

## Paper delivered to the ENCoRE PhD Symposium to honour Ulrich Schiessl, Dresden November 25<sup>th</sup> 2014

Thank you for the opportunity to present this paper here today to honour Ulli Schiessl and mark his contribution to the field of Conservation and Restoration. Ulli was to the forefront in the early days of E.C.C.O. and is considered one of the founding fathers of the confederation. It is testament to the insight, knowledge and wisdom that those formative documents, both our Statutes and our Professional Guidelines in which he was so deeply involved back in the early 1990's, remain potent and relevant today in the continuing development of a professional demographic.



**Figure 1: Susan Corr , E.C.C.O. president, during the speech at the Ulrich Schiessl PhD Colloquium in Dresden**

The 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of E.C.C.O. occurred in 2011 and a big meeting was held to mark the occasion in Barcelona. It gave us moment to pause and assess the progress that has been made since our formation. Past Presidents were invited to reminisce, make comment on their tenure and reflect on current developments in the field.

Interestingly, the same themes, the same issues that preoccupied those early founding members and past Presidents continue to dominate the work of E.C.C.O. today: professional



recognition and regulation of the profession; education, its delivery and benchmarking; legislation and the role of the Conservator-Restorer. However the fact that many of the issues remain the same is not to suggest that progress has not been made; neither has the broader context in which we operate remained static. I would contend that progress is better measured by the amount of new knowledge which has been generated over the years particularly that which has enabled the specificity of the profession to be more fully drawn and realised. The many papers offered over the course of these two days demonstrate the extent to which Conservation-Restoration is understood to be a discrete discipline with its own particular line of intellectual enquiry; symposiums such as these also serve to make the work and study of Conservation-Restoration visible.

Perhaps visibility is a good word to choose as it encompasses much of the work in which E.C.C.O. engages through the promotion of the profession and in the elucidation of the role that Conservation-Restoration plays. Both are topics on which I would like to make brief comment.

In respect of the profession the recent development of professional competences have sought to describe exactly what it is that we do by mapping the Conservation-Restoration process and presenting it as a continuous decision-making narrative. Although illustrated in linear format, the process is actually cyclical.

This work, originally arising out of our engagement with the European Qualifications Framework and its focus on learning outcomes has helped to clarify levels of knowledge and skills that are required across a range of specific actions. The contribution of this work in the writing of learning outcomes for educational delivery has been more fully explored in recent papers by Jeremy Hutchings and is probably familiar to many of you here today. As a practising Conservator-Restorer what is also relevant is the way in which the mapping of these competences demonstrate our credentials to participate in the decision making process around the management of cultural heritage.

While the mapped framework represents point of access to the profession, the Conservator-Restorer usually gains in expertise throughout their working life perhaps reflecting increased levels of knowledge and skill in different parts of the map. (*See figures at the end of this paper*).

Ironically, the increasing specialisation of the Conservator-Restorer may reserve their skills to a specialist skill-set. For instance, I have been struck by how much the papers that have been presented here have focused on examination and diagnosis. This has been hugely fascinating but I also think that the conservation issues such in depth examination produces prompt even more questions that need to be answered in terms of type or level of interventions that are to be carried out.



Interestingly, management in the care of cultural heritage is easily identifiable with the initial stages of planning, examination and diagnosis. In consequence, decision-making responsibilities, as Conservators-Restorers find themselves moving further up the professional hierarchy are often interpreted as only having to do with planning and can in effect remove the Conservator-Restorer from direct interventions.

Under the twin pressures of time and money this is leading to a blurring of certain competences where activities once the specific domain of the Conservator-Restorer are delegated to a growing cadre of professional Conservation Technicians. This is not to suggest any negativity towards the role of the Conservation Technician but rather to indicate how the field Conservation-Restoration has expanded to include different types and levels of practitioners which must compete financially in tight budgets.

It also makes Conservator-Restorers vulnerable to a skewed notion of management as the thinking part and intervention as a delegated activity. This can serve to reinforce a view of decision-making as located exclusively in the planning, examination and diagnosis phase of the Conservation-Restoration process without recognising the authoritative insight which skill and practice brings.

Unfortunately, failure to adequately account for skill, reflected in the reaching of appropriate solutions through a continued process of action and evaluation, does have implications for the provision and the concentration of resources in education, employment opportunities and the relationship of the Conservator-Restorer to other actors within the cultural heritage sector.

