

S U M M A R Y   R E P O R T



ENGLISH HERITAGE



THE INSTITUTE OF CONSERVATION



**ARCHITECTURAL  
CONSERVATORS:  
EDUCATION  
AND  
TRAINING  
IN ENGLAND**

*Preserve as Found*

MAY 2006

### Definition and Competencies of an Architectural Conservator

For the purposes of this report the following definitions and competencies were used:

*A conservator is a professional who, through specialised education, knowledge, training, aptitude and experience, formulates and implements all the activities involved in conservation, in accordance with accepted ethical codes. Conservators contribute to making our heritage accessible and sustainable, thus helping current and future generations to enjoy and understand this vital asset.*

An architectural conservator may undertake consultancy as well as preventative and practical conservation. The latter includes the repair and preservation of historic buildings, especially their carved, applied or painted decoration, as well as that of structures or individual objects within archaeological sites. The material disciplines within this are gilding, glass, metals, monuments, plaster, sculpture, stone, timber, wall and floor tiles, terracotta, and wall paintings.

The main occupational characteristics and professional activities of this group comprise:

- Understanding the character, integrity, context, evolution and significance of the fabric of a site, ruin, building, architectural element or monument
- The knowledge and ability to identify materials used in construction and their expected performances and deterioration mechanisms
- Diagnosis, documentation and interpretation of information obtained from assessments of the existing condition, pathology, past treatments, current influences and future impacts of conservation interventions
- The ability to effectively communicate and work with other conservation professionals, craftspeople, administrators and laypeople to devise holistic conservation approaches and to train others in conservation theory and practice
- The skill and knowledge to advise, commission specific analyses, undertake trials and on-site testing and carry out appropriate treatments
- The knowledge and application of established conservation principles for recommended treatment and maintenance procedures
- The ability to interpret and document research, investigation and conservation interventions in a clear, comprehensive format



# SUMMARY REPORT

MAY 2006

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## Context

Architectural conservators are a small but vital community within the built heritage sector whose practitioners are entrusted with the conservation, repair and preservation of the entire constituent elements of historic buildings, often working *in situ*. Conservators ensure the proper preservation of our cultural heritage, sustaining it for the benefit and enjoyment of current and future generations. To do this, they must demonstrate a unique combination of practical proficiency and sound grasp of theory.

Within the next 10-15 years, a large segment of the current generation of active conservators will be retiring, raising concerns over whether there will be a sufficient number of suitably qualified and experienced conservators available to fill their place. English Heritage, as the Government's advisor on the historic environment in England, and the Institute of Conservation (Icon), as the UK professional body for conservators, share a responsibility to ensure the highest standards of conservation practice, including the provision of effective conservation training. While it seems clear that sufficient numbers of conservators are being trained each year in

England, it remains uncertain whether enough of them can demonstrate the necessary skills, knowledge and relevant experience across the diverse material disciplines.

The architectural conservation community, characterised by its highly specialised sub-groups, is further complicated by a perceived blurring between the specialist work of conservators and other aspects more readily associated with traditional building craft skills. This overlap, which is more prevalent in some categories than others, raises questions about the nature and provision of appropriate training, and the need to better define career paths and roles within architectural conservation – as well as the relevance of professional accreditation.

To address these questions and concerns, English Heritage, in collaboration with the Institute of Conservation (Icon), commissioned the Centre for Education and Industry (CEI) at the University of Warwick to carry out directed research. Undertaken between January and August 2005, this involved in-depth qualitative interviews with

12 training institutions, 51 employers, and 40 employed and self-employed practitioners, which set out to:

- Assess the current state of training in architectural conservation, including employer and practitioner views and address the issue of career progression
- Produce a qualitative assessment of the profession, identifying strengths and weaknesses, to aid the relevant bodies in planning and adapting for future needs
- Develop and support coordinated national recruitment, training, career progression and continuing professional development (CPD) strategies
- Provide data to complement the National Heritage Training Group (NHTG) Skills Needs Analysis in England (2005) report *Traditional Building Craft Skills: Assessing the Need, Meeting the Challenge* and make comparative assessments between both sub-sets of the built heritage conservation sector

## Conclusions

This research provided the first-ever opportunity for architectural conservation practitioners and training providers to express their opinions about current education and training practices, skills needs, careers and employment. The research makes it clear that there is some complacency in the profession; much is done on an ad hoc basis. The sector relies

heavily upon the enthusiasm and commitment of individuals, rather than having a long-term strategy for training, skills development and career progression and retention.

