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Science and Heritage: an Update

Report with Evidence

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Contacts for the Science and Technology Committee

All correspondence should be addressed to:
The Clerk of the Science and Technology Committee
Committee Office
House of Lords
London
SW1A 0PW

The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 6075.
The Committee’s email address is hlscience@parliament.uk.

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Science and Heritage: an Update

Background

1. In our inquiry into *Science and Heritage* we explored a sector where the science base was in decline. The discipline that we called “heritage science”—the rich and diverse scientific research that underpins the conservation of our cultural heritage—originated with the development of science-based conservation in the British Museum and National Gallery in the mid-twentieth century. But this discipline, in which the United Kingdom once excelled, has in recent years been undermined by Government indifference, and by a fragmentation of interests and a prevailing sense that it was neither “science” nor “art”. These factors have combined to make research funding difficult.
2. Our Report, published in November 2006, has had a dramatic effect on this hitherto largely neglected area of science. Indeed, even before this it became clear that the mere fact that a parliamentary inquiry had been launched to look at the sector had had a galvanising effect.
3. What our recommendations described, in outline, was an organisational framework whereby the hitherto fragmented heritage sector could come together with university-based scientists and funding bodies to develop strategic priorities for heritage science and collaborative projects and research proposals. We argued that it was essential that this strategy should be developed by the sector as a whole—not just by those who did research, but also by those who cared for our cultural heritage, and who had first-hand knowledge of the needs of the conservation community.
4. A week after publication, on 23 November, we held a post-publication seminar, at which representatives from the heritage and science communities, many of whom had given evidence in the course of our inquiry, were given the opportunity to tell us what they thought of our recommendations¹. The response was overwhelmingly positive. Particularly encouraging was the welcome offered by Edward Impey of English Heritage (EH) and Tony McEnery of the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). Both organisations, within the framework set out in our Report, will have key roles in developing and implementing a strategy for heritage science.
5. The formal Government response to our Report appeared in January 2007². It was divided into two sections: the larger part was prepared by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), after consultation with its Non Departmental Public Bodies. We comment on the position of DCMS in more detail below.
6. In addition, an appendix contained a self-contained response from the Research Councils to those recommendations of direct concern to them. This fully bore out the positive comments made at our seminar by

¹ Brief notes of this meeting are given in Appendix 1.

² *Government Response to the House of Lords Science and Technology Select Committee Report on Science and Heritage*, January 2007 (Cm 7031). See <http://www.culture.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/56B4B774-3172-4881-AFC1-F5D172C26305/0/Cm7031.pdf>.

Professor McEnery. In summary, the AHRC “welcome[d] the opportunity to champion heritage science”, and made a series of commitments to practical actions in fulfilment of this pledge.

7. Finally, the Report and response were debated in Grand Committee on 12 June 2007³.

Comments from witnesses

8. Following publication of the Government response, we offered our witnesses an opportunity to submit written comments. Those that we received, which are printed as evidence with this Report, fully bore out the comments made at our seminar. The Institute of Conservation (Icon) both hailed the Report and warned of the consequences should our recommendations not be implemented:

“It is difficult to overestimate the significance of the Science and Technology Committee’s report ... No opportunity equal to this will exist for heritage science for another generation. If we do not take the appropriate steps promptly, this could be the last ever report on heritage science in the UK. By the time the issue attracts high-level political attention again, there could be little left to report on” (p 7).

9. Mr John Fidler, formerly Conservation Director at EH, but now a Guest Scholar at the Getty Conservation Institute in California, took an even broader view:

“The Select Committee’s interest in science and heritage has impressed all those concerned with the conservation of cultural heritage—far beyond Westminster and the shores of the United Kingdom. There has been particular interest in the United States, for example, where the Committee’s findings resonate well with conservation scientists who find themselves operating in a similar research policy vacuum to that revealed in England” (p 6).

10. Perhaps equally significant were the comments of Sir Neil Cossons, Chairman of English Heritage. He noted that EH had been consulted by DCMS in the preparation of the Government response, but pointedly distanced himself from the tone adopted in that response. Commenting on our recommendation that EH take the lead in developing a strategy for heritage science, he wrote: “We disagree with the somewhat negative approach of the Government’s response in relation to [EH’s] remit”. He confirmed EH’s view that it was “well-placed to provide the necessary co-ordination and secretariat functions, and its share of intellectual leadership”. He also expressed EH’s willingness to “contribute funding” to support efforts to bring the sector together in developing a “common approach” (p 5).

Recent developments

11. The heritage sector has now started to deliver on the undertakings given at our seminar and in evidence. Although Icon, writing in March, expressed disappointment that EH had “yet to make an effective start in offering a clear lead to the sector”, since that time EH and Icon have jointly organised the first meeting of the Steering Group that will lead on the development of a

³ See HL Deb., 12 June 2007, cols. GC47–80.

national heritage science strategy. This took place on 17 July at the new British Library Conservation Centre, and over 30 representatives of the science and heritage communities attended.

12. We strongly urge stakeholders within the heritage sector, including the National Museums and Galleries, the National Trust and Historic Royal Palaces, as well as universities, research councils and other funding bodies, to throw their full weight behind this initiative. As we made clear in our Report, the establishment of partnerships and collaboration is crucial to strengthening the heritage science base; continued fragmentation will lead only to lingering decline.
13. AHRC has also taken steps to fulfil the pledges made in the Appendix to the Government response. It has, for instance, in partnership with the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council, implemented our recommendation that a “champion” for heritage science be appointed at senior level. In May 2007 the appointment was announced of Professor May Cassar, of University College London (and formerly Specialist Adviser to this Committee), as Programme Director for the new Science and Heritage Research Programme⁴. We have confidence that under her direction the Research Councils will begin to give heritage science the priority and the funding that it deserves.

The Government response

14. It is with pleasure, therefore, that we can report that considerable work has already been put into implementing our recommendations. It will be clear, however, from the outline above, that this work has been done by the heritage sector and the research community. The Government have been notable chiefly by their absence.
15. Indeed, the progress that has been made could be said to have happened despite the best efforts of the Government to prevent it. The Government response grudgingly described our recommendation for a strategy for heritage science as “appropriate”. However, in practice DCMS appear to have devoted more effort to raising detailed or trivial objections to the development of this strategy than to attempting to support it.
16. For instance, the response comments on our recommendation that EH provide a secretariat to support the development of the strategy as follows:

“While we note and applaud English Heritage’s willingness to provide such a secretariat, we shall consider the proposal further taking into account the resource implications and whether it has the necessary statutory authority to undertake such a role for both moveable and immovable heritage of all kinds.”

This legal argument was described as a “red herring” by John Fidler. Even Sir Neil Cossons expressed disappointment at the “somewhat negative approach of the Government’s response in relation to remit”, noting that “collaborative partnership and shared ownership” were called for, not the “directive leadership” which the Government’s reference to statutory authority appeared to presuppose. In the event, not only has English Heritage found the resources internally to fund a full-time post for 12

⁴ See

http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/news/news_pr/2007/AHRC_EPSRC_appoint_director_UK_Science_Heritage_Research_Programme.asp

months for a secretariat to co-ordinate work on a heritage science strategy, but the legal objection has been withdrawn.

17. One more general issue raised in the Government response also requires comment. This is the relationship between the DCMS departmental objectives and the Government's broader policy on sustainability. We argued in the Report that "Heritage science is ... key to the long-term sustainability of our cultural heritage: it is about managing change and risk and maximising social, cultural and economic benefit not just today, but in such a way that we can pass on to future generations that which we have inherited". In recognition of this, we recommended that DCMS "add to its objectives an explicit reference to the need to conserve our cultural heritage for the benefit of future as well as existing communities" (paragraphs 2.21–2.23).
18. The response states that "DCMS's existing departmental objectives already reflect the importance of sustainability", and cites, as an example, the objective to "increase and broaden the impact of culture and sport, to enrich individuals' lives, strengthen communities and improve the places where people live, now and for future generations".
19. This response sidesteps our recommendation. In Mr Fidler's words, "The DCMS response focuses on 'Sustainability' without addressing the specific point of their Lordships' recommendation: the need to incorporate an explicit reference to the need to conserve our Cultural Heritage. This still remains a void in DCMS policy". Icon commented that the reference to sustainability was "an isolated example, and it is unsupported by the PSA targets which are associated with the Department's strategic objectives, since these are all about increasing visitor numbers and wider participation and not about stewardship for the future."
20. Our recommendation was not that DCMS direct the sector in developing a strategy for heritage science, nor that it invest heavily in sponsoring such science. Rather, we urged the Department to offer moral support to the sector by making explicit in its own departmental objectives the importance of conserving our cultural heritage. Moral support counts—as Icon pointed out, strategic objectives feed into PSA targets, and these in turn shape how Non Departmental Public Bodies spend the resources allocated to them.
21. Icon also provided a damning but accurate summary of the moral failure at the heart of the Government response: "The single most important response the Government should have given was to endorse the broad conclusion of the report. It has failed to do so in this response. Does the government believe that heritage science is under threat? Or does it not? From its response it is not possible to tell" (p 8).
22. It is not good enough for DCMS to wash its hands of responsibility by falling back on the obvious fact that "it is not for Government Ministers to determine how the specific funds allocated to their sponsored bodies are to be spent." Ministers do not sign the cheques—but they can, and should, provide moral leadership, and show to those responsible for conserving our cultural heritage that their work is properly valued at the highest level. For this reason alone, DCMS should no longer delay the appointment of a Chief Scientific Adviser with an interest in heritage science.

