

## The Historic Environment Forum Skills Summit

This summit to discuss skills training provision in the sector was convened by IHBC and IfA for HEF, supported and subsidised by English Heritage. It was held on 1 May 2013, at St Andrews, Holborn. There were 60 invited participants from a broad spectrum of organisations across the sector.

### Presentations and discussion

During the morning delegates listened to scene-setting papers from representatives of the Archaeology Training Forum, The National Heritage Training Group, English Heritage, the Institute of Historic Buildings Conservation, and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The presenters were asked to cover the following broad points:

- *Who are we*
- *What do we do*
- *What is our experience of training?*
- *What lessons have we learned from it?*
- *What solutions would work for us?*
- *Our vision for training and qualifications for our part of the sector*

The presentations were followed by an open discussion session which was in part re-active but also identified common areas of concern which informed the afternoon session.

This began with breakout groups, facilitated by experts with a solid body of knowledge, and recorded and reported upon by young professionals with recent experience of work-place learning programmes. The breakout groups were charged with assessing the extent of mismatch between training provision and skills needs, identifying how they could be better aligned, defining how professionals *should* be acquiring and developing their skills throughout their careers, speculating on the advantages of a more integrated approach, painting a picture of what a better training and skills structure would look like – and identifying funding to bring it about.

### Principal findings

Plenary feedback and subsequent discussion concluded that while the current skills and qualifications framework contained much that can address the needs of the sector, there is little connection between academic and vocational skill sets and qualifications, and there are few non-graduate entry-routes into professional skills. There is much to be done to align university courses, vocational training, academic qualifications and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). A consistent view was that skills provision tends to concentrate on depth of expertise in specialisms rather than breadth of expertise in generalist heritage conservation and investigation.

To make training more relevant to skills needs in practice there needs to be a core element of conservation philosophy in all heritage qualifications and in qualifications for other professions whose work impacts on the historic environment. The main challenge was seen as how to ensure that all professions had an appreciation of core heritage principles and values whilst respecting the need for others specialist

skills. There was some desire for a generalist heritage management qualification based on mandatory core units with optional specialist elements. Universal comprehension of core principles and a widespread basic understanding of the roles and methods of the myriad specialisms in the sector would allow for more fluid career movement to meet evolving personal goals and (rapidly, unpredictably) changing sectoral needs.

An issue to be resolved was that paper-based evidence of expertise, required for the assessment of NOS units for example, presents barriers to many wishing to demonstrate their competence in craft activities. For both heritage management/investigation and craft skills, workplace learning was recognised as a successful means of skilling the sector, and of changing employers' attitudes to underwriting skills development, especially through apprenticeships. Sharing of resources between employers to create apprenticeship programmes would spread costs and promote partnership. In addition to formal apprenticeships there was recognition that the opportunities for informal on-the-job learning are rapidly diminishing as experienced senior practitioners are being prematurely removed from their posts, leaving relatively new entrants to the profession without expert guidance. A formal network of mentors and peer reviewers was proposed, perhaps facilitated by the relevant professional institutes managing mentoring programmes with defined outcomes agreed between mentor, mentee and professional body – this would also allow a staged transition to retirement. This could incorporate or complement cultural heritage mentors; elements could also be delivered through social media.

There needs to be a greater emphasis on Continuing Professional Development (CPD). The professional bodies are providing extensive resources but the culture of CPD is not yet fully embedded. Employees feel that employers are not providing enough support; others wish to see a greater personal commitment to CPD by individuals.

Throughout the discussion delegates emphasised that the strongest driver for appropriately competent professionals would or should come from the demand rather than the supply side: an initiative is required both to encourage the specification of accredited professionals as well as nurturing a larger proportion of 'intelligent clients'. Such an initiative might benefit from a coordinated advocacy endeavour by the relevant professional and craft bodies.

In answer to the question *What would a structure that is more fit for purpose look like?*, delegates envisioned

- non-traditional entry routes to the professions, for those without academic qualifications or those wishing to join from other professions or from the voluntary sector – promoting equality of opportunity and diversity
- stronger links between vocational and academic training, and between academic institutions, training providers and employers, allowing students following either route to undertake units from the other, and using portable credits in the Qualifications and Credits Framework (QCF)
- apprenticeship programmes and sustainable work-place learning opportunities
- new entrants to the sector equipped with a common overarching set of skills, covering generalist and specialist areas, shared management competencies,

universal grasp of conservation principles, a solid foundation in professional ethics and an understanding of the differing drivers of owners, developers, and public-, private-, and third-sector heritage experts

- alignment of the common elements of the existing National Occupational Standards to permit the development of more relevant qualifications
- a sector that is more cohesive through shared language and vocabulary
- more straightforward career transition between current specialisms, allowing for sideways and diagonal as well as upward progression
- a career atlas to help members of the heritage workforce plot their career pathways
- a sector that is more adaptable to changing demands, with a more flexible workforce
- comprehensive, up-to-date and sufficiently detailed labour market intelligence, allowing emerging skills gaps to be targeted
- greater emphasis on understanding of the contribution and needs of heritage in the training and CPD of property, construction, land management and other built environment professionals, to mainstream the demand for heritage skills and to create more 'intelligent clients'

### **Proposals for future action**

HEF accepted a preliminary report and agreed:

The establishment of a time-limited working group, reporting to HEF and other UK partners

- a. to develop a new framework for heritage qualifications and skills development
- b. to explore the merits of the model developed by EH and LANTRA for horticultural skills
- c. to review developments in HCA regarding place-making skills
- d. to hold further, UK-wide, summit meetings to review progress of the working group and HEF
- e. to disseminate good practice examples through appropriate channels
- f. to explore the scope for cooperation beyond UK
- g. to look at 'surprising partnerships'

The establishment of a task group to promote a client demand for skilled heritage practitioners

- h. to review attitudes towards accredited professionals in other sectors
- i. to open a conversation with DCMS, other government departments and opposition parties
- j. to seek partners elsewhere in the UK

The need to promote to the client sector the need for skilled practitioners, emphasising the fragility of present provision.

Better integration between HEF advocacy and NHPP activities in support of training and skills infrastructure and development

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Services Department:

Telephone: 0870 333 1181

Fax: 01793 414926

Textphone: 0800 015 0516

E-mail: [customers@english-heritage.org.uk](mailto:customers@english-heritage.org.uk)