Regarding education and training, the research reveals four types of course, training people from a range of backgrounds and experience to different levels:

- 1 University undergraduate or postgraduate courses: generic in content and mainly theoretical, providing a broad-based approach and emphasising transferable skills, as not all graduates will wish to enter the conservation profession. Also offering full or part-time heritage conservation programmes which provide a general overview of conservation philosophy
- 2 Specialist conservation centres: providing a relatively large number of courses within one institution solely devoted to conservation education, sometimes having developed as a substantial department within an academic institution
- 3 Traditional skills-based courses: often within further education colleges as higher education franchises offering HND or Foundation degree courses
- 4 Specialised architectural conservation departments: found within educational institutions and often have a national and international reputation and clientele

It was also established that:

- Full-time 'traditional skills'-orientated conservation courses are well subscribed
- Foundation degrees are successful and are being given some priority by universities, but there is some evidence of limited progression of students through to full BA status
- Postgraduate courses and professional updating programmes are robust and recruit satisfactorily
- There are some excellent examples of flexible delivery, designed to suit individual students and the sector's needs alike

A detailed analysis of the architectural conservation field and the information gathered during the research are contained in the full report, which can be downloaded from the English Heritage and Icon websites (for details see page 8).

The report's conclusions can be divided into the following five categories:

### The Architectural Conservation Profession

- Composed primarily of micro-businesses and small/medium-sized enterprises, and dependent on the availability of freelance conservators
- Largely dominated by white males; while more females are entering the profession there is no ethnic diversity
- Individualism and the competitive environment are valued, but business depends upon teamwork and the sharing of good practice through networking
- Employment market for conservation graduates is ill-defined, with little awareness of the number of current or future graduates needed
- Distinct absence of professional career structure
- Poor careers advice and guidance
- The professional accreditation scheme, operated by Icon, is not well understood within parts of the architectural conservation community; there is a need for Icon to consider how to communicate the potential benefits of accreditation to this group

### Heritage Sector Issues

- Need for a higher profile for conservation issues in the built heritage sector and a clearer definition of the sector's relationship to the construction industry
- Difficulties in establishing a clear professional definition of the architectural conservator greatly restricted the capacity to target this research
- Low rates of pay and a large freelance population may have a negative effect on the heritage sector by producing an unsustainable workforce that cannot afford further training. This may in turn result in a diminished knowledge base, reduced skills, and the further loss of qualified conservators
- Competitive tendering seen by many employers and practitioners as adding to bureaucratic burden; at times acts as a disincentive to the maintenance of high standards of conservation skills
- Funding constraints at national level were considered to impede the influence and involvement of English Heritage, both in training and setting practical standards

### Current Education and Training for Architectural Conservators

- Lack of strategic planning regarding future conservation education and training, potentially leading to a lowering of standards
- Little formal consultation between course providers and practitioners on course content/provision and whether it meets sector needs
- Limited practical training content in some courses is considered problematic by many practitioners
- Practical work placements severely lacking and too reliant upon an informal network
- Little evidence of expansion in the number of students, though recruitment is currently stable
- Conservation education and training faces similar problems to those of other spheres of vocational education, especially regarding low social perceptions of the value of skills-based training

### Meeting Sector Needs through Current Education and Training

- Feeling of complacency regarding education and training requirements, which have remained unchanged for many years
- No clear indication from the sector of ideal education and training course content
- No professional guidelines exist to support course development by universities or colleges
- Current range of courses provide an effective general introduction to architectural conservation, though at present there are significant variations in the extent and range of discipline-specific training – including gaps, such as the lack of any dedicated training course for the conservation of stained glass
- Graduate output appears to meet demand, but employers consider some graduates not always well-equipped to enter the conservation field, in particular where there is an immediate need for practical proficiency
- Formal professional development for university and college staff is lacking and there is a need to develop effective training for current and future trainers
- Continuing Professional Development for many practitioners appears limited to 'on the job' opportunities and informal networking

