

Sustaining Our Living Heritage

Skills and training for the heritage sector



Heritage
Lottery Fund

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Front Cover:
Reed Lighter on Hickling Broad

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Masonry restoration at Highcliffe Castle



The United Kingdom's heritage is, in part, the product of generations of skilled labour.

Foreword

A sustainable future for our landscapes, habitats, buildings and artefacts depends upon the availability of people with a wide range of specialist craft and conservation skills – skills that are themselves part of our heritage.

The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) was set up in 1993 to distribute proceeds from the National Lottery to projects relating to the United Kingdom's heritage. In 1999 HLF commissioned research and consultation into the skills and training needs of the heritage sector. Our aims were to inform our policy making and to enable wider debate and action to support training for the heritage sector. The picture revealed by this research is not a happy one. Despite the flow of substantial funds from the HLF and many others into the repair and restoration of traditional structures and landscapes, the skill base has not grown to meet the demand. Poor investment in training, few new apprentices and an undervaluing of traditional skills are putting the heritage at risk. Many of our traditional skills are in danger of dying out. Positive action is needed to reverse this trend.

We will make funding available to address training issues within HLF funded projects, for example by taking on new apprentices or offering work placements. We will add additional safeguards to our tender requirements to ensure that only skilled craftspeople work on HLF projects. We will encourage

suitable partners in the delivery of heritage activity projects which raise the profile of heritage skills. We recognise the important contribution made by volunteers and we will support this work by funding training projects specifically for heritage volunteers.

Action is also needed by others. Training needs to be prioritised by heritage organisations; agencies commissioning conservation work need to ensure that only skilled craftspeople work on the delicate fabric of historic buildings and objects, building contractors need to develop traditional building skills; crafts skills need to be valued and revealed. We all need to become 'skill literate', recognising the hidden skills supporting our heritage. We will continue our dialogue with national agencies in the education, training and heritage sectors to encourage wide ranging responses which, together, can halt the skills decline.

Liz Forgan
Chair, Heritage Lottery Fund

The background to this research



Conservation of Grinling Gibbons carvings following the 1986 fire at Hampton Court.

In 1998, a MORI survey for the Heritage Lottery Fund revealed a deep-rooted concern among employers about the apparent shortage of people with the specialist skills needed by the heritage sector. One in three respondents reported difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff and almost half made reference to the lack of appropriate vocational education and training.

These concerns demanded further investigation and so, the following year, the HLF commissioned the HOST Consultancy to undertake a detailed piece of research into the skills and training needs of the sector.

The research had three aims:

- to establish the nature of the heritage labour market, including paid staff and volunteers.
- to assess the difficulties inherent in recruiting, retaining and training skilled staff.
- to make an assessment of the extent to which existing training opportunities are addressing the reported skills gaps and shortages.

The researchers reviewed other recent studies (including the Cultural Heritage National Training Organisation's labour market assessment), interviewed 40 heritage agencies and 50 employers and analysed the volume and range of vocational education and training opportunities of direct relevance to the sector. HOST's work was completed in April 2000 and was followed up, by HLF, with six meetings with employers, employees and training providers in London, Manchester, Belfast, Cardiff and Edinburgh.

This study is the first to consider the skills and training needs of all parts of the heritage sector. It provides a valuable overview of the context in which heritage specialists are being trained and employed. It identifies shortages of specialists in specific areas and skills gaps in existing workforces and it lays down a challenge to employers, training providers, funders and policy makers to work much more closely together to ensure the supply of skilled people on whom the heritage sector depends.

Heritage organisations tend to identify themselves with one of four sub-sectors – the cultural heritage, built heritage, natural heritage or industrial and transport heritage. Even within these sub-sectors there is a huge variety of practice and experience. There are organisations that employ several hundred staff and others that are run entirely by volunteers. There are organisations that have been operating for decades and many that are just a few years old. Some have tens of thousands of members; others have no members at all.

Whatever their remit, age or scale, heritage organisations today are working in a social, political and economic landscape that is significantly different to that of even ten years ago. While the need for specialist craft skills remains the same, heritage organisations are now urgently seeking people with skills in generic areas such as information technology, marketing, audience development, fundraising and financial management.

Heritage organisations today are dealing with a more demanding public than ever before. Interest in

every aspect of our heritage continues to grow and membership organisations, especially in the natural heritage, are experiencing year on year increases in numbers. As a result, the sector is having to acquire new skills in the development and delivery of membership services and in customer care.

