

## **English Heritage's Research Strategy 2005-2010**

### ***Discovering the Past Shaping the Future* - A summary of responses to the consultation.**

#### **Introduction**

On 27 October 2005 English Heritage launched its first Research Strategy establishing a 5 year plan of action for the use of research to support its business, government priorities and the historic environment sector. As well as publishing the Strategy itself, English Heritage also published a Research Agenda that illustrated how it structures and prioritises the wide range, depth and types of research it carries out to support its business. The Strategy was also intended to be a catalyst for debate on the need for, and the shape of, a UK-wide research strategy for the historic environment.

The launch of the Research Strategy and its associated Research Agenda marked the start of a 12 week public consultation on both:

- the Research Strategy and its associated research agenda; and
- English Heritage's proposal to work with partners to help assemble a UK-wide strategy for research on the historic environment.

#### **Approach to the consultation**

The key element of the consultation exercise was the publication of the Research Strategy and Research Agenda documents. More than 1,000 hard copies of the documents were distributed to a very wide range of interested organisations. They were also made available from EH's website and entries in a number of journals and newsletters published by organisations in the public, private, voluntary and community sectors.

#### **Detailed responses to the English Heritage Research Strategy**

The following section provides a summary of the main issues which emerged as a result of the consultation on the Research Strategy:

##### **a) Realising the potential of the research dividend**

The difficulties of accessing data and research from previous projects and the obstacles this creates for new research was highlighted by a number of respondents. Many respondents from different sectors remarked upon the difficulty of accessing the results of EH funded research and consequently the need for better archival and retrieval systems to help information exchange.

#### **Response**

English Heritage recognises that it is uniquely placed to ensure that conclusions and recommendations emanating from our research programmes can be effectively transferred and exploited for national benefit. It encourages staff, research partners, consultants and contractors to publish interim and final reports whenever possible. All grant-aided research projects are required to specify formal outputs and increasingly these are web-based as well as available in hard-copy format. The importance EH attaches to ensuring that its

research is made available in a form which can be used by others is reflected in the establishment of its research programme A3: 'Realising the potential of the research dividend'. EH's publishing policies will also require management and staff to deliver the maximum number of research outputs for a given piece of research to the largest possible audience. Results of research should be readily and easily available and one of our commitments is to work more closely with other agencies and departments to establish better links, networks and exchanges of research so that we all can benefit from the interchange of problems and solutions and to share common research costs.

EH will continue to work with wider research communities to improve the exchange of information and ideas and to develop common research interests. This is reflected in the establishment of research theme F: 'Studying and developing information management' which recognises that technical advances in data capture, manipulation and storage will have a critical impact on the historic environment sector in the years ahead. By studying and developing information management, EH can make itself and the sector more efficient, effective and economical and assist knowledge transfer and public access to data. EH is also considering making all its research publications available through our website together with references to those of our partners and research contractors. This is demonstrated by EH's support of digital archiving and dissemination organisations such as the Archaeology Data Service, and specific initiatives such as The British and Irish Archaeological Bibliography and the Survey of London On-line. EH has also recently begun the quarterly publication of *Research News* to keep stakeholders and potential partners in the research community informed on the scope and breadth of EH's research activity. It will also serve to flag-up emerging corporate research interests.

#### **b) The shift of resources to fund socio-economic research**

Although there was general welcome to English Heritage's commitment to carry out more socio-economic research, especially to better understand those public values invested in the historic environment and the barriers to wider participation, some respondents did express concern at the implications of re-balancing research resources away from traditional areas of EH's research, such as studying and understanding the historic environment. There was a suggestion that English Heritage might need to further prioritise the allocation of internal resources between the seven research themes and programmes.

#### Response

Understanding the historic environment and studying and assessing the threats to it (the focus of research themes A and D) will continue to enjoy substantial English Heritage research investment. The Strategy commits English Heritage to investing more in providing the evidence-base for policy development, especially focussing resources on more socio-economic research. The total value of external research (that is commissioned, contracted or delivered with partners on a shared cost basis) will be expressed on the English Heritage website each year as the total value will vary depending on the funds available. English Heritage's research budget is not ring-fenced and must be justified and prioritised in competition with other pressing activities

### **c) Capacity challenges arising from Heritage Protection Review and the planning process**

Several respondents called for more research to assess better the consequences of Heritage Protection Reform following publication of the White Paper later this year. They argued that further research is essential to assess the capacity of the sector to support the reform process and local delivery.

