Austalian Heritage Quality Framework
Discussion Paper No 1: April 2017

**The Relationship between the Heritage Quality Framework and Heritage Skills Development**

**Introduction**

With reference to current heritage management systems and processes, this brief paper explains how outcomes could be improved, and the standards of heritage conservation raised, by adopting quality measures and practices in an Australian Heritage Quality Framework. In particular, this paper explains how quality measures would drive relevant training and improve competence and outcomes in heritage conservation works.

The urgent need to develop skills in the heritage trades and professions is confirmed by formal research and the lived experience of senior heritage practitioners. Three surveys undertaken in recent years substantiate this.¹ To date, attempts to address the decline in skills and meet current and future skills needs have achieved little.

In recent years, three significant training programs aimed at heritage trades skills development in NSW and Victoria² have been supported with substantial State Government resources. In large measure, the programs have foundered due to the lack of incentives for employers and trainees—there are no mandatory requirements for higher level skills to be used in works to heritage-listed places. There is little incentive for training and upskilling when most work to heritage items is allocated on the basis of lowest price and speed of execution, rather than competence, skills and a demonstrated understanding of correct heritage conservation practice.

The Australian Heritage Quality Framework (AHQF), proposed in the Australian Heritage Strategy (2015), could address this deficiency by:

- Raising awareness of the importance of correct techniques applied by skilled practitioners in realising conservation works, so that any work carried out makes a positive contribution to the heritage asset;
- Mandating the use of higher level skills and competency in works to heritage-listed places through Practice Notes and Quality Measures within the AHQF;
- Providing incentives for training, monitoring and self-improvement through the development and consistent use of quality measures; and

¹ HCOANZ, CPSISC and TBCITB.
² NSW TAFE (1990s), Holmsglen, Victoria TAFE (2000s) and NSW Department of Industry (current).
- Emphasising quality outcomes for places of World Heritage, National Heritage and State Heritage significance at least.

Best practices are now rare in heritage conservation across Australia (with the exception of the Longford Academy example discussed below) due to the acceptance of lower standards by the majority of property owners and managers. The experiences of two English-trained tradesmen working in the north of Tasmania\(^3\) provide evidence of shortcomings in current heritage conservation standards, and of the challenges faced in delivering high quality conservation works in Tasmania. Their high-level skills are appreciated by informed property owners and professionals, but in day-to-day activities they are routinely underbid by other tradesmen offering sub-optimal services. This outcome gives rise to adverse impacts on heritage values at the places concerned, for example through the use of common cement mortar in lieu of lime mortar, or by excessive replacement in lieu of careful repair.

**Examples of a demand for quality driving Training, Competency and Use of Skills**

**Canada**
Canada provides an example of how recognition of heritage competence drives appropriate training. Canada has a well-developed heritage management system that values trades training, skills development, professional training and the rigorous application of heritage management methodology in the execution of works. The Canadian experience also informed some early Australian heritage conservation management practices.\(^4\)

In Ontario, Canada, the Willowbank multidisciplinary (mixed trades and professionals) three-year program trains practitioners whose skills and competence are valued by industry to the extent that all graduates to date have been placed in full time positions in heritage project management, construction supervision, professional design and Government bureaucratic roles, mostly in Canada.\(^5\)

The Canadian system supports the highly successful program at Willowbank, a non-profit advanced applied heritage skills educational institution based at a National Historic Site on the Canada-US border in Queenston, Ontario.

**George Town, Malaysia**
After World heritage listing in 2008, the World Heritage Office in George Town became increasingly aware of the lack of traditional trade skills to conserve the many buildings of George Town that were in poor physical condition and under pressure for adaptation using modern building techniques.

The use of traditional building techniques in repair and adaptation is now demanded in the Special Area Planning Scheme for George Town. This has driven a growing demand for

---

\(^3\) The ‘Two Daves’ are English Heritage-trained tradesmen who relocated to Northern Tasmania for family reasons. They have participated in the Longford Academy, demonstrating traditional plastering skills.

