

SUMMARY REPORT



# BUILT HERITAGE SECTOR PROFESSIONALS

*Current Skills, Future Training*



**SKILLS NEEDS  
ANALYSIS OF  
THE UK BUILT  
HERITAGE SECTOR  
2008**

## executive summary

This report was commissioned by the National Heritage Training Group (NHTG) to complement its UK-wide programme of Skills Needs Analysis for the built heritage sector, published as *Traditional Building Craft Skills: Assessing the Need, Meeting the Challenge* (England, 2005 and 2008; Scotland, 2007; Wales, 2007; Ireland, forthcoming 2008).

The home country craft skills reports concentrate on heritage contractors and craftspeople working on pre-1919 buildings, but include the views of manufacturers and suppliers of traditional building materials, public and private stockholders, training providers and a limited survey of architects and surveyors. This report seeks to provide a separate assessment of the needs of UK building professionals – architects, building control officers, conservation officers and specialists, engineers, planners, surveyors and property managers – to establish their training, knowledge and skills in relation to specifying for and advising on traditional buildings and structures.

The research objectives were to:

- analyse and quantify the UK building professionals' labour market, and the demand for building professionals in the heritage sector
- identify the ways in which the skills of professionals may need to change in the future, and as part of this review their understanding and knowledge of the supply and use of traditional building craft skills and materials on pre-1919 buildings and structures

- examine the provision of formal education and continuous professional development available and relevant to building professionals working in the built heritage sector
- make recommendations for improvement to help inform the development of a Skills Action Plan (see Section 11, main report)

To this end, the research has included:

- a quantitative survey of 398 professional services firms and building professionals
- a total of 52 in-depth qualitative interviews with building professionals and professional bodies
- a further 20 interviews with education and training providers offering courses of relevance to built heritage sector professionals
- a set of 30 further in-depth qualitative interviews with property owners and managers (referred to as 'stockholders' throughout the report), and the building professionals they commission
- two focus group meetings with a range of key building conservation professionals and representatives of professional bodies: one at the beginning of the research to inform the quantitative questionnaires and topic guides for the in-depth qualitative interviews; the other at the end of the research to consider the findings and assist in developing the Skills Action Plan.

### 1.1 Conclusions and Recommendations

#### 1.1.1 Demand

- There are over 6 million traditional (pre-1919) buildings in the UK including around half a million listed buildings and over 33,000 scheduled monuments.
- For professionals who have worked on pre-1919 buildings in the last 12 months, this kind of work has made up an average of 35% of their workload, which increases to 76% for conservation or heritage specialists.
- Most professional firms (85%) expect their workload either to stay the same or to increase in the next 12 months, but over half (54%)

of conservation or heritage specialists expect an increase in pre-1919 work, compared with 39% of general professional practices.

- Of pre-1919 turnover 61% is in the private sector and 54% involves conservation and restoration activities, with specialist conservation or heritage practices more likely to be involved in work on public and religious buildings, and general professional practices on private properties.

- Building professionals are most likely to be called upon by property owners to supervise or specify works of repair to pre-1919 buildings and least likely to be involved in routine maintenance work.

- Evidence points to low awareness levels among stockholders regarding the importance and long-term benefits of regular maintenance.

- Even when stockholders are aware of the existence and relevance of conservation accreditation, they can sometimes be persuaded to overlook the fact that a professional is not building-conservation accredited, if the professional can produce a portfolio of relevant experience. This implies a lack of incentive for conservation accreditation.

- The cost of commissioning conservation-accredited professionals was mentioned as being prohibitive by some stockholders.



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- Almost half (45%) of building professionals interviewed produce specifications for built heritage work; 42% of these always or usually consult conservation specialists when developing specifications, and 39% consult master or experienced craftspeople.
- Over a third (37%) of professionals producing specifications for heritage work stipulate that certain aspects of the work requires specialists.
- Encouragingly, 62% of building professionals stipulate that the work should be undertaken by experienced contractors or master craftspeople, although only 34% stipulate that appropriate qualifications should be a requirement.
- It is recognised that demand for appropriate qualifications among contractors will increase.

