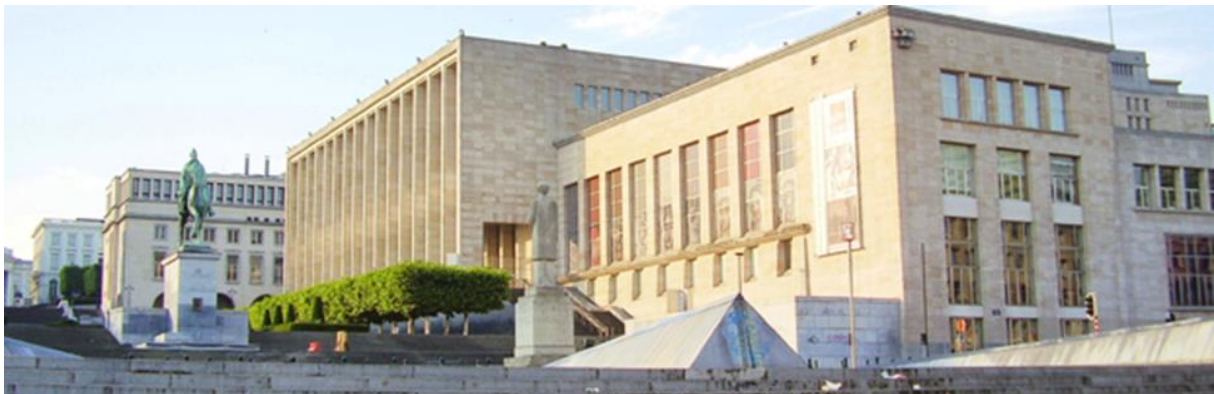


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# Evaluation of the Royal Library of Belgium - Management Summary

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**Final report - Summary**



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# Management summary

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This report presents the final results of the evaluation of the Royal Library of Belgium, one of the ten Federal Scientific Institutes (FSI) of Belgium. Technopolis Group and Helmus Advies performed the evaluation in the period April 2016 - February 2017, upon commission by the Belgian Federal Science Policy Office (BELSPO).

The objective of the evaluation was to assess the library's past performance as well as to provide input and formulate recommendations for their future activities, policy and strategy. It had a comprehensive focus and covered all activities in the library related to its scientific, museum, and service functions. The evaluation was based upon a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods; a key component was the review by a panel of international experts.

## Background

The Royal Library of Belgium (KBR) was founded in 1837 and belongs to the ten to fifteen most renowned libraries in the world. The KBR is a *research library* and acquires, preserves, catalogues and discloses manuscripts, rare books, maps, drawings, prints, music manuscripts, coins and medals. Acting as a *scientific library*, the KBR also collects, preserves and discloses scientific monographs and journals – since 2002 limited to the field of the social sciences and humanities. The KBR's role as *national library* was endorsed by the law on the Legal Deposit in 1965.

The Royal Library received the status of Federal Science Institute by Royal Decree in 1965. Formally, the FSI are operational departments of the Belgian Science Policy Office (BELSPO), the department responsible for coordinating science policy at the federal level. As the other Federal Science Institutes, the KBR is a 'State Service with separate management', with no legal entity.

Reflecting its mandate, the KBR worded its mission as follows:

“The Royal Library of Belgium is the national scientific library. It collects all Belgian publications and plays an essential role in safeguarding the historical, scientific and literary memory of the country. Its primary tasks consist in the delivery of scientific information and the acquisition, preservation, management and valorisation of an important and vast contemporary and historical cultural patrimony.”

In its vision, the KBR summarises the key points of its institutional strategy: research is at the core of its activities but there will be more emphasis on providing access to its collections and collaboration with the library system in the country will be enhanced. In contrast to the benchmark institutes, the KBR does not define its role in society.

## The institutional strategy and management

### *The institutional structure*

The current organisational structure consists of two Operational Directorates (OD) and one Support Services Directorate. The OD Heritage Collection is responsible for the enrichment, preservation, restoration, and assessment of the collections as well as to provide access to these collections. The core tasks of the OD Contemporary Collections are to develop the contemporary collection by applying the law on the legal deposit, acquiring the “belgicana” and publications abroad, and collecting donations. The Directorate Support Services is in charge of the (centralised) digitisation and preservation functions as well as the exhibition policy, communication, and the public services - next to the internal administration services.