#### Response

The Heritage Protection Review (HPR) represents a vital opportunity to improve the way in which we interpret, assign, value and manage the historic environment. Creating a new system must be underpinned by research in a number of areas: the review covers all aspects of heritage legislation, from Ecclesiastical Exemption to marine archaeology; from archaeological class consents to local designations; from integrated approaches to designating historic places to creating a new system of heritage consents. The need for targeted research is very strong. English Heritage has already redirected substantial research resources to support this new strategic priority. We need to ensure that the implementation of HPR is both realistic and achievable. In conjunction with the DCMS, English Heritage has commissioned Atkins Ltd to examine current delivery structures and assesses the capacity of local authorities to implement to proposed changes to the national system of heritage protection. An initial desk-top study has been concluded which:

- Maps the range of services currently provided by local authorities at community, local and regional level, identifying user expectations and assessing English Heritage's engagement with local authorities;
- Assesses the research methodologies employed and reviews the conclusions and recommendations relating to local service delivery; and
- Defines the criteria to categorise the nature and quality of service provision and clarifies the likely implications of HPR on historic environment services.

### **d) Historic Environment Records**

Attention was drawn to the importance of maintaining the Historic Environment Records (HERs) centres as a key information resource.

#### Response

English Heritage is committed to developing HERs management and services primarily through the National Monuments Record (NMR). Working closely with the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers (ALGAO) to support Historic Environment Records, English Heritage provides leadership and ensures that the services provided meet their needs. A range of services to the network of HERs is provided including:

- In partnership with ALGAO and IHBC, developing the Heritage Gateway, a portal to the resources of national and local records, which will also help deliver the information base to support the Heritage Protection Review
- HER News, a free digital news letter published twice yearly and available on the English Heritage website
- HER Forum, twice yearly meetings with presentations and discussion sessions on issues relating to HERs and an email discussion list.
- Audits, English Heritage provides grants to HERs to carry out wide-ranging audits of their content, resourcing and services to assist them in making improvements.
- Hosting a joint working party on HERs with ALGAO.
- Free licences to hold copyrighted data from the NMR.
- Support and advice for IT companies working with HERs.
- Advice on a range of issues including data standards, database design, GIS and funding bids.

English Heritage's national archiving role through the National Monuments Record, means that it is conscious of the risks and challenges associated with providing researchers with ready and efficient access to information of all kinds and this has been identified as a research priority through research theme F: 'Studying and developing information management'.

#### **e) Regional Research Frameworks**

A number of respondents sought reassurance that the Regional Research Frameworks initiative will continue to be supported by English Heritage and wished to understand how the frameworks will be aligned with the Research Strategy themes and programmes.

#### Response

English Heritage is committed to supporting the development of research frameworks for the historic environment. Working with the sector EH will facilitate the completion of dynamic and collaborative research frameworks from which priorities for sectoral engagement in historic environment research can be synthesised. This will ensure that research values are embedded in all future work and help set priorities for action and spending across the sector, as well as identifying and sustaining long term strategic objectives. This commitment finds expression in research programme G2: 'Devising research strategies, frameworks and agenda'. Priorities are currently delivered through our strategic framework, Exploring Our Past 1998 Implementation Plan (EOP98); this however is due for detailed review and revision in the light of the Research Strategy. The revised version will provide the clarity of priorities within the themes and programmes that the consultation requests.

In terms of national research agendas, English Heritage has recently begun working with the UK Research Councils to encourage and secure funding for inter-disciplinary historic environment research. At a seminar held in Birmingham in March 2006, five cross-cutting research themes were identified. These were:

1. Integrated methodologies

2. Values
3. Engagement and interpretation
4. Impact of climate change on the historic environment
5. Sustainability

Participants at the workshop were invited to identify the key challenges which might benefit from cross-disciplinary research. Work is currently underway to identify and agree cross-disciplinary “Research Clusters” which will then be open to funding by the AHRC, EPSRC and ESRC. Participants at the workshop will then be eligible to apply for funding to undertake research in accordance with the priorities identified in the Research Cluster.

#### **f) Research governance**

Several observations were made about English Heritage’s internal arrangements for agreeing and prioritising research. It was queried whether the “success criteria” listed will be adequate to measure the effectiveness of the Research Strategy as improvements in performance could be attributed to other factors. Clarity was also sought as to what criteria will be used to evaluate and fund external research applications and whether proposals will still be subject to external peer review.

