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N.S.C.G. - The Future.....

The Way Forward - A personal view (1)

Suggestions were put forward at the Cardiff AGM on how various groups relating to natural science conservation/curation might establish closer links with each other, possibly to form one large organisation. This idea is still at the melting point stage - there are many pros and cons but a larger group, if it could exist, would give us greater political clout, one subscription, one journal plus newsletter, one large 3-day conference (more appealing to overseas members) and considerably more exchange of valuable information.

When making the point made about merging to form an SPNHC style Curator-Conservator Group to provide a stronger political pressure group, I failed to stress at the AGM that we already have this with membership within the Conservation Forum as illustrated by a Conservation Forum letter to Julian Spalding on the cuts in Conservation at Glasgow. The Museums & Galleries Commission Conservation Unit "Conservation Forum" consists of representatives from 11 professional Conservation organisations (representing about 2,000 members) who meet to discuss common issues and help to formulate policy on the development of the profession. A major part of the Forum's work is focused on a common approach to professional accreditation

for conservators with much study of other professional groups' efforts in this field. Most of the organisations are at different stages of working out what diplomas, degrees, NVQs and years of experience and what combination of these they would require for their full accreditation. The ideal would be a national unitary accreditation scheme with differences for each specialism as agreed by the Forum.

One reason why the NSCG left UKIC was that they wished to follow professional accreditation and thus raise the subscription level. I stressed the point at our AGM that if Natural Science Conservators do not follow this road to full harmonised accreditation then we may not be recognised as professional conservators at all by other conservators or employers or the greater museum community and beyond. We know that many of us have had a different career structure to other conservators and are hybrid curators and researchers but many others out in the "real world" may not understand this "special case" scenario. My lonely voice of dissent on the Conservation Forum worries me especially as I have no recognised "bit of paper" saying that I am a conservator myself. All on the Forum are agreed that accreditation is a necessity that will have to come and soon.

My personal view on an SPNHC type amalgam is that the UK is not the USA and that we would be swamped by the greater curatorial membership and no longer recognised by the Conservation profession or by the Museum Community. William Lindsay's comment on waiting for the UKIC money to be sorted seems common sense. As with the Conservation Forum, with due consideration, we can be part of a three-way pressure group without having to merge! We can be this with other groups such as UKIC, Care of Collections Forum and the Museums Association itself.

Do we take charge of our own parameters for accreditation and have a series of "individual peculiarities" attached to our system which can be agreed by Conservation Forum? We have Chris Collins' new MPhil and Certificate courses at Cambridge which could be approved courses to go toward accreditation. Or if individuals wish accreditation do they seek it from other sources such as UKIC.

Do we need accreditation for our membership via Conservation Forum?

Do we seek political clout via Conservation Forum and nurture closer ties with other organisations within Museology in general and not just within Natural Sciences?

For those who do not want accreditation, we could have a student/non accredited and lower fee.

Paul A. Brown
Natural History Museum

The Way Forward - A personal view (2)

Following the discussions at the Cardiff AGM I have drawn up a plan outlining a possible restructuring if the NSCG was to merge or become a sub group of a combined organisation to include BCG, GCG & NSCG. An organising committee consisting of a Conservation Forum rep and reps from each group could meet twice a year. Sub-committees would include: a) Biology curatorial (BCG); b) Geology curatorial (GCG, SPCC); c) Conservation (NSCG, ?ICOM-CC); Training; Editorial & Publication; Membership & Publicity; Conference; Taxidermy (Guild of Taxidermists*).

*[I would suggest not including the Guild of taxidermists since most of their members are individual freelance and professional taxidermists and are not museum connected.]

The first three of these sub-committees each have their own relevant subject groupings:

- 1 taxidermy/freeze-drying (a,c)
- 2 preventive conservation and infestation work (a,b,c)
- 3 geology treatments (b,c)
- 4 fluid preservation - biology (a,c)
- 5 botanical - herbarium (a,c)
- 6 IT and documentation (a,b,c)

We are already establishing closer links with other similar organisations and it could be, for the time at least, that we may proceed no further - the mixing of curatorial and conservator groups may not be ideal in the long term. I would strongly suggest, however, that a united