The KBR has undergone several changes in its operational structure over time, especially during the last five years. At the institutional level, these changes predominantly reflected the requirements set by the federal government and BELSPO to reach more efficiency. Closely related to the search for efficiency was also the need for the KBR to reach a more integrated and institutional approach to the activities in the OD Heritage Collections. The combination

of these two drivers led, amongst others, to the centralised management of the digitisation and preservation activities.

While efforts for an improved structuring of the activities were therefore made in the recent past, the KBR has largely kept its traditional structure, ie operational departments focusing on the heritage or contemporary collections, and one or more ‘service’ departments. The international peers considered that the current organisational structure is sub-optimal for the implementation of the KBR strategy.

#### *Federal, institutional and departmental strategies*

The FSI strategies are expected to reflect the decisions taken at the higher policy level, formulated in the **management agreements** between BELSPO and the State government. The two management agreements of relevance for this study, adopted in 2012 and 2015, defined an ever-increasing set of expectations for the KBR, in terms of expected collaborations and target user groups. The policy trend, especially in the last management agreement, is towards an enhanced focus on the ‘museum’ function of the library. Next to its tasks related to the management of the cultural and scientific heritage and collections, the KBR is expected to reach a strong position in the cultural and scientific environment through the conduct of quality scientific research and the delivery of excellent scientific services, as well as to strengthen its collaborations. It is expected to maximise access to its collections and provide a broad and unique offer of society-oriented activities and services, setting the user at the centre of its activities. In addition, it should maximise efficiency and lower its costs by optimising the use of its available resources.

The management agreement adopted by the new government in 2015 also announced a reform of the FSI system. The declared intent was to turn the FSI into autonomous and independent institutions. Two years later, the model for this new statute of the FSI is not yet defined, creating for the KBR (and the other FSI) a period of substantial uncertainty on their future.

The **institutional strategy** of the KBR responds to the expectations defined in the management agreements. They also reflect the current trends in national libraries globally: digitisation, outreach and external collaboration are major priority areas – next to the ‘mainstream’ focus on scientific research.

While appreciating the drive in the KBR towards a more institutional ‘transversal’ approach to the activities and an enhanced outward-going approach, a major critique of the international experts was the lack of a clearly articulated and forward-looking vision in the KBR, and a strategy defined to achieve this vision.

In their **departmental strategies**, the directors outlined clear visions on the developments they see needed for the KBR to respond to the requirements set on the library and the ways in which the KBR can and should interact with the research environment, other libraries and heritage institutions, actors in the cultural sphere, and the citizen at large.

In many aspects, the departmental directors are taking similar approaches. Nevertheless, the international experts noted some areas of divergence and a certain lack of coherence in the visions of these directors and their operational priority-setting.

The KBR has a long-standing tradition of priorities and procedures set at an individual department level – and in the Heritage collections OD, even at unit level. The legacy of these ‘siloed’ activities in partly autonomous departments is strong and rooted in its history as a research library. The current drive towards an institutional integration therefore constitutes a significant change in culture in the institution. To overcome this challenge, the international experts saw the solution in a more articulated and consensus-based overarching institutional strategy; internal stakeholders emphasised the need for a stronger leadership combined with more intense internal communication.

### *The financial, HR and infrastructure management*

The KBR has experienced significant budget reductions in the last five years. The total income of the KBR in 2015 was **€18.3m**, including a one-shot additional subsidy of €1.9m. This represents *in real value* a decrease of about €1 million compared to 2010 - and of €2.8m or a **reduction of 15.4%** when not considering the one-shot additional subsidy.

The KBR is highly dependent on BELSPO also for its competitive research funding. As a consequence, the budget restrictions that were imposed on BELSPO and its competitive research funding programmes had a strong effect also on the KBR availability of external research funding.

In response to this decline in income, the KBR significantly reduced its investments, especially those related to its infrastructure and to a lesser extent, its acquisitions.

