Consultation: Cultural Protection Fund

This response to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport's consultation on the Cultural Protection Fund is submitted by the National Heritage Science Forum (NHSF). The Forum brings together 20 of the UK's leading organisations that undertake and use heritage science research, including national museums, universities and heritage and conservation organisations[i].

Heritage science is the application of science or technology to the understanding of heritage. Its purpose is to further the understanding of cultural heritage and in so doing overcome inequality of access to, and inequality of protection for, cultural heritage.

NHSF welcomes the proposals for the Fund and the opportunity to contribute to its development. It recognises, in the consultation document, the references to the use of scientific techniques and technology to record, protect and make accessible vulnerable heritage sites but it would like to see the importance of science in underpinning documentation, conservation and restoration projects more clearly communicated in the way that the Fund will operate. For example, materials characterization of heritage assets is essential to inform decision making and ensure best practice, and training in analytical techniques for local professionals should be supported as part of capacity building.

NHSF's response to the specific questions asked as part of the consultation is given below:

1. Do you agree or disagree with the proposed overall approach to the Cultural Protection Fund as outline in Section 1?
We agree with the proposed overall approach and consider the Fund to be timely and much needed.

The UK not only leads the world in international development, but it is also a world-leader in heritage science. The expertise, techniques and technology are now available which allow for fast and efficient recording of heritage sites and artefacts at risk. The Fund would facilitate the UK's participation in international efforts to respond to, and recover from, acts of cultural destruction.

2. Do you agree or disagree with the principles of the Fund?
We agree with the principles of the Fund.

3. Table 1 provides a list of potential projects under each of the Fund outcomes. Is there anything that we have not considered?
In the category of cultural heritage protection, we feel it would be beneficial to add 'Heritage science programmes' to the list of example projects to deliver outcomes.

In the category of training, we feel it would be beneficial to add 'Training in analytical techniques' to the list of example projects to deliver outcomes.

4. Please tell us about any examples of existing successful cultural heritage protection initiatives operating in conflict zones in ODA eligible countries.

Project Mosul – integrates knowledge in archaeology, web development and photogrammetry to promote the preservation, in digital form, of lost cultural heritage using crowd sourced data. http://projectmosul.org/

The Million Image Database (Institute of Digital Archaeology, University of Oxford) http://digitalarchaeology.org.uk/projects/ and Project Anqa (ICOMOS-CyArk) http://cyark.org/news/cyark-and-icomos-announce-joint-initiative-for-emergency-recording-and-archiving. Both projects involve the distribution of low-cost photogrammetry equipment to specialists in regions with heritage at risk and training in use of the equipment to document at risk sites.

As all of these are fairly new initiatives, their success has not yet been widely measured.

5. Should there be a minimum and maximum value for grant awards?
No

6. Please provide any additional comments on question 5.
We feel a flexible approach will be necessary given the wide range of potential projects and the potential for variation in costs that will be incurred depending on the geographical region of operation. Regions with heritage at risk will incur higher costs for on the ground field work and any maximum value might impede the success of a project.

7. In your experience what are the most effective ways of monitoring and evaluating the success of project, especially outcomes which may be harder to capture?
Monitoring and evaluation can be applied to the ability for heritage managers to use, in practical terms, and apply data or information generated from a project for the conservation of the heritage site or artefact.

Measurement of capacity building within the local heritage sector can be carried out and evidence that training has been implemented can be tracked.

8. Do you support our overall approach to the Cultural Protection Fund as outlined in section 2.1?
Yes

It would be good to see the requirement for 'a project's impact on local skills development' as part of the criteria for grants as a means of contributing to the sustainability of the projects, or outcomes of the projects, that are funded.

9. Which regions or ODA-eligible countries do you think grant funding should be targeted towards and would have most benefit in the first year of the Fund's operation?

10. Which regions or ODA-eligible countries do you think grant funding should be targeted towards and would have the most benefit in the subsequent years of the Fund's operation?

For both the above there needs to be a balance between risk, accessibility, need and perceived benefit. Although their need may be great, it would not be practical to focus first funding towards least developed countries (by income) as they are countries in which it is likely to take longer to organize and execute projects.

Furthermore, conflict and heritage at risk is not limited to the least developed countries. For instance, Jordan, Syria, Iraq and Iran are classed as Lower or Upper Middle Income countries and their need may be more immediate than those classed as least developed countries.

11. What are your views on the feasibility of working in potentially dangerous areas? Please include any advice on how the Fund could support interventions in these scenarios and examples of previous initiatives.

On the ground work carries many risks. For instance, even with rapid 3D-scanning / photogrammetric techniques operatives need to be on site for a period of time to capture data that is of sufficient quality to be of practical use in conservation. Security may be needed for this which would need to be factored into funding bids.

Remote sensing techniques such as satellite imagery offers a safer alternative for data acquisition, but the data is unlikely to be of suitably high resolution for use in any detailed reconstruction work.

Off-site training of local teams and the provision of access to specialist equipment and software may be a good approach for the highest risk areas.

12. Which issues relating to gender should we be aware of? Please make reference to any specific examples that you would like us to consider.

No answer

13. Are there any other specific requirements or conditions that should be applied to programmes applying for grant funding which you think we should be aware of? Please make reference to any specific examples that you would like us to consider.

Issues of quality should be addressed, for instance 3D scanning or photogrammetry should be carried out to agreed standards and protocols for data archiving and metadata recording put in place. This is important to ensure the longevity of the data and production of data at a high enough standard to be of practical use in conservation monitoring and reconstruction.

Consideration should also be given to where data is archived. If it is only archived in the region with heritage at risk, then that data may also be at risk. A cloud or UK-based storage system, in addition to local storage may provide a solution. There are, however, financial implications for big data archiving and these should be addressed in the funding bid.

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i Members of the National Heritage Science Forum (www.heritagescienceforum.org.uk)

Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales, Birmingham Museums Trust, British Library, British Museum, Cardiff University, English Heritage, Historic England, Historic Environment Scotland, Historic Royal Palaces, Icon the Institute of Conservation, National Galleries Scotland, National Trust, Natural History Museum, Royal Armouries, Tate, The National Archives, University College London, University of Oxford, University of Cambridge Museums and Botanic Garden, Wellcome Library.