E.C.C.O. continues to liaise and work closely with ENCoRE to support and ensure that the educational delivery of the Conservator-Restorer contains an appropriate balance between theory and practice. We greatly welcome the most recent paper on practice by ENCoRE as it fixes this firmly in curricula. The transcendent value that is placed on the cerebral in an academic environment can make higher education institutions hostile to the resources required for developing skill in a practical sense, especially in this time of economic retraction. In respect of university based education, there is much precedent for skill based training in this sector and as Ulrich Schiessl has attested in his paper on the History of Conservation-Restoration Education<sup>1</sup> there is a long tradition of Restoration and Conservation not only being located in universities but that a high level of training has always been required to fulfil the very specific demands of this profession.

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<sup>1</sup>Schiessl, U. (1988): The Conservator-Restorer: a short history of his profession and his principles. *The Jubilee Symposium 18-20 May 1998, Karen Borchersen (ed.), Det Kongelige Danske Kunstakademi 1998.*



Returning to the issue of role, both that of E.C.C.O. and of the professional Conservator-Restorer. E.C.C.O. is not just a professional interest group, a union or a lobby seeking professional recognition or regulation for narrow sectorial interest. Rather our role is defined by the public interest dimension of our work which underwrites any engagement with the body politic. E.C.C.O., and again this goes back to the insight of those early founding members, has always argued that the care necessary to the protection and appropriate management of cultural heritage is contingent on best practice in Conservation-Restoration. Any discussion, to make relevant the value of Conservation-Restoration must therefore take place in the broader political discussion on the value of cultural heritage.

At a European level, there have been many conventions which address cultural heritage and its protection. The most recent is the Framework Convention on the value of Cultural Heritage to Society<sup>2</sup> and was signed at Faro in 2005. It came into effect in 2011 the same year that E.C.C.O. celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. To date this convention has been ratified in 15 countries while 6 other countries are yet to sign. Some countries who have not signed argue that cultural heritage is a human right that has already been enshrined in previous charters. Nevertheless the thinking that underpins the Faro Convention is directed towards the social aspiration for cultural heritage to be managed and enacted where this is not already happening.

In brief, the Faro Convention offers a definition of cultural heritage which sees it as a group of resources inherited from the past. These represent constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions and it argues for the democratization of heritage by emphasising that heritage serves the community. It recognises that people not only have a right to benefit from cultural heritage but that they also contribute to its enrichment. This is enacted through an appraisal of shared, common or contested values which can be meaningful at a local or indeed universal level.

The Faro and the European Landscape Convention did not spring out of nowhere, both of them reflect an emerging zeitgeist which is in many ways a reaction to the over-commodification of heritage and over-specialisation on the part of those whose job it is to mind and manage heritage. It is recognised that a distance has been created between experts on the one hand, who have had a somewhat exclusive role to play and may have contributed to a sense of heritage as something which is fixed and static, and the public who are evolving from passive spectator or consumers of heritage into active participants, authors and stewards of heritage. The commodification of heritage has also allowed a greater role for its economic value than is actually healthy giving rise to policies which focus on those aspects of heritage that can be turned into tourist commodities at the expense of

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<sup>2</sup> Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, (Faro, 27/10/05), <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/EN/Treaties/Html/199.htm> (accessed, 27/07/13).





other aspects of heritage. These by coincidence are often more real in that they are more grounded in contemporary culture. There is a stronger international sense now of authorship, ownership and stewardship among the general public. Inadvertently or otherwise trained professional actors, including ourselves as Conservator-Restorers can be seen to have contributed to an elitism and its corollary a sense of disenfranchisement. It is important that we as professionals are able to interpret our position and role in the global heritage sector. In respect of Conservation-Restoration the Faro Convention implicitly demands that Conservator-Restorers negotiate through a social dialogue which involves a wider range of views than those traditionally held by this profession, ones that accept the benefits of use and change. In his forward to the Convention, Robert Palmer suggests that this shift in emphasis comprehensively repositions heritage as an entity which *'is never merely something to be conserved or protected, but rather to be modified or enhanced.'*<sup>3</sup> Challenging words indeed to a profession committed to the safeguarding and protection of the material aspects of cultural heritage above and beyond anything else.

I would like to think that the Faro Convention's emphasis on the social value of heritage requires that Conservator-Restorers advocate not just on the long term future of material heritage but must consider the role of that heritage in contemporary living society.