The **personnel** base of KBR equally had to suffer from the budget cuts, creating a large impact on the morale of the organisation as well as on the ambitions and operations of the KBR. In 2016, the KBR had 272 staff members or 234 FTE. Between 2010 and 2016, the total number of staff members went down with 20 FTE, ie an **8% reduction**.

Strongest hit were the scientists, where FTE staff numbers reduced by 23% compared to 2010. The cuts in staff were particularly harsh in the last two years (2015 & 2016) when the KBR faced an 11% FTE staff reduction compared to 2014.

Like other national libraries globally, the KBR is challenged by new demands for access, digital curation and engagement, user experience etc. In this context, our analysis brought to the foreground the need to review the distinction between scientific and non-scientific staff in the staff role descriptions so that they would properly reflect the new roles and responsibilities of the library staff. This distinction was introduced in the past to adapt the federal human resources management procedures to the needs dictated by the scientific function of the FSI.

Closely linked to the changing roles and responsibilities of the KBR staff is the need for an improvement of the internal knowledge management and the creation of formal processes for this purpose. This topic is even more relevant when considering the staff ageing problem that the KBR is about to face, especially among the scientists. Half of the scientists are currently age 50+.

The federal institute status of the KBR has some important implications for the library's management of its **infrastructure** in terms of its capacity to undertake urgent interventions, the administrative burden the federal rulings impose, and the recent restrictions on its capacity for autonomous decision-making on investments needed. The inadequacy of the digital infrastructure, and more precisely its library management system (LMS) VUBIS, has been a major issue for the KBR and its functioning in the last ten years.

## **The KBR and its research function**

### *The strategy for the research function*

The KBR mission and vision clearly state that 'research' is a core feature of the national library. Reflecting the trend in its strategic thinking, the KBR currently sets research firmly within the institutional context and seeks an improved coherence between the scientific research activities and the activities related to the management, disclosure and valorisation of the collections.

Opinions are divided, both internally and in the research community, whether the KBR has reached the right balance in the fulfilment of its research and museum functions.

Next to its thematic areas of expertise, the KBR set priorities on research in the field of library and information sciences and technologies to enhance its digitisation and digital

collection management capacities. The intention is also to create and strengthen partnerships with the library community to foster the exchange of knowledge and expertise.

A challenge is the KBR capacity effectively to conduct research. The KBR currently (2016) has 28 FTE staff members that have a formal 'scientific' function, compared to 36 FTE in 2010. Most of these scientists (19 out of 28) are active in the OD. However, the restrictions on the KBR budget as well as the reduction in scientific staff and the additional responsibilities set on those staff members have put the research capacity of the KBR under considerable strain. Time availability for the conduct of research and financial resources for the participation in international conferences and network events have become increasingly scarce.

In addition, the KBR has been less successful in gaining research funding from national sources, despite the high efforts made. This is to be set in the context of a change in BELSPO's approach for the competitive funding of research in the FSI. There has been a concentration of the research funding budget in a few large programmes, an opening of the competition to all institutions in the country, and according to KBR scientists, a more basic focus of the research funded as part of the BRAIN.be programme.

The international experts found evidence of a good culture of working across directorates. For research, there are clear links between digitisation projects, digital humanities and digital collection management. However, they perceived that research on special collections is less well co-ordinated across the organisation; better co-ordination and awareness of research internally would provide a benefit to the KBR's exhibitions and education programmes.

#### *The scientific quality of the research in the KBR*

The quality of the KBR research output is perceived as high in the national and international research communities, and this perception is confirmed by our bibliometric analysis. One in four KBR authors (ie publishing scientists) produced articles that were published in Scopus-indexed journals; overall, KBR scientists succeeded in publishing ~40% of their articles in high-quality international journals in their field.

The bibliometric data show an increasing pressure on the scientists in the KBR to publish, as well as a concentration of scientific publication production among fewer scientists in 2015 compared to the years 2011 – 2013. There is a skewed distribution of the publications, with half of the scientific staff contributing only marginally to the KBR scientific outputs.

#### *The KBR in the national and international research and library system*

Interviewees (both national and international) broadly confirmed the high-level prestige that the KBR and its researchers enjoy in the scientific community. In the specific niche fields of research, there is also a very good relationship and collaborations especially with universities – in Belgium and abroad, the latter albeit at a lesser extent. The KBR collection has a high level of visibility in the national and international scene, thanks to the Europeana projects as well as the active involvement of the thematic collection departments in the international associations in their fields of research.