Conclusion

23. **We warmly applaud the progress that has been made across the heritage and science communities in implementing our recommendations. Our inquiry and Report have clearly made a difference. We shall keep progress in the sector under review, and, in whatever ways possible, we shall continue to offer support and encouragement.**
24. **We regret the failure of DCMS to grasp the significance of our recommendations. We urge Ministers now in charge of the Department to look again at our Report, and to offer the sector the moral leadership it deserves.**

APPENDIX 1: POST-PUBLICATION SEMINAR

Notes of the post-publication seminar held at the House of Lords, 23 November 2006

The participants were: Baroness Sharp of Guildford (Chairman), Lord Broers, Lord Chorley, Lord Redesdale, Professor May Cassar (Specialist Adviser), Christopher Johnson (Clerk), Cathleen Schulte (Committee Specialist), Chris Batt (Museums, Libraries and Archives Council), Nancy Bell (National Archives), Leslie Carlyle (Tate), Ben Cowell (DCMS), Michael Dixon (Natural History Museum), Edward Impey (Director of Research, English Heritage), Tony McEnery (Arts and Humanities Research Council), David Leigh (Institute of Conservation), Eric May (University of Portsmouth), Mark Pollard (Oxford University), Nick Poole (Museums Documentation Association), David Saunders (British Museum), Helen Shenton (British Library), Sarah Staniforth (National Trust), Jim Tate (National Museums of Scotland) and Heather Viles (Oxford University).

Baroness Sharp of Guildford introduced the report and summarised the main findings, before inviting comments.

The report was welcomed by all participants, some of whom expressed the hope that it would prove to be a turning point for the heritage sector. In particular there was broad consensus on the following:

- The principles of sustainability should be applied in the heritage sector, and the desire to widen public access could not be dissociated from the need to conserve our cultural heritage. The IIC would host a conference on access and conservation in London in September 2008.
- There should be a national strategy, or linked strategies with co-ordinated priorities, for heritage science, bringing together what was currently a fragmented field.
- The Research Councils should seek to establish a baseline for funding of heritage science.
- DCMS should appoint a physical or natural scientist to act as Chief Scientific Adviser, and the appointee should co-ordinate the development of the proposed national strategy. A report on the terms of appointment was likely to be presented to the Permanent Secretary in February 2007.
- English Heritage could well provide administrative support for the strategy, but would need additional resources to support this task.
- The “bottom-up” approach to developing priorities was the right way forward. In many cases the information on conservation needs was already available at this level, but needed collation.
- Progress was already being made, and would be pursued further, on a national framework of standards for ICT services, involving The National Archives, and MDA. The National Archives, the MLA and MDA, and JISC, were developing a national framework for digitisation.

Concerns were expressed in particular areas:

- New funding would not necessarily be available from DCMS, particularly given the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review.

- The leadership role of the AHRC could create problems, given the high level of funding required to support scientific research. However, AHRC was already in the process of formalising cross-Council funding arrangements, accepted the principle of full economic costs, and would explore the possibility of calling on additional expertise to manage heritage science as a distinct area of research.
- The model of “end-user led” research should not be allowed to undermine the engagement of university scientists with the Research Assessment Exercise.
- The focus on national bodies and strategy should not lead to neglect of the thousands of smaller bodies, museums, churches, charities and so on.
- Support from DCMS and OSI would be crucial if the sector was to take the recommendations forward.
- Funding for education and training within universities needed to be reviewed. Although the research councils were aware of the need to work on this area, the fact that many university archaeology departments were funded as arts and humanities departments was having an adverse impact on the availability of resources to train heritage scientists.

Written Evidence

Memorandum by the British Library

The British Library warmly welcomes the Report of the House of Lords Science and Technology Select Committee. The BL commends Baroness Sharp and the committee members for producing such a clear and lucid analysis of the current state of Science and Heritage in the UK.

In addition to providing written and oral evidence for this Select Committee, the British Library recently provided written evidence to the Culture Media and Sport Committee on the subject of conservation research (see paragraphs 50-52).

9.2. Under the current governance and funding structure the maintenance of the science base for conservation, and thus the long-term preservation of the United Kingdom's cultural heritage, are severely under threat. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has hitherto failed to grasp the scale of this threat/indeed, probably does not know it exists. This must be put right. (3.46)

9.3. We recommend that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport review its departmental objectives in light of the Government's policy on sustainability. We recommend in particular that the Department add to its objectives an explicit reference to the need to conserve our cultural heritage for the benefit of future as well as existing communities. (2.23)

9.4. We recommend that the DCMS move rapidly towards the appointment of a permanent Chief Scientific Adviser, as recommended in 2004 by the Office of Science and Technology. (6.24)

9.5. DCMS does not currently possess the scientific expertise to act as an intelligent customer of science. This has prevented the Department from recognising the importance of heritage science to the preservation of our cultural heritage. It has also inhibited the Department from arguing effectively for the allocation of funds to the heritage sector from the European Union Framework Programmes for Research. We therefore recommend that the terms of reference for the new Chief Scientific Adviser make it clear that the appointee should have primary skills in the natural or physical sciences. (6.25)

9.6. Once appointed, we recommend that the DCMS Chief Scientific Adviser act as a "champion" at departmental level for heritage science. This is an essential prerequisite if an understanding of the value of science is to cascade down to the heritage sector as a whole, and the downgrading of conservation and heritage science within the sector is to be reversed. (6.26)

BRITISH LIBRARY RESPONSE TO 9.2 – 9.6

The BL agrees that the science base for conservation and the consequential long-term preservation of the UK's cultural heritage require substantial input from DCMS and MLA to avert severe, long-term damage to the national movable and immovable cultural heritage.

The BL agrees with the Report's recommendation that both the DCMS' and MLA's strategic objectives should explicitly address the conservation and conservation science of the cultural heritage.

In the absence of a specific cross-sectoral strategic initiative on stewardship the concerned cultural heritage sector itself has engendered many building blocks from within (such as the National Preservation Office's National Preservation Needs Assessment in Libraries and Archives, and the Digital Preservation Coalition's National Assessment of Digital Preservation) which are readily available to inform a stewardship strategy.

The BL warmly supports the urgent appointment of a permanent Chief Scientific Adviser and is very happy to assist Dr Michael Dixon in his advisory capacity to DCMS in fulfilling the role. The BL is not only taking a leading role in establishing conservation science in libraries and archives in the UK, but is to appoint a Head of Science, Technology and Medicine to lead the development of the BL's collection in the new e-universe.

The BL supports the need for the permanent Chief Scientific Adviser to be a "hard" scientist with considerable personal authority in the STM community.

DCMS is ideally placed to ensure the co-ordination of the important cultural products of science and technology, between the educational, scientific, environmental, commercial and humanities activities in government. Heritage science is one of the most accessible bridges between these seemingly disparate fields.

The BL encourages DCMS to ensure that its scientific policy in relation to both the cultural heritage and the narrower heritage science, is founded on a strong national base of scientifically literate humanities scholars and arts literate scientists in collections-based institutions. International collaboration and a flux of people between different cultural strands, for example, collections-based institutions, HE and the private sector will contribute to UK heritage science institutions regaining their world ranking of excellence.

