or archival initiatives, or they belong to some other specific organization. In terms of governing policies it seems these sectors and their associated institutions have yet to step over the boundary to become truly cross-institutional in the GLAM sense of convergence.

However, this does not mean such a vision of a converged GLAM environment in Australia is not conceivable. Indeed, in the Digital Culture Sphere Submission Paper one of the many recommendations is that Commonwealth cultural policy supports the creation of a national coordinating body or program for digital heritage (2011, 96). At first glance, this would seem to be a very grand vision that to be fully implemented would require much change in the operation and daily practices of Australia’s GLAM institutions. However, a project like this is not unprecedented and Australia could learn much from other GLAM projects, using them both for policy models and operational inspiration. For example, Europeana, DigitalNZ and the collaborative activity occurring at the Smithsonian all provide examples of innovative GLAM practice that Australian policy makers could do well to consider and follow if collecting institutions are to be able to function effectively in shaping Australia’s cultural heritage sector in the 21st century and beyond. Although, as mentioned earlier, at the moment, the NLA’s Trove is perhaps closest in principle to fully engaging with the GLAM principles of collaboration and digitization, it remains under the auspices and management of the NLA. What would be truly innovative, and position Australia as a peak participant in the GLAM movement, would be for the new cultural policy to initiate an over-arching cross-institutional, or pan-institutional, cultural heritage
strategy for a digital network and search platform which would include the key collecting institutions in Australia.

**Conclusion**

This paper has considered the emerging GLAM environment in Australia. It has focused on the NGA, NLA, NAA and NMA because in a paper of this length it was not feasible to attempt to consider all interested parties in detail. Of course there are many other stakeholders (both institutions and existing industry bodies) that would need to be included in any future discussions and projects regarding GLAM initiatives in Australia. In particular, it has examined the ramifications for cultural heritage of GLAM principles and how the sector might change and adapt accordingly.

Specifically, the paper has approached these issues from a cultural policy perspective. The paper placed future cultural policy in historical context by considering what, if any, GLAM practices and themes could be detected in *Creative Nation*. In terms of current GLAM principles, *Creative Nation* resonated with the increasing access to culture that information technology offered. More significantly, *Creative Nation* also signalled the potential to form a single cultural heritage collection, directly connecting to the current GLAM recommendation of building a cross-institutional collection available from a single online portal.

The discussion of each institution’s submissions to the *Cultural Policy Discussion Paper* provided insight as to how these four GLAM institutions have so far progressed into the GLAM environment. The paper then highlighted *The Digital Culture Sphere’s* response to the *Cultural Policy Discussion Paper*, which, if adopted, would position Australia as a strong and viable GLAM nation. This could be achieved by establishing a peak governing GLAM body which would be able to strategically plan collaborative projects as well as working with government at a policy level to see that sufficient funding ensures the quality of sector is maintained. If the Commonwealth cultural policy does decide to make investments in a GLAM future, Australia could become a leader in the worldwide GLAM landscape.

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References


Wendy Davis is a lecturer at CQUniversity in the Academic Learning Services Unit. She completed a PhD in cultural studies in 2007 following undergraduate degrees in music (USQ) and literature and cultural studies (UQ). She is currently a part-time student in QUT’s M. IT (Library and Information Science) and has a keen interest in GLAM and cultural heritage.

Katherine Howard has extensive experience working in special libraries. After completing an international Masters degree in Europe, Katherine transitioned into academia, spending 12 months as an Associate Lecturer at QUT in 2011. She is now pursuing her PhD, investigating education for the GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums) sector.