

Notes in response to the proposed Guide to Training Plans for Heritage Lottery Funded projects.

We wholeheartedly welcome this initiative. As an educational charity working to enhance provision for the preservation and conservation of heritage, UKIC has been advocating the need for the training opportunities inherent in Lottery funded projects and for recognition of the skills shortage problems that hamper these projects. The following comments are mostly general in nature, intended to inform thinking in the development of the guidance material and the 'culture' change agenda that lies behind it.

1. Introduction

While we applaud the requirement that projects of over £1M should set out Training Plans and entirely agree that smaller projects would benefit from these, we also recognise that there are inherent weaknesses in this for projects relating to the conservation of collections in archives, libraries, museums and elsewhere (the 'moveable heritage'). Building and monument conservation projects can so often cost in excess of £1M, but collections projects rarely need this level of expenditure. Indeed, the HLF has itself, since 1998, conveyed the message to institutions in all these sectors that collections projects of this magnitude would be much less likely to be supported than smaller, more tightly prioritised ones. They are distinguished as 'revenue projects' simply because they pay staff to be employed directly on undertaking the project, rather than, for example, buying a heritage asset and paying a company to renovate it. In reality there is little difference, but the message has been conveyed that revenue projects of more than £100,000 are unlikely to be looked upon favourably.

We are faced with a dilemma here. We all want smaller projects to maximise training opportunities as well as larger ones, but smaller, collections-focussed projects are slow in materialising because they are hampered by lack of expertise and available skills.

Archives and library collections projects for example have suffered significantly over the last five years from lack of relevant conservation skills and knowledge at a high enough level available for recruitment to the necessary fixed-term contracts. Consequently the projects have, usually retrospectively, had to be re-modelled to run with trainees. This latter fact in itself is not a weakness – on the contrary, it provides an opportunity for project funding to contribute to increasing the skills base in this country so that future projects may be less weakened by shortages. But the perception amongst archivists and librarians that they will not get competent staff to run conservation projects is a major disincentive for them to put these kinds of project bids forward. Equally, for curators, archivists and librarians in small institutions with no conservation staff, the expertise necessary to identify a suitable collection conservation programme and work it up into a viable project is not available and so applications don't get written.

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The training opportunities provided by HLF projects should be embraced and projects advocated as a means of increasing a skilled workforce. Archivists, librarians and curators responsible for collections needing conservation should be encouraged to work up bids for this type of project and given sufficient, targeted guidance and support so that they overcome their reticence at considering such projects. We in UKIC have been proposing to assist with this as a part of the work of a mooted 'Conservation Skills Co-ordination Service' that would, amongst other things, be available to assist curators etc to work up project bids that involve training opportunities. HLF can help by raising awareness amongst institution managers that their collection conservation needs could be translated into viable small projects, with training opportunities at their heart. This will help to improve the condition of UK heritage collections and will also ensure that more people are available in the heritage workforce for use in future projects.

Depending upon how the Training Plans guidance will be disseminated, it would be helpful if more proactive encouragement is given to potential applicant organisations. Providing possible applicants with a passive guidance document and indicating that for most projects its contents are, at most, optional would not perhaps be making the most out of the purpose of the document. Instead, the guidance could be presented as part of an approach to institutions in regions, asking them if their collections could benefit from systematic conservation planning and project support with a view to acting as places where skills can be developed. Given the right brief, we would be happy to help do this.

2. Developing a training plan

This part of the document is very laudable and we can support all of the statements it sets out in its first part. It is not clear however how a project applicant will know what skills might be needed for a project. Of course some will be self-evident but others, especially conservation programmes, will not easily be defined in practical terms. We are probably all aware of HLF projects that have got underway with insufficient planning calculations, leading to an immediate realisation, upon starting the project, that proposed targets are not feasible. Undoubtedly there have been other initiatives, undertaken by HLF, that set out to resolve this, but yet there is no targeted support available to assist applicants in this more general way for collections conservation projects, let alone in the more specific field of identifying skills training possibilities.

In part 2 & also 3 Structure & Contents etc.: -

Sub-contracting project work

For moveable heritage conservation projects involving self-employed or other business contractors, it is, as stated, essential to be confident that the quality of the work provided will be sufficient both to meet the project purpose and to protect public heritage. There is only one quality assured mechanism in the collections conservation sphere – The Conservation Register.