As an institution, however, the KBR has been considerably less actively involved in the associations of the national and international library communities. A positive change was noted at the national level, though. Interviewees active in the federal institutes mentioned the KBR taking up a leadership role more pro-actively in recent years. The current ambition for the KBR to develop a research profile in library sciences and librarianship and enhance its collaboration with the university and heritage libraries also fully matches the expectations of university libraries, which would like the KBR to take a 'lead expert' role nationally. The international experts considered that especially in the case of the e-legal deposit and the re-use of digital assets, the KBR has a role in building research capacity nationally.

Visibility of the KBR as an institution on the international scene is very limited. The international experts emphasised the importance of international networking, especially for the KBR to gain expertise in the area of Library and Information Sciences. They strongly advised the KBR to facilitate core staff members to take a bigger networking role as part of their daily job.

## **The KBR and its museum function**

### *Acquisition and preservation of the physical collections*

In both the heritage and contemporary collections departments, the collection management strategy is focused on planning and coordination to improve the internal functioning.

In the OD Heritage Collections, priority is set on the development of a comprehensive policy for the collections, beyond their thematic focus, and on an active conservation and restoration policy.

In the OD Contemporary Collections, the focus is on the development of an acquisition charter to facilitate and improve the relationship with sponsors or Maecenas and to set the framework for the creation of acquisition consortia, with other federal institutes and FSI. In a context of the decrease in resources, the e-deposit and electronic publications in general are increasingly gaining in importance. A change in the law on the Legal Deposit is therefore a major point of action for the KBR; the copyright rulings constitute a major barrier.

### *Digitisation and the management of the digital collection*

Creating a digital presence in a networked environment is a top priority for the KBR and the international experts found that in recent years, the KBR has made significant progress in the digitisation of its collections and its expertise on digitisation and digital infrastructures. The creation of the DIGIT unit has been crucial from this perspective. Despite its relatively late start with the digitisation process, the KBR now has a considerable digital collection.

Funding for the digitisation projects came especially from the BELSPO programmes and initiatives, and EUROPEANA, combined with or completed through internal projects or projects funded by other actors. These digitisation projects also provided important opportunities for collaboration with the other FSI as well as other national and international libraries, universities and actors in the cultural sphere.

The planning and strategic management of these digitisation efforts could be improved, though. The international experts especially noted the absence of an overarching information or digitisation plan that specifies how digitisation can support the strategic priorities of the organisation. Taking account also of the future launch of an e-deposit, the experts urged the KBR to decide on its digital collection policies and digital data management structures.

### *Disclosure of the collections*

Improving the outreach activities to the public has been an area of focus in the KBR since the year 2005 onwards. Interviewees active in the museum sector appreciated the efforts made and the transformation that the KBR has undergone from this perspective in the last 10 years. They emphasised the high potential the KBR has in reaching a broader public with its exhibitions. Strengths from this perspective are its location and the richness of its collections.

The operational plans of the OD Heritage Collections and the Support Services Directorate both address the need for an exhibition policy in the KBR, from different perspectives and to an extent contradictory in their envisaged implementation: while the operational plan for the Support Services envisages a strong user-orientation and focus on a smaller number of exhibitions, the operational plan of the heritage collections director emphasises the link with the cultural environment and envisages a mix of small and bigger exhibitions.

The KBR currently has an internal exhibition, *Librarium*, which opened in 2010, and successfully secured funding for the development of two additional museum venues, both due to open in 2019. Next to the significant opportunities that these new exhibition projects offer, they also considerably challenge the KBR capacities for the nearby future, both from a human resources and financial perspective. The international experts cautioned the KBR not to underestimate the efforts needed and emphasised the need for the development of an improved long-term planning and an adequate and realistic management of the financial and human resources challenges, including risk management.

Most important, they considered that functioning as a national library requires a clear distinction between a library providing exhibitions and being a full-fledged museum. It was their opinion that the KBR should focus on being a cultural and knowledge institution *with* exhibitions and avoid taking up the function of a museum.