One of the biggest inherent challenges in the Faro Convention is relativism. Heritage values themselves are mutable in a positive sense but they are also open to abuse. This reinforces the burden of responsibility on experts whose dispassionate analysis of heritage is required to offer an important bulwark against the worst excesses of relativism. The tangible heritage which is largely immutable is a portal on to the utterly mutable and far more complex landscape of intangible values. Acknowledging our human right to cultural heritage, at its most basic the role of today's citizen is to make sure that we do not deny or compromise the capacity of future generations to enjoy and benefit from heritage. Because we as Conservator-Restorers can intervene directly on the material heritage we have a responsibility to facilitate and partake in the discussion on how we do this. Certainly, the philosophical principles underpinning Conservation-Restoration are not beyond the general public in any sense other than the fact that inadvertently or otherwise we as a profession have somehow kept them beyond their reach.

The quality of the research that has been presented at this symposium over the last two days speaks to a growing body of work that provides us with insight into originating motives, methods and materials in the making of material heritage. It is providing information, data and quantifiable analysis which helps us to better assess current methods in its care and use and as these may affect long term well-being or preservation. It is this expert knowledge

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<sup>3</sup> Palmer, R. (2009): Preface. Heritage and Beyond Council of Europe Publishing

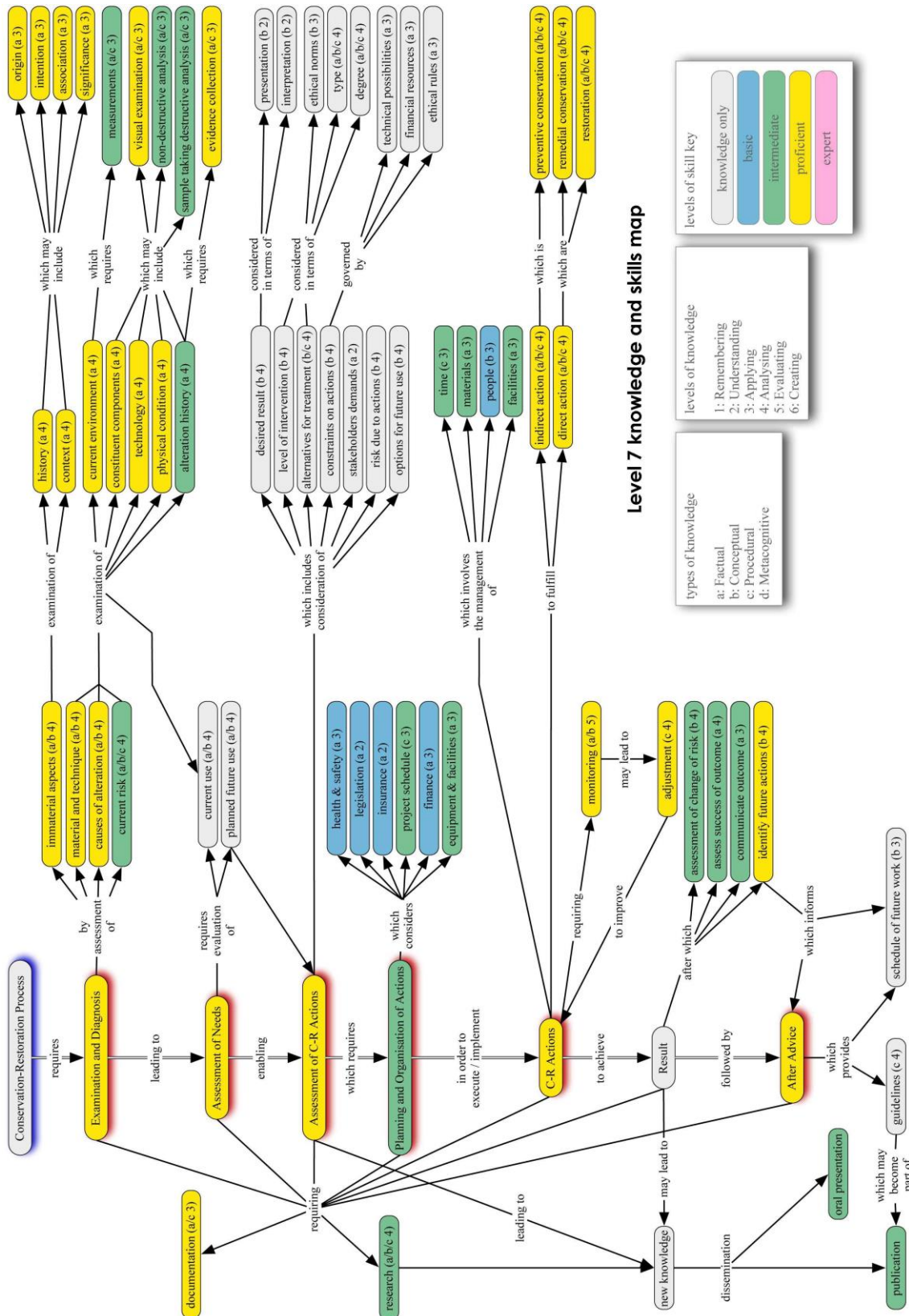


that also provides ballast against misleading thinking on competing or contested values around cultural heritage.