The public has higher expectations and every heritage organisation is competing with alternative attractions for customers. The sector therefore needs more people with the skills to design, make and market new products, people who know about audience development, access and education, and people with the skills to make the most of new technologies.

Employees are becoming more demanding too. They are looking for employers who can offer opportunities for professional development and career progression, as well as a wage. While the focus of this study is the calibre of people available to the sector, the terms and conditions that heritage organisations are able to offer are clearly critical to the recruitment and retention of staff.

The heritage sector is hugely diverse and demands a wide range of specialist and generic skills, from the conservation of delicate documents to the management of vast tracts of open space.

The HOST study was commissioned in response to reports from employers of widespread shortages of people with the skills the sector needs. The research has unearthed two types of shortage. The first is a genuine, national shortage of people with specialist skills. This is particularly true of conservation and building skills, perhaps where the use of traditional materials is dying out, or where the training

opportunities are few and far between, or where the demand for skilled people has simply outstripped the supply. In these cases, the shortage applies not just to employees but to specialist sub contractors.

The other type of shortage is specific to those

The lack of conservation craft skills across the sector is a cause for considerable concern, because it is putting the fabric of the heritage at risk. In the built heritage sector the missing skills include the use of lime mortar, harling, thatching, flint knapping, leadworking and masonry. In the natural heritage sector, skills in walling, hedging, ditch maintenance and habitat management are all in short supply as are engineering skills in the industrial and transport sector. Where traditional materials are rarely used, for example Derbyshire stone for roofing, the skills to use them are in imminent danger of dying out.

Structures and attitudes

In order to understand how these shortages have come about and what the sector might do about them, it is important to look a little more closely at the economics and operational structure of the heritage sector.

The culture of sub contracting

The majority of heritage organisations are small and not many of them either need or have the resources to employ teams of full-time specialists. Short-term,



Broadsworth Hall. Plaster repair work in progress.

part-time work is very common and there is a tradition of sub-contracting specialist work. While there are many benefits to the heritage organisation in sub contracting, there are weaknesses in the system.

The first is that trustees and senior managers without a clear understanding of the importance of employing the best available skills may be tempted to go for the lowest bid. While attractive in the short-term, the cost to our heritage in the long term may be much greater.

Secondly, the demand for specialists may encourage sub contractors to take on more work than they can reasonably do. The specialist workers may then begin to feel that they are not doing as good a job as they would like to and may look for other forms of employment.

Thirdly, the pressure on sub contractors to fulfil contracts and to keep their costs down militates against the investment of time and money in training for apprentices and professional development for existing staff.

The importance of ensuring both that those who award the contracts recognise the long-term benefits of contracting the most skilled people and paying appropriate fees for that work cannot be overstated. Quite apart from the direct benefit to sustaining our heritage, a change in attitudes at this level should enable sub contractors to retain good workers and to invest more in training, thereby ensuring the future supply of specialist skills.

Career progression and professional development

Small organisations may not be able to offer their employees much opportunity to progress within the organisation. There may be nowhere to go but sideways and retaining good people is therefore a challenge.

There is a growing expectation on the part of employees that an employer should offer some form of professional development. The heritage sector as a whole has been slow to recognise the importance of training and professional development in recruiting and



The Albert Memorial. Railings restoration work in progress at the workshop of Paul Dennis & Sons Ltd.

retaining staff. While there are some excellent examples of good practice, too few organisations are making adequate provision in this area. Shortcomings include the absence of training policies, the size of training budgets and a disconnection between staff appraisal and training.

It is also the case that part-time workers tend to find it much more difficult to take the time for professional development and employers may think it more difficult to justify the expenditure.

Another issue for employers throughout the heritage sector is the trend towards self employment, not just among skilled craftspeople but also among professionals in areas such as marketing, computing, education work and fundraising. Unless terms and

conditions in the sector can be improved, the shortage of skilled people wanting to work in the heritage sector may become even more acute.

Volunteers

In some parts of the heritage, particularly in the natural, industrial and transport sectors, volunteers make up as much as 50% of the workforce. Structured programmes of training and development for those volunteers interested in increasing their skills could have a major impact on the sector and yet few heritage organisations see this as a priority, beyond the minimum required by health and safety legislation.



The Albert Memorial. Parnassus frieze restoration, work in progress.

Vocational education and training

The volume, range, quality and accessibility of vocational education and training are critical factors in developing and securing the skills the heritage sector needs. One of the criticisms made by people taking part in this study was that there is no single reliable source of information about the opportunities available.

There are three main reasons for this:

- the diversity of skills for which there need to be training opportunities.
- the number and range of different providers.
- the fact that many of the skills employed by the sector are not specific to the heritage sector and could be used elsewhere.

