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Sydney's Powerhouse Museum appoints Lisa Havilah from Carriageworks as first CEO

ABC Arts

By national arts reporter [Michaela Boland](#)

Sydney's Powerhouse Museum is about to get its fourth leader in five and a half years, with Carriageworks boss Lisa Havilah appointed to the top job.



PHOTO: As CEO of Carriageworks, Lisa Havilah oversaw an increase in overall attendances from 110,000 in 2011 to 1.32 million in 2017. (Supplied: Museum of Arts and Applied Sciences/Renee Nowytarger)

Reporting directly to arts minister Don Harwin, Havilah will assume control of the state government's planned \$1.17 billion move to a new riverside site in Parramatta. In a statement, Arts Minister Don Harwin said: "I'm thrilled to welcome Lisa to this crucial role. There is no doubt her wealth of experience puts her in a class of her own."

"MAAS's future, in particular the move of the Powerhouse Museum, requires expert governance — I have total confidence Lisa is the person for the job." Ms Havilah said: "This is such a visionary project and I'm really looking forward to working with the government, the trust and with the staff of the Powerhouse."



PHOTO: Powerhouse Museum has been located in the inner city suburb of Ultimo since 1988. (Mhairi McClymont)

Havilah has since 2011 overseen significant expansion of the Carriageworks multi-arts hub in Redfern. Before that, she built her career in western Sydney as director of Campbelltown Arts Centre, after a period as deputy at Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre. Havilah has been a champion for western Sydney arts and a successful

collaborator with the NSW Coalition government, which has often praised Carriageworks' success with audience engagement at relatively small cost to taxpayers.

Havilah will be the first chief executive to run the Powerhouse which, as a museum, has historically been run by a director. Dawn Casey left in 2013, at the end of her contract, after the role was advertised and she failed to be re-appointed. An untried director, Rose Hiscock, was appointed instead. Ms Hiscock re-named the Powerhouse as the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, but resigned after two years after accepting the job to oversee a start-up Science Museum in Melbourne when the NSW government announced it intended to move the Powerhouse to western Sydney.



PHOTO: The announcement was made on the proposed site for the new Powerhouse Museum. (ABC News: Kathleen Calderwood)

Hiscock's deputy Dolla Merrillees was appointed to the top job, but [resigned earlier this year](#) after the ABC revealed she approved museum funds be spent on a lavish fashion fundraiser which ended-up costing more than it raised.

The Powerhouse has existed for 129 years and been located at Ultimo, inner Sydney, since 1988. Four years after then-NSW premier [Mike Baird announced an intention to sell the Ultimo site and relocate the Powerhouse to western Sydney](#), the move has not yet commenced.

The announcement of the new MAAS chief executive comes as Create NSW takes the next step in determining the new Powerhouse Museum's architectural design. An international design competition is slated for launch in early December under the oversight of UK-based independent architectural competition organisers Malcolm Reading. The winning design is due to be announced in the second half of 2019, after the March election.

NSW Labor has expressed its opposition to the move, the announcement of which triggered a backlash. In June 2016, the NSW Legislative Council announced an inquiry into museums and galleries that would look into the Powerhouse Museum move. The inquiry is still underway and scheduled to meet next Friday, November 16.

The riverside site in Parramatta chosen for the new museum has been [identified by experts as flood-prone and highly dangerous](#).

Ms Havilah will report to the arts minister, rather than board chairman as per the previous structure, and her job description is heavily weighted towards managing the move and build of the new museum.

MAAS's operating expenditure in 2017 was \$61 million and the chief executive is expected to have in-depth knowledge and understanding of the workings of museum collections and major exhibitions. None of Ms Havilah's previous roles incorporated collections oversight. The chief executive salary is band three, which pays approximately \$400,000.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-11-09/powerhouse-museum-appoints-lisa-havilah-new-chief-executive/10482594>