

Heritage 2020

Heritage 2020 Foresight meeting: Diversity in the historic environment sector

Notes of sessions including recommendations emerging from the day

8 February 2017

The Heritage 2020 Foresight meeting brought together members of the Heritage 2020 working groups and the Historic Environment Forum to examine an issue that cuts across the historic environment sector, and generate practical suggestions that will address the issue through collaborative working. The 2017 Foresight meeting focused on the question of *diversity* in the historic environment sector.

These notes record the format of the day and capture the key points raised by the invited speakers and the discussion groups. They conclude with over-arching recommendations for the Heritage 2020 working groups as well as a summary of three broad groups of issues to be addressed by collaborative working across the Historic Environment Sector.

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Introduction

Structure of the day

The day began with an address by invited speaker Giles Smith, Deputy Director of Heritage, Tourism and Cultural Diplomacy at DCMS. The address set the scene by highlighting what is known about current practice, comparing the heritage sector's performance to other sectors and by drawing on examples of the challenges and opportunities for improving diversity.

Over the rest of the day participants were split into four working groups, each focusing on a theme:

- Governance
- Participation
- Research
- Workforce

Five 'critical friends', external to the work of Heritage 2020, chaired the working groups and contributed their perspectives on diversity issues:

- Elizabeth Henry, Church of England (*Governance*)
- Sefryn Penrose, UCL (*Research*)

- Judy Ling Wong, Black Environment Network (*Workforce*)
- Steve Moffitt, A New Direction (*Participation*)
- Ian Bradshaw, The McPin Foundation (*Participation*)

In the first discussion session, each working group set out to identify the diversity challenges relevant to their theme and priorities for action. The second session sought practical solutions, discussing ways in which collaborative working, and the Heritage 2020 themes¹, can address these challenges.

Challenge address: Giles Smith, Deputy Director of Heritage, Tourism and Cultural Diplomacy, DCMS

Giles began his address with positive examples of heritage initiatives explicitly or implicitly tackling issues of diversity and looking afresh at the heritage agenda (e.g. the Heritage Index, 2016; work done by Historic England [re: diversity and strengthening corporate structure]). Recently published data (Heritage Counts, Taking Part) shows heritage is doing better than other sectors in some areas, such as engagement. Specific metrics (e.g. Taking Part Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) decile, and socio-economic status measures) show gaps in participation amongst people from different socio-economic groups are closing.

The data also highlights certain challenges though: while heritage is closing the gap in engagement across socio-economic divides, it is still noticeably behind other areas. For example levels of participation across underrepresented ethnic groups remain low and there is relatively little data about the diversity of the workforce across the sector and of people in governance roles.

In terms of suggestions as to how the sector might address the diversity challenges it faces, Giles commented on the value of targets and the role they can play in driving improvement. However, he highlighted the need to first address gaps in the data and the need to ask challenging questions to improve the sector's understanding of the current situation, without which it is considerably harder to target interventions.

He encouraged learning from other sectors' successes and challenges – such as, for example, Sport England's successful '[This girl can](#)' campaign, which transcended the gender issues it set out to target and projected an image of sport as a sector for people who previously felt it wasn't for them. What could the heritage equivalent of this campaign be? To achieve similar changes, the heritage sector will need to draw inspiration from other innovative sectors, and consider how to bring these approaches into heritage.

Giles also addressed the question of a selling point to appeal to a future workforce – in a sector with relatively low pay, it is essential to reconsider whether heritage is leveraging its story effectively. There is a need to focus hard on what the mission of the sector is in order to advocate effectively for what people will join when they take part in it.

Giles ended his opening remarks by recommending that action plans be targeted to specific communities and issues. He reminded participants that the heritage sector is strategically well-placed – in terms of its role in the economy and connections to local communities – and that exit from the EU will present opportunities for engagement and forging new values for the future.

¹ The objectives of the [Heritage 2020 initiative](#) are delivered through five themes:
[Capacity Building](#)
[Constructive Conservation and Sustainable Management](#)
[Discovery, Identification and Understanding](#)
[Helping Things to Happen](#)
[Public Engagement](#)

Introductory observations by ‘critical friends’ / discussion group chairs

The discussion groups’ ‘critical friends’ were invited to share their thoughts on diversity issues before the start of the first discussion session.