For this study, the researchers decided to limit themselves to:

- courses involving a compulsory vocational element and a formally recognised assessment procedure;
- post-16 education and training designed to provide an entry point to employment in the heritage sector;

- courses with a subject focus specifically linked to one or more of the four heritage sub sectors. So, architectural conservation was in but pure architecture was out; and
- the study did not explore non-accredited short courses.

Using information provided by the key heritage agencies, a postal survey of 100 selected providers and directories and databases compiled by the higher education sector, the researchers identified 367 full-time or part-time courses with a heritage-specific focus. This was not intended, in any sense, as a definitive list, but it did provide a useful overview of the range and type of opportunities available. It is important to note that since many of the short courses that are so popular among people already in employment are rarely formally assessed, they were not included in the count.

The table below (Figure 1) analyses the 367 courses in terms of qualifications, mode of delivery, duration and location. The range of qualifications on offer is particularly interesting.

Figure 1

Qualification	None	S/NVQ & intermediate	HNC/D	First degree	Post graduate	Total
	123	57	30	32	125	367
Mode		Short-intensive	Full-time	Part-time/eve	Other, e.g. distance learning	
		106	122	135	4	367
Duration FTE	2-3 days	3-20 days	1-6 months	7-12 months	12 months +	
	64	53	72	96	82	367
Location		England	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland	
		327	9	30	1	367

Source: HOST Policy Research



Lock restoration on Langollen Canal

Level

Just over a third of courses are at post-graduate level, reflecting the sector's demand for specialist provision. This is most evident in heritage management (where 78% of opportunities are at post graduate level), archives (55%), architecture and building conservation (51%). It is least evident in heritage and conservation building crafts (12%) and natural heritage, where only 3% of courses are for post graduates.

A third of these courses (123) offer no qualification that is recognised against national benchmarks of achievement. That said, many of them do award an institutional certificate that is recognised as a mark of quality by employers.

Duration

In terms of the duration of courses, there is an almost equal split between courses lasting less than six months and courses lasting more. Full-time courses are more common in architecture and building conservation, archives and heritage management, while natural heritage studies are predominantly part time, reflecting the expansion of NVQ courses. For building and furniture crafts, the most common mode of delivery is a short, intensive course lasting a few days.

Mode

Almost all courses are taught face to face, with distance learning and other modes of delivery used in just four of the 367 courses. One of the most flexible forms of vocational training is the customised course, with assessment linked to qualifications and delivered in the workplace, yet opportunities of this kind are offered by fewer than ten percent of providers.

Location

It is the distribution of courses across the UK that is most striking. Nearly 90% of all opportunities are in England, with Wales and Northern Ireland being particularly badly served. In-service training is therefore limited by the fact that there are few opportunities for it within easy reach. In most conservation specialisms, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are poorly provided for. This is also true of heritage management and natural heritage courses. Only in architecture and building conservation is training provision more evenly spread, although even here there is just one course in Northern Ireland.

The researchers concluded that while there may be a large number of education and training opportunities in the UK as a whole, the lack of marketing by training providers to the heritage sector, the location of the courses and the lack of provision for distance learning clearly disadvantages people working in areas where few courses are available locally.

Cost

No information was collected on the cost of training, but for employers, employees and self employed people, this is a critical issue. Quite apart from the question of course and assessment fees, small-scale employers experience real difficulty in releasing staff to undertake further training during the working day. If a course is not available locally, then evening study is not an option. When it comes to course fees, self employed people may not qualify for schemes that are available to employers and employees.

Links between employers and training providers

The relationship between employers and training providers is surprisingly tenuous. Only one third of employers can point to substantive links with the further and higher education sector and the connections between employers and training providers in the built and cultural heritage are particularly poor.

The providers reported that their contact with employers was mostly informal. About half of the colleges and universities involved heritage employers on subject-based advisory groups but there were few other examples of strategic partnerships between the two sectors.

The lack of structure to the relationship between employers and training providers might help to explain why education and training opportunities are failing, in many cases, to reflect and respond to the emerging needs of the heritage sector. While new further and higher education courses are being developed all the time, employers suggest that many of them are of doubtful relevance.

While some providers have long experience in heritage education and training the majority are relative newcomers. Of the university providers, two thirds have been offering courses since 1980, while three quarters of further education providers had no involvement in the sector before 1990.

The funding structure of post-16 vocational education and training reflect student rather than employer demand. This means that no matter how much employers might value a specialist course it will close if there is insufficient student demand.

