UKIC Stone and Wall Painting Section
Committee response to the NC-CR Convergence Consultation Document

1 Executive Summary

1.1 The Committee continues to support the aspirations of a united conservation body for the UK and is therefore in favour of the convergence process.

1.2 The Committee does not feel that the consultation undertaken to produce this current document was sufficiently widespread and that it has not adequately taken into account the role and importance of individual members.

1.3 The Committee considers the remit and intentions of the groups identified in Chart 2 are too vague at present, and feels there is a risk that increased spread of interest groups (including regional groups) may weaken the current 'volunteer' network.

1.4 The Committee would strongly encourage the vanguard group to define a more clear and specific vision for the new body at all levels to help members to understand their individual and collective roles and rewards.

1.5 The Committee feels that the perceived increase in electronic communication proposed for the new body will required dedicated and fully resourced support since this acts as a 'linchpin' between the formal governance and management groups and the specific interests groups.

1.6 In principle, the Committee:

- supports the general framework of the Governing Body, its associated election process, and the duration of the first term.
- supports the intentions of the Advisory Council and the Officers Group.
- supports the staff allocation but would strongly encourage an increase in central office staffing to assist in a centralised membership activities programme and IT support.
- supports the notion of simplified membership categories
- strongly encourages an active and explicit method and status for student and recent graduates in relation to membership and accreditation.
- expresses concerns over the current status of the both the regional and members groups.

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Suggested name of the new body

1.7 The committee suggests that a new name for the body could be 'The Association of Conservators – UK' or (ACUK), though hopes that this decision will be taken under wider consultation.

2 Specific review comments

2.1 Despite the claims of wider consultation and discussion between the vanguard groups and their representatives, there is a general feeling that the process to date does not appear to have clearly or adequately identified the nature/extent/ range of the various groups and their specific membership.

2.2 This is reflected in this document through the following:

- The definitions provided for 'conservation' and 'moveable heritage' demonstrate a clear bias towards objects-based practical conservators. They contradict the intentions expressed that this new body would 'unite the conservation profession and the wider conservation community' and has created considerable scepticism and resentment on the part of section members. Correspondence between individual members and the UKIC Chair and Executive Director have already highlighted this important issue. The committee feels that his response adequately addressed the inappropriateness of the document's terminology, yet the pervading error in language has highlighted the need to re-examine the composition of the vanguard advisory group, and to reflect on the wider issues relating to the remit of united body. In particular, there were valid concerns raised about the parameters and structure of the current PACR accreditation system. It is noted that all the email correspondence, including the UKIC responses, were forwarded to Blue Spark consulting, and the committee encourages its careful reading and review.
- The document and proposed framework appears to have concentrated heavily on the higher level management structure at the cost of understanding the role and place of the individual member, and most importantly how their volunteer input is organised, fostered, sustained and ideally expanded.
- The proposed structure lacks definition in the way in which the average individual member relates to the GB and associated standing committees, with the only specific reference made to access to membership services, and increased use of electronic communication.

Specialisms and their structure

2.3 At present, sections within UKIC operate under a clearly defined system of organisational rules, with elected representation through annual meetings and clear committee structures, and a defined mechanism of communication through a position on council. For section members, this is their direct link to the Institute as a whole, and section chairs take this role seriously.

2.4 This document appears to suggest that these formal procedures are abolished, yet doesn't offer clear methods to ensure their continued activity or the accountability of their actions both downwards (towards individual membership) and upwards (towards the GB).

2.5 In addition, it is identified that collective resources would be distributed on a forward request basis to groups, but no clear demarcation of annual limits, or methods for even, objective distribution are indicated.

2.6 Given their diversity in size and length of existence, and without any clear infrastructure, this committee has grave concerns that more 'established' groups could dominate the 'Institute' activities, drawing on the limited total resources. The reliance on volunteer input is already a significant challenge to specialist groups, especially ones such as S&WP which has a strong element of site-based private practitioners. It is feared that smaller specialist activities will get slowly squeezed out due to competitive pressures, and a growing feeling of tangential relevance.

Quantity and breakdown of committees and other groups

2.7 The new framework creates two new higher level groups (AC and OG), and identifies three distinct types of members' groups. At present, this arrangement lacks clarity. There is no clear hierarchy between these groups, nor a clear avenue for their communication towards the GB. The Committee noted that the connecting line of Chart 2 highlights this point clearly, suggesting that the members' group must somehow determine amongst themselves which of the management groups to approach. This 'three-way' junction needs careful review, and may be assisted through a well established electronic support network, staffed from the central office.

