

**NKF-N (Nordisk Konservatorforbund – Norge
The Norwegian section of the Nordic Conservator Association)
annual report 2017**

Finances

NKF/N is in good financial order and has no debt.

NKF-N membership survey

NKF-N has conducted a survey of its members. More than half of the members answered (130 out of 243 total number of members as per 6.03.2017).

Conservators in Norway are a relatively young group: 39% are in their thirties and 29% in their forties. However there is a gender discrepancy typical for the conservation profession: 84% are women.

There is a strong international component in conservation. 35% of conservators are foreigners and 55% of conservators were educated outside Norway.

Most work is concentrated around Oslo: 57% of conservators work in the capital. There are very few conservators in the provinces. Five provinces in the west and north of Norway have no conservators at all.

Many have to work in areas outside of direct conservation, such as in collection management, as registrars, as archivists, as curators or historians, as advisors, as building renovators, as photographers or as conservation scientists.

Regarding education, 77% of conservators have a Master degree, 2% recognized Master level of qualification on the basis of training and experience, 5% PhD degree and 16% have a Bachelor degree. Norwegian conservators are in a better position regarding employment than the rest of Europe: 70% are employed within an institution, 11% work on contract, 12% have their own private firm, 3% of the respondents are students, retired people and those who do not work in the field, and only 4% are actively looking for work. It would be important to repeat this survey in a couple of years to see if that pattern continues.

There are many projects in the country, and many conservators are employed on contract; in the average, about 4 conservators per institution work on contract. 35% of these contracts are shorter than 1 year, 45% are up to 3 years and 20% longer than 3 years.

The majority (75%) of employed conservators work for museums; only 9% work for conservation services, and a small percentage for libraries (5%) and archives (4%).

There is significant discrepancy regarding placement in the salary category, as a special salary framework for conservators does not exist. Some are defined as consultants, senior or heritage consultants; other as advisors or professional advisors; still others as departmental or chief engineers; and only a small group of conservators, as for example in the National Museum, are placed in the same salary category as the curators, i.e. as research staff or amanuensis. The salary

placement defines the attitude towards conservation as a profession. Usually, as an engineer one is treated as technical staff; as a consultant or advisor one is given a bit more of an intellectual role; and only as amanuensis is one regarded as equal to curators as a researcher.

One question addressed the issue of leadership, since the more conservators there are in leadership positions, the more influence it might have in the world of heritage preservation. It was found that 8% are employed in conservation leadership positions, and 6% in other leading roles. 86% of conservators are not in management positions. The question remains whether these are good numbers or if there should be more effort made for conservators to reach up to management.

Regarding private work, a rather small proportion of conservators in Norway work in the private sector. 17% of respondents work in private practice; 89% of these prefer to continue to work in the private sector, and only 11% of those working privately would like to have a full time employment

Outwardly, the situation seems positive. Norwegian conservators are a relatively young and vigorous group from varied backgrounds, and with education from all over the world. This creates an enriching professional environment. Most are employed within institutions and those few who work privately do so because of personal choice. However, there are some worrying tendencies, such as the growing proportion of contract work, and the rise of so called "hybrid" museum organizations (about 38% of all organizations fall in this category now), that are run primarily by public funding, either government or municipal, but are officially organised as private foundations. This creates flexibility for the management but insecurity for the staff. One conservation department was closed in 2015, which was possible for the management because the institution had changed its status a few years earlier from a municipal museum to a private foundation.

There is a strong professional conservation presence in the Oslo area, particularly in large state museums. However, in the provinces, particularly in the library and archive sector there are very few conservators on staff. There are also relatively few centralised conservation services in the country. There is a need for further cooperation between various institutions in relation to collection management, conservation research and conservation in general.

Suggestions given by the conservators at the end of the survey were most revealing of the general feelings and needs of the profession. The majority would like to secure the title of 'Conservator,' to make the conservation profession more clearly defined in the eyes of other professional groups. In Norway, a conservator has been traditionally called *Teknisk Konservator* or *Technical Conservator* while a curator who has received official accreditation from the Norwegian museum association is called *Konservator* or *Conservator*. The other most common request is the need for making the profession more visible to society, to increase our presence via media. Especially in the provinces and smaller museums, in libraries and archives, there are very few conservators

on staff. There is often little understanding what conservation is about. This needs to be addressed.

The last, largest group expressed a desire to increase the presence of conservation within the provinces, strengthening the profession and promoting better cooperation with management, having a voice and doing our best to make management understand the ethical principles that stand behind conservation.

Only one respondent said that we need to have a higher salary. Conservators are generally perceived as reserved and conscientious, more concerned with the common good and the well-being of the collection than with personal needs. However, the institutional system operates in such a way that the higher the salary, the higher the status. To improve the status of a conservator, there should also be work done towards higher salaries.

During **The general meeting of NKF** (that includes five Scandinavian countries) in May 2017 small changes of the statutes were discussed. Hopefully, Swedish conservators can explain the details as the principal language of the umbrella organization for NKF is Swedish.

Proposed changes in application for membership in NKF-N

Previously, the ordinary membership of NKF-N was granted to those applicants who had official conservation education at the Masters level with a proof of one year work experience within the institution. Presently, there is growing number of recent graduates who do not find job in public sector and have to work as free lance conservators from the very start. The question is stated: how can these conservators get references of their professional work?

