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Training and Career structure, 1987 (The Hale Report)'. The latter is of course about the needs of the museum world, whereas the former initiatives are concerned with more general but still highly significant changes occurring in education and training throughout the UK. These changes are immense and the museum world is at the forefront of developments. This brings with it advantages and yes, as Mike Hounsome indicates, some difficulties too!

What of the advantages? The museum world has in MTI an organisation that is recognised nationally as both an Industry Lead Body and an Industry Training Organisation. In practical terms this means the Museum Training Institute is working on behalf of museums, to devise and implement a new qualifications framework. In doing this MTI is not alone and there are similar organisations in most professional areas, each engaged on similar projects.

National Vocational Certificates will not therefore be limited to 'receptionists, administrators, shop workers or porters' but will eventually embrace most if not all of the professions. The UK qualification framework being devised by NCVQ is intended to be comprehensive.

NCVQ are charged with introducing this national qualifications framework and consequently it is important that there is a degree of consistency in how the qualifications are developed. All Industry Lead Bodies are using a standard model to devise and develop their respective qualifications. The use of this model and the associated terminology has unfortunately been for some difficult to come to terms with. MTI has always understood these difficulties in coping with the jargon and has attempted to overcome it in a number of ways ranging from newsletters to seminars.

The active involvement of museum professionals in the qualification development programme has been a key feature of our work. This involvement of museum professionals extends from membership of the MTI Board of Directors through to attending practical standards development workshops. On a wider front the 'so-called consultation' programme involved over 12,000 sets of draft standards being circulated nationwide for comment! All of the responses have been recorded and will be evaluated before the standards are redrafted.

A further key element of the consultation programme will be when the standards are field tested in 40 museums. This is not being undertaken for the sake of saying we have consulted with the sector - rather it is a vital and critical part of the qualifications development programme. Each of these 40 museums will be asked to use the standards of competence in assessment situations and again these comments will be listened to. In some instances standards will even be redrafted and field tested again!

One of the more beneficial outcomes from the qualifications development programme is that there has been a resurgence in the level of debate about museum education and training. MTI welcomes this debate and because of its approach actually encourages it.

There are, and will continue to be many opportunities for involvement in the work which MTI is leading on your behalf. Your comments are always welcomed and, where constructive and detailed we can actually incorporate the suggestions into the standards themselves.

Simon Roodhouse, Director, MTI

Newcastle University pursues Tyne and Wear option for Hancock Museum

On January 29th the University of Newcastle issued a press release stating 'Hancock Museum Saved', and proudly claimed the successful negotiation of a tripartite agreement between the Tyne and Wear Museums Service, the Natural History Society of Northumbria and The University. Under this new arrangement, Tyne and Wear would run the Hancock Museum as a Service Level Agreement, as it runs museums for the constituent District Council. Unfortunately, neither Tyne and Wear, nor the

Natural History Society (who own the museum and its collections) knew that a press release was imminent - indeed the Natural History Society had never been consulted about the intended arrangement.

A few days later, all Hancock Museum staff received a letter from the University's Personnel Officer intimating that if the agreement was ratified by the University Senate and Council, all staff would effectively be redundant from the end of June 1992.

It was stressed that efforts would be made to redeploy staff where possible, and that some posts might become available under the Tyne and Wear regime. However, there are no guarantees.

As yet the full details of the new staffing arrangements are not known, leading to concerns about the levels of curatorial care, the lack of continuity of care, a reduction in technical expertise and a loss of the computerised documentation systems.

The rationale behind the proposed change results from a projected deficit in the University's accounts of £1m. The £215,000 the Hancock Museum costs to run each year is deemed to be excessive, and a substantial saving needs to be made. In addition, the Hancock, despite its renowned collections and scholarly connections, is regarded by the University as having no relevance to teaching or academic research. An alternative scheme for the Hancock's future, which relied on a major fund-raising exercise to raise capital for expansion, (and hence reduce running costs) was shelved on receipt of the Tyne and Wear option. The Council of the University asked that the budget for the Hancock be reduced to c. £70,000 per annum (a saving of £145K), an unrealistic figure for the smallest of museums! The projected saving under the Tyne and Wear option falls far short of that demanded by Council - a saving in the region of £60,000 is rumoured. So the Hancock Museum has been 'saved' - or has it? - and at what price?

Letters

Dear John

I recently received a request from Liz Hill, of the BBC Wildlife Magazine for a listing of 'Beetle-down ...' events. She is responsible for compiling the 'Whats-on' section of the magazine. I explained that there is no national 'Beetle-down ...' events listing available as each museum does its own thing.

If anyone wishes therefore to advertise an event in BBC Wildlife they should notify Liz direct at the address below. She stresses that she cannot guarantee a mention for all 'Beetle-down ...' events but will be happy to do so where space permits.

Liz Hill, BBC Wildlife Magazine, Broadcasting House, White Lady's Road, Bristol BS8 2LR

Best wishes
Paul Richards
Sheffield City Museum

Book Reviews

The Herbarium Handbook

edited by Leonard Forman and Diane Bridson

Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, 1989, pp 214.

ISBN 0 947643 20 6

This modestly priced handbook, paperback and vinyl-bound, is obviously intended for bench use. The foreword explains its origins as course documents provided by numerous Kew staff for their 'International Diploma Course in Herbarium Techniques'. It intends to deal with only the technical side of herbarium work and excepts the 'science of taxonomy itself'.

The book is neatly organised into an introduction followed by 39 numbered chapters in five sections - The Herbarium Building, Collections and Materials, Herbarium Techniques and Management, Additional Techniques, Collecting, and the Herbarium in a Wider Context. A five-page index and about 100 bibliographic references are also given. I appreciated the itemised, almost checklist style of each chapter, facilitating quick reference, together with many line drawings.

Generally speaking, the longer chapters are the best, those on herbarium techniques and management being the most comprehensive. Here, many line drawings are given showing the right and wrong ways of mounting and labelling, administering loans, visitors, etc. We are, however, still urged to place labels on the bottom right of a sheet, where fire and water damage will exert their first effects.

While the book attempts to be fully comprehensive quite often the chapters are very short, sometimes of only one page, and may convey little beyond the title. For example, computers are pretty well dismissed in chapter 28 an 'Introduction to computers' which is two pages long, and spends 40% of this space spelling out the disadvantages of using them! The single page on photographic copying of herbarium