Elizabeth Henry, National Adviser for the Committee for Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns at the Church of England, stressed the importance of making a shift to beyond talking about diversity to talking about diversity of inclusion. She proposed that diversity is well-used and understood as the mix of people; inclusion is about how to get the mix and make it work. She is a supporter of the use of targets as an aspirational show of commitment to diversity from the part of organisations to the people they are seeking to include. She discussed collaboration and the value of local partnerships and partnerships between small and large organisations.

Sefryn Penrose is a research associate on the AHRC-funded project, ‘Assembling Alternative Futures for Heritage’ at UCL, exploring how heritage creates futures and how, in turn, current processes direct what future heritage will be. She has also worked as a researcher and consultant for Atkins Heritage. Sefryn raised issues of exclusion and accessibility in the heritage field. She suggested that the shift towards inclusivity would need to happen at the top – when defining heritage and deciding what to include, using the listing of a mosque but exclusion of its minaret from the listing as an example of the importance of asking ‘whose heritage?’ and ‘whose voice?’ when setting the research agenda. She spoke in favour of embedded innovation and better collaboration between researchers and practitioners, using the example of the success of the Historic England [Pride of Place](#) initiative in building a collaborative base to take forward a project.

Judy Ling Wong is a painter, poet and environmental activist, and Honorary President (previously Director) of the Black Environment Network charity. She raised the question of whether recent history, although multicultural, is truly represented as multicultural. For Judy, the role of the heritage sector lies in shaping how others see us, through all possible interpretations and the atmosphere they create; she views perception and identity as the way forward in creating an inclusive workforce and ensuring that diverse and excluded communities think that heritage is their arena too.

Steve Moffit is the Chief Executive of A New Direction (AND), the Bridge organisation that works in partnership with others to ensure all children and young people get the most out of London’s creative and cultural assets. While new to heritage, Steve is particularly interested in partnerships and collaborations. He challenged the sector to use available data more intelligently to better support arguments and decision-making, and commented on the need to listen to target communities. AND, for instance, has involved young people in the decision-making of the organisation which has changed the way the organisation works. Steve argued that innovation is a process that happens on the edge and, whilst not always straightforward, creates the conditions for change to happen, from which organisations can learn.

Ian Bradshaw, Policy Manager at the McPin Foundation, specialises in mental health research, involving people with experience of mental health problems. He pointed out that research, for a long time, has been done ‘*to* people, rather than *with* people’: true involvement takes time and investment, and requires a review of organisations and their structures. Ian advocates involving so-called target communities in the conversation, getting a broad range of input, and being aware that diversity is sometimes hidden.

Session 1: Identifying the diversity challenges

Discussion Questions:

- *What are the diversity challenges for [governance/participation/research/workforce]?*
- *What are the priorities?*

Governance

The Governance group identified multiple challenges for diversity in governance:

- Starting the conversations in the sector can be difficult: some areas of diversity are more difficult or contentious than others, and uncomfortable issues can stand in the way of achieving diversity.
- Lack of diversity can stem from unconscious bias, and in turn creates bias – particularly in the selection process, where the people tend to appoint in their own image.
- The sector runs the risk of defining heritage too narrowly, with fixed boundaries – definitions and, subsequently, perceptions of what heritage is should be broader.
- Are heritage players aware of who they represent and the breadth of their constituents?
- The heritage sector needs to review its branding, or outward image of who and what it is for, to expand understanding.
- Increasing diversity in the fabric of heritage (what it is) and who engages with it (communities) might require different approaches.
- The sector is full of very small organisations.

It put forward the following priorities for action:

- Thinking harder about what heritage is and how broad it is.
- Enabling flexible working to draw in a wider range of people (e.g. part-time work options).
- Challenging unconscious bias and becoming ready to take more risks in employment practices.
- More collaboration between larger and smaller organisations.
- Developing an assessment mechanism to help small organisations evaluate their performance, and a self-assessment framework for organisations to compare performances between them.
- Building personal relationships and mentoring between people in governance roles and people questioning how to get there.
- Identifying and working with role models from the sector that others can aspire to.
- Making sure governors of organisations believe in the issues at hand.

Research

The group discussing diversity and research put forward the following challenges:

- Knowing what there is in terms of data and how to access it.
- The sector tends to approach the issue as a “diversity project”, when diversity needs to be normalised and built in to research. This approach poses problems with embedding our knowledge of the issue, where legacies aren’t imported into work practice beyond a diversity campaign.
- There is a disconnect between the research done and its application. How is research being disseminated? How are practitioners accessing and using it?
- The language of heritage creates barriers – this needs to be addressed either at research level, or at engagement level (teaching people how the sector communicates).

