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***Scottish Museums Council
& Partners***

***EVALUATION OF
SCOTTISH TEXTILE HERITAGE ONLINE***

Executive Summary

February 2007

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

In November 2006, Giraffe Consulting was commissioned by the Project Manager of Scottish Textile Heritage Online and the Scottish Museums Council to conduct an independent evaluation of Scottish Textile Heritage Online (STHOL).

The purpose of STHOL was to map Scotland's textile heritage and improve access to information relating to Scotland's textile treasures within museum and archive collections for the benefit of historians, textile designers and other researchers through partnership working.

STHOL was financially supported by the Scottish Executive's Strategic Change Fund, administered by the Scottish Museums Council (SMC), and received £128,670 in funding from May 2003 to December 2004.

Evaluation Methodology

During December 2006 / January 2007, the evaluator conducted face-to-face interviews with the Project Manager, the three members of the project team and representatives from each of the project partners, as well as telephone interviews with around a dozen stakeholders.

Project Management and Project Team

The project was led by Ann Jones from Heriot-Watt University Archive, Records Management and Museum Service, and was conducted in partnership with Glasgow School of Art, Glasgow University Archive Services, Paisley Museum and Art Galleries, Scottish Borders Council Museum and Gallery Service and the University of Dundee Archive, Records Management and Museum Services.

The Project Management Group recruited a project team of three staff – a project coordinator and two documentation and survey officers. All three members of the team were employed on fixed term twelve month contracts from April/May 2003, although one member of the team remained in post part time until December 2004 to ensure the project was seen through to completion.

Project Activities

The project involved several distinct activities, which are described in the body of this report:

- The choice of the methodology for describing the collections of Scottish textiles
- The choice of database system for holding the information on the collections
- A survey of museums, archive repositories and other heritage organisations with textile collections in Scotland
- The development of the Scottish Textile Heritage Online website
- Three events designed to progress the objective of developing a framework for coordinated collecting and realising the concept of a distributed Scottish textile collection.

Survey of the Project Team, Partners and Stakeholders

There was consensus among the project team, the project partners and stakeholders that STHOL has been a highly successful project, in that its main aims have been achieved. The interviewees attributed this success to the excellent and dedicated project team, and they applauded the considerable hard work of the project manager and the three project officers.

The curators and archivists strongly praised the documentation methodology that was adopted by the project team, and the use of RSLP Collection Description Schema to describe the collections.

Unfortunately, it was clear from the interviews that the website is not well used, and several people involved in the early stages of the project had not looked at the site for some time. A few interviewees expressed disappointment that the information on the Scottish textile collections is not comprehensive.

The overall view of those interviewed was that STHOL is a worthwhile resource that should be continued – the issue being not whether STHOL should continue, but how it should continue. From our discussions, it was clear that there is considerable enthusiasm and potential for the future development of the project, but that no one really appears determined to lead the project at this point.

Performance of the Project, Benefits and Outcomes

STHOL has mapped some of the most significant textile collections in Scotland and successfully delivered an online database on the STHOL website, which presents an overview of the textile collections in Scotland's museums and archives. In doing so, it has demonstrated the potential of creating a comprehensive web-based database of Scottish textile collections.

The project brought together museum and archive professionals working in the specialist area of textiles and improved their knowledge of related textile collections held in other Scottish museums and archives. In this sense, STHOL was ahead of its time and one of the first specialist subject networks.

STHOL also raised awareness of some of the issues of collecting and cataloguing amongst museum curators and archivists, and successfully demonstrated the effectiveness of the top level collection documentation methodology.

Disappointments and Difficulties

One of the main disappointments has been the relatively low level of usage of the STHOL website. For a number of reasons, the existence of the website is not widely known about and the site has not been well promoted and marketed. In the evaluator's view, there is considerable scope to increase awareness of the STHOL website and increase access to the collections.

For the project team and the project partners, the major disappointment has been the lack of a way of sustaining the project, adding in other textile collections and updating the site. The main issue is the need for funding, although there is also an issue with regard to leadership and ownership of STHOL. The project appears likely to languish unless some individual or some body takes ownership of STHOL and leadership of the project.

Recommendations

The evaluator's recommendations in summary are that:

1. The website should be updated, using the remaining funding [We understand this is being done.]
2. A search engine optimisation exercise should be undertaken, so that STHOL is likely to be ranked more highly in web searches, and more users are attracted to the site
3. Web site usage statistics should be recorded, so that use of the site can be charted over time
4. Other mechanisms for monitoring usage should be put in place, subject to funding being available
5. The STHOL site should be marketed and promoted again to its current target user groups
6. A decision should be made at the end of 2007 as to whether to archive the site or whether to develop it, based on more detailed information on the usage of the site