

ABSTRACT

In June of 2000 a Skills Gap Audit was conducted by the Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Materials (AICCM) on behalf of the Heritage Collections Council (HCC) to investigate the skill gaps which exist for conservators in Australia. Several skill gaps were identified by conservators. One was the recognition that many traditional trade skills (TTS) required for the conservation of cultural material were being lost.

To address the issue of the survival of TTS and to acquire an understanding of the current needs of conservators in Australia, a new survey was submitted to conservators, conservation students and people involved in allied and supportive conservation roles.

The data collected provides an overview of the opinions of the conservation profession in Australia. Is there still a perceived skills gap relating to traditional trades? What difficulties do conservators experience in accessing these trades? Are there traditional trades at risk of disappearing? Can the skills gap be addressed?

Due to the large and detailed number of responses to this survey, only a selection of results from this survey are summarised in this poster presentation.

BACKGROUND

In the year 2000, a survey titled 'Attainable and Sustainable: Skill Gaps in Conservation in Australia' (Heritage Collections Council 2000, p. 37).

revealed the following concerns:

1. Risks to conserving and caring for heritage objects if TTS were no longer available.
2. Loss of the intangible heritage associated with TTS (UNESCO 2016, para.1).
3. Reliance on contractors resulting in a loss of control of conservation treatments which may lead to objects being incorrectly treated or damaged.
4. Tradespeople, although skilled, may not have an understanding of conservation ethics and practice.
5. There is a disconnect between hands-on skills and scientific understanding (ICOM-CC 1984, Section 2.1)



A master wood carver.
Image from
<http://www.sustainlife.org/blogs/woodworking/woodturning/>

METHODS

1. A qualitative method was chosen to gauge the opinions of conservators and allied stakeholders.
2. An online survey method was employed in order to make the survey available to a large number of participants
3. To obtain statistically credible data, the author aimed to obtain three hundred responses and made the survey available to a variety of participants, in all states of Australia.
4. Personal interviews included a varied selection of participants from traditional trade, conservation, craft-based and conservation organisation backgrounds.
5. Raw data from this survey is available upon request from the author



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Gilding a picture frame. Image from
<https://www.framesnow.com.au/help/gold-leaf-gilding/>

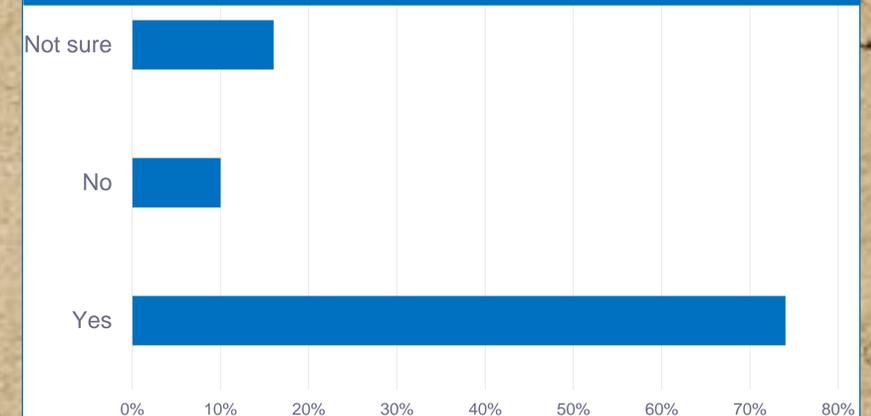


Stonemason Adam Wilcockson, 26, from Lincoln.
Photo: English Heritage



Stained glass conservation. University of York MA in Stained Glass Conservation and Heritage Management

Question 9: As a conservation professional, do you believe you have a responsibility to preserve traditional trade skills?



CONCLUSIONS

- TTS are dying out with no process in place for the sustainability of skills and knowledge.
- Society does not value TTS.
- There is no value in learning a TTS if it does not result in employment.
- Cultural heritage objects are suffering due to the difficulty in accessing TTS.
- Lack of government interest and/or financial support.
- There is a need to establish a 'National Living Treasures' register and an 'Endangered Skills Register' to recognise endangered TTS.
- There continues to be a disharmony between the practice of traditional trades and crafts and the science and theory of conservation.
- The author suggests the establishment of a National Heritage Lottery to fund conservation in Australia.

OBJECTIVES

1. understand current conservation practice
2. identify the current needs of conservators and allied stakeholders
3. assess whether there is still a perceived skills gap
4. determine if opinions have altered since the year 2000 survey
5. generate ideas and solutions to the problem of a skills gap in TTS
6. understand how conservators are solving skills issues in their day-to-day practice

RESULTS

Some recurring opinions expressed in this survey were:

- There are not many people left who have specialised TTS.
- It is difficult to access some TTS due to location.
- There may be a lot of people with a particular TTS but not all of these people are experienced or proficient.
- There is a lack of training of TTS in Australia partnered with a breakdown of the TAFE system (Willis 2011, pp. 10-11).
- Specialised skills command higher fees.
- People with TTS are ageing and their expertise is not being passed on.
- Lack of access to TTS may not be an issue at the moment but will be in the near future.

REFERENCES

Heritage Collections Council 2000, *Attainable and sustainable: skill gaps in conservation in Australia. Skills gap audit of specialist conservators and conservation specialisation in Australia*. Heritage Collections Council, Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, viewed 17 March 2016. <<https://aiccm.org.au/sites/default/files/docs/AICCMBusinessDocs/Attain%26Sustain.doc>>.

ICOM-CC (International Council of Museums-Committee for Conservation) 1984, 'The conservator-restorer: a definition of the profession', viewed 20 August 2016, <<http://www.icom-cc.org/47/history-of-icom-cc/definition-of-profession-1984/#.V7elBph942w>>.

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