The European Network for Conservation-Restoration Education; a promoter of research and education in the field of cultural heritage

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Summary

‘ENCoRE’ was founded in 1998 to promote research and education in the field of cultural heritage and to improve and encourage cooperation among academic programmes and institutions for the conservation-restoration of cultural heritage. The need for clarification of university level programmes and recognised equivalents in conservation-restoration education has been achieved in the form of the ENCoRE document ‘Clarification of Conservation-Restoration Education at the University Level or Recognised Equivalent’. In its criteria, the document takes into consideration the Bologna Declaration on the European Higher Education Area. ENCoRE has from the start actively promoted EC framework programme research among its member institutions and partners, and offers its active cooperation and support to ensure the best possible dissemination of research, as well as its cooperation in helping with the integration of education and research within the area of cultural heritage. This includes the implementation of the Bologna system of higher education in the area of conservation-restoration. An important tool in supporting these efforts is the new ENCoRE website: www.encore-edu.org.

Introduction

UNESCO defines cultural heritage as the entire corpus of material signs, either artistic or symbolic, handed on by the past to each culture, and so to the whole of mankind. Cultural heritage is not only a source of business, but also a fundamental condition for the maintenance and development of a society and its economy. The preservation and presentation of cultural heritage should therefore be a cornerstone of any cultural policy.

As the result of a meeting held in Dresden in November 1997 (ENCoRE, 1997), between representatives of 30 European educational institutions, a new European network of institutions providing education and research in the conservation of cultural heritage, ‘ENCoRE’, was founded in Copenhagen on the 23rd of May 1998 (ENCoRE, 1998). One of the main objectives of ENCoRE is to promote research and education in the field of cultural heritage, based on the directions and recommendations given in the Professional Guidelines of the European Confederation of Conservator-Restorer’s Organisation E.C.C.O. (E.C.C.O. II, 1993; E.C.C.O. III, 1994) and the Document of Pavia of October 1997 (PAVIA, 1997).

ENCoRE seeks to develop and promote professional conservation-restoration (ICOM-CC, 1984) education at the highest level, and to improve and encourage cooperation among academic programmes and institutions which offer courses and research programmes in the conservation-restoration of cultural heritage. Further objectives are to support and increase the mobility of teaching staff and students within Europe and to promote collaborative research in the discipline of conservation-restoration of cultural heritage.

Conservation-restoration as an academic discipline

Over the last fifty years it has become increasingly evident that the conservation of cultural heritage poses problems too complex to be solved within the existing systems of practice, which are based on craft skills supported by related academic disciplines, e.g. art history, science, etc. During this time, many academic study programmes in the conservation-restoration of cultural heritage have been established in Europe, and graduates from these institutions have begun to enter the field of conservation-restoration. Although different in level and quality of provision, all these study programmes aimed to draw together the necessary practical and technical skills with those of related humanistic and scientific disciplines (BANIK, 1998; LARSEN, 1998; PEDERSEN, 1998; SCHIESSL, 1998). They were designed to provide structured programmes of study, where practice was supported by a clear underpinning of knowledge, and where research could be supported and fostered. The science of conservation-restoration was established, forming the basis for the application of practical skills (both preventive and interventive) necessary for the conservation of cultural heritage.

During this time, the dangers of commercial interests and pressures which could result in poor quality conservation-restoration with potentially disastrous and irreversible results, were also acknowledged. The Document of Pavia recommended ‘the establishment of a regulatory framework to guarantee the quality of intervention on cultural heritage or its environment in order to avoid the negative impacts of
market forces. In Greece, for example, a law was passed on education and practice in conservation-restoration (PANAGIARIS, 1999) and an Act of Protection of the Professional Title ‘Restorer’ was passed by the Parliament of Mecklenburg Vorpommern, Germany, to ensure the necessary quality in the protection of cultural heritage (SCHIESSL, 2000). Despite these positive trends, there is still a need for progress in several areas, as identified and clarified by the CON.BE.FOR research project (Conservator-Restorers of Cultural Heritage in Europe: Education Centres and Institutions. A Comparative Research Project) (SUARDO, 2000) and the APEL research project on ‘A survey of the legal and professional responsibilities of the conservator-restorer as regards other parties involved in the preservation and conservation of cultural heritage’ (APEL, 2001).

The ENCoRE Clarification Document

At a meeting held in Vienna, 43 representatives of European educational and research institutions and organisations within the field of conservation-restoration expressed the need for clarification of university level programmes and recognised equivalents in conservation-restoration education (VIENNA, 1998). In the documents of this meeting it is stated that this task should be co-ordinated by ENCoRE, in association with the CON.BE.FOR project. This has now been achieved in the form of the document ‘Clarification of Conservation-Restoration Education at the University Level or Recognised Equivalent’ carried unanimously at the third General Assembly of ENCoRE in Munich, June 2001 (CLARIFICATION, 2001).

This document is the contribution of ENCoRE to this clarification, taking into consideration the Bologna Declaration on the European Higher Education Area (BOLOGNA, 1999; PRAGUE, 2001). It states that the necessary access to, and existence and protection of cultural heritage as a right of all humankind makes great demands on the quality and democratic control of, and public insight into all aspects of cultural heritage activities and management, including education. The quality, democratic control of and public insight into conservation/restoration education can only be guaranteed by governmentally validated academic education at university level, leading to protected and internationally recognised academic titles. Moreover, the clarification document states that: ‘Educational institutions, which are not called universities, but which offer programmes of study that in length, content and quality are regarded by the respective governmental validating bodies (such as Ministries of Education) to be equivalent and/or compatible to university degree provision should be recognised as being the same level’.