#### Recommendations: Demand

The sector needs to work together to:

- Increase the amount of maintenance carried out on pre-1919 buildings using appropriate techniques and materials.
- Increase the demand for suitably skilled and building-conservation accredited professionals.
- Improve the relevance of national building standards relating to pre-1919 work to drive demand for professionals with the requisite knowledge to successfully deliver projects
- Identify where variables in practice, policy or understanding might impact significantly on the future demand for skills and supplies in traditional buildings.
- Drive demand by ensuring that the links between built heritage and the sustainability agenda are understood and promoted

#### 1.1.2 Supply

- There are approximately 542,249 UK building professionals within non-manual construction occupations and related consultancy services.
- It is impossible to accurately quantify how many of these professionals work on pre-1919 buildings, although the indications are that a significant proportion of general professional practices undertake work on pre-1919 buildings as part of a broader portfolio of work.
- Out of an initial survey of 1,096 building professionals, 36% said that they had carried out work on pre-1919 buildings in the past 12 months.
- Many building professionals choose to become members of professional bodies, but relatively few become building-conservation accredited.



- This research identified a total of 507 conservation-accredited building professionals from a number of available schemes.
- This equates to one conservation-accredited architect for every 14,722 traditional buildings; one conservation-accredited surveyor for every 84,444 traditional buildings; and one conservation-accredited engineer for every 276,364 traditional buildings.
- Over a third (35%) of professional practices report difficulties in recruiting at professional level and a quarter (25%) at technical level.

- Skills shortages are most prevalent among architects and engineers, and considered very severe by the vast majority (80%) of building professionals.
- New recruits are generally not thought to be adequately prepared for the built heritage sector (unless they have undertaken postgraduate or other specialist conservation training) because of the lack of heritage or conservation content in undergraduate courses.
- Concern exists that there will be inadequate numbers of suitably knowledgeable younger recruits to

take over as experienced professionals retire.

- Although the majority (86%) of professionals say they have not knowingly experienced *skills gaps*, there is a problem relating to the knowledge that building professionals have of appropriate traditional methods and materials for use on pre-1919 buildings.

#### Recommendations: Supply

The sector needs to work together to:

- Maximise the number of high-quality new entrants.
- Improve the image of the built heritage sector.
- Promote clear progression routes for new recruits and the existing workforce.
- Establish a UK-wide pan-professional system of accreditation and facilitate greater uptake of building-conservation accreditation within the sector.
- Improve access to authoritative advice and guidance relating to traditional skills and materials.

#### 1.1.3 Traditional Building Materials Supply Chain

- Over half (55%) of pre-1919 projects worked on by professionals in the last 12 months involved the use of traditional materials, and 77% of professionals writing heritage specifications always or usually stipulate these on traditional buildings and structures.
- Cost and lack of client demand are the main reasons for not specifying traditional building materials, although the latter is to some extent a result of the former.
- There is an apparent lack of understanding among property owners regarding the importance of using traditional building materials and the potential damage that can be caused to their



properties by the use of inappropriate substitutes.

- More than half (55%) of professionals find it easy or fairly easy to obtain performance data on traditional building materials from manufacturers and suppliers, although a minority (5%) do report that this is particularly difficult.

- General guidance on the application of traditional materials for pre-1919 buildings is considered to be lacking.

- A quarter (25%) of professionals find it difficult to specify traditional building materials because of a lack of knowledge on how to guide craftspeople in their use; 38% find planning obligations in relation to these materials difficult.

- Perceived complexities with the planning system and the need to meet modern building standards and legislative requirements can prove particularly challenging for professionals when specifying traditional building materials for pre-1919 buildings; specific concerns relate to the need for pre-1919 buildings to meet energy efficiency and public accessibility criteria, while still observing conservation principles or meeting listed building requirements.

#### Recommendations: Materials

The sector needs to work together to:

- Promote and develop further training programmes targeted at specifiers.

- Promote awareness of the importance of using traditional materials to clients.

- Encourage manufacturers and suppliers to liaise with professionals in order to establish how and where traditional materials meet modern building requirements.

- Establish a comprehensive, easily accessible and well-publicised

source for building professionals to obtain information and performance data on traditional materials and techniques.

- Encourage and facilitate dialogue between professionals and craftspeople to enable experienced craftspeople to contribute their knowledge to the development of the specification process.

#### 1.1.4 Training Provision

- Almost two-thirds (65%) of building professionals do not feel that their formal education prepared them adequately for working on pre-1919 buildings, and the majority (68%) believe that much of the skills and knowledge they have acquired is self-taught.

