



INSTITUTE OF HISTORIC BUILDING CONSERVATION

Research Strategy Feedback
c/o James Stevens
Conservation Department
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Dear Sir

Discovering the Past, Shaping the Future: Research Strategy 2005 – 2010 Consultation

I refer to the above consultation document.

The Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC) is the professional body for the United Kingdom representing conservation specialists and historic environment practitioners in the public and private sectors. The Institute exists to establish the highest standards of conservation practice, to support the effective protection and enhancement of the historic environment, and to promote heritage-led regeneration and access to the historic environment for all.

The Institute welcomes the proposed Research Strategy, which appears robust and carefully considered, and looks forward to the opportunities it will create to work in partnership with English Heritage on research projects.

Research is important in any discipline if the subject area is to progress. The Strategy is clear, focused and provides a realistic framework for delivery. The wide range of research interests in the historic environment is acknowledged. It will be a challenge of the Strategy to consider the various interests. In addition, it provides a chance to address the need for pan UK perspective on heritage research matters. Promoting and fostering interdisciplinary research will go to reinforce the relationships and commonality of historic environment professionals.

The Institute would like to take this opportunity to emphasise the need for building research. There are gaps in our knowledge and understanding of our built heritage, whether it is of a particular building type, construction or material, or properties with historical or design importance. In addition, further research into traditional materials and construction techniques in the context of increasingly complex building regulations is needed. Similarly, there is the potential to draw a closer relationship between building conservation and the green/sustainable agenda which needs to be underpinned by research.

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The Strategy should take a holistic approach to research in the historic environment, and the appeal of carrying out research just to ensure outputs are reached, should be resisted.

The emphasis on adopting research definitions and research methods used by Government and other partners in the research community is sensible so there is a level of consistency. The outputs proposed appear measurable, realistic and achievable, which is not an easy task.

A broad understanding of the research being carried out by other groups in the historic environment will be necessary to ensure similar research projects are not being carried out independently. This could assist in the managing of resources and in the production of the annual Research Agenda to be published at the end of the year.

The transfer of knowledge is going to be critical if the Strategy is to maintain credibility over the five year period. Short term and long term research aspirations are needed, and this is recognised in the document. Dissemination of results should be regular, concise and relevant to practitioners dealing with the historic environment on a daily basis. Peer-review will be important at this stage. As with any piece of research, whether qualitative or quantitative, it is imperative that it contributes to existing practice or knowledge of the subject area.

The Strategy acknowledges that the historic environment sector is underdeveloped, and that in the field of research, the historic environment is only a small part. Perhaps there is an opportunity within the proposed research framework to demonstrate and understand the needs and aspirations of the sector within the built heritage, with a view to making a difference.

In summary, the academic style of the Strategy is sound and robust, and that if delivered successfully over the next five years could provide the basis from which future historic environment research programmes can develop and inform current practice.

I trust these comments are helpful.

Yours faithfully

Karen Holyoake
Consultations Secretary