

A Proposed Conservation Course at the C.C.A.E.

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The Report of the Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections tabled in Parliament in November last specifically and strongly recommended the establishment of training facilities in conservation in Australia as an urgent and necessary step in the process of bringing the national collections under better control. The report suggested that the Canberra College of Advanced Education was one place, although not necessarily the only place, within Australia at which the necessary facilities should be established without delay. Two members of the College Council, including its Chairman, Dr. D. F. Waterhouse, were in fact members of the Committee of Inquiry and, on their initiative, the College undertook some preliminary research to determine what might be done at relatively small cost in view of the constraints upon expenditure imposed by the present state of the national economy. The Principal of the College, whilst on vacation in Europe, visited some of the centres in the United Kingdom at which education in conservation is on offer and met with many people (including Mr. Thompson who is the guest of your Conference) with a view to seeing the nature and scale of the physical facilities provided there for the operation of courses in Conservation and to discuss the outline of a possible curriculum. Some preliminary exploration was undertaken to discover the availability of specialist teaching staff who might be interested in being associated with the work of establishing courses in Australia. In discussions about the Principal's report and his investigations in the United Kingdom, the Committee of Inquiry suggested that it would be desirable for him to have a look at work being done in Canada to ensure that, in establishing a course in Australia, we had the advantage of seeing what was being done in that country which had problems over conservation which were somewhat similar to those prevailing here. Unfortunately, there have

been no funds available to organise this further reconnaissance as yet.

The work to be covered in educating conservators is extremely diverse. It is, at times, highly scientific and involves a wide range of crafts. There is need to provide for detailed study of the structure and characteristics of works of art and artefacts, and of basic procedures of restoration and conservation involving, amongst other things, a study of packaging, storage and display of materials and artefacts. There is a requirement to establish the environmental factors in conservation. Criteria have to be developed for determining what can be done by way of restoration of damaged materials. Procedures have to be established for documenting collections. All these questions are related to the study of the physical and chemical properties of materials including their behaviour and reaction with each other and with external agents of decay and deterioration. Teaching has to include instruction on chemical, instrumental and analytical procedures, microscopy and micro-chemical techniques and practical work in laboratories and workshops. It can be seen from this catalogue of topics that, in establishing a course, the College will be involved in a considerable enterprise.

Preliminary thinking is that a programme might be designed for graduates leading to a Master's degree in applied science over two years of full time study with the possibility of developing a one-year programme at graduate diploma level in specialised areas and perhaps also a diploma programme at undergraduate level for school leavers specifically in the conservation of printed materials and paper.

It is not thought that initially the programme at the College should cover any requirements which might exist in Australia for the training of restorers of high quality paintings. Such a specialised course might more appropriately be established

in a College of Art or in association with a considerable gallery. This judgment, however, was reached largely on the basis of a view formed after a visit to the Courtauld Institute and may, to that extent, have been over influenced by the situation as it was seen in England.

The first development in Canberra will be primarily directed to training conservators for general employment in galleries and museums and some specialists in some specific aspects of materials conservation. The European experience suggests that we should design our courses at the level proposed for an enrolment of not more than fifteen persons each year in each course.

In the present state of employment in Australia, the normal requirements for enrolment in a Master's programme or a graduate diploma programme in conservation could conveniently be stated as possession of a qualification of at least a pass degree or three-year tertiary level diploma, preferably in Science and including Chemistry. Clearly, however, it should be acceptable that we enrol students with degrees in other fields such as a tertiary level art qualification providing that there is evidence of a satisfactory level of knowledge in Chemistry. It is also intended that provision should be made to admit a student on the basis of possession of appropriate Technical College qualifications and work experience.

After a long silence during which these proposals have necessarily been placed in cold storage, there has been some movement in the past few days on this proposal, apparently at the initiative of the Department of Administrative Services and Ministers in the Government. The minimum financial provision initially necessary to provide foundation staff for a course and some very basic equipment would be of the order of \$300,000 distributed over a three-year period. If funding is assured at this level, it is thought possible that a

start might be made in Canberra to establish some courses in 1977. How much more might be required as the work develops will presumably become apparent when we have recruited staff with the necessary expertise to establish the curricula and to determine precisely what is needed by way of back-up equipment, laboratories, access to collections and museum material and other important matters on which very little work has so far been done. Perhaps the most important step to be taken immediately is to identify staff with the experience and enthusiasm to get on with this exciting work.

Postscript

During two months at the end of November 1976 and the beginning of February 1977, Dr. Richardson (the Principal) and Dr. Dunstone (the Principal Lecturer in Chemistry) carried out an extensive reconnaissance of institutions involved in conservation training overseas to assist in the planning for the introduction of appropriate courses in Australia. As a result of this survey, additional developments to the course structure and content have been proposed, the chief of which are:

1. that the proposed graduate course should be for a two-year full-time (or part-time equivalent) period leading to an award of Master of Applied Science, and that, in addition, the course should contain a substantial internship component;
2. that the proposed undergraduate course should be for a two-year full-time (or part-time equivalent) period, leading to an award of Associate Diploma;
3. that the course should cover the widest possible range of materials and should include a study of the conservation and restoration of paintings and buildings; and
4. that the student intake should not exceed ten per year in each course.