
World Heritage: how to improve the Technical Evaluation process for sites on the UK Tentative List

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Policy Brief



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UK National Commission for UNESCO Secretariat
3 Whitehall Court
London SW1A 2EL
United Kingdom

+44 (0) 20 7766 3491
www.unesco.org.uk

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1 / Executive Summary

Many sites around the world aspire to achieve inscription as a World Heritage Site, and competition is strong. The UK's approach is that only the very best sites should be nominated for inscription, and it has put in place a Technical Evaluation process for sites wishing to proceed to nomination. Following the 2013 Expert Panel it was agreed that it would be useful to evaluate the process prior to the next round of assessment. The results of that evaluation, which included consultation of panel members and applicant sites, inform this Brief and provide the basis for its recommendations, which are:

1. Conduct a further round of Technical Evaluation in autumn 2015; publish, and notify all relevant sites, of the timetable and process in spring 2015.
2. Review and publish the purpose, role and terms of reference of the panel at the point at which submissions are invited. Specify the composition of the panel, which should normally be institutional and representative rather than personal. Allow for the possibility of additional specialist advice to the Panel if necessary. Review, clarify and publish the guidelines on managing conflict of interest.
3. Organise briefing seminars, with mandatory attendance for those sites wishing to progress to the Expert Panel and for representatives from the national heritage agencies, covering the nomination process and crucial requirements. Actively encourage dialogue and iterative review of emerging evidence in liaison with national bodies. Discourage excessive presentational standards for material coming to the Expert Panel.
4. Promote a simple annual return for all sites on the Tentative List, indicating current intentions, likely timescales, and any significant changes. A possible model is provided in Appendix 1.

5. Implement the practical and administrative improvements to the Technical Evaluation and Expert Panel processes in Appendix 2.
6. Make provision for the UK component of any transnational proposals which have not already been through the Technical Evaluation process to be evaluated in an appropriate and comparable manner.

2 / Background

The UK ratified the World Heritage Convention in 1984; 28 sites from the UK and its Overseas Territories have been inscribed to date. UNESCO's World Heritage Committee has expressed concern that the balance of the WHS list does not yet equitably reflect global heritage. Particularly in the early days, those states with heritage management capacity to prepare nominations were able to progress more nominations, faster, than less well-resourced ones were.

UNESCO invited well-represented states to reduce their number of nominations voluntarily in order to help rebalance the global spread of World Heritage Sites. In 2008 the UK Government conducted a public review in to its policy on World Heritage (published early 2009). In January 2010, the UK government announced that it would continue to put forward nominations from a new shorter and more focused Tentative List, but not necessarily every year.

In accordance with UNESCO procedures, in 2011 the UK published its third Tentative List¹ (an inventory of those properties which each State Party intends to consider for nomination); this was accepted by UNESCO in 2012.² UNESCO advice is for lists to be reviewed at least every 10 years.

The UK's approach is that only the very best sites, with clear **Outstanding Universal Value**, i.e. properties that meet at least one of the selection criteria for Inscription, have **Integrity** and (for cultural sites) **Authenticity**,³ and have appropriate arrangements for **Protection** and **Management** in place, should be nominated for inscription. The process of preparing and submitting a nomination is time consuming and expensive (estimated in 2008 at £400,000 / USD 596,300).⁴ For some, it inevitably ends in disappointment and perhaps a feeling that precious resources have been wasted.

1 <http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/>

2 updated to include one transnational nomination in July 2014

3 <http://whc.unesco.org/en/criteria/>

4 Department for Culture, Media and Sport, UK Government, News Release 2008; see also World Heritage Status: Is there opportunity for economic gain? Rebanks Consulting Ltd and Trends Business Research Ltd <http://icomos.fa.utl.pt/documentos/2009/WHSTheEconomicGainFinalReport.pdf>

3 / The Technical Evaluation process

A key recommendation of the 2011 Tentative List Report, accepted by the UK Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), was to put in place a ‘feasibility study’ phase to ensure both the viability of any given site as a nomination and that any submissions are of the highest quality. Sites on the Tentative List wishing to proceed to nomination have therefore, since the publication of the current List, been required to participate in Technical Evaluation.

This involves submitting substantial evidence, in a prescribed manner which follows the UNESCO nomination format, for assessment by an Expert Panel (working either *ex officio* or *pro bono*). Prior to the panel meeting, seminars and workshops for applicants were held, and guidance produced for panel members.