### Ability of Universities and Colleges to Supply this Training

- Universities and colleges appear to be coping with current resources, but financial pressures are increasing and some anxiety exists about future sustainability
- Severely limited ability of institutions to respond to demands for more practical course content
- Some undergraduate courses facing recruitment problems in an increasingly competitive market for generalist courses
- Internal and external reports on course quality are generally good and most students appear satisfied with their educational or training experience, but the quality monitoring regimes of academic institutions do not in themselves guarantee a course's vocational relevance
- Employers call for the reintroduction of an apprenticeship scheme, reflecting strong preference for experiential learning and the equipping of recruits with better practical skills
- No defined quality assurance structures or criteria with which to assess expected outcomes

# Action Plan

Effective change and sustainable long-term training and skills provision can only be achieved by the relevant stakeholder groups working together. This should be coordinated through the two sector skills councils with which architectural conservators are most closely aligned, that is, Creative & Cultural Skills and ConstructionSkills. As the NHTG is responsible for the training and development of traditional building craft skills and there is a clear link between craftspeople and some architectural conservation work, they are also integral to any partnership between the two sector-related skills councils, as well as to their relationship with English Heritage and Icon. In particular, Icon needs to ensure recognition of its role as the profession's pressure group, and work with its partners to influence better training and skills development for all conservators, including those working in the built heritage sector.

This partnership approach will provide better opportunities for collaboration and for sharing experience, vision and resources. It can assist in providing careers information and raising awareness of conservation within the built heritage sector. It will also ensure a more strategic approach to conservation skills and training provision than hitherto. The sector partnership should in the near future fund a further study to establish the need for and development of apprenticeships within conservation linked to the NVQ system or Professional Accreditation of Conservator-Restorers (PACR) scheme ([www.pacr.org.uk](http://www.pacr.org.uk)).



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This Action Plan highlights the key areas needing to be addressed and who within the partnership should tackle them:

## Strategic Vision

**Creative & Cultural Skills** – through its Heritage Skills Panel must define its future training and educational advisory role in relation to national conservation needs and establish an Education and Training Working Group for conservation with representation from Icon, English Heritage and relevant training providers

**ConstructionSkills and NHTG** – liaise with Creative & Cultural Skills, Icon and English Heritage on current efforts to improve the conservation content in mainstream

construction courses. Also, develop aspects of education policy and initiatives to promote conservation in schools through the OCR History & Heritage and GCSE Construction & the Built Environment syllabi

**Sector Partners** – work together to plan future education, training, skills and professional needs; through the Learning & Skills Council, access existing and future Government funding more effectively to support conservation education and training, especially in the case of apprenticeships

**Sector Partners** – with the Learning & Skills Council, assess the need to rejuvenate traditional full-time apprenticeships in those skills areas facing greatest skills

shortages, such as stained glass, stone, ceramics, metals, preventative conservation and project management

**Sector Partners** – explore ways of maximising existing training provision, such as Centres of Excellence, and of developing training so as to sustain current courses, while ensuring such initiatives are linked to the NHTG strategy within the Skills Action Plan outlined in *Traditional Building Craft Skills: Assessing the Need, Meeting the Challenge*

**Icon** – seek funding for a permanent in-house education, training and skills coordinator and thereby assume a substantial role for careers liaison and profile-raising for conservation with heritage stakeholders and the general public

## Recruitment and Career Development

**Sector Partners** – devise and develop an appropriate strategy to improve information on and support for careers within architectural conservation. Schools and the Connexions Service must become a prime liaison focus and Icon must assume a future careers support role

**Creative & Cultural Skills, grant-giving and regulatory bodies, Icon and training providers** – address the current lack of any coherent regional national and international marketing of conservation education

**Creative & Cultural Skills and Icon** – establish a Conservation Ambassadors scheme, similar to the ConstructionSkills

Construction Ambassadors scheme, so practitioners can visit colleges aiming to raise awareness of the profession

**Creative & Cultural Skills, English Heritage and Icon** – develop a mentoring scheme, enabling younger conservators to gain experience and knowledge from more established conservators