THE RESEARCH COUNCILS

9.7. *We recommend that for the avoidance of doubt the Office of Science and Innovation should formally appoint the AHRC as the Research Council responsible for heritage science, and that at the same time it review the funding available to the AHRC from within the overall budget of the Research Councils so as to reflect the higher cost of scientific research. We further recommend that the OSI review the performance of the AHRC in this regard before the end of 2008. (6.43)*

9.8. *As champion for heritage, one of the key tasks of the Arts and Humanities Research Council will be to deliver an increase in Research Council funding for heritage science. In the absence of reliable data, it is currently impossible to measure success or failure in this task. We therefore recommend that the AHRC commission an analysis of current levels of Research Council funding for heritage science, and that it publish the results and update them annually from now on. (6.44)*

9.9. *We recommend that the AHRC take steps to ensure that its responsibility for scientific research in the field of cultural heritage is reflected in the appointment of an appropriate “champion” at Council level, supported by qualified staff. (6.45)*

9.10. *We recommend that the AHRC, in conjunction with the other Research Councils and the heritage sector, bring forward proposals for a time-limited directed programme of research in heritage science, with the aim both of re-generating this area of research and of attracting younger scientists to enter it. (6.46)*

9.11. *We recommend that AHRC and the Office of Science and Innovation make a formal commitment to recognise the full cost of science-based research in field of cultural heritage. This commitment should be reflected in the size of individual awards and in the AHRC’s acceptance of full economic costs. (6.47)*

9.12. *We welcome the decision of the Arts and Humanities Research Council to invite applications from the National Museums and Galleries for academic analogue status. However, in order to promote collaboration with university based scientists we recommend that:*

- *All National Museums and Galleries seek academic analogue status with the appropriate science-based Research Councils, in addition to the AHRC;*
- *That those Councils encourage and facilitate applications from the National Museums and Galleries in the same way that the AHRC has done. (4.26)*

BRITISH LIBRARY RESPONSE TO 9.7 – 9.12

The BL fully supports AHRC being formally appointed the Research Council responsible for heritage science.

The BL further welcomes the moves within AHRC already under way to address the need to champion scientific research in the cultural heritage field.

It was clear at the recent AHRC/CCLRC joint conference at Tate Modern, that the higher cost of scientific research is a major concern that the BL has already highlighted. We support the recommendation that AHRC and OSI acknowledge the full cost of science-based research in the field of cultural heritage.

The BL welcomes the recommendation that the AHRC, in conjunction with the other Research Councils and the heritage sector, bring forward proposals for a time-limited directed programme of research in heritage science, however, with the proviso that the full, higher costs of scientific research are recognised from the start.

Based on its experience, for example in recruiting a project manager for the Mellon-funded scientific research projects, the BL is very aware of the need to attract younger scientists to enter this field and considers dedicated funding of a research programme to be a way of addressing this.

The BL supports the proposal in 9.12 encouraging national institutions to become designated independent research organisations (previously termed academic analogue status) with appropriate science-based Research Councils in addition to AHRC. This support is based on observations of the Natural History Museum’s success with other Research Councils. The BL recognises that there is the danger that multiple independent research organisations could dilute the primacy of AHRC in heritage research at a time when it

is just establishing itself, but in practice, it will doubtless remain the main Research Council. However, we note that many institutions will not have the critical mass of researchers in science disciplines needed to support independent research organisation status with the science research councils.

DISSEMINATION OF BEST PRACTICE AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

9.13. Despite the outstanding quality of individual publications, the dissemination of up-to-date results of heritage science to practitioners in the United Kingdom is patchy and poorly co-ordinated, particularly in the field of moveable heritage. We therefore recommend that the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, in consultation with the National Museums and Galleries and Icon, review and consolidate the sources of scientific guidance available for collections-based conservators, with a view to providing a regular, central source of up-to-date advice. (5.29)

9.14. We recommend that the Office of Science and Innovation undertake to provide the necessary resources to enable the Institute of Conservation to become the focus for the use of heritage science projects to promote public engagement with SET as a whole. (5.37)

BRITISH LIBRARY RESPONSE TO 9.13 – 9.14

The BL agrees that the dissemination of heritage science to UK conservation practitioners is fragmented, especially in the field of movable heritage, and that a regular, central source of advice would be valuable. There is a healthy precedent in the MLA's predecessor body, the Museums and Galleries Commission, being a trusted clearing house for up-to-date applied research.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGIES

9.15. In 2004 the National Audit Office highlighted the lack of a national framework for the digitisation of records across museums, libraries and archives. Little progress has since been made. We recommend that the Government, through the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, and in consultation with the devolved administrations, make every effort to facilitate the development of such a framework for the sector. (7.39)

9.16. The Museum Documentation Association (MDA) is working hard to promote best practice and common standards in the use of ICT in museums, libraries and archives. However, it lacks teeth, and we therefore recommend that its parent body, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, incorporate MDA approved standards for the use of ICT as part of the museum accreditation scheme. (7.40)

9.17. We further recommend that the MDA and National Archives formalise their relationship, with a view to clarifying their different areas of responsibility, as a matter of urgency. (7.41)

9.18. In order to keep abreast of progress in technology, the heritage sector needs to develop closer partnerships with industry, exploiting and marketing new commercial opportunities as they arise/although such partnerships should not replace long term core public funding to support investment in conservation and heritage science. We therefore recommend that the National Museums and Galleries, along with the MLA, drawing on experience in the universities and Research Councils, explore ways to provide a central source of information and support for the development of commercial partnerships. (7.42)

BRITISH LIBRARY RESPONSE TO 9.15 – 9.18

The British Library has extensive experience with digitisation projects, a feature of which is the plurality of funding streams. Such a multiplicity of funding sources is different to some other European countries, where there has been a concerted national government effort to digitise swathes of the national heritage. A national framework may be helpful if accompanied by specific funding, and may be helpful in establishing technical standards, not least to militate against future digital preservation problems and costs. The BL would welcome high level assistance at government level to promote and lever EU funding, for example with FP7 i2010.

The BL has experience of close partnerships with industry, such as its strategic partnership in the digital arena with Microsoft and welcomes the call to assist the heritage sector with developing commercial partnerships.

As with other suggestions that mention National Museums and Galleries, the BL would like Libraries and Archives to be explicitly included in such developments and would be pleased to contribute to cross-sectoral discussions.

JISC has a key role to play in this area, given that it leads the group working on e-content strategy (of which the BL is a member) and given that it is a major source of funding for digitisation.

A STRATEGY FOR HERITAGE SCIENCE

9.19. *Collaboration is crucial to heritage science. There needs to be good communication between university and museum-based scientists in order to draw effectively on the resources of both communities. But at the moment, despite isolated successes, collaboration remains largely ad hoc. There is no-one within the sector to promote information exchange and support the development of collaborative research projects. In particular, we deplore the fact that there is no body within the United Kingdom taking a strategic overview of research priorities across the field of heritage science. We therefore make the following recommendations. (4.39)*

9.20. *We recommend the development of a comprehensive national strategy for heritage science, embracing both the immovable and moveable heritage, and covering the United Kingdom as a whole. We do not recommend the establishment of a National Conservation Centre at this stage, though this might be needed in the longer term if the sector does not come together as we have recommended. (8.46)*

9.21. *We recommend that English Heritage provide the secretariat to support the development of this national strategy for heritage science. We call on the major heritage organisations in England, and their counterparts in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, along with the universities and the Research Councils, to come together in establishing a steering group to take forward the implementation of this recommendation. (8.47)*

9.22. *We recommend that the newly appointed Chief Scientific Adviser of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport chair and oversee the development of this strategy. (8.48)*

9.23. *We further recommend that the strategy be developed as a “bottom up” strategy, with considerable input from the “users and doers” of heritage science, so that the many institutions that play a part in the heritage sector can share a sense of ownership. (8.49)*

9.24. *In parallel, as the strategy develops, and research priorities are identified, we recommend that the Research Councils instigate a time-limited directed programme of research, to encourage collaborative projects and build capacity in heritage science. (8.50)*

BRITISH LIBRARY RESPONSE TO 9.19 – 9.24

The British Library considers the need for a comprehensive national strategy for heritage science, embracing both movable and immovable heritage, to be absolutely fundamental and very strongly supports this recommendation.

The BL led on the development of a Framework for Applied Conservation Research in Libraries and Archives in the UK, and would be willing to be very involved with the development of the cross-domain national strategy

The BL is gratified that the House of Lords Select Committee recognised the value of the collaborative approach that the BL and TNA took with the other five copyright libraries and national archives, to produce an internationally peer-agreed strategy for priority areas for applied science for libraries and archives. The subsequent award of \$700k to the BL by the Andrew W Mellon Foundation for two projects that strategically fitted with the identified priorities is testament to the value of this approach. Based on the evidence of this model, the BL completely agrees with the recommendation that a “bottom-up” approach is the most appropriate, involving “users and doers”. The BL is very happy to contribute substantially in this way to the national strategy, contributing both experience of delivering a successful “bottom-up” strategy across two domains, as well as ideas and expertise.

