

Collections Council of Australia Research: Report No.1

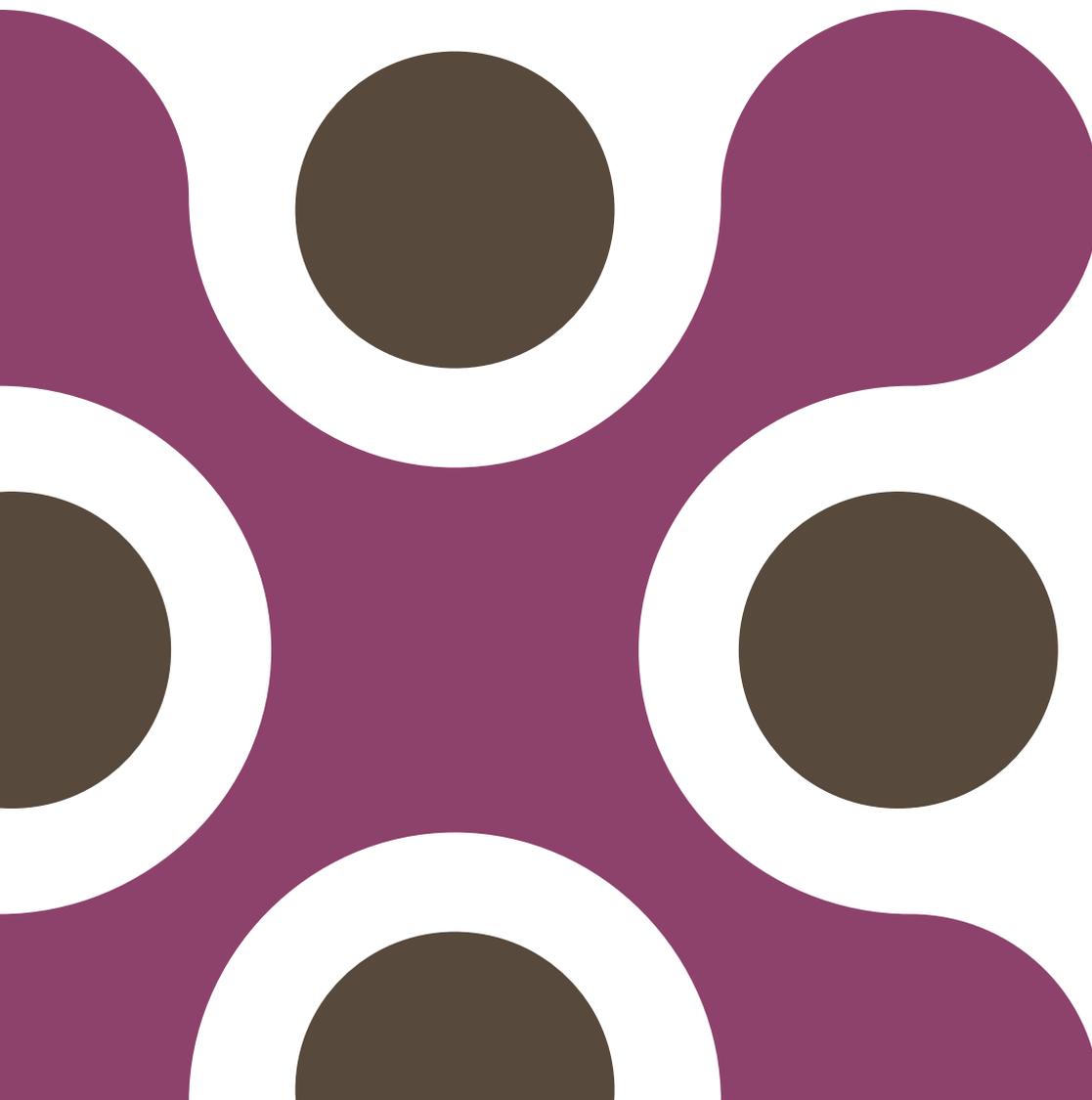
# CONSERVATION SURVEY 2006 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A survey of human and financial resources in  
Australian conservation and preservation

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• LINKING THE NATION'S MEMORY

