

News

Mastering interpretation

A new Masters level course is set to emerge from the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI). The course, borne out of a unique partnership between Interpret Scotland members, industry practitioners, and higher education, aims to meet the growing demand for skilled and innovative professionals who can plan and implement effective interpretation products and programmes.

The need for interpretation is recognised at all levels, from Donald Dewar announcing proposals for new National Parks in 1999: "It is hard to put your finger on what makes Scotland special. But we are all aware of it and aware of the responsibilities it brings", to Jack McConnell in a St Andrew's Day speech in 2003: "We should truly celebrate this cultural diversity while we seek to attract more and more talented people and creative people to come and experience Scotland. To visit – but to work and live here too."

This Masters course sets out to meet the clear challenges facing interpreters in the 21st century as they draw on Scotland's natural environment, its history, modern culture, natural and built heritage, and its people in a way which responds to change and provides new or improved experiences. While focusing on the internationally recognised Scottish dimension, the course will critically explore interpretive principles and techniques using sites and experience from around the world.

The full Masters course comprises eight credit rated modules and a dissertation. The PgDip requires the 8 modules and no dissertation, while the PgCert requires students to complete the 4 core modules of communication theory, planning, implementation and policy/practice. The course will be delivered flexibly on a full or part time basis. Subject to validation, the course will begin in September 2005.

UHI is a partnership of higher education colleges throughout the Highlands and Islands.

For more details contact Helena Bell at Perth College helena.bell@perth.uhi.ac.uk

Guided tours – what is the visitor getting?

Rosalind Newlands, Training Manager, Scottish Tourist Guides Association, reports on European developments

In the last ten years, there have been moves to ensure that people can work across European boundaries. For Tourist Guides, this has meant a great deal of explanation to officials in Brussels and Strasbourg. After all, why shouldn't a tourist guide be like a doctor and work anywhere in Europe as long as they can speak the language? It did not seem to occur to anyone that being qualified to guide in, say, Paris, did not necessarily mean you could do the same in the Outer Hebrides! The Federation of European Guides (FEG) has worked long and hard to get recognition that tourist guiding is area specific and this has finally been accepted.

However, the tourist guiding profession does have a responsibility to ensure that a visitor seeking a qualified tourist guide in Scotland will get the same standard of guiding as one who takes a guide in Germany or France.

To help towards this, the Scottish Tourist Guides Association and the Institute of Tourist Guiding offer accreditation for guides in the UK. We work together to establish common training in interpretation skills so that all our guides can help visitors to see what they are looking at. At the European level, FEG has already established a European wide foreign language competency standard, with interpretation skills to follow hopefully later this year.

Research has shown that a tourist guide has a major effect on the quality of the visitor experience, even for short visits like those of cruise passengers. Visitor expectations are increasing; it is no longer acceptable for a gap year student to stand up outside an attraction, wear a funny costume and say "I am a guide, trust me!"

Rosalind Newlands rosnewlands@osa.sol.co.uk

New case studies

Scottish Natural Heritage has added two new case studies to its interpretation web pages: the Access for All developments at Beinn Eighe; and details of SNH's arts commissions at Beinn Eighe and Knockan Crag. SNH's interpretation pages are at www.snh.gov.uk/www/interpretation

ICT strategy for museums

A strategy for Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in museums has been published by the Scottish Museums Council. The strategy illustrates the opportunities for ICT in museum collection and presentation, and sets out a vision for its development.

Culloden on TV

Culloden (see page 4) will feature in BBC2's Battlefield Britain series on Friday 17 September. The programme promises "an amazing fly through of the battle using the most up to date computer imaging available". The National Trust for Scotland will be following this up with a weekend of special events at the site on 25 and 26 September.