As a response, the group advocated for research as a tool for better understanding the problem, by probing into the causes of the lack of diversity. It identified the following priorities for action:

- Collating the data available to the sector and clarifying the metrics used.
- Attitudinal research to understand why heritage is not a very diverse field.
- Research into exclusion (who, why and how).
- Institutionalising approaches to diversity.

- Exploring digital possibilities, particularly around how existing heritage data could be mined.

The group also flagged up the need for caution against applying solutions to problems we don't understand.

Participation

The group discussing participation discussed the challenge of defining heritage and its resonance in the way it is described and its different elements. The following challenges were identified:

- Measuring participation in heritage is hindered by the fact that the sector itself struggles to define heritage consistently.
- At the moment, participation is measured primarily in visits. Heritage itself is broader than visitor attractions, and requires thinking about engagement and participation more broadly – to include, for example, listing decisions and neighbourhood plans.
- Participation, unlike engagement, is about challenging the power of authoritative voices and other decision-makers in heritage. How do we create the space for people to challenge power?

Emerging from the discussions about the definitions of 'heritage' and 'participation vs. engagement' were the following priorities for action:

- Clarifying what data is being collected in sector reviews, and in what context (e.g. *Taking Part* shows the sector is doing relatively well. Does this data capture what the sector defines as heritage and participation?).
- Reviewing how the sector builds relationships beyond the "diversity campaign" – we know, for instance, that engaging with young people from underrepresented backgrounds is a priority, but the sector often fails to build on this early participation.
- Thinking about shared understanding of different levels/types of participation, and what the sector is looking to accomplish
- Better articulating current activities and the benefits of investment in heritage in tangible terms, telling stories about what people have saved or accomplished

Workforce

The final group identified two main challenges affecting diversity in the workforce:

- The systemic low pay and lack of security of heritage sector jobs, which tend to only draw in people from secure economic backgrounds. The sector needs to review its image and find alternative ways of expressing its value.
- The recruitment process remains rigid, and often relies on academic routes that may be inaccessible to wide segments of the population.

In order to address these challenges, the group suggested:

- Reviewing the organisational image of institutions in the sector, actively looking for areas of opportunity open to diverse backgrounds and appointing ambassadors.
- Rebranding organisations, finding stories about *people* that others can identify with.
- Looking for parallels with other sectors from which to draw inspiration.
- Reviewing mobility in the sector and recruiting with an emphasis on transferable skills rather than academic qualifications.
- Establishing a network of role models.

The Workforce group also touched on the need to address the different challenges and opportunities faced by the privately-owned heritage sector.

Session 2: Addressing the challenges

The purpose of the second session was to expand on the issues that had been identified as priorities in session 1, and for each themed group to discuss how these priorities could be addressed through collaborative working, in particular, through the Heritage 2020 working groups.

Discussion Questions:

- *Where can collaborative working address these challenges?*
- *What can each Heritage 2020 group commit to doing in practical terms?*

Feedback from each group's discussions is summarised below.

Governance

- Look at the qualifications and occupational requirements needed for governance roles. Do these exclude people?
- Small and large organisations could work together to share existing assessment criteria or tools so that organisations can assess themselves and understand where there are gaps, what the barriers are and what is and isn't working in terms of the steps they are taking to ensure diversity in governance.
- Mechanisms for cascading practice could include a toolkit or peer-to-peer sessions or consultancy support.
- Investigate funding available to encourage collaboration between organisations and a project to support self-assessment and evaluation/comparison of performance.

Research

- Practical action should focus on embedding approaches to diversity in research and a shift away from a project focus to addressing diversity as an issue.
- Share examples of approaches between large and small organisations as both have experience to benefit the other.
- Heritage is a diverse sector and we must recognise that while there may be solutions and issues in common there will also be differences. Research into 'barriers to participation' is almost always going to come up with a traditional approach (around barriers to visits) so breaking up the research into smaller parts might yield more useful information, e.g. subsectors, such as research undertaken by CBA with UCL '[Diversifying participation in the historic environment workforce](#)' (2012).

Participation

- The conversation about diversity in the heritage sector needs to extend beyond Heritage 2020 and bring in people from organisations outside of the sector.
- When thinking about diversity in participation there is a need to think about the different incentives for participation that are embodied by the collection of organisations that take part in Heritage 2020.
- Use the assets available across the sector – got heritage assets, a strong cause, the sector is able to recruit people to take part (volunteering, membership).
- Think about the hidden diversity in the workforce. The workforce is not homogeneous.
- Understand the perceptions of the people who do not currently participate of what is involved in taking part.