Technical Evaluation panels were held in May 2012 and November 2013; nine sites have been formally assessed (some on both occasions).⁵ In each case one or two sites were recommended to proceed to nomination. Feedback was provided to all applicants; in some cases, areas for further work were identified, in others the site was not considered suitable to go forward for nomination.

Following the 2013 panel it was agreed that it would be useful to evaluate the process prior to the next round of assessment. The results of that evaluation, which included consultation of panel members and applicant sites, inform this Brief and provide the basis for its recommendations.

5 Chatham Dockyard and its Defences; Creswell Crags; England’s Lake District; Flow Country; Forth Bridge; Gorham’s Cave Complex; Jodrell Bank Observatory; Mousa, Old Scatness and Jarlshof: the Zenith of Iron Age Shetland; The Twin Monastery of Wearmouth and Jarrow

4 / Findings of the consultation

The following observations and recommendations follow a consultation with 10 Technical Evaluation panel members and nine applicant sites.

4.1 The process as a whole

The Technical Evaluation process has demonstrably encouraged careful and timely preparation and high quality applications. It has provided helpful feedback to sites in the nomination process. For those sites assessed as unsuitable to progress further, it has truncated potentially fruitless further investment. However there is scope to improve the process, building on the experience of the first two rounds, and particularly to improve effectiveness by avoiding wasted effort and expenditure.

Some applicants reported difficulty in obtaining definitive information on timescales and sources of relevant information. This could be resolved by early publication on a central website of a timetable with all relevant deadlines and links to available information sources. DCMS and the national heritage agencies should agree respective responsibilities in relation to this, perhaps with DCMS as the UK State Party, taking lead responsibility and managing version control and other agencies providing links.

4.2 The Panel: clarity, transparency, expertise

The consultation process showed mixed understanding of the purpose and role of the Panel – for example to what extent it is advisory and/or adjudicatory? How many nominations might be recommended to go forward? And over what period of time? The Terms of Reference of the 2013 panel are attached as Appendix 3. These matters were addressed in a workshop for all Tentative List

sites held in January 2012. However fading memories and/or staff changes may since have eroded that understanding.

There is also scope for improvement in defining and explaining the composition of the Panel. There is inevitably potential for conflicts of interest in a process relying on a fairly small pool of experts in a specialised field. The existing guidance and processes for managing these needs to be reviewed and made public, to avoid misperceptions. It is essential that the Panel has access to adequate expertise including people who can comment on the accuracy with which challenges are addressed. Where a site involving a particularly specialised area is coming to the Panel, there may be a case for involving a special advisor, possibly for that site only.

The purpose of the Panel is to provide a UK level objective assessment. All Panel members are there to contribute their expertise to that assessment, and are specifically precluded from lobbying for a site in which they may have a geographical or academic interest.

4.3 Approaches to minimise wasted investment

All those involved are concerned to minimise potentially wasted investment in applications which may never succeed. To go forward as a nomination, a site needs to demonstrate both the integral qualities required, and the appropriate management arrangements.

All three pillars of Outstanding Universal Value must be in place. These are: meeting the Criteria; Integrity and (for Cultural Sites) Authenticity; and Protection and Management. Management arrangements can sometimes be changed and improved. Although knowledge and understanding can be improved by additional research, even the most extensive research can only demonstrate meeting of criteria, and integrity (and authenticity) where these do actually exist. These aspects will therefore receive particular attention in the Technical Evaluation process. It is therefore highly beneficial to establish the existence or otherwise of these crucial elements, against a backdrop of comparative analysis, at an early stage. National heritage agencies should ensure that advice on OUV given to Tentative List sites during the preparation process is clear and consistent with current UNESCO Operational Guidelines. There is no purpose in sites which cannot make a robust case continuing to pursue nomination.

Further, it is premature and potentially wasteful to invest in detailed preparation, high quality visual design and presentation until there is some confidence that the case can be made.

The key to this lies in promoting an iterative approach, starting with seminars where the process is explained to Tentative List sites, and continuing with dialogue and workshops involving national agencies and advisory bodies. Tentative List sites should be encouraged to seek feedback as their submissions develop. They should also consider coming to the Panel with an early draft for advice and comment rather than waiting until they feel ready to seek nomination.

In this context, it is important to remember the definition of Outstanding Universal Value, which comprises meeting one or more of the criteria for Inscription, having sufficient Authenticity (for cultural sites) and Integrity, and demonstrating that effective Protection and Management arrangements are in place.

4.4 Effective management of Tentative List

At present, there is no clear overview of the situation of the sites on the Tentative List, and their intentions as to whether or when to progress towards nomination. UKNC intends to instigate annual dialogue with these sites to collect this information (which will be shared with the devolved administrations and heritage agencies), to provide a central record of applications potentially coming forward and enable better and more effective forward planning of the nomination process, including ensuring appropriate panel expertise.