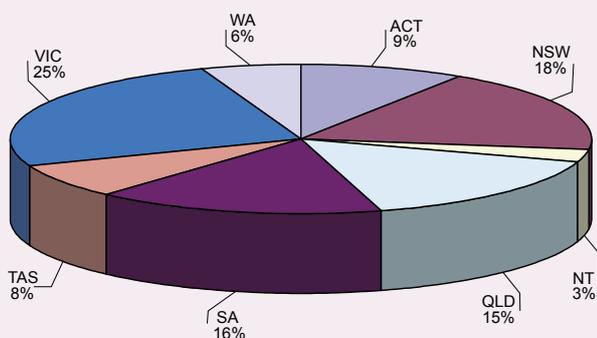


# CONSERVATION SURVEY 2006

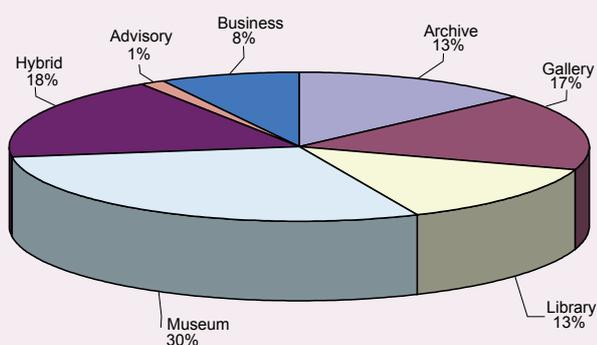
## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Collections Council of Australia Ltd has conducted its first survey of the collections sector in Australia.

A total of 310 organisations was invited to participate in Conservation Survey 2006 and 143 organisations provided responses. The survey has captured a diverse and representative range of experience from across the domains and across the country. The response rate of 46.5% represents a strong return and provides a robust statistical basis from which to make authoritative conclusions and recommendations about the canvassed conservation and preservation needs in Australia in 2006.



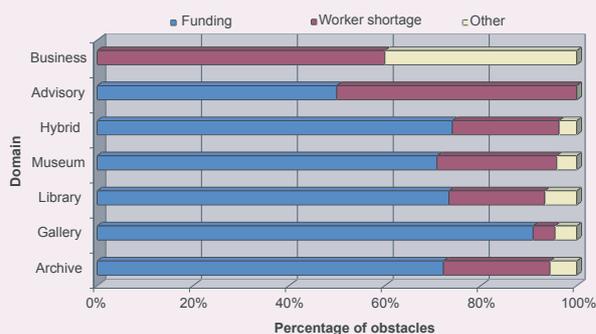
State / Territory breakdown of organisations participating in Conservation Survey 2006 (N=143)



Domain breakdown of organisations participating in Conservation Survey 2006 (N=143)

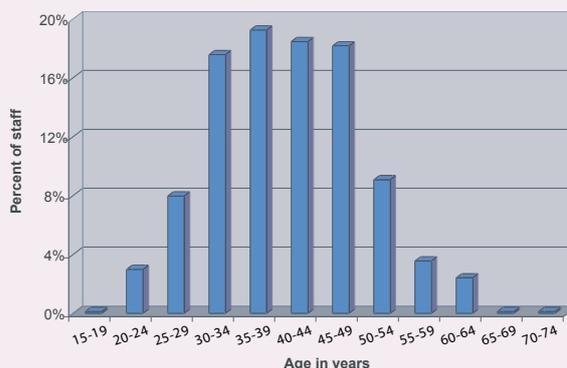
On the basis of responses, the Collections Council has been able to produce good baseline information about conservation and preservation employment and education in Australia between 2003 and 2005, and to indicate key considerations for 2006-2008. The summary findings are:

- There is a shortage of available and suitable conservation / preservation workers in Australia.
- There is a lack of funds to achieve reasonable conservation / preservation goals for collections across Australia.



Proportion of reported obstacles to achieving organisational plan 2006-2008, by domain (N=110)

- Only 11% of the current conservation / preservation workforce is under 30 years of age.



Age profile of conservation / preservation staff 2003-2005 (N=701, C=57)

- There is clear current and future demand for both professional and paraprofessional training for workers in traditional and emerging specialisation and skills areas:
  - Most workers are required in areas where the item type is a 'carrier of information' (e.g. publications / manuscripts, film, audio and sound recordings, paper-based flat works / records), and also in such areas as collection maintenance, reformatting / copying, archival materials, paper – nonarchival, electronic media, audiovisual, books and photographs.
  - Significant numbers of workers are required in the still growing areas of preventive conservation and of educating colleagues and clients about conservation / preservation.
  - Small to moderate numbers of highly specialised workers are required in each of the following areas: objects (general), paintings, buildings / architecture (including interiors), technological collections, textiles, furniture, ship models, natural history, metals, conservation science, conservation framing, large technology, archaeological objects and organic materials.