Any national strategy for heritage science will require underpinning with a national assessment of the needs of the national heritage. The BL would point out that much work has already been done both across sectors and within significant national collections to provide the fundamental data to underpin a strategy. For example, a Preservation Needs Assessment of UK libraries and archives, and a National Digital Preservation Needs Assessment have both recently been completed (by the NPO and DPC respectively). Many museums, galleries, libraries and archives have undertaken either risk assessments (eg TNA) or condition audits (eg Museum of London, V&A, BL). The BL cautions against recommissioning work that has already been carried out by or within the sector itself, which would be wasteful of time and money.

The BL strongly endorses the conclusion that there is currently no need for a National Conservation Centre. The distributed, federated, collaborative model across heritage institutions and academic organisations towards conservation research, both within the UK and internationally, is the best, most pragmatic model at the moment.

Furthermore, several Centres of Excellence have relatively recently been established (such as the Textile Conservation Centre) or are about to open (for example the BL Centre for Conservation) and a distributed, national network of centres of excellence is a viable possibility.

The BL supports the suggestion that English Heritage provide the secretariat to support the development of this national strategy for heritage science, whilst highlighting that EH would require some additional resources to carry this role out effectively.

The BL considers that there is logic in the newly appointed Chief Scientific Adviser of the DCMS chairing and overseeing the development of this strategy.

16 April 2007

Letter from English Heritage

Thank you for your letter of 5 March.

English Heritage did, indeed, respond to the Committee's report, but in the form of a letter sent by one of our Executive Board Directors, Edward Impey, to Ben Cowell at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), intended to inform the DCMS' own response. Dr Impey has since also put a number of questions to the DCMS arising from the Government's response. For present purposes, however, the following comments may be of some use in compiling your supplementary note:

1. The House of Commons and House of Lords reports both call for more support for the heritage sector—and, especially, money from Government/DCMS. The lack of any commitment in the Government's Response (eg to recommendation 1) is all too palpable, especially in the context of declining support over the past decade.
2. We welcome Michael Dixon's review (recommendation 3); but we have concerns about whether a single Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA) appointment within DCMS will effectively address issues in DCMS' ability to deal with the full spectrum of hard and social and economic sciences. Hard science capacity is of great importance in the context of the committee's recommendations and to the proposed role of the CSA in chairing and overseeing the development of the strategy.
3. We welcome the intention that the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) lead on heritage science research (recommendation 6), and the action already taken.
4. We welcome the call for a heritage science strategy (recommendations 18–23) to promote closer collaboration between different parts of the sector and a more effective use of limited resource.

We disagree with the somewhat negative approach of the Government response in relation to remit. In view of the fragmentation of responsibilities and roles within the sector, it is English Heritage's view that no single body has both remit and capacity for a directive leadership, and that this is not an appropriate model for the development of the strategy. Instead, our view is that the more appropriate model is one of collaborative partnership and shared ownership, especially between the funding bodies; and that EH is well-suited to provide the necessary co-ordination and secretariat functions, and its share of intellectual leadership. We have discussed this informally with some of the other sector funding bodies who agree and are keen to see action sooner rather than later; with their agreement we are making arrangements for a first meeting of funding bodies to discuss this common approach, and are willing to contribute funding for a post to facilitate this, with the intention of appointing someone on secondment from a different part of the sector.

20 March 2007

Letter from John Fidler RIBA IHBC FRICS FSA FIIC FAPTi

Thank you for your letter inviting me to comment further on the Select Committee's inquiry and in particular upon the Government's response as issued by the Department for Culture Media and Sport.

I should be delighted to help. I am no longer employed by English Heritage under whose auspices I submitted written and oral evidence to the Committee. I retired from my position as Conservation Director in July 2006 and am currently a Guest Scholar of the Getty Conservation Institute, part of the J Paul Getty Trust in Los Angeles—undertaking research into ways and means to train architects and engineers in the conservation of built heritage.

I have read the DCMS response in detail and would offer the following comments for the Committee's consideration. Page numbers cited refer to those in the DCMS report.

GENERALLY

I acknowledge, appreciate and agree with the vast majority of conclusions and recommendations put forward by the Committee in its report.

The Select Committee's interest in science and heritage has impressed all those concerned with the conservation of cultural heritage—far beyond Westminster and the shores of the United Kingdom. There has been particular interest in the United States, for example, where the Committee's findings resonate well with conservation scientists who find themselves operating in a similar research policy vacuum to that revealed in England.

More publicity could be given to the debate currently circulating around the inquiry report and response—for the subject would be of great interest, in my opinion, to scientific research communities and conservators across the European Union and the English-speaking world.

SPECIFICALLY

Page 1: DCMS response to the Select Committee Conclusions and Recommendations (1) (3.46)

1. The Select Committee's report clearly pointed out the lack of “joined-up thinking” and oversight of many of the key issues at a strategic policy level that imperil the science base for conservation. Sterling work by English Heritage, AHRC and the other research councils, and by the British Library and The National Archives, can be seen therefore as tactical palliatives for a governance system that patently has not been working. In particular, there appears on the evidence provided to be no primary national oversight of conservation of the moveable heritage ie collections. The heritage agencies are also not encouraged to collaborate across the moveable/immoveable boundaries of their respective remits (though some do). There is no upward synthesis of needs and concerns—no one Government report to consider the state and welfare of the UK heritage and its management. One could argue that DCMS' strategy is to “divide and conquer”—ie manage England's heritage in small parcels so that cumulative impacts are lessened or lost in the detail.

Page 2:

2. DCMS makes plain that it is not for Government Ministers to determine how specific funds allocated to their sponsoring bodies are spent. However, many Funding Agreement Targets are very specific and could be tailored, if the Government wished, to make good the specific problems identified in the Committee's report. In addition, the Government's Chief Scientific Adviser has been recommending that Government Departments should ring-fence science budgets to protect them from erosion through inflation and cuts for other priorities.

3. Part of the problem so far as science and heritage is concerned stems, in my view, from the break in communications between the heritage agencies, DCMS and the Government's Chief Scientific Adviser. While many of the heritage agencies have Chief Scientists, they are not formally connected to OSI-DTi except through passive reporting systems eg on statistical data collection. So the Government's response to the issue of lack of communication and poor chains of command in agreeing with the Committee to appoint a Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA) within DCMS; to make AHRC the lead research council for heritage science, and to appoint a Director of Heritage Research within AHRC is to be welcomed.

DCMS response to the Select Committee Conclusions and Recommendations (2) (2.23)

4. The DCMS response focuses on “Sustainability” without addressing the specific point of the Committee's recommendation: the need to incorporate an explicit reference to the need to conserve our Cultural Heritage. This still remains a void in DCMS policy regardless of whether and how its sponsored bodies react to climate change issues driven by Defra and other departments.

Page 3 DCMS response to the Select Committee Conclusions and Recommendations (3) (6.24) (6.25) and (6.26)

5. An apparent tension within DCMS concerning the CSA post is the need for the Department to have a senior head of socio-economic research and manage scientific affairs adequately. The Committee might address this tension in its debate because it must surface in other ministries without adverse affects on standards of operation

Page 4 DCMS response to the Select Committee Conclusions and Recommendations (6) (6.43)

6. The “devil is in the detail” and RCUK’s reservations about AHRC’s funding review is a practical issue that might well de-rail a sensible looking plan. What is plain however is that NERC has already all but dropped heritage science components from its remit without much consultation and unless conservation scientists can hook their work to EU research platforms, they are unlikely to be funded by EPSRC, the biggest funder.

Page 5 DCMS response to the Select Committee Conclusions and Recommendations (12) (5.29)

7. MLAC seems to have no views at all on science and heritage and little role to play on the evidence provided/unlike its predecessor body, the Museums and Galleries Commission for England which saw how fragile the professional conservator base was and took steps to support it. None of MLAC’s current programmes sponsors science-based research for conservation. More guidance is available from the OSI-DTI than from DCMS or MLAC on knowledge transfer from the science base to end-users.

Page 7 DCMS response to the Select Committee Conclusions and Recommendations (19) (8.46); (20) (8.47); and (21) (8.48)

8. The moves towards a national strategy for heritage science are sensible but are a subset of a much larger need to brigade nationally all research in the heritage field—to maximise resources, avoid unnecessary duplication and steer future directions based on end user inputs. Components are already building as the Committee heard. However, there are political sensitivities that DCMS is having to dance around and these concern mixing moveable and immoveable interests and the question of overall leadership in a field of equals.

