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Abstract:

## On skills, training and knowledge transfer in conservation-restoration within cultural heritage professions

### E.C.C.O.

The principle of transmitting to present and future generations an authentic material heritage that retains its cultural and historic relevance and integrity is the foundation stone of contemporary heritage management and practice. It is what lies behind the emergence of conservation-restoration as a discrete field of study and the professional discipline of the conservator-restorer.

Cultural heritage is acknowledged by the Council of Europe, the European Commission and Parliament as being strategic to the social and economic wellbeing and future of Europe informing the *European Agenda for Culture*. Conservation-restoration is specifically identified as being critical to the safeguarding and preservation of this cultural heritage and the profession of the conservator-restorer uphold this imperative.

E.C.C.O. is constituted to represent national professional organisations at European level. A strategic goal has been the realisation and development of a coherent and discrete professional demographic across Europe.

This goal has as its core a series of statements about the profession, its responsibilities and educational requirements known as the Professional Guidelines. These provide the ethical code for the practice of conservation-restoration and are in effect the 'soft law' of the profession.

The role conservation-restoration plays in the safeguarding of cultural heritage and the activity of the professional conservator-restorer as it relates to this protection, are unevenly specified, legislated or provided for across Europe. Because the conservation-restoration of cultural assets is practised within the framework of national legislation on cultural heritage, which are sovereign to each country, it is very difficult to legislate for the profession at European level. However, conditions of access to and exercise of the profession are subject to European Community provisions for standards in qualifications (European Parliament 2005) and for the free circulation of the professional.

The principles on which education and training are legislated for in the EU are intended to promote freedom of individuals to practice across Europe and to remove the risk of non-recognition of professional qualifications by individual states, arguably because of disparity in the contents and acquisitions of the training. The European Qualification Framework (EQF) was developed as a tool to overcome this. The EQF is a common reference system linking the different countries national qualifications systems. Its 8 levels form a sliding scale of learning outcomes that is fully compatible with the Bologna Process. Its Descriptors require summaries of the knowledge, skill and competence achieved on reaching certain levels of education. Levels 6, 7 and 8 describe learning outcomes achieved at third level education.

The development of the EQF led E.C.C.O. to focus on writing the Learning Outcomes for the delivery of education of the professional conservator-restorer. Competences for the profession were mapped as a decision-making narrative, which describes the conservation-restoration process. This work, published in 2010 as *Competences for Access to the Conservation-Restoration Profession* also provides competence maps for levels 6, 7 and 8 EQF respectively and is now used by many universities. With its emphasis on learning outcomes the mechanism of the EQF acts as a nexus point between the goals of an education programme and the requirements of the profession.