

ACTION ON SKILLS TRAINING FOR THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

Introduction: Donald Hankey, President, ICOMOS-UK

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen!

Background

On behalf of ICOMOS-UK, may I bid you all welcome to this two day conference to develop “**Action on Skills Training for the Historic Environment**”. Although initiated by ICOMOS-UK, this conference is a collaborative venture with our supporters, most particularly the National Heritage Training Group, Construction Skills and English Heritage, and we are very pleased that it follows on from the launch this morning of the two new landmark research reports, commissioned by the NHTG – about which you will shortly hear more.

This conference is a follow-up to the ICOMOS-UK Conference at the University of Bath in September 2005, entitled “Conservation in Architectural Education: Making the Case” which identified the need for research to quantify what we all already knew:- that there are significant gaps in the provision of skills training both for crafts and for professionals. The first ever NHTG report entitled “Traditional Building Craft Skills in England” had been launched in June 2005 and had made the case for the craft occupations in the built heritage sector. For the building professionals, we now have the hard evidence to support the anecdotal and the craft skills picture is up-dated. This conference therefore is an opportunity to define how we might use this evidence to fill the skills gaps through the concerted actions of as many key stakeholders as possible.

The context for Training

In the past few years there has been considerable progress in the field of skills training – but there have also been significant changes to the context within which we are all operating:

- There is a new Skills White Paper. Published on 17 March 2008 by the Dept for Innovation Universities and Skills “Raising Expectations: Enabling the system to

deliver”. It reorients responsibilities to Local Authorities for training – will they be able to cope?

- There is growing concern about climate change, energy conservation and achieving sustainability.
- There is new Heritage Protection legislation in the form of the “Draft Heritage Protection Bill” which with supporting regulations and revised guidelines will, we hope, help to sustain heritage, world heritage and its setting, and strengthen the conservation and planning process.
- There is a growing emphasis on young people and entry level skills; - as opposed to mature students, but I believe perhaps too little emphasis on the role of the professions.
- Funds as we all know are more restricted, and this means that money is less available for adult skills training and specialist courses, that are needed - particularly in developing best practice for management, conservation and sustainability.
- There is a growing awareness that skills, and the results of those skills, contribute to our overall sense of well-being and quality of life – and therefore have a strong social and cultural dimension. But will we encourage definition and certification of skills attainment, so that both employers, professional and craftspersons can know the target skills required in different sectors of the construction industry?

Sustainability

The industry training emphasis is on new build; but it should focus also on the existing 20 million existing properties that must achieve performance and economies in use of energy. The value of “heritage” as a contributor to sustainability is now better understood, but it is still seen as a specialist sector – but we suggest that it should be considered as part of the total existing environment.

Four Challenges

There are, I suggest, four great challenges that we should be considering to raise the profile of heritage/conservation skills as a key part of sustainability:

- The **first challenge** is to broaden the disciplines of "heritage/conservation" to encompass the Conservation Repair and Maintenance of the approximate 6 m pre-1919 buildings – most of which are well built by craftspeople using traditional methods and materials.

We could do more to increase functional performance and energy efficiency, and to reduce carbon emissions, by upgrading existing buildings rather than focussing on the 250,000 new building constructed each year.

- The **second challenge** is to apply more widely the discipline of heritage conservation. It should be seen as a **process or approach** towards energy efficiency and best practice in design that is as applicable to new buildings, as it is to the conservation of existing buildings and their context. The conservation research, analysis, design and management process should be seen as a key tool to achieve sustainability.

The Government target is to construct 3m new homes by 2020. Let us make sure that sustainable and energy efficient materials are used. Many of these materials are new but will be used in conjunction with natural and traditional materials and design.

How to optimise performance of the built environment, demands constant training of professionals, craftsmen and managers.