At present the changes suggested to include a special form where work experience can be documented. References could be obtained from either work place, nearest leader or the one who commissions the work to the conservator.

Debates regarding the conservation title

There are ongoing discussions about the conservation title between NKF-N and the Norwegian museum association (NMF).

On the 8th of April 2016, NKF-N sent a request to NMF to reconsider the title of conservator, asking to reserve it only for those practicing conservation and not for those that have backgrounds in art history, cultural history, archeology, ethnography and other fields. Museums advertise positions of *Konservator* (Conservator) although they do not expect our professional group to be amongst their applicants.

NKF-N believes that the separation of our professions will strengthen the identity of our own professional group and others. This should improve awareness of our specialities within society, and contribute to a greater respect for the different professions connected with museums and heritage.

Historically, the title '*konservator*,' in the meaning of a professional with a historical background that is hired within the museum sector, was borrowed

from German or French. 'Restaurator' was not applicable for conservators in the English sense of the word, as it had similar associations with restaurant business as it does in French. Therefore, museums came up with the term of *technical conservator* or *teknisk konservator* to describe the conservation profession, but that is not at all satisfactory as it denigrates conservators, reducing them to the level of a technician.

NKF-N waited for a year for an answer from the Museum Association. The Conservation journal *Norske Konserver* then published an answer from the Museum Association (NK, 2017 No 1, p. 19 <http://www.nkf-n.no/12-nyheter/146-norske-konserver-2017-1>). The General Secretary of the Norwegian Museum Association (NMF) Liv Ramskjær clarified that it had been historically established since the 1990's that a committee with special competence in the Norwegian Museum Association studies the application of a curator, and upon validation of his or her credentials, gives an authorization of scientific competence which is called either konservator NMF or førstekonservator NMF. Kurator (curator) is preferably given to free lance curators who organize special exhibits and do not work as regular staff. To clarify the difference between the two professions, curators use the title konservator-NMF, and conservators - konservator-NKF-N. She points out that NMF is not a trade union and thus cannot influence the title description tied to the salary level. Besides this, the salary table does not adequately cover museum needs. Various museums use different practices. In order to improve the situation, various partners will have to be involved and it will take time.

On 19th of June 2017 Liv Ramskjær visited NKF-N where the issue was discussed further. After pressing for the need to make a change and get areas of specialization clarified, it was agreed that NKF-N will send a proposal to NMF that can be addressed at their annual meeting next year. Leader of NKF-N Vigdis Vingelsgaard had sent an appeal to the journal of Norwegian Museum Association called *Museumnytt* (Museum news) to reconsider title Konservator in their next annual meeting. Finally, the answer came, saying that NMF is not interested of having this subject discussed at the Annual Meeting and their proposal of distinguishing curators and conservators consists simply of adding English translation: konservator/curator (for art historians) and konservator/conservator (for conservators)

There is definitely a change occurring regarding the title of a conservator in the country. Only 5 people in the membership survey said that they are officially titled *technical conservator and 1 a material conservator*; the rest are either called simply *Conservator* or with the addition of their specialty, such as *Paintings Conservator, Archeological Conservator, Paper Conservator*, and so on.

The Museum section in Norwegian Art Council.

Museum section in Norwegian Art Council has played an important role in raising museum standards. It has introduced the Norwegian version of *Spectrum*, the British standards for the museum sector. In the *Spectrum* publication, the conservator is officially recognized as a professional who works directly with the conservation of cultural objects. On the 1st of March 2017 the government

decided as part of its decentralization policy to send the museum sector of the Norwegian Art Council to Bodø, far in the north of the country. NKF-N have reacted in media to this decision, expressing its opinion in various newspapers as well as in the *Museum News* published by the Norwegian Museum Association. The Museum Section is a small and vulnerable professional group of just 10 people. It is hardly probable that those who are working for the Museum section will move to Bodø and thus the professional competence that many of them have developed will be lost. This decision will marginalise museums, and there will be a danger of worsening collaboration between the Cultural Department, the Directorate for Cultural Heritage and the Norwegian Museum Association.

Letter to the Directorate for Cultural Heritage

NKF-N sent a letter to the Directorate for Cultural Heritage because of the concern raised by some of our private conservators. Conservation projects that are financed through the grant of Directorate for Cultural Heritage or through other authorities are rarely publicly announced and sent for tender. That is a problem for many private conservators. The answer from the Directorate for Cultural Heritage was that they need to support the Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research (NIKU) and that is why they send the jobs directly to that institution without public announcement. However this institute (NIKU) is officially a private foundation and should be treated on equal terms with other private contractors. Therefore this answer was met with criticism from conservators. Further dialogue is likely to continue.

Norske Konserver

NKF-F publishes biannually their publication digitally. It is opened on line for all members. It includes both professional articles as well as debates on issues that are currently at stake, such as the title of a conservator. It includes interviews with various practitioners as well as reports on conferences and seminars.

Local centers

Most activity within the field of conservation takes place in Oslo. However there are also small conservation communities in Bergen, Stavanger and Trondheim. NKF-N supports their byannual meetings where various invited lecturers give talks on various subjects related to conservation.

IADA conference in May 2017

Last spring NKF-N members, mostly paper conservators helped to organize and host IADA-conference. It had 70 participants and helped to make Norwegian conservation world a bit more opened to international community.

Membership

As of February 2018 we have 189 ordinary (or full) members and total number of members are 260 (including associated membership, student membership and others).