- Although over half (53%) of building professionals have sourced information and advice before commencing conservation and restoration activities, only a third (32%) say that they find it easy or fairly easy to locate specialist training providers.

- Higher education courses relating specifically to the historic built environment are most commonly taught at postgraduate level; however, concerns exist among providers regarding numbers of students attending specialist courses (at both undergraduate and postgraduate level) because of the effects of top-up fees and other financial considerations.

- Lack of awareness of the career opportunities, a poor image of the heritage sector, and less than adequate coverage of traditional building materials and techniques in relevant mainstream undergraduate curricula are thought to be responsible for lack of interest in this sector by new entrants.

- Practical 'hands on' learning is integral to the way in which

building professionals develop their knowledge and understanding relating to pre-1919 projects, despite the reported lack of practical learning elements within some education and training provision.

- Building professionals report extensive use of online resources to mitigate project-specific knowledge gaps, and more generally as a support to professional development.

- Nearly three-quarters (71%) of professional firms report not having a formal training and development strategy, and staff working within professional practices had an average of 1.7 training days (CPD seminars, conferences, personal research) in the last 12 months in order to assist work on pre-1919 projects.

#### Recommendations: Training

The sector needs to work together to:

- Strengthen the traditional building and conservation components of mainstream built environment professional courses and higher education study curricula.

- Encourage more uptake of existing postgraduate courses relevant to the built heritage sector.

- Demonstrate to employers the essential need for building professionals to continuously develop their understanding.

- Further develop and promote flexible training opportunities and CPD available to building professionals.

- Improve access to information on available training and education relevant to the built heritage sector.

- Continue to link the development of traditional building techniques and the material supply chain to the wider issues raised in the sustainability agenda.

# Key recommendations

In its findings and recommendations, this report recognises the widespread need for awareness-raising and education – educating clients so that they appreciate the benefit and importance of using traditional building methods and materials on their pre-1919 buildings – and ensuring that there is a suitable supply of professionals with the right skills and knowledge to work in the sector through improved training and skills development.

It is also essential in the long term to promote the image of the built heritage sector better to potential new entrants. However, this requires existing building professionals to fully understand the most appropriate ways of working with traditional buildings and the materials they use. Effective communication with experienced craftspeople will assist this process.

The immediate priority is to increase the amount of high-quality information and training available to building professionals in relation to pre-1919 projects. This will help to drive demand for more built heritage and conservation teaching within formal education routes, which in itself will also have to be a parallel driver. These changes will not only help existing building professionals achieve higher standards when working on pre-1919 buildings but will also prepare new entrants better for the type of work they are likely to encounter in their professional duties.

Taking these factors and the rest of the research findings into account, the key recommendations emerging from this study are presented in the adjacent table (presented in more detail within the Skills Action Plan in Section 11 of the main report).

1. **Client demand.** Increase awareness among pre-1919 property owners and managers of the importance of implementing routine maintenance, the use of appropriate materials and techniques, and the appointment of highly knowledgeable experienced professionals and trades/craftspeople for all aspects of pre-1919 work.
2. **Building standards.** Improve the relevance of national building standards relating to the conservation, repair, maintenance and improvement of the historic built environment.
3. **Latent demand.** Identify where variables in practice, policy or understanding might impact significantly on the future demand for skills and supplies in traditional buildings and drive demand through links to the sustainability agenda.
4. **Sector support.** Secure sector recognition of the knowledge gaps of existing professionals working on historic buildings, and sector support to address the shortage of specialist building professionals.
5. **Resources.** Improve access to authoritative advice and guidance relating to traditional building skills and materials, to improve levels of understanding among the building professions, especially with a view to the improvement in standards of specification.
6. **Quality assurance.** Establish and propagate standards of best practice for professionals working in the built heritage sector.
7. **Positive image.** Improve the image of the built heritage sector among potential new recruits.
8. **New entrants.** Maximise the student intake for existing higher education courses, and support the development of new providers where appropriate.
9. **Employment opportunities.** Strengthen the sector by ensuring that the best potential new entrants have ready access to information on current vacancies.
10. **Traditional materials demand.** Increase awareness of the need to specify traditional materials on pre-1919 buildings in order to stimulate demand.
11. **Traditional materials supply.** Increase supply by enabling greater cross-fertilisation of ideas and practices among traditional building and material manufacturing companies to improve standards.
12. **Higher education.** Strengthen the traditional building and conservation components of professional courses and higher education study curricula.
13. **Understanding building craft skills.** Strengthen understanding among the professions of traditional building craft skills and their application on site.
14. **Lifelong learning and CPD.** Improve the knowledge base of professionals already working in the sector.
15. **Trend monitoring.** Monitor improvements within the sector.