9. My original suggestion that English Heritage offer a secretariat for the science based strategy was based on a purely administrative function already bringing together Historic Scotland, Cadw and the E&HService/NI for the immoveable side in the British Isles Technical Forum (BITF). Indeed, I invited Historic Scotland to join English Heritage in addressing the heritage conservation component of the Construction Industry’s foresight plan two years ago—and this collaboration was most successful, even though “devolved interests” were clearly involved. I also envisioned a neutral or revolving chairmanship to allay fears of an English Heritage take-over. So the Committee’s idea that DCMS’ new CSA chair these meetings is an excellent one.

10. As to whether English Heritage has the necessary legal powers—this is a red herring. English Heritage can do anything the Secretary of State asks it to do and, as a licensed museum body and national archive, it has interests in both the moveable and immovable culture camps.

APPENDIX 1

11. I welcome the response of RCUK. Some of the early stages of development of this approach stemmed from my discussions with AHRB and I am proud to have been associated with forging links between the heritage agencies and the research councils.

18 March 2007

Memorandum by Icon

WHY DOES ICON WISH TO COMMENT?

It is difficult to overestimate the significance of the Science and Technology Committee’s report. As the DCMS response says, “the focus on the science behind the care and conservation of cultural heritage means that the report offers vital new insights into an area that does not always receive the highest level of public attention.” No opportunity equal to this will exist for heritage science for another generation. If we do not take the appropriate steps promptly, this could be the last ever report on heritage science in the UK. By the time the issue attracts high-level political attention again, there could be little left to report on.

WHAT DID THE REPORT ASK GOVERNMENT TO DO?

The report basically invited DCMS to recognise, in the first place, that heritage science is not thriving and that unless appropriate steps are taken, it will decline seriously. It also encouraged DCMS to appoint a Chief Scientific Advisor who will be able to help drive forward the changes we need to restore heritage science in the UK to better health. Beyond this it actually asked the Government for very little, so explicitly endorsing its findings should not have been difficult. The resource implications of the recommendations were not great; essentially funding was sought for a secretariat post within English Heritage. Most recommendations applied

to other agencies and organisations and it is likely that if these are adopted, there will be a greater demand for resources eg in AHRC or the Office of Science and Innovation. However the Report made no specific recommendations to this effect.

WHAT DOES THE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE INDICATE?

The most worrying aspect of the DCMS response is that it fails to explicitly acknowledge that there is a problem. The purpose of the enquiry was to determine whether heritage science is in a fit state to meet the challenges of the future. Its conclusions are unequivocal—heritage science is “fragmented . . . lacking in overarching leadership and vision . . . relying on goodwill and serendipity”. The single most important response the Government should have given was to endorse the broad conclusion of the report. It has failed to do so in this response. Does the Government believe that heritage science is under threat? Or does it not? From its response it is not possible to tell.

DCMS should ensure that a systematic approach to horizon scanning is undertaken across all its sectors and the results used (eg; as part of the department's risk assessment and management). This should ensure that the results of its NDPBs' horizon scanning activities are taken into account where appropriate (and a coherent approach taken with NDPBs to such work where this would be beneficial).

(Office of Science and Technology's Review of Science within DCMS, 2005)

We now refer to the specific recommendations in the Report and to the DCMS response to each of them (the responses from DCMS are not necessarily reproduced in full).

RECOMMENDATION 1

Under the current governance and funding structure the maintenance of the science base for conservation, and thus the long-term preservation of the UK's cultural heritage, are severely under threat. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has hitherto failed to grasp the scale of this threat—indeed, probably does not know it exists. This must be put right.

DCMS Response

As the evidence originally submitted by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) made clear, Government delegates responsibility for conservation of cultural heritage to the public bodies that have been established for this purpose. English Heritage, Historic Scotland, Cadw, the sponsored museums, The National Archives, the British Library and a host of other publicly funded bodies, are provided with annual grants to fulfil certain statutory (and, in some cases, charitable) aims relating to the ongoing conservation of cultural heritage, whether moveable or immovable. The Government does not believe that the governance and funding structure that is implied in such an arrangement necessarily imperils the maintenance of the science base for conservation, or indeed the long-term preservation of cultural heritage. On the contrary, this structure ensures that decisions about the conservation of cultural heritage can be taken by trained professionals working at arm's length from Ministerial departments, in organisations that are directly accountable to Parliament for their activities.

Icon Comment:

DCMS has focused its response on the specific recommendations in the report. Given the lack of comment on the broader issues, should we understand this narrow focus as meaning that DCMS recognises much of the problem set out in the report, but does not accept all of the Committee's recommendations as helpful means of addressing them? Or does it indicate a more general lack of confidence in the findings of the Report?

The response to Recommendation 1 looks like an example of the very thing the Report is challenging—a lack of understanding of the threat which heritage science faces. The Government says it “does not believe that the governance and funding structure that is implied in such an arrangement necessarily imperils the maintenance of the science base for conservation, or indeed the long-term preservation of cultural heritage.” Assuming that the Government believes what it has not actually said—that heritage science is in decline—are the current governance and funding structures a neutral backdrop to this? Are they possibly contributing factors? Or do they offer solutions to hand to help address it?

The British Library gave evidence that “conservation research as not adequately funded nor necessarily focused in the right direction”. The National Archives indicated that “there will be a very real skills shortage in conservation science research, as the core of conservation scientists will retire in the next ten years”. The

Chief Executive of MLA in his oral evidence said the discussions he had with DCMS about strategy and conservation science were “not significant”. The British Museum described the position of conservation science in the UK as “in threat”.

In their evidence, the NDPBs and other bodies indicated what steps they could take, or were already taking, to remedy matters. None of them advocated that DCMS should steer clear of the issue and leave it to them to develop a full strategic response. Nor did any of them say that the status quo represented an adequate deal for heritage science and that no change was required. In effect, the NDPBs and national institutions have given evidence that the present structures and funding regimes make it hard to put heritage science on a sustainable footing.

In the face of such a clear consensus, it is difficult to account for why DCMS alone should remain apparently unconvinced. The DCMS response has a curious circular quality. On the one hand it declines to comment on the grounds that expertise lies with its NDPBs; yet when those NDPBs clearly say that there is a problem, it does not seem inclined to act on their advice.

DCMS should make itself aware of where NDPBs’ science is unique or hard to replace and of importance to wider Government / the UK, so that it can ensure that such expertise is not lost (eg by decisions on funding) without proper consultation and recognition of the consequences.

(Office of Science and Technology’s Review of Science within DCMS, 2005)

It is interesting to note the difference between DCMS’ approach to heritage science and its approach to sport science. Sport, like cultural heritage, is managed through arms-length bodies, but this does not prevent the Government from taking a strategic leadership role and contributing funding directly into multi-stakeholder initiatives.

There is a national focus for much of sports science in the National Sports Medicine Institute, funded by DCMS. NSMI and the other UK Sports Institutes “provide state of the art facilities for sports science and medicine” and are described by DCMS as “key sports medicine and science initiatives that support our top sportsmen and women, and UK sport as a whole.”

In 2002 Tessa Jowell announced an additional £14.1 million to UK sport to support elite athletes with a range of new initiatives, including “the establishment of a scholarship programme for existing and potential World Class coaches and sports science service deliverers to extend their ability to work at elite level.” In 2004 a further package of £6 million was announced to support young athletes aiming at the Olympics. Only a small proportion of this money will go directly to science, but that is not the point we wish to make. Rather, we wish to highlight the contrast between the approach taken with sport science (where the work of NDPBs is supported by strategic leadership and funding from DCMS which has a specific science component) with approach taken to heritage science—that everything should be left to NDPBs and no direct engagement is deemed appropriate from the Government department.

We acknowledge the increases in funding for museums and for heritage generally to which DCMS makes reference. There have been widely welcomed and the Government is rightly proud of them. Unfortunately they have little relevance to heritage science. We agree that it is for NDPBs and not for ministers to decide how money should be spent—but when the NDPBs themselves give evidence of a lack of leadership and strategic thinking, the case of a greater degree of Government engagement is certainly compelling.

DCMS must remain fully alive to current and projected scientific and technological developments in order to support and guide those sectors to still greater success in ever more competitive economic market-places. To this end, DCMS places considerable importance on horizon scanning, through continued involvement in Foresight, increasing engagement with the HE sector (for example, through the joint DCMS/Universities UK Creative Industries/HE Forum and closer relations with the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB), and the commissioning of detailed research into future trends affecting its policy areas.