## **The KBR and its service function**

### *The onsite services*

The Support Plan 2013-18 of the Support Services Directorate has the overall aim to strengthen the awareness and knowledge of the KBR as a national library. It sets the educational and communication services in close connection with the museum function of the library and takes a pronounced user-oriented approach. Based upon the outcomes of an analysis of the KBR users and their needs, the current objective is to strengthen the social and cultural role of the KBR in the public sphere. The vision is for the KBR to become “an experience and a place to meet” and to play an active role as “a forum for social and cultural life”. There are similarities with the vision of a ‘third-space’ library as formulated by the National Library of Quebec.

The KBR has ambitious plans for the modernisation of its ‘big’ reading room, which the international experts strongly supported. The international experts however cautioned the KBR not to consider the students and the users of the reading rooms as a main target group for its activities. They saw the dissemination of (all) the digital collections as an obvious goal also for the services in the reading room. They expressed their support also for the plan to merge the thematic reading rooms., which they saw being in line with the international trends.

For the educational services, the intention for the nearby future is to improve scope and focus. The unit will work on two pillars: the exhibition policy and the pillar ‘learn to learn’, focused on the use of the collections as source of information, media intelligence, and the development of tools providing access to the digital collections.

### *Digital services*

The new Library Management System, to be installed in 2017, is to solve the current problems in the online access to the KBR collections. It will constitute an important step in the ability of the KBR to aggregate information in a standardised manner and to exchange it with other systems – both national and international. The international experts, however, emphasised also the need for the KBR to have a professional solution for its digital content and asset management, and to define its data publishing strategy. This should take account of both the preferences of the users and the economics of providing access to the collections online and/or on site.

The current law on copyrights imposes major restrictions on the access to the KBR digital collections. The international experts invited the KBR to take up a stronger leadership in the copyright reform, in response to the appeals made by the Belgian research and library community in this direction.



The KBR has relied strongly on The European Library (TEL) to ensure availability of its collections outside its own website. As TEL will be discontinued in 2017, the KBR should urgently look for an alternative solution.

### *The communication policy and its results*

The KBR had a good presence in the media in 2010-2016, with an average growth rate of 54% per year. It was quite successful in promoting its exhibitions and the results of its research overall, and created an interest that was at a close-to-equal level in the two major linguistic communities in the country.

The communication plan of the KBR is focused on the modernisation of the communication channels, making use of the social media and influencing communication by third actors such as cultural networks and the press. A new website and an entirely new brand image were created; the intention is to create also more digital exhibitions for its new website.

The international experts saw a need to clarify the goals of the communication plan, setting it in the context of the overall institutional strategy. They considered that the KBR should decide how it wishes to promote itself as they saw a tension between the KBR mission statement and the focus and style of the communication activities.

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

### *The KBR governance, strategies and resources management*

Already in the preceding decade and especially since the beginning of the 2010s, the KBR management has taken the road of installing a culture that would allow for an institutional approach to its activities, rather than an autonomous management at the department and unit levels. This search for more cohesion constituted a significant cultural change in the organisation. Contemporaneously, the KBR management has emphasised the need for a more pronounced user-orientation in its outreach activities and increased the importance of these activities as such, driven by the changing expectations set on the library, both by the federal authorities and society at large. Efforts have been made to reflect these developments also in the organisational structure of the institute, by setting up transversal activities related to the collections management and its digitisation, and by establishing close links between the communication and public service activities and the research and exhibition ones. Holding firm to its role as a national research library, the KBR has tried to reach a balance between its research and museum function, setting however research at the core of its activities. The strategic decisions made by the KBR management, and the new directions it has taken, are in line with those taken by national libraries globally. The KBR has also set up numerous collaborations with the other FSI, in particular with the ARA, and is taking a more active role in the FSI and federal library community.

These developments have taken place in a period of considerable restrictions on the KBR financial and human resources, which is equally a global phenomenon. The KBR has safeguarded its human capital - to the extent possible, and to the expense of its investments in acquisitions and especially in infrastructure. It has reached improved efficiencies especially through the development of the transversal activities.