Definition of the discipline and the conservator-restorer

In the ENCoRE clarification document, the discipline of conservation-restoration is defined as an empirical science, devoted to the prevention and treatment of the decay of objects of cultural heritage. It is characterised by being a mixture of theoretical knowledge and practical skills, and includes the ability to judge on ethical and aesthetic issues in a systematic way. It has its origins in arts and craftsmanship as well as in the humanistic, technical and natural sciences. Cognitive and systematic analysis, diagnosis, and the solution of problems as the basis for practical conservation and restoration skills are what differentiate the conservator-restorer from the artist and the craftsman. A strong basis in practical skills and knowledge of the complexity and interactivity of the behaviour of object materials, as well as environmental influences, is what differentiates the conservator-restorer from professionals in other related academic fields. These definitions form the basis of and characterise education and research in the field of conservation-restoration.

The clarification document states that conservation-restoration, as an academic discipline, is by definition based on the highest level of research. The basis of conservation-restoration education consists of an appropriate balance between integrated theoretical and practical teaching, which should include the possibility of a doctorate as defined in the Document of Pavia. The aim must therefore be that ‘the conservator-restorer, licensed for independent practice, is per definition a graduate at the Master’s level from a university programme or governmentally recognised equivalent, or doctoral research level (PhD). A programme of study in conservation-restoration at the Bachelor’s level should be regarded as an entry requirement to the Master’s level, and not as a qualification for independent practice’… ‘The overall length of study for entry into the profession or to continue to the doctorate level should be five years. Moreover, there is a need for clear agreed equivalence among countries for access, content, level and duration of study programmes at the Bachelor’s and Master’s levels.’

The doctoral studies

Doctoral studies in conservation-restoration may consist of basic research, applied research, experimental development, or a combination of these things. Due to the complexity of the field, it may in most cases be a combination, e.g. basic to applied research which is applied to experimental development. Apart from deterioration processes and conservation-restoration development, the research subjects may also be in the fields of theory, philosophy, and the history of conservation. The doctor (PhD) in conservation-restora-
tion should be able to continue research and development work within conservation-restoration. The doctorate level in conservation-restoration is the basis from which to recruit researchers and educators to develop future practice and research in conservation-restoration. However, experience shows that some conservator-restorers with a PhD degree in the field choose a professional career within managing, development and planning of practical conservation and restoration. This process of increasing research and research-based education requires resources and European joint actions, as such developments are sensitive to the loss of resources. The commitment and responsibility towards our common cultural heritage (as well as to the world outside the member states and the European Union) can only be fulfilled through continuous European cooperation and sharing of resources, supported by the EC Framework Programmes and other initiatives of the Community.

Education, research and EC cultural heritage research

Research and education in the field of cultural heritage protection is a relatively new subject area to be studied at university level. Over the last decade there have been many developments that have helped to bring conservation-restoration education and research to a comparative level with other disciplines. Even within Europe however, financial and human resources within the field of cultural heritage protection are very limited and without EC research funding many substantial developments in the conservation of several areas of indoor and outdoor cultural heritage would not have been possible.

From its start, ENCoRE has actively promoted EC framework programme research among its members, institutions and partners. This includes calling on our member institutions and partners to contribute to expression of interest activities and to identify research areas for specific programmes as preparation for the 6th Framework Programme for research. It is also ENCoRE’s experience that the dissemination of research results into educational programmes and for end-users in practical cultural heritage conservation is achieved quickly for those research projects which involve conservation-restoration education institutions as partners. However, cooperation between education and research within the field of cultural heritage should be established between the respective General Directorates and their programmes to improve dissemination of research results to end users and to support research-based conservation-restoration education.

The ENCoRE member institutions cooperate closely with public and private institutions that are devoted to practical conservation. ENCoRE also cooperates with organisations representing the practical conservation field. One major example of this cooperation is the implementation of the Bologna Declaration for higher education in Europe by 2010 at the latest. Several ENCoRE member institutions have already achieved the level and structure outlined in the Bologna Declaration although many conservation-restoration education programmes are still in the process of changing to the system. However, for all conservation-restoration programmes, the integration of research still needs to be developed further. This will only be possible with more active research cooperation between educational and end-user institutions to ensure sufficient critical mass and resources. ENCoRE offers its active cooperation and support to ensure the best possible dissemination of cultural heritage research. We also offer our cooperation in helping to integrate education and research within the area of cultural heritage, including the implementation of the Bologna system for European higher educational institutions in the field of conservation-restoration.

The new ENCoRE website

www.encore-edu.org

In order to improve networking between our members and partners and provide better service to others, ENCoRE has established a new website. In addition to general information about the organisation, the website will include information on the areas of study of member institutions, with direct links to their individual websites. It will also include information on members’ and partners’ research, on PhD programmes and ongoing Ph.D. projects in member institutions, and information on EC research projects. The website is meant to improve activities in the form of cooperation in education and research, and the mobility of staff and students among our members and partners. More information on ENCoRE can be found at www.encore-edu.org.

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