The NHTG is confident that progress can be maintained towards providing integrated long-term solutions to overcome the current skills and knowledge gaps clearly identified in this report, but this requires combined resources in terms of funding, person hours, thinking and planning. It is therefore vital that the actions of this report are delivered in partnership with all relevant stakeholders, across the building professionals sector.

Building professionals have a fundamental role as the caretakers, project managers and specifiers responsible for the UK's built

heritage. They need easy access to detailed knowledge and understanding of traditional materials, techniques and buildings.

This will help to ensure that their work on historic buildings is appropriately informed and can therefore achieve a consistently high standard – balancing the need for a sympathetic approach to construction work on historic buildings with the commercial realities and expectations of contemporary society. This is essential in achieving a sustainable and functioning historic building stock for future generations.



# summary of findings

	Demand	Supply	Materials	Training
<b>Findings</b>	<p>There are just over 6 million traditional (pre-1919) buildings in the UK, including around half a million listed buildings</p> <p>An average of 35% of professionals' workload in the last 12 months related to pre-1919 projects, rising to 76% for conservation or heritage specialists</p> <p>Most professional firms (85%) expect their workload to either stay the same or increase in the next 12 months</p> <p>Building professionals are most likely to be involved in works of repair to historic buildings and least likely to be involved in general maintenance</p> <p>Work relates mostly to private structures (61%) and conservation and restoration activities (54%)</p> <p>Evidence of experience is often seen by clients as more important than accreditation</p> <p>Nearly two-thirds (62%) of built heritage specifications written by professionals stipulate that work should be carried out by experienced contractors or craftspeople – only a third (34%) stipulate that appropriate qualifications should be a requirement</p> <p>It is recognised that demand for qualifications among contractors will increase</p> <p>Most professionals report difficulties in finding qualified or experienced craftspeople for pre-1919 work</p>	<p>Survey data identifies 542,249 building professionals working across the UK – a significant proportion probably work on traditional buildings at some point in their career</p> <p>Out of 1,096 building professionals surveyed, 36% said that they had carried out work on pre-1919 buildings in the past 12 months</p> <p>Many building professionals become members of professional bodies – few become building-conservation accredited</p> <p>A total of 507 conservation-accredited building professionals were identified from various available schemes</p> <p>Over a third of professional practices report difficulties recruiting professionals – most prevalent among architects and engineers, and considered very severe by 80% of professionals</p> <p>The majority (86%) of professionals say they have not experienced skills gaps, but there is a problem relating to the knowledge that building professionals have of appropriate traditional methods and materials for use on pre-1919 buildings</p> <p>There is apparent disagreement and uncertainty about the difference between conservation, restoration, repair and maintenance activities, and whether the difference is relevant</p> <p>New entrants into professional practices are reported to be poorly prepared for, or lack interest in, the built heritage sector</p>	<p>Over half of the work carried out by professionals on pre-1919 projects in the last 12 months (55%) has involved the use of traditional materials</p> <p>Where traditional materials are not specified, this is generally linked to the cost or a lack of demand from clients</p> <p>More than half (59%) of professionals find it easy or fairly easy to obtain performance data on traditional materials from manufacturers and suppliers</p> <p>General guidance on the application of traditional materials for pre-1919 buildings is considered to be lacking</p> <p>One quarter (25%) of professionals find it difficult to specify traditional materials owing to a lack of knowledge on how to guide craftspeople in their usage</p> <p>Perceived complexities with the planning system and the need to meet modern building standards and legislative requirements are a particular challenge for professionals when specifying traditional building materials</p>	<p>Almost two-thirds (65%) of building professionals do not feel that their formal education prepared them adequately for working on pre-1919 buildings, and the majority (68%) believe that the relevant skills and knowledge they have acquired has been self-taught</p> <p>Higher education courses relating specifically to the historic built environment are most commonly taught at postgraduate level</p> <p>Demand for formal education specialising in the built heritage sector is currently low, and there are funding concerns that could affect this further</p> <p>Practical 'hands on' learning is integral to the way in which building professionals develop their knowledge and understanding relating to pre-1919 projects</p> <p>Nearly three-quarters (71%) of professional firms report not having a formal training and development strategy in place.</p> <p>On average 1.7 days of formal and informal training were undertaken in the last 12 months by individuals relating to work on pre-1919 projects</p> <p>Only 32% of professionals say that they find it easy or fairly easy to locate specialist training providers</p> <p>There is great variety in the methods used by building professionals to continue their professional development in relation to understanding built heritage work</p>