The KBR has not fully succeeded in its intents. *Communication and collaboration across the different departments* is one of its current major flaws - including at the management level. While the visions of the different departments are clearly set out, and shared and agreed upon among the KBR staff, there is a lack of coherence among these visions. Potential synergies between the activities of the departments are not sufficiently considered and exploited, and the feasibility of the various departmental ambitions are not sufficiently set within the overall context of the institution's financial and human resources capacities.

Most important, there is a lack of a *clear overarching vision* for the KBR as an institution, to guide and direct the strategy and priority setting at the institutional level and their implementation through the departmental strategies and operational plans, encompassing all activities – including the financial and human resources planning.

The KBR is also facing the limits imposed by its status as a federal institution. Apart of the administrative burden of the federal management rulings, limits are set on its autonomy in terms of human resources and financial management. The current rulings conflict with the needs of the KBR to respond to the new developments in the library environment such as digitisation and exhibition management, and adequately to manage its personnel taking account of the new tasks they are asked to fulfil.

## Recommendations

### For the KBR management:

- Urgently to take a clear standpoint, shared among the staff, on the **mission** of the KBR and to formulate a **vision** on its role in society
- To define an **institutional strategy** and to set out clear priorities that will govern the departmental strategies and *rigidly* direct the decision making and implementation of all activities
- To review the **institutional structure** for an optimal implementation of the new strategy
- To review the role of the **scientific advisory body**, which should be less operation-oriented and provide more strategic support for the management of the institution *as a whole*
- To consider expanding the profile of the members of the scientific advisory board, taking account of the multiple functions of the KBR and involving experts that can usefully complement the expertise that is already existing in the institution itself
- To review the **staff role descriptions** of the scientific and non-scientific staff, taking account of the developments in their tasks, and to reward scientific staff not only on the basis of their scientific production but also on the basis of their directional responsibilities, collection management duties, (internal and external) knowledge transfer activities, outreach activities etc
- To develop structured **knowledge sharing** activities, across the departments

### For the federal authorities:

- To grant **flexibility** to the KBR management to review the functions of the Scientific Advisory Board and its composition
- To grant flexibility to the KBR management to review the current rigid distinction between scientific and non-scientific staff
- To reduce the **administrative burden** on the KBR, including those related to the monitoring activities
- To foster the development of **long-term institutional strategies**, beyond and independently from the current operational plans
- To grant the KBR the **right of autonomy** as a public-funded organisation
- **Not** to merge the KBR with another FSI but instead, to keep on fostering and facilitating joint activities and knowledge sharing – especially with the ARA

### *The implementation of the KBR functions*

There is a strong sense that ‘**research**’ is at the core of the KBR activities and integral part of the KBR identity. This is rooted in its past, clearly stated in its mandate, and it has remained constant throughout the management agreements and institutional strategies over the last decade.

The performance of the KBR in its research function is high. The excellence of the research activities related to the heritage collections is recognised in the national and international research communities and evidence has been found also in the bibliometric analysis. The KBR scientists are actively involved in the research community and national and international networks and offers valuable support for the development of research capacity in the fields of its specialisation, including internships of master and PhD students. The current ambition is to strengthen expertise also in the field of library and information sciences, which is appropriate and requested of a 21<sup>st</sup>-century national library. The intent to expand expertise in these areas and to strengthen collaboration and partnerships with the library community in the country, responds also to the expectation in the university libraries for the KBR to take up a leadership role in the field of library sciences and digital collection management.

The current restrictions on the library staff - and especially the research staff - represent a significant risk for the KBR capacity to keep on fulfilling its mission in the research community to the extent it did in the past, and to conduct research at the expected level of excellence. Financial restrictions have also considerably limited the opportunities for the KBR scientists to participate in the scientific conferences in their field and to expand and nurture their international networks, thus setting at risk the image and visibility of the KBR on the international scene. It also sets a limit to the capacity in the KBR effectively to enhance its collaborations and take up a more active role in the national library system.

In addition, the restrictions on the budget that BELSPO has at its disposal for the competitive research programmes, leading to the launch of large programmes with competition open to the entire national research community, has had significant implications also on the availability of funding opportunities for the type of research that the KBR conducts in relation to its heritage collections.

The **museum and public service functions** are closely interlinked. The interconnection is in the link that has been established between the communication and educational services on the one hand, and the exhibitions and exhibition policy on the other.