E.C.C.O.'s role is to ensure that European governments, using the frameworks of EU conventions recognise that Conservation-Restoration is no mere technical skill set but is a knowledge resource in and of itself which contributes to the social dialogue of appraisal around values and the sustainable integration of heritage in our daily lives.

Thank you for your attention!

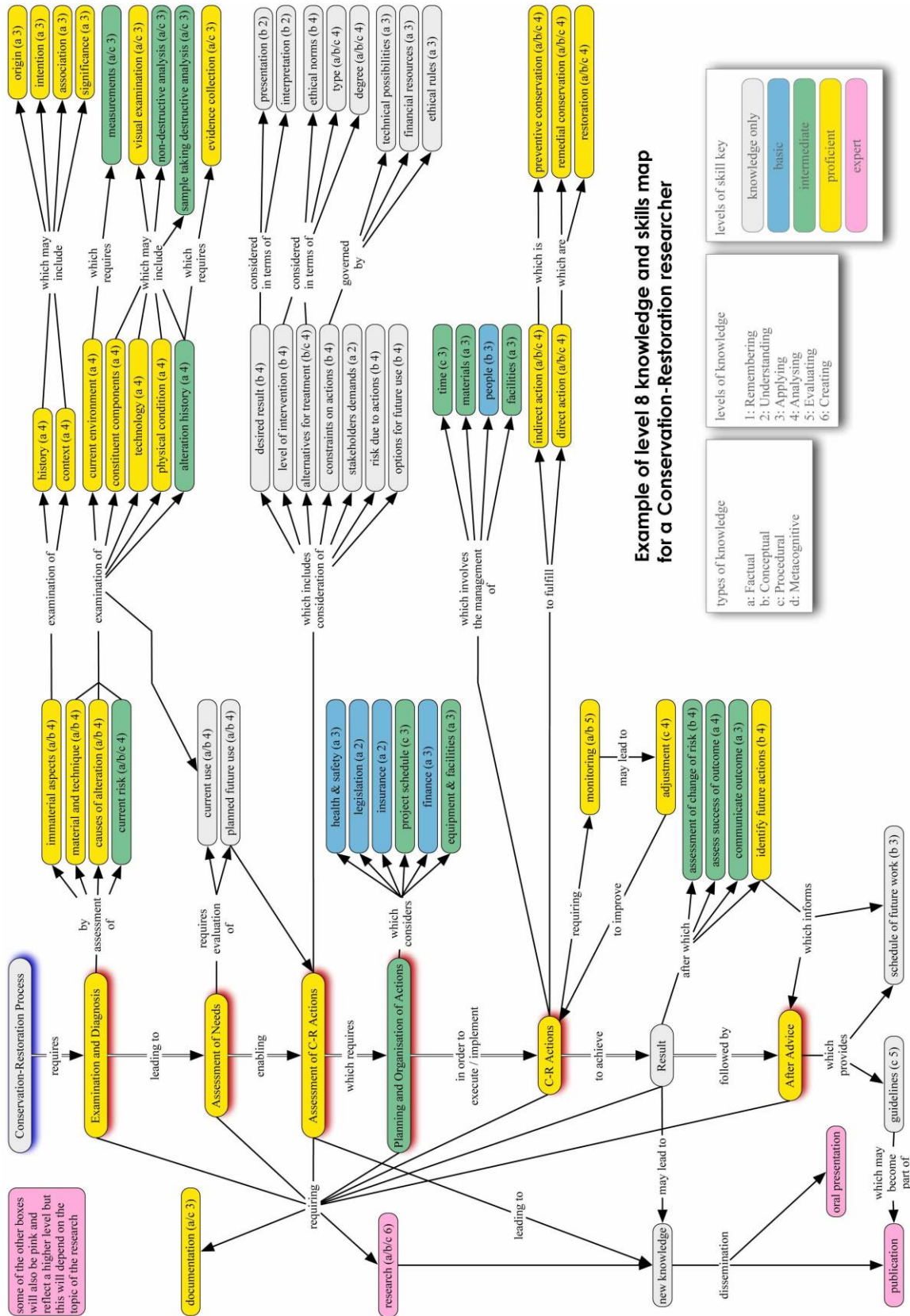
*Susan Corr, E.C.C.O. President, Dublin*



**Figure 2: Reference level in the European Qualification Framework (EQF) of a Master's degree**

Source: *Competences for the Access to the Conservation-Restoration profession*, E.C.C.O. 2011, p. 26-27; as pdf download *Competences in 5 languages* at <http://www.ecco-eu.org/news/index.php>





**Figure 3: Reference level in the European Qualification Framework (EQF) of a PhD degree - Take notice of the pink box top left of the map!** Source: see Figure 2, p.42-43.