(DCMS Science strategy, November 2002)

RECOMMENDATION 2

We recommend that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport review its departmental objectives in light of the Government’s policy on sustainability. We recommend in particular that the Department add to its objectives an explicit reference to the need to conserve our cultural heritage for the benefit of future as well as existing communities.

DCMS Response

DCMS' future objectives and priorities will be under consideration as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review. However, the Committee may wish to be aware that DCMS' existing departmental objectives already reflect the importance of sustainability. For example, one of them is to "increase and broaden the impact of culture and sport, to enrich individuals' lives, strengthen communities and improve the places where people live, now and for future generations.

Moreover, DCMS' Sustainable Development Action Plan sets out the Department's contribution, and that of its sponsored bodies, to government policy on sustainability. Its high-level objective is to "integrate social, economic and environmental factors into all DCMS policy development". As a contribution to the Action Plan English Heritage will shortly publish its own sustainable development strategy and is, for example, developing a website to advise the public how to combat the effects of climate change without damaging heritage buildings.

Nor would it be accurate to suggest that DCMS is interested only in arrangements for promoting access to heritage by present-day users to the exclusion of its longer-term conservation. The funding agreements for the museums and galleries sponsored by DCMS, for example, include a section on Stewardship which provides detail on collections care and management. Moreover DCMS has been active in encouraging English Heritage to improve the delivery of research into the conservation of the historic environment, not least to support the wider objectives of the Heritage Protection Review.

Icon Comment

DCMS has a broad range of initiatives which contribute to sustainable development. The DCMS response cites the wording of one of its five strategic priorities as being an example of its commitment to sustainable cultural heritage. It is in fact an isolated example, and it is unsupported by the PSA targets which are associated with the Department's strategic objectives, since these are all about increasing visitor numbers and wider participation and not about stewardship for the future. We also believe that there is a difference between a commitment to "increase and broaden the impact of culture. . . now and for future generations and explicit reference to the need to conserve our cultural heritage for the benefit of future as well as existing communities".

DCMS will continue to keep a close watch on future developments, through working with key partners and commissioning research, subject to resource constraints. It will take account of this work and of information gained from other sources to inform its policy-making. It is also exploring ways of co-ordinating these activities to improve the way in which this information is gathered, presented and utilised.

(DCMS Science strategy, November 2002)

RECOMMENDATIONS 3, 4 AND 5

We recommend that the DCMS move rapidly towards the appointment of a permanent Chief Scientific Adviser, as recommended in 2004 by the Office of Science and Technology.

DCMS does not currently possess the scientific expertise to act as an intelligent customer of science. This has prevented the Department from recognising the importance of heritage science to the preservation of our cultural heritage. It has also inhibited the Department from arguing effectively for the allocation of funds to the heritage sector from the European Union Framework Programmes for Research. We therefore recommend that the terms of reference for the new Chief Scientific Adviser make it clear that the appointee should have primary skills in the natural or physical sciences.

Once appointed, we recommend that the DCMS CSA act as a "champion" at departmental level for heritage science. This is an essential prerequisite if an understanding of the value of science is to cascade down to the heritage sector as a whole, and the downgrading of conservation and heritage science within the sector is to be reversed.

DCMS Response

DCMS has already indicated the intention to appoint a CSA. Such an appointment is by no means straightforward, if it is to do justice to all of the different areas for which DCMS is responsible (which include, in addition to heritage, sport, broadcasting, tourism, the arts and the creative industries). DCMS has therefore appointed Dr Michael Dixon as an interim CSA. He has been asked to undertake a review of the role and to report his recommendations to DCMS by March 2007. Dr Dixon's report will include recommendations on

how the CSA role should be advanced on a permanent basis, including the specification for the role and the type of scientific advice that will be of most benefit to the Department. Dr Dixon's report will take into account the views of the Committee as expressed in the report.

Icon Comment

We look forward to the forthcoming response from DCMS to the recommendations from Dr Michael Dixon. We hope that he will advocate the appointment of a heritage scientist to the post of Chief Scientific Advisor and that DCMS will take steps to make such an appointment as soon as possible. We believe it is unlikely that DCMS will be able to appoint a single person who is able to focus with equal effectiveness on all the different fields of specialism within his or her remit. We regard it as inevitable therefore that a succession of CSAs will have different strengths, and that for much of the time these may not lie in heritage science. We advocate the appointment of a heritage scientist to the post of CSA for now, so that they will be able to play a constructive role in restoring heritage science in the UK to its previous vigour. We accept, equally, that future CSAs will have a different focus in their work.

The point about the European Union Framework Programmes for Research is not addressed in the DCMS reply, but was well illustrated by the recent launch of the 7th Framework Programme. In January 2007 The European Commission issued a proposal for a European Research Area Network (ERANet) on cultural heritage to support the co-operation and co-ordination of research programmes carried out at national level, financed or managed by public bodies. DCMS did not attend the meeting to decide on the formation of the cultural heritage ERANet and had no input into it. We hope that the appointment of a CSA will see a higher level of engagement in such initiatives in the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS 6, 7, 8, 9 AND 10

We recommend that for the avoidance of doubt the Office of Science and Innovation should formally appoint the AHRC as the Research Council responsible for heritage science, and that at the same time it review the funding available to the AHRC from within the overall budget of the Research Councils so as to reflect the higher cost of scientific research. We further recommend that the OSI review the performance of the AHRC in this.

As champions for heritage, one of the key tasks of the Arts and Humanities Research Council will be to deliver an increase in Research Council funding for heritage science. In the absence of reliable data, it is currently impossible to measure success or failure in this task. We therefore recommend that the AHRC commission an analysis of current levels of Research Council funding for heritage science, and that it publish the results and update them annually from now on.

We recommend that the AHRC take steps to ensure that its responsibility for scientific research in the field of cultural heritage is reflected in the appointment of an appropriate "champion" at Council level, supported by qualified staff.

We recommend that the AHRC, in conjunction with the other Research Councils and the heritage sector, bring forward proposals for a time-limited directed programme of research in heritage science, with the aim both of re-generating this area of research and of attracting younger scientists to enter it.

We recommend that AHRC and the Office of Science and Innovation make a formal commitment to recognise the full cost of science-based research in field of cultural heritage. This commitment should be reflected in the size of individual awards and in the AHRC's acceptance of full economic costs.

DCMS Response

The Office of Science and Innovation (OSI) welcomes Research Councils UK's (RCUK) agreement that AHRC should lead amongst the Councils for heritage science (see Appendix One below for RCUK's response to this recommendation). The OSI will consider carefully the relative priority that AHRC gives to heritage science in its submission for the CSR allocation. However, OSI shares RCUK's reservations about the timing of the proposed review of AHRC's performance in funding heritage science. It is likely to be some time before the impact of any changes in AHRC's priorities becomes evident and a review in 2008 could be premature.

The Government has already made a formal commitment in the "Science and Innovation Investment Framework 2004-14", published July 2004, that research councils funding will move close to 100% FEC (paragraph 3.18). The present level of funding from the research councils, including AHRC, is set at 80% of full economic costs (FEC). Science-based research in the field of cultural heritage should be treated on the same basis as other research.

Icon Comment

We welcome the DCMS response to these recommendations and look forward to further developments.

RECOMMENDATION 11

We welcome the decision of the Arts and Humanities Research Council to invite applications from the National Museums and Galleries for academic analogue status. However, in order to promote collaboration with university based scientists we recommend that:

- *All National Museums and Galleries seek academic analogue status with the appropriate science-based Research Councils, in addition to the AHRC;*
- *Those Councils encourage and facilitate applications from the National Museums and Galleries in the same way that the AHRC has done.*

DCMS Response

Please see the detailed comments by RCUK on these recommendations in Appendix One.

Icon comment

We welcome the RCUK response to these recommendations.

RECOMMENDATION 12

Despite the outstanding quality of individual publications, the dissemination of up-to-date results of heritage science to practitioners in the UK is patchy and poorly co-ordinated, particularly in the field of moveable heritage. We therefore recommend that the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, in consultation with the National Museums and Galleries and Icon, review and consolidate the sources of scientific guidance available for collections-based conservators, with a view to providing a regular, central source of up-to-date advice.

DCMS Response

It is not the role of the Museums, Libraries & Archives Council (MLA) or its parallel bodies in the devolved territories to disseminate best practice in conservation techniques. Rather, this function falls to the professional body for conservators, the Institute of Conservation (Icon), which is the lead body for the conservation of cultural heritage across all disciplines in the UK. Icon, rather than MLA, may be seen as a central point of contact for information in the conservation and conservation science community in the UK (and beyond).