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- Amongst positions advertised in conservation / preservation between 2003 and 2005, large numbers of Bachelor-level graduates and trainees were sought.
- A sharp drop in Bachelor-level qualification requirements is forecast for 2006-2008, and this coincides with preferences both for more post-graduates and paraprofessionals.
- Despite the offer of longer contracts, an overall shift from permanent to more contract-based positions is set to further de-stabilise conservation / preservation employment.
- Only 10 of the 143 responding organisations paid their conservation / preservation interns in 2003-2005, but unpaid interns and volunteers were used by almost half of the organisations.
- Requirements for unpaid interns, volunteers and private workers are expected to remain the same or increase in 2006-2008 .
- More than two-thirds of the 143 respondents engaged private conservation / preservation workers in 2003-2005.
- There are calls for more conservation / preservation businesses to be established.
- All responding organisations wanted to increase time spent on preventive conservation and decrease time spent on administration.
- Many responding organisations want to spend more time on the backlog of 'whole of collection' care instead of exhibition planning and treatment.
- Many responding organisations want to significantly increase time spent on original research based on their collections.
- Employer expectations for qualifications, specialisations / skills, and terms of employment are changing.

**Conservation Survey 2006** responses have shown that there is a shortage of funds for collecting organisations to achieve a range of reasonable conservation / preservation goals for collections, a shortage in the availability and suitability of conservation and preservation workers for advertised positions, and a workforce demographic profile which suggests shortages of skilled staff will intensify through retirement and low recruitment.

It appears that the expectations of a majority of collecting organisations have been curtailed to meet the current funding climate. Many view lack of funds as the reason why they cannot access suitable conservation / preservation workers. However, for the minority of organisations that have been able to test the market systematically, there has been a realisation that the shortage of suitable conservation / preservation workers is indeed a separate issue to lack of funding. More conservation and preservation workers are required in many specialisation and skill areas, across all the major domains in the collections sector, including archives, galleries, libraries and museums.

It is clear from comparing information about the current conservation / preservation workforce with information about positions advertised between 2003 and 2005 that employer expectations regarding qualifications, specialisations / skills and terms of employment are changing. These trends are further reinforced by estimations for the next three years. The universal demands of deteriorating collections, increased public access to collections, and rapid technological change appear to be driving these changes.

Employer requirements for workers skilled or specialised in particular areas can be addressed by a well-structured and articulated system of education and training pathways, including paid internship and professional development opportunities, for both new and lifelong learning candidates.

There is, however, little incentive for people to enter the collections sector in conservation / preservation if even targeted training leads only to short-term contract-based work. Of particular concern are the data showing that very small numbers of young people are currently working in the field of conservation / preservation.

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Part of this approach would require recognition by larger employers of the ongoing nature of collection-based work (including collection-based exhibitions), and the translation of this awareness into ongoing budgetary provisions. A range of organisations in the survey stated that they would very much like to move away from project-specific funding of employees toward longer terms of employment with changing foci. Organisations were unanimous in their desire to increase time spent on preventive conservation for whole collections, and in their desire to decrease time spent on administration. Many also reported that they wished to increase time spent on collection care, at the expense of exhibition-based planning and treatments, and many also saw value in significantly increasing time spent in original research based on their collections.

Given these intentions, employers could very usefully take a more pro-active role in shaping the conservation / preservation employment environment to articulate well with coordinated training. This would lead to greater control over the availability and suitability of workers in conservation / preservation, and contribute to making the collections sector more sustainable. Professional organisations can also make valuable contributions to defining the needs of collections and collection-based workers, whether through their ethics or education / training committees, or through specific expertise like risk assessment skills.

## Recommendations

1

Develop an integrated system of education and training in conservation / preservation.

2

Develop an integrated system of workforce planning in conservation / preservation.

3

Promote **Conservation Survey 2006** to educators with interests in the collections sector, employers in the collections sector and collections sector practitioners.

4

Encourage discussion about **Conservation Survey 2006**.

5

Promote conservation / preservation to potential entrants to the field.

6

Undertake further research into the drivers for change in conservation / preservation employment.



• LINKING THE NATION'S MEMORY

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