**Sector Partners** – support the need for funding to cover the costs of practitioner involvement in and contribution to CPD events, including information on access to grants and bursary schemes

**English Heritage** – develop a more formal approach to encouraging and funding work experience and internships throughout the sector, with a future focus on placements with accredited organisations and using HLF-funded bursaries schemes

**Sector Partners** – provide information and guidance to help students more readily differentiate between what different conservation courses are designed to do, and what to expect after graduation

### Education, Training and Skills Development

**Sector Partners** – develop a new vision, which defines and integrates what is needed

by examining the whole spectrum of theoretical learning, practical skills and attitudes to conservation. This could include the rejuvenation of traditional apprenticeships, with particular reference to emerging new Specialist Diplomas and the Young Apprentice scheme

**Sector Partners** – provide a strategic approach to conservation education and training by considering the idea of centralised ‘heritage academies’

**Sector Partners** – develop flexible training partnerships, bringing together universities and further education colleges, professional bodies and conservation sector representatives, so as to create networks of interlinked craft, technician, degree, postgraduate and professional development courses

**Icon and English Heritage** – refine the professional definitions of conservators and rapidly establish appropriate training criteria so that future education and training course structures can be designed to provide the sector more precisely with what it requires

**English Heritage and Icon** – facilitate better sector support and guidance, building upon and extending existing connections so as to develop closer links with universities and re-establish the Conservation Teaching Forum

### Accreditation and Standards

**Icon** – must provide strong political leadership for its members, particularly within the national training arena, and with regard to the setting and maintenance of standards

**Icon** – proceed with assessing current perceived concerns about the professional accreditation process and in promoting greater understanding of the scheme in the architectural conservation community

**English Heritage** – act with other funding bodies, Government agencies and Icon to maintain quality standards within architectural conservation

### Quality Framework

The research report identified a particular area of weakness: a lack of sector guidance to colleges and universities that would assist in the structuring or design of training courses for prospective entrants to the sector. This guidance would encourage greater vocational relevance and ease the subsequent transfer of graduates into applied conservation work. Equally, there is no definition of preferred sector content. This would enable organisations such as English Heritage or Icon to review programmes and identify those which are the most effective and appropriate in meeting sector needs. Such criteria would encourage a closer relationship between sector representatives and training providers. It would more readily bridge the evident gap between practical conservation and academic course provision. A kitemark system could be developed, identifying and promoting particularly effective training courses.

It is strongly recommended that a quality framework is developed which defines the essential elements of course content as seen from the point of view of the sector. This could be undertaken by self-evaluation or assessed by external review. A quality framework model is included in the Action Plan (Section 5.5) of the main report, and could form the basis of further development by the sector partners.



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The research and production of this summary document and the main report were funded by English Heritage and PDF versions of both reports can be downloaded from the following websites:

[www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk)

[www.icon.org.uk](http://www.icon.org.uk)

[www.citb-constructionskills.co.uk](http://www.citb-constructionskills.co.uk)

[www.nhtg.org.uk](http://www.nhtg.org.uk)

[www.warwick.ac.uk/cei](http://www.warwick.ac.uk/cei)



ENGLISH HERITAGE

English Heritage  
Customer Services Department  
PO Box 59  
Swindon SN2 2YP  
Tel: 0870 333 1181

e-mail: [jeremy.luck@english-heritage.org.uk](mailto:jeremy.luck@english-heritage.org.uk)  
[www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk)



THE INSTITUTE OF CONSERVATION

Icon, the Institute for Conservation  
3rd Floor, Downstream Building  
1 London Bridge  
London SE1 9BG  
Tel: 020 7785 3805

e-mail: [admin@icon.org.uk](mailto:admin@icon.org.uk)  
[www.icon.org.uk](http://www.icon.org.uk)



The Centre for Education and Industry  
University of Warwick  
Coventry  
CV7 4AL  
Tel: 024 7652 3909

e-mail: [p.j.huddleston@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:p.j.huddleston@warwick.ac.uk)  
[www.warwick.ac.uk/cei](http://www.warwick.ac.uk/cei)

Designed by:  
Intuitive Design  
Tel: 01621 868 698  
[www.intuitive-design.co.uk](http://www.intuitive-design.co.uk)