The Register, founded by the erstwhile Museums & Galleries Commission and now owned and operated by UKIC and its management partners, exists as a service to the public and to publicly funded institutions to provide impartial guidance on

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commissioning conservation work from registered practices. The practices are heavily vetted, to a set of criteria laid down by Register's Advisory Panel, which consists of representatives from Resource, English Heritage, Historic Scotland, Council for the Care of Churches and all of the conservation professional bodies and trade associations under the National Council for Conservation-Restoration. In addition, the criteria now include a mandatory requirement for all new register applicants that they are accredited members of their relevant professional body. Existing registered practices are having their registration renewed and the accreditation requirement imposed so that, within the next three years all registered practices will be accredited under a Common Accreditation Framework using the PACR Standards (as they are known – see www.ukic.org.uk).

The major strengths of The Register are that:

- It provides a source of 600 highly competent, specialist conservation business practices in all 'moveable' heritage spheres, including site-located ones such as wall-paintings and stained glass conservation
- It is searched impartially using sophisticated data software
- Each search results in detailed information about five practices in an area, including details of practitioners continuing professional development and of independent referees
- User communities and institutions (such as English Heritage and Council for the Care of Churches for example) can rely on its accuracy and impartiality, removing the risk of litigation for unfair competition by using their own lists of contractors that are not independently vetted.

We firmly support your statements about the importance of high standards and hope that you include reference to The Conservation Register in your guidance. We intend to expand The Register to include data on practices able to take on trainees (interns or Graduate Apprentices) under a national Internship framework and standards currently being produced. Once this is in place it will further support the HLF in advancing its training plans.

3.4 Work Placements

This part refers to local colleges. It may be helpful to refer also to University courses training students in conservation skills. Projects can form an ideal location for a time limited work placement for an undergraduate or post-graduate conservation student. Many of the craft skills discussed in university courses need expanding and honing in work placements ('Internships') if they are to reach the level of providing high quality results. Collections projects lend themselves to this kind of skills development opportunity as they include the need for basic, routine and intermediate level conservation tasks, as well as high-level expertise.

All university conservation courses (about 20 around the UK) seek internship placement opportunities, but there are few, if any, local Further Education Colleges offering training in collections conservation skills. Many may provide building crafts courses, but the knowledge and expertise required to teach collections conservation is not sufficiently commonplace to make Further Education Colleges set up courses. A more vibrant collections project application environment may improve this situation,

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but in the meantime, for the archives, libraries and museums community, this guidance should encourage links with relevant university courses.

3.7 Graduate Apprenticeships (Internships)

We welcome reference to these and would urge future reference to the Internship framework soon to be completed (we will keep you informed). It may be helpful to include a definition of the term Internship in your Glossary, cross-referred from Graduate Apprenticeships. If you need help in defining Internship, please do not hesitate to contact us.

3.9 Volunteer Development

We warmly support emphasis on volunteer training. As with student Interns mentioned above, there are many tasks that require the support of volunteers under periodic supervision by professionals. However, until the conservation community actually articulates which these tasks are for each of the conservation disciplines, no project applicant can set out the use of volunteer support with confidence. The protection of heritage from insufficiently skilled operations is an important feature of this document. Without further, detailed clarification of which tasks require professional skills and which can be undertaken by non-specialists and volunteers, the optimum use of both to ensure heritage is preserved cannot be achieved. We urge HLF to explore every opportunity to undertake such clarification of these distinctions so that more preservation activities can be undertaken with their project support. We have made proposals for this kind of initiative in the moveable heritage sphere and look forward to discussing further it with you.

4. A Training & Development Plan

This is all excellent guidance. We would wish to add to the standards referred to under your sixth bullet point by inclusion, as an example, of the PACR (Professional Accreditation of Conservator-Restorer) Standards. Copies of these are available from www.ukic.org.uk. We are actively exploring with the Cultural Heritage National Training Organisation how our standards articulate with theirs and they are keen to explore overlapping uses in course validation and elsewhere.

We are grateful for the reference to UKIC in the eight bullet point and can provide contact details if you would like to include these, for The Conservation Register as well as UKIC generally.

We are grateful for the opportunity offer support and comments on this document and look forward to close collaboration in the future.

Chris Woods
Chairman, UKIC
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