4.5 Effective management of the Technical Evaluation process

The review and consultation process identified a number of practical and administrative improvements to the Technical Evaluation and Expert Panel processes, which would improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the process for both applicants and panel members. These appear as Appendix 2.

4.6 Transnational nominations

During the 2011 Review of the UK Tentative List, several transnational nominations were considered, and it was recommended that four of these should be considered for addition to the Tentative List if firm proposals for transnational nominations were fully developed by the other countries involved. During the period of this consultation, but independent of it, an issue arose as to how the UK should respond to new proposals for transnational nominations including one or more UK sites which have **not** been the subject of Technical Evaluation, where such proposals are led and promoted by one or more other States. To support international cooperation and to achieve consistency with the overall UK process, it is recommended that the UK components of proposals coming forward in this way should undergo some comparable form of evaluation. The appropriate approach will vary from proposal to proposal, but could involve an international evaluation of all elements of the potential nomination, or evaluation of the UK element by the Expert Panel evaluating sites already on the Tentative List.

5 / Recommendations for DCMS

1. Conduct a further round of Technical Evaluation in autumn 2015. Publish and notify all relevant sites of the timetable and process in Spring 2015.
2. Review and publish the purpose, role and terms of reference of the panel at the point at which submissions are invited. Specify the composition of the panel, which should normally be institutional and representative rather than personal. Allow for the possibility of additional specialist advice to the Panel if necessary. Review, clarify and publish the guidelines on managing conflict of interest.
3. Organise briefing seminars, with mandatory attendance for those sites wishing to progress to the Expert Panel and representatives from the national heritage agencies, covering the nomination process and crucial requirements. Actively encourage dialogue and iterative review of emerging evidence in liaison with national bodies. Discourage excessive presentational standards for material coming to the Expert Panel.
4. Promote a simple annual return for all sites on the Tentative List, indicating current intentions, likely timescales, and any significant changes. A possible model is provided in Appendix 1.
5. Implement the practical and administrative improvements to the Technical Evaluation and Expert Panel processes in Appendix 2.
6. Make provision for the UK component of any transnational proposals which have not already been through the Technical Evaluation process to be evaluated in an appropriate and comparable manner.

6 / Acknowledgements

This policy brief was produced for the UK National Commission for UNESCO by its Culture Director, Helen Maclagan. Expert input was provided by Sue Davies, Chair of the 2012 and 2013 Expert Panels. The UKNC staff lead was Moira Nash.

Thanks are due to all applicants and panel members who participated in the consultation.

The views contained in this policy brief are those of the UKNC and do not necessarily reflect those of the UK Government or of the individuals or organisations that have contributed to the production of this report.

7 / References

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The Costs and Benefits of World Heritage Site Status in the UK, Full Report PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP, December 2007

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UNESCO 1994 World Heritage Committee Global Strategy for a Representative, Balanced and Credible World Heritage List: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/globalstrategy/>

UNESCO 2011 Preparing World Heritage Nominations (Second Edition)

UNESCO 2013 The Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention <http://whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines/>

8 / Appendix 1

Sample annual return form

Annual return for sites on World Heritage Tentative List	
Site name:	Lead Contact:
	Address:
Type of site:	Tel:
	Email:
<p>Are you still considering/intending to seek nomination as a WHS?</p> <p>Yes/Undecided/No</p>	
<p>If Yes or Undecided, please complete this section to help with planning.</p> <p>Do you wish to reserve a place on the next Technical Evaluation panel, to be held in [insert rough date]? Yes/No</p> <p>If Yes, do you anticipate coming to the panel for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • interim advice and feedback, or • with a view to progressing directly to nomination <p>NB Nominations are typically submitted 2 to 3 years after successful Technical Evaluation, with the decision made the year following nomination</p>	
<p>Please provide details of any recent, current or future developments which may be relevant:</p> <p><i>E.g. planned changes in management or personnel; development proposals affecting the site</i></p>	
<p>Completed by:</p> <p>Name:</p> <p>Post:</p>	<p>Date:</p>

Please complete and return to [address/email] by [date to be inserted]:

9 / Appendix 2

UK World Heritage Tentative List: Practical Recommendations to improve the Technical Evaluation process and the quality of applications to the Expert Panel