- The **third challenge** is to show that innovation is just as applicable to the use and management of traditional materials, as it is to new materials:-
 - "Innovation" is generally targeted at new build, but the concept also applies to the way we consider existing buildings.
 - -"Innovation" must include new ways of using traditional materials, and new ways of designing the adaptation of old buildings.
- **The fourth challenge** is to demonstrate that there are wide social and economic benefits that flow from the above. **Social benefits** relate to pride in the product

and job satisfaction, quality of life, continuity in sense of place, and the enhancement of values as is now well stated in English Heritage's new publication "*Conservation Principles Policies and Guidance*". **Economic benefits** flow from reductions in the use of energy, and the omission of replacement costs and overall from a vigorous sector.

Our Vision for the future:

"The development through training of Skills in design, construction, management and maintenance, the innovative use and re-use of traditional materials, which are applicable to all building, and the appropriate use of new materials to enhance performance, are all key components in the drive for sustainability."

This is huge agenda. All stakeholders will have to work together, each contributing their strengths for the benefit of the whole.

If this bigger message is to be heard, I strongly suggest that it must be understood at all levels, well coordinated, well led, and managed with energy.

Key questions

Over the next two days I hope we can begin to address some of these thoughts and ask some key questions:

- **How should the government set the framework** which could support, set realistic targets, guide and monitor a holistic approach to training by the different Skills Sectors?
- How do we ensure **concerted action across all the different Skills Sectors** whose interests can influence the Conservation Repair and Maintenance of traditional buildings and the existing environment?
- How do we **ensure broad consistency of approach** across the UK, whilst accommodating regional variations?

- What are the **indicators that demonstrate the social and economic benefits** which arise from heritage conservation, and care for the existing environment?
- **Is our basic philosophy now too constrained?** Do we need to develop the ICOMOS Education and Training guidelines to address these wider issues?
- **How do we ensure that the conservation process and conservation skills are incorporated into all construction,** and that training and education include a practical understanding of how these contribute to sustainability?

Action Plan

We hope the Action Plan that emerges from this Conference will bring together your views on all these issues. There should be plenty of time for discussion. All of what the speakers and you say in discussion will be recorded and filmed- to be used in due course in an edited version on the ICOMOS-UK and our partners' web-sites.

The man with the awesome responsibility during the conference for bringing together your thoughts for our Action Plan is Paul Simons. He will require the active participation and assistance from all of you, if he is to show us the way forward at the end of the conference tomorrow.

ICOMOS UK

ICOMOS-UK is proud to promote this conference. ICOMOS recognises, through its international scientific committees, the great importance of developing best practice in heritage management, construction and design, the science and use of different materials and structures, the education and training of crafts, and the role of the professions in survey and research, in promoting cultural tourism, in interpretation and presentation, and in defining and conserving environmental values and significance.

Through our new ICOMOS-UK web Forum, many of the contemporary conservation and education issues will be debated and developed further by the membership.

Our sponsors and stakeholders

We would like to acknowledge the very generous financial and time contribution from our sponsors for the conference. We are also greatly indebted to the following for their very important support:-

- Construction Skills
- The National Heritage Training Group
- English Heritage
- Historic Scotland,
- CADW
- The Building Crafts College
- The Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC)
- Carpenters Company
- Conference on Training in Architectural Conservation (COTAC)
- The University of Bath

and the **Prince's Foundation**, to whom we are indebted for providing the venue and supporting services, and to **Boilerhouse Communications** who are filming and recording the event.

Reception and Dinner

At the end of the conference today, there will be a reception at Carpenters Hall in celebration of the 10th Birthday of the IHBC. The Bus will leave from outside the main entrance at 17.15 hours promptly. This will be followed by a dinner for those of you who have booked.

Finally, may I mention house notices:-

- Speakers will need to keep to the time limits set in the programme as we have much to enjoy. The Chairmen of each session will please be firm in keeping control of time.
- Means of Escape
- Mobile Phones

I now call upon Bill Martin to chair our first session and introduce the speakers.