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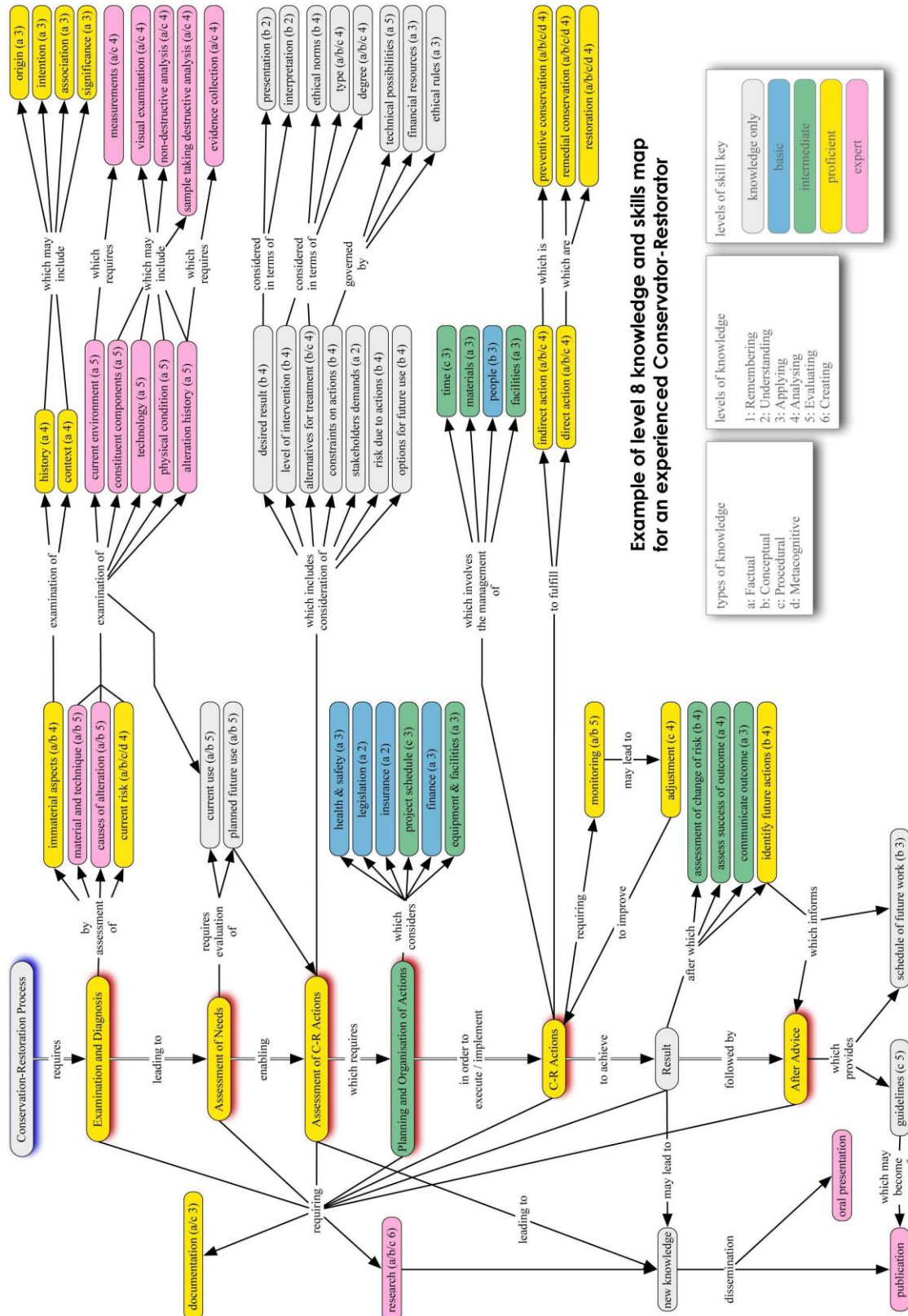


Figure 4: Reference level in the European Qualification Framework (EQF) of an experienced practitioner “who has maintained and increases their expertise through a process of continuous professional development” (“Lifelong Learning”), see *Competences*, E.C.C.O. 2011 p. 39. Source: see Figure 2, p. 40-41.