Not all of the blame can be laid at the door of the training providers and there is still scope for employers and funders to work with providers to ensure a more effective response to the sector's training needs.

Responding to the challenge

Below are some of the many examples of ways in which heritage organisations are responding to the challenge of skills shortages.

- A group of six museums joined forces and set up the Textile Training Initiative. The consortium aims to work together to tackle the problem of rapidly vanishing textile skills. Its first step was to produce a training video for use by other organisations. Another museum has taken on an apprentice to train as a mule spinner.
- Essex County Council has developed a short course programme in traditional building skills that mixes basic theory with the development of practical skills. The practical element is taught by people with considerable expertise and experience. As well as meeting the problem of skills shortages, the course has also proved to be an effective way of enhancing the knowledge of construction professionals.
- An open-air museum carried out a skills audit of volunteers so that it could readily identify volunteers who would be particularly useful in different areas of the museum's work.
- A wildlife trust is working with the local college of further education to develop the skills of volunteers. Staff are encouraged to share their skills with volunteers.
- A national organisation, working in the natural heritage sector, recognised that its catering staff were only needed on a seasonal basis. Not wanting to lose good people, it piloted a training course for catering staff who would be interested undertaking light conservation work during the closed season.
- Cultural heritage organisations, in particular, are making extensive use of Scottish and National Vocational Qualifications (S/NVQs), particularly in areas such as customer care, administration and interpersonal skills. As a result, some are taking a leading role in developing new qualifications relevant to the heritage sector. Birmingham Museums Service, for example, is running a pilot NVQ project in heritage care and visitor services; West Cumbria Groundwork Trust is developing an NVQ in stone carving and, as a result of its positive experience of NVQs, the Wordsworth Trust is now writing a framework document for Modern Apprenticeships.
- In 1991 the National Trust conceived and pioneered a Modern Apprenticeship – Careership – for people wishing to become countryside wardens or gardeners in amenity horticulture. It is suitable for both school-leavers and older people seeking a career change. Careership is a three-year programme combining practical and theoretical training. Apprentices work alongside an experienced member of the Trust's staff as well as attending college courses selected and paid for by the Trust. The programme leads to a NVQ at level 2 or 3, and a National Trust Diploma.
- The Public Records Office (PRO) identified the need to expand the range of skills among its staff. The PRO collaborated with Liverpool and London universities to develop a Certificate, a Diploma and an MA in Archive Study aimed at lay professionals (i.e. those involved, but not qualified, in archival work). The courses combine on-site and distance learning and include an external placement. They are now also available to people in other organisations.
- British Waterways developed its own intensive courses in built heritage to ensure that their maintenance team had the skills most commonly needed in canal preservation – for example: conservation surveying of sites, lime mortar use and basic stone masonry. The intention is to make these courses available to their sub-contractors and to conservation officers, who are commonly involved in site supervision and support.



Conservation of mirrors following the 1986 fire at Hampton Court.

Conclusions

There is much work to be done to redress the imbalance between the demand and supply of skills needed by the heritage sector. While part of the answer lies in better intelligence on trends – a better sense of the marketplace that publicly funded bodies often lack – there is more to it than this.

There needs to be a radical shift in attitudes to training and development in the heritage sector. While some organisations are working hard to provide staff with opportunities to develop skills and to progress in their careers, there are still too many employers that are failing to recognise the vital importance of training and development, not just to their organisation or business, but to the future of the heritage sector. Too much time is being spent on site and asset management at the expense of the development of staff and volunteers.

The firms that provide many of the specialist skills the sector needs are failing to contribute to the debate about training needs and not investing sufficiently in their existing workforce. There are good economic reasons for this, but it is an area that cannot afford to be overlooked.

On the other side of the coin sit the providers of education and training. The research concludes that while there are many exciting and relevant opportunities both for students thinking of a specialist career in the heritage sector and for people already working in the sector, there is too wide a gap between the skills that heritage organisations and specialist firms need and what the education and training establishment is offering. A prerequisite for progress is clearly a closer working relationship and greater mutual respect between education and training providers, employers and sub contractors.

During the course of this study many comments have been made by employers, training providers and umbrella organisations about the challenges they face in sustaining our living heritage. While policy makers and funders can take action to support employers and training providers in securing the right kinds of skills for the sector, nothing will change until those individuals and organisations with direct involvement in the development and employment of skills decide that this is an issue that urgently needs to be addressed.



Coppicing trees in Hatfield Forest in December.



Thatching roof with combed wheat straw

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A park team building a path below Llyn Idwal.



Conservationists propping up a wooden beam at Llanerchaeron.



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