<b>Implications</b>	<p>There is very significant latent demand for work on pre-1919 buildings</p> <p>There is insufficient incentive for conservation accreditation</p> <p>Insufficient awareness among stockholders regarding the benefits of carrying out routine maintenance and the appropriate use of traditional skills and materials</p> <p>A failure to address weak specification writing could prove detrimental to the supply of skilled traditional craft skills</p>	<p>New recruits may be ill-equipped to replace experienced professionals approaching retirement</p> <p>There is a shortage of conservation-accredited professionals available for projects requiring the input of a recognised specialist</p> <p>Knowledge gaps among existing professionals working regularly on historic buildings will have long-term implications for the buildings concerned</p>	<p>Knowledge gaps exist relating to the characteristics and properties of traditional materials, the techniques required to use them, and the most appropriate application of them</p> <p>The application of inappropriate materials or techniques by professionals and craftspeople is detrimental to the buildings they work with</p> <p>Stockholders unwittingly disregard the long-term benefits to their buildings of using traditional materials</p>	<p>New recruits lacking interest in built heritage sector work and an awareness of the career opportunities available to them</p> <p>Knowledge transfer for the sector is reliant upon peer consultation, online resources and other informal learning methods rather than high-quality formal training and education</p> <p>Insufficient easily accessible specialist training provision exists for professionals looking to develop</p>
<b>Solutions</b>	<p>Increase the amount of maintenance carried out on pre-1919 buildings and the demand for suitably skilled professionals</p> <p>Increase demand for suitably skilled and building-conservation accredited professionals</p> <p>Improve the relevance of national building standards relating to pre-1919 work</p> <p>Identify where variables in practice, policy or understanding might impact significantly on the future demand for skills and supplies in traditional buildings</p> <p>Drive demand by ensuring that the links between built heritage and the sustainability agenda are understood and promoted</p>	<p>Improve the image of the sector and promote clear progression routes for new recruits and the existing workforce</p> <p>Maximise the number of high-quality new entrants into the sector</p> <p>Establish a UK-wide pan-professional system of accreditation and facilitate greater uptake of building-conservation accreditation within the sector</p> <p>Establish and propagate standards of best practice</p> <p>Secure sector support to address skills gaps and shortages relating to built heritage work</p> <p>Improve access to authoritative advice and guidance relating to traditional skills and materials</p>	<p>Establish a comprehensive, easily accessible and well-publicised source for building professionals to obtain information and performance data on traditional materials and techniques</p> <p>Promote awareness of the importance of using traditional materials to clients</p> <p>Encourage manufacturers and suppliers to liaise with professionals in order to establish how and where traditional materials meet modern building requirements</p> <p>Encourage knowledge transfer between professionals and craftspeople</p> <p>Promote and develop further training programmes targeted at specifiers</p>	<p>Strengthen the traditional building and conservation components of mainstream built environment professional courses and higher education study curricula</p> <p>Demonstrate to employers the essential need for building professionals to remain up to date with built heritage issues.</p> <p>Promote and encourage more uptake of existing postgraduate courses relevant to the built heritage sector</p> <p>Further develop and promote flexible training opportunities and CPD available to building professionals</p>

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[www.nhtg.org.uk](http://www.nhtg.org.uk)

[www.constructionskills.net/research](http://www.constructionskills.net/research)

[www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk)



The National Heritage Training Group  
Carthusian Court  
12 Carthusian Street  
London  
EC1M 6EZ

e-mail: [info@nhtg.org.uk](mailto:info@nhtg.org.uk)  
[www.nhtg.org.uk](http://www.nhtg.org.uk)

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Intuitive Design  
Tel: 01621 868 698  
[www.intuitive-design.co.uk](http://www.intuitive-design.co.uk)