2.8 In addition, with the additional instigation of generalist regional groups, the committee is unclear whether these can be sustained through the existing volunteer workforce, or how additional volunteer support will be fostered. At worst, this extended and wide ranging collection of interest groups may act to discourage continued involvement by those existing volunteers who find it difficult to see any personal or collective benefit.

2.9 There is some concern that the body will not have sufficient membership to support both groups defined by special interest and those by region.

3 Suggested areas to be further explored

Definitions and scope

3.1 The new body must taken into account the need to clarify and amend the current terminology to reflect the wider conservation community that forms the prospective and projected membership. It is imperative that this is undertaken in an explicit and visible manner to ensure that those existing and prospective members who have felt excluded by the definitions within this document, and those used in previous NCCR convergence papers are clear about the intended inclusiveness of the new body.

3.2 The committee would also highlight the use of similar terminology within the current Conservation Register, and need to be carefully reviewed and amended as part of this exercise.

3.3 The terms requiring amendment include:

- **moveable heritage** (and the use of **portable heritage**) – neither of these reflects the breadth of the conservation community and should not be used. The Committee has reviewed definitions used by other conservation bodies, and recommends the term '**cultural property**' as defined in the Code of Ethics of the Canadian Association of Professional Conservators:

  > *Objects that are judged by society, or by some of its members, to be of historical, artistic, social or scientific importance.*
  >
  > ***Cultural property** can be classified into two major categories:*
  >
  > *1) Movable objects such as works of art, artefacts, books, archival material and other objects of natural, historical or archaeological origin.*
  > *2) Immovable objects such as monuments, architecture, archaeological sites and structures of historical or artistic interest.*

- **the three domains (libraries, archives and museums)** – these do not take into account the wider proposed membership and are extremely misleading. The phrase alienates private conservators, as well as those in education / training, and within the public sector. It is recommended that delineation of this sort is counter-productive and should be avoided.

3.4 The committee strongly recommends that emphasis be placed on characterising the professional attributes of the membership, rather than any limited description of the work that might be considered relevant. There are countless ways in which prospective membership of the new body can contribute towards conservation, and that is not exclusive to interventive or preventive action to historic fabric. In this regard, we would draw attention to the Canadian Association's definition of a conservation professional:

> *…**conservation professional** refers to any person who has the education, knowledge, ability and experience to formulate and carry out conservation activities in accordance with an ethical code such as this Code of Ethics and Guidance for Practice. The term, therefore, includes practising conservators (who are normally designated according to areas of specialisation, e.g. paintings conservator, textile conservator, architectural conservator) as well as conservation scientists, conservation technicians, conservation educators, conservation managers and conservation consultants.*

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Specialist and regional groups

3.5 The new body should undertake a clear evaluation and review of all existing 'specialist groups' with an aim at simplification, and clarity of purpose and intent. It is unclear how many existing groups are spread between the various vanguard bodies, nor the extent of any overlap or duplication. It is acknowledged that this exercise may be better served by waiting for the formation of the new body, however, with the apparent lack of a clear relationship between the GB and these groups, a detailed and structured proposal for the scope and intentions of any review should form part of the formation objectives.

3.6 The nature and intention of regional groups should be driven by the outcome of the review and reorganisation of the specialist groups, who should be tasked to address this as part of their overall remit.

Centrally-driven activities

3.7 The committee suggests that there needs to be a clear and regular system for 'Institute' activities and events which is centrally controlled and driven. This would provide a yearly schedule of event 'slots', which would then be offered to specialist sections or faculties, and could provide a method for encouraging cross-disciplinary thematic events bringing the membership together, rather than encouraging individual events in relative isolation. This would also encourage continued and routine involvement across membership against a framework that provided initial structure and significantly simplify and reduce the organisation and resource demands on the volunteer groups. Once established, it would also ensure even distribution of energy, time and resources across the specialist and regional components of the new body.

The UKIC Stone and Wall Painting Committee
18 February 2004

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APPENDIX 1: Section Background

UKIC S&WP Section comprise over 150 members from varying backgrounds including institutional and private practice conservators, scientists, consultants, architects, historians/researchers and academics.

At present, approximately 40% of membership is PACR accredited, with the vast majority going through the initial 'fast track' system.

Already an amalgam of two specialist sections, there is recognised alignment with other specialist sections, including metals, paintings, and historic interiors.

A large proportion of section members is directly involved in in-situ or site based conservation within historic buildings, either as private single practitioners or as part of larger conservation firms. Widely spread across the UK, the membership tends to have limited time or resources to engage in numerous 'Institute' activities, but there is reasonable loyal to section events, with attendance at the last 2 AGM's totally over 50, and the most recent conference being over-subscribed (at 100 people).