

Notes from 2nd ICON DG meeting

11-04-2014 14:00 Chelsea College of Arts

Present:

- Gillian Boal
- Martin Edwards
- Clare Finn
- Jennifer Marchant
- Jennifer Murray
- Heather Ravenberg
- Anne-Marie Steel
- Thanasis Velios
- Francesca Whymark

Apologies:

- Caroline Babington
- Louise Bacon
- Sheila Banks
- Gabriella Barbieri
- Marta Garcia Celma
- Jane Eagan
- Simon Fleury
- Frances Halahan
- Maria Jordan
- Sophie Julien-Lees
- David Leigh
- Tuula Pardoe
- Louise Robertson
- Joyce Townsend
- Richard Williams

Current state of documentation

Combining work that Jane Eagan and Marta Garcia Celma undertook with the results of her MPhil, Heather gave a presentation on the current state of conservation documentation in UK's conservation departments (including educational departments). Some important points were:

1. Documentation systems of different institutions are built to encourage the collection of similar information but they are not consistent.
2. Although some of these systems encourage a more structured approach to information, free-text narratives are used extensively contributing to inconsistent records.
3. Requirements for conservation documentation are often considered as a plug-in to existing collection management systems.
4. In some cases conservators adopt a number of different styles of records depending on the purpose of the record (confirming the group's support of a layered approach to conservation documentation).

Action – Thanasis Velios to circulate Jane Eagan's report to the group.

Report on ConservationSpace

Anne-Marie Steel presented a summary of the work that has been done for the project: ConservationSpace. She described the two specification meetings which took place at the beginning of the project which focussed on the identification of conservation events. Mervin Richard (National Gallery, Washington – project leader) has indicated that the estimated time for the delivery of a working system is the end of 2015. It was noted that several ontologies are used in the project including the CIDOC-CRM.

Action – Anne-Marie Steel to pass specific questions about ConservationSpace to the development team:

- How does ConservationSpace integrate with existing documentation systems?
- Who provides support for ConservationSpace?

- Under what software license will ConservationSpace be available?

Action – Anne-Marie Steel to contact the Courtauld to arrange a demo for ICON-DG (perhaps after the next ICON-DG meeting is scheduled).

Development of layered approach to documentation

Combining existing conclusions from Heather Ravenberg's MPhil with a pre-meeting discussion among Clare Finn, Jenny Murray, Heather Ravenberg and Thanasis Velios, there are a number of useful recommendations which the group can take forward:

1. Conservation records should include data about:
 - The conditions of recording, i.e. how and why the choice of a specific structure and level of detail of a record was decided. This is useful information when a record appears to be incomplete or inaccurate.
 - Object structure.
 - Preservation condition.
 - Proposed treatment and the aim of the proposed treatment.
 - Actual treatment (which may be different to what the conservator proposed for a variety of reasons) and the assessment of the success of the treatment as per the aim set.
2. A discussion about the criteria to be used for lower or higher level of records led to two suggestions:
 - A more qualitative record tends to be lower level while a more quantitative record tends to be higher level. I.e. the existence of measurements makes a record more detailed.
 - Describing an object at its current state tends to be lower level, while specifying the sequence of events which led to the object's current state is higher level. About this point it was noted that this criterion would not apply to objects with full history of treatment records.

The group draw attention to the fact that condition reports are done by a range of professionals in addition to conservators but often the detail and accuracy of records done by conservators differentiate them from the rest. The group also draw attention to the fact that currently quick and non-detailed records are produced for budgetary reasons but these are not always suitable.

Action – Thanasis Velios to email the group for volunteers to take the layered approach development further.

Commercial companies

There was limited time to discuss the group's policy when communicating with commercial companies. The group agreed that at the moment it is not possible to review or recommend any products. We are also not in a position to attend presentation by commercial partners for such reviews.

Action – Thanasis Velios to check with ICON on whether there is an ICON policy about dealing with commercial entities.

Group operation

It was agreed that the group should have a temporary web-space to circulate information and publicise some of the group's activities. This is a temporary solution until the group is formally recognised by ICON and therefore be given some web-space on ICON's website. This temporary domain name was chosen:

consdoc.org.uk

Action – Thanasis Velios to register the domain name and setup web-space at the webserver of the University of the Arts.

Action – Heather Ravenberg to manage the website as per the group's requirements.

It was also agreed that an article about the group's activity should be published in the next ICON news which would help the discussion about the function of the group within ICON and invite opinions from other groups. The deadline for submission is the 2nd of June.

Action – Jenny Marchant to draft some text by mid-May. Everybody to review.

It was also noted that when the ICON procedure for designating new groups will be published, some work on the preparation of the documentation for the application will be needed.

Action – Thanasis Velios to keep in touch with Alison Richmond to find out when the guidelines will be published. Gillian Boal, Clare Finn and Thanasis Velios to draft group application. Everybody to review.

A list of organisations which the group considers as important stake-holders was compiled. Contact points in these organisations should be identified at a later date .

Action – Thanasis Velios to circulate the list. Everybody to review.

There was no decision on the date and place of the next meeting, but the Welcome Trust is a possibility.