Workforce

- Organisations can question the qualifications needed to work in the sector/specific roles.
- People are unclear about the range of jobs available. Create short videos on YouTube to show people what's on offer.
- Use opportunities like Heritage Open Days to show the jobs behind the heritage sites.
- Think beyond organisations and encourage individuals working in the sector to each take steps such as going back to school/university to talk about their career and career path, or create opportunities for job-shadowing or mentoring.

A wider discussion between Foresight participants identified a need for the democratisation of the notion of heritage, and for radical action to change understanding and perception of heritage as "taking part in country houses". Participants raised organisational complacency, self-perception and the way this affects perception of the field of heritage as issues that all need to be addressed.

Recommendations for Heritage 2020 working groups

- Involve people from outside of the historic environment sector in the Heritage 2020 working groups.
- Stop talking about diversity as a distinct issue but embed steps to address it in the way that we work across the sector.
- Define a piece of work (for example around collaborating to share practice and experience to support self-assessment and evaluation in governance practice) and propose it for funding.

Conclusion and next steps

The Foresight day enabled people from the five Heritage 2020 working groups to come together with members of the Historic Environment Forum (HEF) to discuss diversity challenges in governance, research, participation and workforce for the sector. These discussions were enhanced by the input of 'critical friends' who work with diversity issues but are not presently involved with the Heritage 2020 working groups. Involving people outside of the historic environment sector in Heritage 2020 work going forwards was, itself, a recommendation to come out of the day. The groups had no difficulty in identifying challenges for the sector and were also able to put forward priorities. Whilst there was limited success in identifying specific practical actions that could be proposed to the individual Heritage 2020 working groups certain common themes, both in terms of issues to be addressed, as well as mechanisms to address the issues, did emerge.

The challenges and priorities identified in session 1 (in several cases priorities were given as priority actions) and the feedback from session 2, have been drawn together and grouped under three broad headings of 'data', 'process' and 'perception', transcending the original themes of the day's working groups (see Table 1 below).

This summary of the Foresight day discussions will be circulated to the Heritage 2020 working groups and will be made available on the H2020 website. The working groups will be encouraged to address the issues raised here through their action plans. Circulation of the summary will help to inform the wider sector of the discussions that took place and the sector will be encouraged to contribute ideas and practical measures for working in collaboration to address the issues. Circulation is also a first step towards engaging a wider group of people, from outside of the historic environment sector, with the diversity challenges faced by the sector as was recommended by the day. It is hoped that this can lead to extending collaborations beyond the sector.

Table 1. Heritage 2020 Foresight session on diversity in the Historic Environment Sector: summary of challenges, priority actions and suggestions for collaboration

Issue	What's needed	How to address
DATA		
What data exists?	Collate data Clarify metrics used	Existing work into influencing statistics by Helping Things to Happen working group?
- workforce? - governance? - participation [data = visits to heritage visitor attractions?]	Heritage is broader than visitor attractions. Participation is broader than visits. Attitudinal research – why not diverse? Exclusion – who, why, how?	
PROCESS		
Existing processes (especially around recruitment/ promotion) reinforce lack of diversity (governance and workforce).	Explore range of opportunities (roles) and different skills required. Explore different employment practices (flexible working, Apprenticeships) Examine mobility (of workforce).	Communicate through: Role models and ambassadors. YouTube videos showing range of roles. Personal stories. Mentoring and job-shadowing.
Absence of process (assessing diversity in governance)	Share governance practice	Develop self-assessment process that enables evaluation/ comparison of performance with toolkit to address areas for development (e.g. through peer support, consultancy, shared resources)
New process	Seek out examples of innovative practice elsewhere.	
Research processes	Move to an 'embedded' not 'project' approach to diversity.	Share examples of work that achieves this so that it becomes normalised.
PERCEPTION		
Narrow definition of heritage → narrow perception of heritage → narrow diversity.	Expand perception of what heritage is. Expand perception of what participating in heritage is. Create space for people to challenge power.	Expand the conversation - Use assets: Cause People already engaged with the cause (volunteers, members) 'Hidden' diversity within the workforce
Systemic low pay means the sector is only attractive to people from secure economic backgrounds.	Re-define 'value' to people from many backgrounds.	Re-brand heritage/ organisations as more inclusive.

6 March 2017