Notwithstanding this, MLA already works closely with Icon, as well as with other organisations that work in the professional interests of individuals and the cultural heritage sector such as the Museums Association, the Museum Documentation Association (MDA), and the National Preservation Office (NPO), to develop specific projects that contribute to promote best practice in conservation. For example:

Using MLA's Collections Link investment, MDA are taking forward the development of the "Standards in the Museum Care of Collections. . ." series, so that the standards will be updated and better-embedded within museum practice.

Renaissance in the Regions has invested £31 million in collections care over the period 2002–08, of which £17 million has gone directly into collections. This investment has enabled the creation of 188 new curatorial posts, 18.5 of which are conservation posts.

Through the Designation Challenge Fund £3.5 million will have been invested by 2008 in conservation projects, equating to 28% of the funds awarded for the period through the Fund.

Conservation is one element of collections care which is benchmarked within Accreditation, which encourages and enables museums to move towards and attain best practice. This is achieved via the Benchmarks in Collections Care toolkit and via the regional MLAs which have staff with collection care responsibilities giving advice, information and training.

Under the MLA-funded Collections Link website (www.collectionslink.org.uk), MDA has recently signed a formal partnership agreement with Icon which will ensure that conservation and conservation research are better-represented within the service.

The Cultural Property Advice website was commissioned by the MLA in July 2005 and is due to be launched soon via Collections Link in partnership with the MDA. It will be a comprehensive on-line advisory service to help individuals to collect, buy and sell art, antiques and antiquities legitimately and with confidence, providing a reliable, accurate and practical source of information and guidance on cultural property including: exporting and importing cultural objects; current legislation; news on stolen and illicitly traded objects; and lots of checklists and factsheets to support activities.

Icon Comment

DCMS maintains on the one hand, in its answer to Recommendation 2, that it is fully committed to the sustainability of our cultural heritage and delivers this commitment through its NDPBs. On the other hand, its response to Recommendation 12 is that MLA has no role in the dissemination of conservation techniques. This highlights the disjuncture we feel sometimes exists between statements of intention at the strategic level and actual delivery.

DCMS should consider ways to encourage NDPBs to adopt targeted approaches to the publication of science findings, so that the right audiences are reached, either for further debate or to ensure that the results are properly understood by different groups that could use them.

(Office of Science and Technology's Review of Science within DCMS, 2005)

It is worth noting that the MLA's predecessor body, the Museums and Galleries Commission, did have a central Conservation Unit which provided advice and guidance both to conservators, curators, collections care specialists and others who needed advice. This Conservation Unit worked closely with the Area Museum Councils to ensure that best practice and guidance fed through from research into practice in museums and galleries across England. Sadly this very valuable infrastructure was abolished as part of the restructuring which led to the formation of MLA. In contrast to England, the Scottish Museums Council has retained a leading role in the dissemination of conservation advice to museums and galleries.

To improve the value that DCMS obtains from its NDPBs' science, DCMS should:

- bring forward to training for its own staff on evidence-based policy making;
- encourage training for NDPBs' staff on communication of the relevance and implications of technical information for non-specialist readers/audiences; and
- make greater use of secondments/workshops and seminars.

(Office of Science and Technology's Review of Science within DCMS, 2005)

The reference in the DCMS answer to the new Cultural Property Advice service is not really relevant. The service is about the prevention of illicit trade in looted artefacts and restitution of illegally-acquired objects. Although there is a link to our Conservation Register there is no other conservation content.

Icon fully accepts that it is not within the present remit of MLA to consolidate the sources of scientific guidance available for collections-based conservators and we agree this is primarily a task for us. However dissemination should not be so narrowly defined. MLA certainly does have a role in disseminating conservation knowledge more widely to curators, keepers and collections care specialists more generally. The regional MLAs employ a network of Museum Development Officers to offer a full range of advice and support to museums and galleries, including advice on conservation and collections care. MLA certainly can give a commitment to spreading the findings of research more widely, particularly to small local museums, which generally do not employ conservators and depend largely on the advice of the Museums Development Officer. Unfortunately MLA Council no longer employs anybody with specialist knowledge of collections, which does make it rather difficult to identify any clear leadership on this question.

Icon does work with MLA on a number of initiatives and looks forward to continuing co-operation. We acknowledge the contribution of "Renaissance in the Regions" and the money it has put into collections, but so far as we are aware none of this has a bearing on the dissemination of up-to-date findings of conservation science. Likewise we welcome the funds made available through the Designation Challenge Fund and the commitment to increasing Standards in the Museum Care of Collections. We are also pleased to be partnering with MDA and NPO in the development of the Collections Link service, which is currently funded by MLA.

There are two particular points we wish to make about Icon's relationship with MLA at this point. The first is that in our oral evidence (p.180) we said:

"MLA has a 14 page operational plan for the year 2005–06. In this plan conservation is mentioned twice, once in the context of the conservation awards which the Institute of Conservation runs and which MLA supports financially. The only other mention of conservation is a key output in the form of bursaries to develop an internship scheme for conservation trainees. This is actually a scheme run

by my organisation, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, to which the MLA has only given its encouragement. The plan makes no mention whatever of science or conservation research”.

In its own oral evidence to the committee (p.139) MLA cited its support for the Awards as an example of how it promoted public access to and interest in conservation and heritage science. Since giving this evidence we have been advised by MLA that they are withdrawing their support for the Conservation Awards after the 2007 round as it no longer supports their strategic priorities.

This leads to the second point, which is that the sole direct and funded contribution MLA now makes to care of collections in museums and galleries is the Collections Link service. No funding is guaranteed for this service beyond 2008, although MLA has indicated to Icon that it intends to continue funding the service beyond that time.

RECOMMENDATION 13

We recommend that the Office of Science and Innovation undertake to provide the necessary resources to enable the Institute of Conservation to become the focus for the use of heritage science projects to promote public engagement with SET as a whole.

DCMS Response

The Office of Science and Innovation’s policy is to provide funds for promoting public engagement with science through grant support to key delivery bodies: the Research Councils, the Royal Society, Royal Academy of Engineering, British Academy and the British Association for the Advancement of Science. The Institute should seek to work with them.

Icon Comment

Icon will consider whether to pursue this possibility in the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS 14,15,16 AND 17

Icon offers no comment on these recommendations as they fall outside our area of expertise and charitable remit.

RECOMMENDATIONS 18, 19, 20 AND 21

Collaboration is crucial to heritage science. There needs to be good communication between university and museum-based scientists in order to draw effectively on the resources of both communities. But at the moment, despite isolated successes, collaboration remains largely ad hoc. There is no-one within the sector to promote information exchange and support the development of collaborative research projects. In particular, we deplore the fact that there is no body within the United Kingdom taking a strategic overview of research priorities across the field of heritage science. We therefore make the following recommendations.

We recommend the development of a comprehensive national strategy for heritage science, embracing both the immovable and moveable heritage, and covering the United Kingdom as a whole. We do not recommend the establishment of a National Conservation Centre at this stage, though this might be needed in the longer term if the sector does not come together as we have recommended.

We recommend that English Heritage provide the secretariat to support the development of this national strategy for heritage science. We call on the major heritage organisations in England, and their counterparts in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, along with the universities and the Research Councils, to come together in establishing a steering group to take forward the implementation of this recommendation.

We recommend that the newly appointed Chief Scientific Adviser of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport chair and oversee the development of this strategy.

DCMS Response

The creation of a national strategy for heritage science, to co-ordinate the activity that is already underway, is an entirely appropriate response to the Committee's observation that there is no such strategic co-ordination currently in place. The Government welcomes the suggestion that English Heritage provides the secretariat for a co-ordination/steering group to support the development of a national strategy for heritage science. While we note and applaud English Heritage's willingness to provide such a secretariat, we shall consider the proposal further taking into account the resource implications and whether it has the necessary statutory authority to undertake such a role for both moveable and immoveable heritage of all kinds. We would also need to secure the positive support of the national museums and galleries, MLA, NHMF/HLF, and other heritage bodies in the UK, and their agreement to work actively together to develop the strategy.

Given that English Heritage's remit does not cover Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the Committee's recommendation for a UK-wide steering group bringing together the major heritage organisations from each of the home countries along with the Universities and the Research Councils is to be welcomed. Such a group would provide a useful forum for debate and for agreeing the adoption of common standards, as well as being a vehicle for more comprehensive dissemination of information.

