![The Heritage Alliance]

Heritage Alliance Consultation Response: 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage

February 2024

<u>General Comments</u>

After consulting with our members and those familiar with ICH on our Board of Trustees, we have collated feedback on this consultation on several key points:

1) The first is that there is a wider need for improving awareness and understanding of ICH, including amongst the historic environment sector. There is also potential for the proposed committee to produce a toolkit/guidance or training to equip more established heritage organisations to play a role in supporting or identifying local ICH and collaborating with smaller/community heritage groups who are at centre of ICH practices.

2) The second is the need to recognise that tangible heritage and ICH are deeply intertwined. It will be most transformative if we use ICH to link to and bolster public understandings of the existing value and purpose of (tangible) heritage protection and management processes. Many intangible heritage practices will link to the reasons why we designate tangible heritage assets.

   For example, In Stoke-on-Trent where the Staffordshire Oatcake an important part of food heritage, it is not only the processes/traditions that are of public value, but the clear links to tangible heritage. Buildings in historic industrial districts that retain archaeological evidence of where Oatcakes were sold through holes in the wall are likely to be listed for that reason, and these holes in the wall, though no longer used, are the tangible evidence of why that food is part of the local heritage. Blue plaques are another example of the interplay between tangible and intangible heritage and the connection between places

and stories – whilst they are physically attached to buildings and monuments, their cultural meaning is attached to the people's lives they represent. For further examples of these connections, see our [Inspiring Creativity](#) and [Heritage, Health and Wellbeing](#) reports.

The intangible register is a significant opportunity to explore and celebrate these connections. It would be a catastrophic message to send that tangible heritage protection is not also vitally about people and what they care about. We therefore urge caution around the language used and the messaging - tangible heritage is about people and communities too – and suggest that this work going forward involves close work with the heritage team in DCMS.

Connected to this point, it would be valuable for established heritage organisations to sign up to a set of values around safeguarding intangible heritage, as this would provide more visibility to the growing understanding of ICH. There should also be consideration of what ICH could mean for policies and practices in existing heritage organisations – what could this mean for community engagement practices, for example. This could strengthen partnerships, policies and practices around ICH. There is overall a pressing need to ensure that tangible heritage and established heritage organisations play a role in the listing, safeguarding and understanding of ICH.

3) Third, we endorse an inclusive approach to ICH over an exclusive one. Propositions to restrict listed ICH to only generational practices, or only recognising broad categories rather than particular types (e.g. recognising Sword dancing as a blanket practice, rather than particular forms such as Yorkshire Longsword Dancing) are too narrow, not in line with how ICH is understood internationally, and can potentially be discriminatory if not including more recent forms of ICH introduced by diverse communities (e.g. Grime music).

4) Finally, there is a question about financial resources and funding for listed ICH – crucial for the wider sector as we begin to recover from a challenging period. We have called for the next government to pioneer a new Culture Growth Fund (building on the success of the Culture Recovery Fund) to deliver targeted investment to safeguard the future of heritage and leverage new growth in our sector. It's important to note that the heritage sector is not set up to deliver capital/organisational funding outside of the project-based grants offered by the Heritage Lottery Fund - an equivalent scheme to the Arts Council's

National Portfolio Organisations system to fund the independent heritage sector would significantly enhance its long-term sustainability.

While there is generally a political appetite to avoid new spending, it is critical that a long-term funding plan is developed to ensure that communities have sufficient resources to celebrate, protect and safeguard their ICH. It is also crucial that such funding not be separate from existing streams of heritage sector funding (and therefore inaccessible to the wider sector which is intertwined with ICH), and that there is enough flexibility to encompass both tangible and intangible elements of heritage in any new funding streams.

Are there any criteria in addition to the above that should be added in your view?

We agree with most of the criteria as set out, except for a suggested caveat for the criteria that 'the ICH must be currently practiced'. For some at-risk craft skills, as identified by the Heritage Crafts Association Red List, the number of skilled practitioners is in the single figures (and declining year-on-year). Many of these skills, such as millwrighting, bell founding and watch making are ancient and regionally distinctive crafts with important cultural links to their communities. Some including gold beating and mouth-blown glass are already extinct and would therefore be excluded from this register. We would propose that this cut off be reviewed, to prevent very recently 'extinct' elements of ICH from being unable to derive associated benefits of public understanding and potential future investment to safeguard them.

The additional criteria that may be worth considering is refusing the addition of ICH that is discriminatory and/or incompatible with human rights instruments. While this is explicitly outlined in the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, it would be useful to have this reiterated in the UK's own process of listing ICH.

Are you supportive of the concept of community representation? If not, why not? What suggestions do you have for obtaining support for a community for a submission to the Inventory?

THA is very supportive of the concept of community representation. However, as part of putting together this inventory, it is important to clarify how the complexities and diversity of different types of ICH are recognised and valued across different communities. There is a danger that more established organisations being more engaged with ICH than small community groups would reinforce traditional hierarchies and values and result in a register which does not reflect the true

range and diversity of UK ICH. This new inventory needs to represent all sectors/communities to be representative and engage in outreach activity with relevant groups to support and identify ICH activities taking place in community settings. Relying on individuals to submit and provide evidence of, community of practice, may be insufficient to create a meaningful and accurate register.

What are your views on the additional category of Traditional games and sports? And culinary traditions / knowledge?

THA is supportive of the additional two categories, as they encompass unique or important elements of our history, heritage, and practice.

Are you supportive of our intended approach to the approvals process?

The approvals process seems to be a fair approach, if the panels are representative of a range of regions/different communities and their perspectives on intangible and living heritage. An important part of this process will be raising more awareness amongst local communities about the importance and value of their ICH. It would be useful to understand how stakeholders who are not part of established organisations will be engaged, and whether there could be new models for developing and capturing community knowledge of ICH through local heritage organisations acting as brokers. We would propose the development of a tool or template for identifying and promoting ICH with local community groups, to ensure that community participation and perspectives are included in how ICH is understood.

Are you supportive of our intended approach to reviewing the inventory?

Yes, as proposed.