Recommendation	Action
1 / Management of the application process	
1.1 Review and update the advice for applicants. This would include publishing a toolkit and running an advice seminar for applicants. Attendance at the seminar would be a mandatory part of the application process. The seminar could be run twice if necessary.	UKNC/DCMS
1.2 Ensure all deadlines in the application process are clearly publicised and explained, sufficiently in advance.	DCMS
1.3 Develop a central, online information hub with links to latest UNESCO guidance and decisions on WHS; application documents and supporting information.	UKNC
1.4 Ensure availability of comprehensive information (guidance, background information, applications) for panellists in a convenient online format.	UKNC
2 / Application form	
2.1 Provide clear guidance on advised style and format for the application including font size, word limits and use of illustrative material.	UKNC
2.2 Include a more open section on the form which requires applicants to answer/update: 'Why do you want to become a WHS?'	UKNC
2.3 Provide a specific space for sites reapplying to outline how their application has changed in response to previous feedback.	UKNC

3 / Panel composition and preparation	
3.1 Continue to implement the Terms of Reference and send to all Panel members.	DCMS
3.2 Provide clear guidance to the panel on their role and when and how they can (and cannot) relate to applicants.	DCMS
3.3 Provide clear guidance to applicants on the role and composition of the panel and measures to avoid conflict of interest.	DCMS/UKNC
4 / Management of the Panel process	
4.1 Ensure adequate notice of panel timescale to applicants and panel members.	DCMS
4.2 Provide secretariat and continue to service the work of the expert panel.	DCMS
4.3 Allow sufficient time for effective panel preparation: at least 3 clear weeks for up to 5 sites.	DCMS
4.4 Set deadlines within this period for panel members to raise, and applicants to respond to, any requests for factual clarification.	DCMS
4.5 Allow sufficient time for discussion on the day(s): minimum of 75 minutes per site.	DCMS
4.6 If and when appropriate, invite a representative of each site to be available by telephone on the day of the panel to deal with any remaining factual issues.	

10 / Appendix 3

UK WORLD HERITAGE TENTATIVE LIST 2013 TECHNICAL EVALUATIONS TERMS OF REFERENCE

Sites on the Tentative List which wish to go forward to nomination should first complete a Technical Evaluation of their bid in order to allow the government to decide when and in what order sites may be nominated to the World Heritage List, and to allow sites to receive advice on what further work needs to be carried out. The government will hold periodic assessments of these Technical Evaluations.

Any site on the Tentative List that wishes to be considered in the next assessment round will need to complete a Technical Evaluation, taking into account the Guidance on Technical Evaluations issued in December 2011, and submit it to DCMS by 21 October 2013. Any site on the List which does not want to go forward to nomination straight away may also submit a Technical Evaluation in order to receive feedback on what work they need to do.

Technical Evaluations will be assessed by an Expert Group which will:

- advise the Minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries on which sites, if any, should be the first to go forward to nomination and when;
- advise what further work the sites need to do to support their case, identifying any weaknesses and areas in need of development;
- ensure that potential nominations are subject to tough scrutiny to ensure that only sites which have the best possible chance of success embark upon the costly and arduous nominations process.

The Expert Group's assessment will follow the Guidance on Technical Evaluations,⁶ which focuses on four key elements based on those aspects

6 Guidance provided by Government

assessed by the World Heritage Committee and its Advisory Bodies when evaluating nominations:

1. Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), including integrity and (for cultural sites only) authenticity
2. Protection
3. Management
4. Resourcing

The Expert Group for the 2013 round of Technical Evaluations will consist of relevant government departments and agencies and those with advisory roles regarding UNESCO: UKNC, ICOMOS UK, and IUCN UK. This is consistent with the composition of the 2012 Expert Group, with the addition of those with practical experience of World Heritage site management. *[Details of members removed]*

To avoid bias, members of the Expert Group may not, whether paid or unpaid:

- provide substantive advice⁷ to sites preparing technical evaluations;
- edit or draft parts of the Technical Evaluation documentation.

However, we recognise the importance of ongoing dialogue between sites on the Tentative List and the organisations listed above to ensuring that the best possible documentation is produced and preventing sites from wasting time and money by going off track. Should advice be required, sites should contact the members of their relevant government department or agency and seek advice from someone other than those individuals listed above. *[Details of members have been removed]*

All members of the group will be asked to complete a form declaring if they have engaged with any of the sites, and the nature of that engagement, to further support transparency.

7 Feedback from the previous Expert Group or advice on overall parameters of the nomination process is not considered substantive for this purpose. Advice on how to fit those parameters to a specific case would, however, be considered substantive advice and would be a conflict of interest.

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