#### Response

English Heritage intends to review and update the Strategy every three years and as part of this process it will seek to evaluate the effectiveness of its research governance processes. Research proposal assessment criteria were set out in Appendix 3 and these will be kept under review. An essential component of the Research Strategy is to ensure that there are effective mechanisms in place to allow it to evaluate the success of any research it has undertaken, grant-aided, or commissioned, not only to check its quality and whether intended benefits have been realised, but also to make improvements for future projects. Research priorities will be determined largely by corporate objectives and organisational priorities. Decisions on relative priorities for research will be taken by the EH Research Board acting on guidance from the Research Advisory Panel. As stated in paragraph 9.1, page 20 of the Research Strategy, EH will concentrate on essential research that must or only it can carry out and where we can secure collaborative funding and support from others to help influence policy development.

#### **g) Composition of United Kingdom Historic Environment Research Group (UKHERG)**

Concern was expressed that archaeology was under-represented on UKHERG and a suggestion was made that its membership needed to be widened to include public-sector and commercial bodies involved in frontline work.

#### Response

UKHERG is hosted by the Heritage Lottery Fund to share research plans and information focussed on socio-economic and political interest in the historic environment. Constituent members come from the cultural and environmental agencies and non-departmental public bodies and sectoral interest and this feedback will be passed to the Heritage Lottery Fund for further consideration.

#### **h) The contribution of the commercial archaeological sector**

Some respondents felt that the role of the commercial archaeological sector had been neglected in the Research Strategy, pointing out that some of the most important archaeological insights and innovations have emerged as a result of planning-driven archaeology (although there was acknowledgment of the considerable problem of retrieving the mass of data from these interventions).

#### Response

The work of the commercial archaeological sector is recognised and supported through the research carried out under research programmes A1: 'Defining, characterising and analysing the historic environment' and A3: 'Realising the potential of the research dividend'. EH clearly recognises the value of commercially driven research in the sector and is fully aware of the enormous contribution that it makes every year. Specific programmes of research synthesising elements of this dividend have been supported for several years through our Historic Environment Enabling Programme, but EH will be placing even greater emphasis on maximising the potential of this work in the future.

#### **i) Training Needs**

Many respondents commented upon the need for English Heritage to underpin capacity within the sector by supporting research-studentships. The shortages in finds and environmental specialist staff was commented upon, where the numbers of specialists have not kept pace with the rise in developer-led fieldwork over the last decade.

#### Responses

English Heritage is already developing a more comprehensive, organisation-wide CASE-Studentship programme – aligned with its new Concordat with Arts and Humanities Research Council. This is part of a wider initiative to increase the capacity of the sector and this is reflected in research programmes B3: 'Delivering Sector Intelligence' and G3: 'Measuring Outcomes and Effectiveness', which direct research to understanding the needs of the historic environment and those concerned and to measuring the impact and effectiveness of aspects or activities of the sector.

#### **Response to the proposal to formulate a UK-wide Strategy**

All respondents welcomed English Heritage's proposal to work with partners to help assemble a UK-wide strategy for research on the historic environment. However, there was no consensus as to who should be involved in developing the proposal. Responses varied between those who suggested a very inclusive approach involving every academic research group, regional curator and amenity society to those who felt that priorities could only be sensibly set by the statutory UK heritage agencies (English Heritage, Historic Scotland, Cadw, Northern Ireland Environment and Heritage Service, the Historic Buildings and Monuments Councils and the Royal Commissions) acting effectively as mouthpieces for the concerns of their respective national constituencies. There was also no consensus on scope of the Strategy with some respondents supporting a Strategy focussing on issues of purely

national and international significance (such as the impact of climate change), whereas others felt that it should be more wide ranging and comprehensive.

Among the research themes suggested for UK-wide attention were:

- Climate change
- developing a strategic response to flooding
- maritime archaeology
- economic and demographic change (e.g. the supra-national impacts of economic change)
- information-technology (e.g. the development of UK-wide databases of assets, collections and research)
- the study of global transformation

### Response

English Heritage is now embarking on detailed discussions with potential stakeholders with the objective of forming a plan and delivering a common strategy (or overlapping suite of strategies) before the end of March 2007. Since the Strategy was launched English Heritage has jointly sponsored a seminar entitled *Preserving Our Past* with four of the Research Councils (EPSRC, ESRC, AHRC and NERC), which was attended by various researchers to look at pathfinder projects for cross-disciplinary research, which will be key component of a UK wide Strategy.