Icon Comment

We regret the fact that DCMS will make no additional funding available to support English Heritage to facilitate the running of the new secretariat. Icon has strongly supported English Heritage in taking on this role, and in playing its part in the building of the wider network of partnerships to which DCMS alludes. We are disappointed that a full five months after the publication of the Lords report, English Heritage has yet to make an effective start in offering a clear lead to the sector in getting the secretariat up and running. We appreciate that it has taken time to clarify that no new funding will be coming from DCMS and that taking on this role will necessitate shifting of resources and priorities within English Heritage. We believe the time has now come for English Heritage to give a clear signal to the sector that it intends to undertake this role and make a prompt start with the development of the strategy. If it is not able to do so then we believe it falls to Icon as the membership body representing both the bulk of the conservation science community and the conservation practitioner community to consider alternatives. The committee will perhaps recall that Icon originally offered to host the secretariat, and while we would need to seek funding commitments from a number of external partners in order to be able to undertake this role, we believe that it is of such importance that the matter cannot simply be left to drift.

DCMS should work with and encourage stakeholders to establish science strategies that meet the current and future needs of DCMS' sponsored sectors; and take account of priorities across government as a whole. To fulfil its stewardship responsibilities, DCMS should:

- assure itself that its main science-using NDPBs have science strategies in place that are based on and support the NDPBs' objectives, responsibilities and priorities;
- assure itself that such science strategies take account of the needs of the NDPBs, DCMS and the wider government/stakeholder community; and
- use its NDPBs' science strategies in the development of its own Science and Innovation Strategy.

(Office of Science and Technology's Review of Science within DCMS, 2005)

RECOMMENDATION 22

We further recommend that the strategy be developed as a "bottom up" strategy, with considerable input from the "users and doers" of heritage science, so that the many institutions that play a part in the heritage sector can share a sense of ownership.

DCMS Response

Government agrees that the strategy should be developed in a "bottom-up" fashion, with input from "users and doers" of heritage science. As with the collaborative approach taken by the British Library, TNA and the other five copyright libraries and national archives in producing an internationally peer-agreed strategy for priority areas for applied science for libraries and archives, this sort of approach offers the surest route to securing an agreed strategy that reflects the interests of all parties. Similarly, any national strategy for heritage

science will need to be underpinned by a clear assessment of the needs of the heritage sector across the UK. The preparation of such a needs assessment can draw upon much existing work that has been undertaken, for example in the museums, libraries and archives sectors.

Icon Comment

We welcome and support the views expressed by DCMS on this recommendation.

RECOMMENDATION 23

In parallel, as the strategy develops, and research priorities are identified, we recommend that the Research Councils instigate a time-limited directed programme of research, to encourage collaborative projects and build capacity in heritage science.

DCMS Response

See the response by RCUK to the similar recommendation at paragraph 6.46 in the report.

Icon Comment

Icon welcomes the forthcoming appointment of a Director for Heritage Research, the effective leadership shown to date by AHRC and the positive developments towards a much more coherent focus for heritage science in the research councils. We accept that it is not for DCMS to direct the councils to initiate a specific programme of research, and we will continue to make the case for this with AHRC and its sister bodies when the Director of Heritage Research takes up their post.

Memorandum by Dr Eric May

**OBSERVATIONS BY HERITAGE RESEARCHERS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PORTSMOUTH
AND THE MARY ROSE TRUST (MRT)**

CONTEXT

Portsmouth has a community of heritage researchers based within the University of Portsmouth and the Historic Dockyard. The University has an established record of research and teaching in heritage and conservation science. Its position in a city that houses HMS Victory, HMS Warrior and Henry VIII's flagship Mary Rose, has enabled collaboration on research and MSc courses. Since the Mary Rose was raised from the Solent in 1982, there has been research collaboration between the University and the Mary Rose Trust (MRT), focusing particularly on the deterioration of wood and its conservation. Naturally, MRT is a leading centre for waterlogged wood conservation (Dr Mark Jones), and collaboration with the University has extended to work on the Swedish warship Vasa in the Save the Vasa project funded by the Swedish Government and other EU-funded projects on wood deterioration and conservation.

The University and MRT jointly hosted an international scientific meeting on Heritage Microbiology and Science (HMS2005) at Portsmouth during the Trafalgar anniversary celebrations in June 2005, following previous conferences in Florence and New York. Recently collaboration between the University and MRT has resulted in an edited book on conservation science published by the Royal Society of Chemistry.¹

Heritage materials research at the University is concerned with stone deterioration and conservation and is found in the Schools of Biological Sciences (Dr Eric May) and Geography (Dr Rob Inkpen) with funding from the European Union, Building Research Establishment (BRE), English Heritage, Heritage Malta, SWAPNET, Historic Royal Palaces (Tower of London), Federation for the Built Environment (FBE) and Historic Scotland. The University runs postgraduate MSc courses on Historic Building Conservation and Heritage & Museum Studies (Dr Zeynep Aygen, EDAM) through co-operation with English Heritage at Fort Cumberland, Portsmouth and the Mary Rose Trust. Postgraduates work on historic forts around the city as well as Salisbury and Winchester Cathedrals. The Electrochemistry Group in the School of Pharmacy and Biomedical Sciences (Dr Sheelagh Campbell) has research directed towards conservation of metal in historic

¹ *Conservation Science: Heritage Materials* (edited by Eric May and Mark Jones), November 2006, RSC Publishing, Cambridge, ISBN 978-0-85404-659-1.

ships including the s.v. Cutty Sark, Holland I and the M33. This work involves collaboration with Hampshire County Council Museums Service, Royal Armouries, Mary Rose and English Heritage.

Dr Eric May was invited to give oral evidence to the Lords select committee along with other university researchers in March 2006. The following brief comments are submitted by him after consultation with other researchers in the heritage and conservation science fields.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE ORIGINAL REPORT

1. The original report was a comprehensive assessment of the UK situation relative to heritage and conservation science research and made some excellent recommendations for future action.
2. The recommendation that AHRC should be the lead RC championing heritage science was a cause of some concern but there was reassurance in respect of the appointment of a Director of Heritage Research to oversee activities.
3. It is essential that AHRC will promote both cross-RC and pure science research in heritage and conservation.
4. There were expectations in the research community that the Lords inquiry would highlight the drastic reduction in ring-fenced, direct funding for heritage RTD projects at European level, with transfer of responsibility to national governments.

REACTIONS TO THE GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

1. In general, the tone of the response is positive and gives some encouragement that the profile of heritage research within Government has been lifted by the report. However, to researchers in the provinces, and outside the National Museums, the response is very London/National Museum oriented.
 2. As researchers who have dealt with National Museums/English Heritage, we do not believe that these sponsored bodies have the resources, commitment or brief to either encourage or maintain diversity of research activity.
 3. The introduction makes the extremely important distinction between conservation, conservation science and conservation science research. For many researchers, the care and maintenance of heritage does not mean the same as conservation science research. It is not clear to what extent allocations of £9 million by EH for conservation research will help conservation science research.
 4. Taken together, the endorsement of the appointments of a CSA in DCMS and a Director for Heritage Research at RC level, and the development of a UK-wide strategy for heritage, can only be good for heritage research.
 5. Nevertheless, in view of the importance of heritage and culture to the UK, the appointment of the CSA within DCMS dedicated to heritage (and possibly tourism) seems reasonable. Why should (s)he cover the complete brief of the Department as the response suggests?
 6. There is no reference to the loss of secure funding for heritage research in European RTD programmes that occurred in the last 5 years. It also appears that all comparisons are made entirely within the UK, with no attempt to contextualise within Europe.
 7. Perhaps AHRC should be renamed AHHRC to include its heritage brief and devise a strategy accordingly, with appropriate extra funding for heritage research?
 8. The response of DCMS to Knowledge Transfer Partnerships is disappointing. The lead Department could be DCMS (with HLF?) rather than DTI (with possible involvement of AHRC), unless industry was involved. Problem-solving in heritage/conservation science does not have to have an industrial outcome.
 9. The Government suggests that the UK-wide steering group should consider the nature of heritage science. It asks whether dating, etc. might be a part of "heritage". We suggest caution here: these areas might already be adequately funded and their inclusion in the definition of heritage will exaggerate the extent to which conservation science is funded.
 10. The response leaves the impression that the Government are not proposing any new money for conservation science research, despite the reduction at European level. RCUK state unambiguously "that to deliver the Lords' recommendations in full, additional resource would be required".
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Session 2004–05

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