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## NSCG Newsletter

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## N.S.C.G. - The Future.....

### The Way Forward - A personal view (1)

Suggestions were put forward at the Cardiff AGM on how various groups relating to natural science conservation/curation might establish closer links with each other, possibly to form one large organisation. This idea is still at the melting point stage - there are many pros and cons but a larger group, if it could exist, would give us greater political clout, one subscription, one journal plus newsletter, one large 3-day conference (more appealing to overseas members) and considerably more exchange of valuable information.

When making the point made about merging to form an SPNHC style Curator-Conservator Group to provide a stronger political pressure group, I failed to stress at the AGM that we already have this with membership within the Conservation Forum as illustrated by a Conservation Forum letter to Julian Spalding on the cuts in Conservation at Glasgow. The Museums & Galleries Commission Conservation Unit "Conservation Forum" consists of representatives from 11 professional Conservation organisations (representing about 2,000 members) who meet to discuss common issues and help to formulate policy on the development of the profession. A major part of the Forum's work is focused on a common approach to professional accreditation

for conservators with much study of other professional groups' efforts in this field. Most of the organisations are at different stages of working out what diplomas, degrees, NVQs and years of experience and what combination of these they would require for their full accreditation. The ideal would be a national unitary accreditation scheme with differences for each specialism as agreed by the Forum.

One reason why the NSCG left UKIC was that they wished to follow professional accreditation and thus raise the subscription level. I stressed the point at our AGM that if Natural Science Conservators do not follow this road to full harmonised accreditation then we may not be recognised as professional conservators at all by other conservators or employers or the greater museum community and beyond. We know that many of us have had a different career structure to other conservators and are hybrid curators and researchers but many others out in the "real world" may not understand this "special case" scenario. My lonely voice of dissent on the Conservation Forum worries me especially as I have no recognised "bit of paper" saying that I am a conservator myself. All on the Forum are agreed that accreditation is a necessity that will have to come and soon.

My personal view on an SPNHC type amalgam is that the UK is not the USA and that we would be swamped by the greater curatorial membership and no longer recognised by the Conservation profession or by the Museum Community. William Lindsay's comment on waiting for the UKIC money to be sorted seems common sense. As with the Conservation Forum, with due consideration, we can be part of a three-way pressure group without having to merge! We can be this with other groups such as UKIC, Care of Collections Forum and the Museums Association itself.

Do we take charge of our own parameters for accreditation and have a series of "individual peculiarities" attached to our system which can be agreed by Conservation Forum? We have Chris Collins' new MPhil and Certificate courses at Cambridge which could be approved courses to go toward accreditation. Or if individuals wish accreditation do they seek it from other sources such as UKIC.

Do we need accreditation for our membership via Conservation Forum?

Do we seek political clout via Conservation Forum and nurture closer ties with other organisations within Museology in general and not just within Natural Sciences?

For those who do not want accreditation, we could have a student/non accredited and lower fee.

*Paul A. Brown*  
*Natural History Museum*

### The Way Forward - A personal view (2)

Following the discussions at the Cardiff AGM I have drawn up a plan outlining a possible restructuring if the NSCG was to merge or become a sub group of a combined organisation to include BCG, GCG & NSCG. An organising committee consisting of a Conservation Forum rep and reps from each group could meet twice a year. Sub-committees would include: a) Biology curatorial (BCG); b) Geology curatorial (GCG, SPCC); c) Conservation (NSCG, ?ICOM-CC); Training; Editorial & Publication; Membership & Publicity; Conference; Taxidermy (Guild of Taxidermists\*).

\*[I would suggest not including the Guild of taxidermists since most of their members are individual freelance and professional taxidermists and are not museum connected.]

The first three of these sub-committees each have their own relevant subject groupings:

- 1 taxidermy/freeze-drying (a,c)
- 2 preventive conservation and infestation work (a,b,c)
- 3 geology treatments (b,c)
- 4 fluid preservation - biology (a,c)
- 5 botanical - herbarium (a,c)
- 6 IT and documentation (a,b,c)

We are already establishing closer links with other similar organisations and it could be, for the time at least, that we may proceed no further - the mixing of curatorial and conservator groups may not be ideal in the long term. I would strongly suggest, however, that a united

annual conference would be a good idea and should encourage overseas members.

An annual conference would take into account zoology, botany and geology comprising: one day of talks for each discipline group, plus one on general matters - preventive, risks, buildings etc. This would total three days [meaning that those who only have enough funding/time to attend one day can do so without having waste time on other unwanted disciplines.]

Additional 2 day workshop involving technical specialist talks and practical demonstrations and/or half day practical courses in either zoology, botany, geology by rotation each year.

The conference will also give a chance for all the various sub-committees to get together while visitors go on a local Jolly and for conference organisers to have a breather.

Certificates for workshop attendees could be awarded, to add to their CVs.

#### Reasons for possible merger.

Presently we are in separate groups with little or no influence on policy makers and funding sources. I feel that as one group, something like SPNHC, we will have a much better chance of making our stronger voice heard where it matters.

Membership is confusing. Having to pay three different subscriptions, having three separate AGM'S, conferences and, for some of us, having to attend all those separate committee

meetings up and down the country is just so wasteful of time, money and logistics (like the dating of AGMs not to clash with other groups). Intending members from abroad would feel much happier about joining one organisation than having to decide which of the three (or more) suits them best and that one large annual conference would attract many more members from outside the UK. Perhaps a Joint membership of NSCG, BCG, GCG each sharing out the monies, for overseas members might make this easier?

One reason there is so little material for the newsletter, I have been told, is that authors are not interested in submitting to a newsletter that has a small circulation. At least the membership and newsletter circulation continues to augment.

In the meantime a sub-committee has been set up to investigate ways forward. I would urge members to think about the above proposals and send their views and ideas to Kirsten (chair) at the Horniman Museum.

This paper is just a suggested starter for drawing our organisations closer together and members' views are required. I hope that as natural science conservation and the desire for accreditation become stronger in the UK this proposed organisation will continue to take the steps to further such causes.

*Simon Moore*

*aka Steve in the MA Journal!*

## A New Working Party

At the NSCG committee meeting on 24 July, a new working party was set up to consider the feasibility and desirability, or otherwise, of developing formal links with related organisations, namely BCG and GCG. Its point of reference will be the aims of the NSCG and whether or not we would further or fog those aims by a merger with another group.

The NSCG was initially set up as a Section of UKIC. Following restructuring of the latter and the prospect of Section Members having to become full UKIC members (with a resultant prohibitive increase in fees) the Section/Group decided to opt out of UKIC and go it alone. Some concern has since been expressed about

the Group needing a stronger voice, more support and greater opportunity for shared meetings and publications with related groups.

We also need to consider whether or not to apply for charitable status.

Please send your ideas, suggestions, comments etc to any of the Working Party members, by phone, fax, surface mail, email, whatever, BEFORE 10 OCTOBER. We would like to present a comprehensive set of options in the next Newsletter, with a view to then holding a membership ballot.

The Working Party consists of the following committee members, Nick Gordon, Simon Moore, Tracey Seddon, Wendy Simkiss and Kirsten Walker (addresses on page 28).