The recently appointed operational directors have set clear priorities for the departmental activities related to the **collection management**, both in terms of acquisition and preservation. In both departments, the focus is on an improved planning, prioritisation and internal coordination to improve performance and efficiency. Both directors also envisage a close collaboration and improved relationships with the other actors in their field. Acquisition is a major challenge in the current financial situation and the strategy is to focus on a change in the Legal deposit legislation, expanding the obligations to digital publications, and the set-up of acquisition consortia with other federal institutes and FSI.

Next to the challenges that the directors are currently tackling, improvements in the collection management are needed also in terms of providing a good overview of the content of the collections – both physical and digital. This is crucial for the disclosure of the collections, both physical and digital, and for an exploitation of the collection to its full extent.

After a slow start in its **digitisation** activities in the beginning of the 2000s, the KBR has made significant progress over these years and has now a considerable digital collection at its disposal. It has also made leaps ahead in its expertise on digitisation and digital infrastructures. The launch of DIGIT as a unit responsible for the digitisation activities has been crucial in this context. The KBR staff has made significant efforts for the retro-

cataloguing of the collections, an activity that has not yet been concluded, providing quality and scientifically-validated metadata. International standards are used, ensuring the exchangeability with other digital platforms. The KBR has implemented small-scale and mass digitisation activities, funded through a mix of national programmes and initiatives, and Europeana – and to a lesser extent, also funding from other national and international cultural actors and internal funding. The KBR staff and management has exploited the contacts in the national and international networks to identify funding opportunities and has looked for potential synergies with smaller projects to maximise the outcomes of the larger digitisation projects. External project funding was therefore a major facilitator for the KBR digitisation activities.

It is important for the KBR to continue its mass digitisation projects. Most important, however, the KBR lacks a digitisation strategy that would allow for prioritisation as well as for a structured search of funding opportunities.

In addition, as for many national libraries, the major challenge for the KBR is the management of the **digital collection**, including the content that is digital born. In this context, the KBR lacks a professional solution for digital content and asset management and a data publishing strategy.

The KBR has the crucial task as national library to manage the (future) legal e-deposit, incorporating born digital content, and has the ambition to take up web archiving at the national level, as part of the e-deposit. If the KBR will archive the web of the entire .be domain, a strong leadership at both the policy and the practitioners level is needed to avoid duplication of efforts at the federal and regional levels. The KBR should show strong professional leadership to make collaboration across the whole of Belgium work, otherwise it cannot succeed as a federal institution.

In the last decade, the KBR has made significant steps forward also in enhancing and improving the **disclosure** of its collections. The KBR has lent its collection pieces to many exhibitions in the country and abroad and a number of flagship exhibitions have taken place, in the KBR and on virtual platforms, attracting a high number of visitors and providing access to some of KBR's most valuable collections. In 2010, the KBR has opened an internal exhibition venue, Librarium, dedicated to temporary exhibitions, and has successfully gained funding for the launch of two additional venues in 2019, one of which for a permanent exhibition.

Especially the new permanent exhibition venue, dedicated to the Library of the Dukes of Burgundy, constitutes a major leap in the KBR outreach activities due to its scale and ambition. This initiative creates new opportunities for the KBR, but poses also significant challenges for the KBR financial and human resources. There is a risk of either under-resourcing the Library of the Dukes of Burgundy, or being too ambitious in its objectives. The development of a detailed long-term planning is of *paramount* importance for a successful implementation of this new exhibition project. The international also considered that functioning as a national library requires a clear distinction between a library providing exhibitions and being a full-fledged museum.

A major hurdle block for the KBR has been its capacity to provide digital access to its collections. Despite its efforts, the KBR has not yet succeeded in reaching the needed reform of the copyright rulings and the lack of an integrated library management system implies that there is no comprehensive and integrated inventory of all the collections. The collection is also little visible on international platforms.

The **educational services** unit, which has the responsibility for the Librarium, built its activities in close connection to the exhibitions taking place in the Librarium. In addition, guided tours and workshops were organised, for schools and touristic groups. The current strategy is to focus on the one hand, on the management of the exhibitions, and on the other

hand, on an improved service delivery to the users of the ‘big’ reading room, focused on digital intelligence and the use of media.