\(^4\) The late Jacques Dalibard and Professor Herb Stovel, pioneers and leaders of heritage conservation in Canada, advised and mentored Australians through the early processes of establishing Australia ICOMOS, APT Australasia Chapter and the Burra Charter development. Canadian built environment conservation expert, Lori Anglin, was a foundation member of the APT Australasia Chapter.

\(^5\) Information provided at Australia ICOMOS conference ‘Fabric’, November 2015 by Julian Smith, Director of the Willowbank Centre.
training in understanding heritage conservation philosophy and traditional building trades. The demand for access to traditional building materials has also increased.\textsuperscript{6}

\textit{Tasmania}
Tasmania is discussed here as an Australian case study example for reasons of being relatively well researched and having a high number of significant cultural heritage places, including world heritage sites, that require sustainable heritage conservation resources.

Tasmania has a Heritage Skill Transfer Assistance Scheme administered by the Tasmanian Building and Construction Industry Training Board (TBCITB).

TBCITB established the Heritage Skill Transfer Assistance Scheme in response to commissioned research into current and future industry needs in Tasmania\textsuperscript{7}, which revealed clear evidence of diminishing resources and a lack of ongoing training or skills development. The research revealed an alarming downturn in apprenticeships in the traditional trades, an ageing workforce and fast looming shortages of most skills. However, despite the compelling evidence of need, heritage trades training in Tasmania is still limited to one-off, short and informal programs. There are no accredited heritage training programs at vocational or tertiary level.

The Heritage Skills Transfer Assistance Scheme supports the APT Australasia Chapter with funding to deliver the annual ‘Longford Academy’ in Advanced Conservation Techniques, involving Autumn and Spring Masterclasses in heritage trades practices. The Longford Academy provides a learning opportunity which is currently rare in Australia. More than 100 participants have taken the program including administrators, young and mature practitioners, tradespeople, apprentices and students. Most participants have attended more than one program.

The Longford Academy Program demonstrates how a demand for quality heritage conservation at significant heritage sites will drive a demand for training. The Longford program has resulted in:

- Measurable improvement in the quality of conservation works at the two world heritage sites (Brickendon and Woolmers Estates);
- Improvement in works at other heritage sites through the transfer of skills developed by Longford participants.
- Participants with a technical or trade background reporting strong positive benefits arising from their learning at Longford, including increased opportunities to work on significant heritage places.

\textbf{Conclusion}

All of the available evidence points to an urgent need to develop skills in heritage trades and practices across all levels of heritage management. At the same time, research and practical experience confirms that raising the required standards and incentives will drive training and improve performance in works to heritage-listed places.

Government agencies, the National Trust of Australia, Australia ICOMOS, APT Australasia and others strive to reverse the decline in heritage conservation outcomes through

\textsuperscript{6} AusHeritage and APT Australasia have been involved in delivering heritage competency training programs in Malaysia and in other significant heritage sites in Asia.

\textsuperscript{7} Purple Infinity was contracted by TBCITB in December 2011 to research current provision of, and future demand for, specialist heritage skills within Tasmania’s building and construction industry.
advocacy, mentoring, information sharing, conferences and workshops. But the situation is unlikely to change unless heritage funding and approval bodies and informed property owners mandate a higher standard of heritage conservation practice. Only then will there be a resulting increase in demand for formal training so that practitioners can understand the higher heritage conservation standards and learn how to achieve them.

Quality measures within an Australia Heritage Quality Framework would inform each step in a sustainable and largely self-regulating heritage conservation process, from project planning to execution of works and monitoring of outcomes.

Donald Ellsmore
Convenor
Association of Preservation Technology (Australasian Chapter)

Ian Travers
President
Australia ICOMOS

David Young
Convener
Australia ICOMOS Fabric Conservation Reference Group

For further information please contact

Mary Knaggs
Coordinator
Australia ICOMOS AHQF Project
0427 502042
Mary.knaggs@gmail.com