The profiling exercise of the KBR and Librarium user, together with the analysis of the data related to the use of the reading rooms, has led to a significant change in the KBR approach to its public services – including the exhibition policy. The ‘vision’ is for the KBR to act as a ‘forum for social and cultural life’.

The **communication** activities of the KBR have been geared in recent years to modernise its channels for communication, with a major attention for the branding of the KBR activities and including the re-design of the KBR website.

There is an opportunity – and need – for the current website to be more aligned with the needs of the research and higher education community. This is a topic that should be considered especially for the structuring of the access to the digital collections, once the new Library Management System will be in place.

The categorisation of the KBR activities in terms of functions is to an extent artificial and does not make justice to the reality. The distinction cannot be rigid; there are multiple overlaps and most important, the recognition of the **links between the different functions** is vital for the development of strategies and operational plans that can ensure a good functioning of the institution.

It is exactly in this interconnectedness of the different functions that the major shortcomings in current KBR performance lay. Specifically, and most importantly, this regards the interconnection between the research and collection management activities in the OD Heritage Collections and the educational services and communication activities in the Support Services directorate. The apparent confusion on responsibilities and roles, combined with an insufficient communication and collaboration, has led to two distinct views - on the exhibition policy and strategy and to an extent, on the role of the KBR as such.

Improving the coordination and collaboration between the research, outreach and collection management functions of the KBR is of vital importance for the successful implementation of the Library of the Dukes of Burgundy project, and for the future performance of the KBR as such.

## Recommendations

### For the KBR management:

- To develop and publish a **research strategy**, making clear which subjects are prioritised, which type of research outputs the KBR values, how research will be supported through the organisation, and how research will inform and support other library priorities – reflecting the (new) institutional strategy
- To enhance the visibility of the **entire portfolio of research** in the KBR – both internally and through communications to the research and library communities and the public at large
- To review the categorisation of the **collections** and ensure a good overview of their content
- To implement the recommendations of the 2015 evaluation of the **Librarium** with regard to visibility, accessibility and coordination of content
- To write out a **digitisation strategy** with clear priorities and planning of the activities, reflecting the (new) institutional strategy, and including a data publishing strategy
- To set up a structure and strategy for the **digital collections management**

- To take up a **leadership role in the library community** (both regional and federal) in the field of digital collection management, the change of the copyright rulings, and web archiving
- To focus on being a **cultural and knowledge institution *with* exhibitions** and avoid taking up the function of a museum
- To develop a *coherent* **exhibition strategy and policy**, reflecting the (new) institutional strategy
- To ensure the alignment of the **communications strategy and policy** with the mission and vision defined for the KBR

**Specifically in relation to the new exhibition venue(s):**

- To develop a **long-term planning**, including a minimum five-year plan of rotating exhibition ideas
- To develop a **structure** and ensure a **close collaboration** between the academic curators, the restoration department, and the education team, as well as eventually the digitisation team
- To be ambitious also in the implementation of the new exhibitions and exploit the opportunities to **showcase the scientific research activities** of the KBR staff through publications, exhibition catalogues, brochures and label materials
- To ensure an **adequate balance of time investment** required from the different curators in the planning of the rotating exhibitions
- To set-up the implementation plan considering the calendar of foreseen major local events in order fully to **exploit the creation of synergies**, and potential additional funding sources
- To take in **external advice and expertise** (in a structured manner and with a longer-term perspective) and set up close collaboration with experienced and successful museums
- To create **learning opportunities** on exhibition management for all KBR staff members involved
- To set up a **monitoring structure** to allow for timely lessons-learning

**For the federal authorities:**

- To recognise the vital role of collections-based research in the KBR and the importance of the related national and international network activities and to foresee **funding opportunities** for both
- To provide political support to the KBR in its efforts to achieve the needed changes in the **copyright rulings** and the installation of the **legal e-deposit**
- To review existing and planned changes to funding programmes and consider the **impact** it has on the KBR and similar FSI, and eventually make the needed adjustments
- To consider the appropriateness of including funding for digital collection management as an (additional) item of the **general dotation**, seeing that it is part of the 'core' function of the KBR



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