

# **National Historic Ships UK (NHS-UK): Response to the call for evidence of the impact of Covid-19 on DCMS sectors**

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## **Summary**

This evidence is submitted by National Historic Ships UK, an independent organisation funded by DCMS to advise on all matters relating to historic vessels in the UK.

It reviews the impact of Covid-19 both on itself as a leading body and on the wider sector based on data gathered from over 100 custodians of heritage in the form of: private owners, charitable organisations, museums and small businesses. It also relates to the infrastructure for historic vessels including maintenance facilities and skills training institutions.

It demonstrates that Covid-19 has had a considerable effect on these groups, initially resulting in closures, event cancellations, furloughing of staff and loss of seasonal revenue. It identifies that whilst some have benefited from the funding support packages put in place by Government and arms-length bodies, others have been ineligible and are at potential risk of insolvency.

The impact on the sector is projected to extend to the 2022/23 season, with organisations calling for further financial aid to avoid possible redundancies, closures or loss of heritage.

Social distancing is likely to be particularly hard to implement for historic vessels with confined spaces and there is a concern that volunteers, the mainstay of the sector, will be slow to return due to their average age and the difficulties of creating a safe environment.

The report concludes with a reflection on the fortitude and creativity shown by the sector in response to the crisis. It identifies an opportunity to build on this by putting in place additional aid for digital programmes, skills training, match-funding schemes and concessions for historic vessels.

Greater communication between NHS-UK and its funding body would also be welcomed at this time, with increased support for its small grants scheme to enable financial aid to go to those within the sector who need it most.

## **1. Introduction**

1.1 National Historic Ships UK (NHS-UK) is an independent organisation set up to give objective advice to UK governments and local authorities, funding bodies and the historic ships sector on all matters relating to historic vessels in the UK. It is funded by DCMS and has a service level agreement with Royal Museums Greenwich (RMG) through which its grant is channelled and where its offices are based.

1.2 NHS-UK carries a wide remit, not only looking at the immediate issues concerning historic vessels in the UK, but also addressing questions relating to their supporting infrastructure and their potential for contributing in the wider economic, social and community context.

1.3 One of NHS-UK's principal activities is to hold and develop the National Historic Ship Registers which include: the National Register of Historic Vessels, the National Archive of Historic Vessels, the Overseas Watch List and the UK Replica List. The NHS-UK database currently totals some 2,100 vessels of UK significance.

1.4 NHS-UK also manages the Shipshape Network – an online framework which connects all those with an interest in ship conservation, promoting the regeneration of traditional skills and related training activities. The Network brings together over 85 external maritime heritage projects and independent initiatives across the UK.

1.5 NHS-UK is the lead partner on the Shipshape Heritage Training Partnership (SHTP 2) project, which is grant aided by the National Lottery Heritage Fund under its Skills for the Future programme. This provides placements of 12-months duration for 16 young people with eight host training providers in the skills of operating, conserving and maintaining historic vessels.

1.4 On behalf of NHS-UK and the maritime heritage sector, I welcome the opportunity to submit evidence in response to this inquiry into the impact caused by Covid-19.

## **2. What has been the immediate impact of Covid-19 on the sector?**

### **2.1 Impact on NHS-UK as an organisation**

NHS-UK has largely been able to continue its operations with minimal impact due to the ability of the whole team to work from home at a level of 95-100%. This was possible as a result of previous remote working made necessary by the wide geographical area the organisation covers, so that a policy of home working was already partially in place and all team members had access to the relevant software and equipment.

2.1.1 NHS-UK has a small team of six staff plus one volunteer. The Policy, Projects & Course Manager contracted the virus immediately prior to lockdown and was absent for three weeks, which had a considerable impact on team output as her duties had to be distributed elsewhere. Another member of the team is in the vulnerable category and shielding. The NHS-UK volunteer also elected to self-isolate early, but is continuing to offer support remotely to the best of his ability.

2.1.2 Whilst pandemic planning had been carried out in conjunction with RMG, our offices had to be deep cleaned following the staff absence detailed above, requiring us to evacuate without notice. As lockdown ensued, we were not able to return, which meant we were unable to access certain material in the office and were not able to put in place measures to manage the usual distribution of guidance manuals.

2.1.3 All planned events, meetings and vessel visits were cancelled as a result of the virus, but every effort has been made to reinstate these online where possible.

2.1.4 The most significant impact has been on our Heritage Lottery funded SHTP 2 training project, which has seen partner organisations closing, supervisors and other staff furloughed and trainees left isolated or returning home to support their families. As lead partner, NHS-UK has had to respond with increased pastoral care and online learning for the trainees. This has required additional input from the Project Manager and Co-ordinator and an options review has been carried out to consider the best way to adapt the project to ensure trainees still experience time on placement post-lockdown. This has been submitted to the Heritage Fund as it will involve a change to project objectives and a project extension. A small grant increase may also be requested.

## **2.2 Impact on the wider historic vessel and maritime heritage sector**

Via social media, email correspondence, phone meetings, and impact statements received through a call for evidence, NHS-UK has collated information on the impact of Covid-19 on over 100 organisations within our sector. This includes documenting the effect on 78 historic vessels listed on the National Historic Fleet (the best surviving representatives of their type, which merit the highest priority for conservation, being of pre-eminent national significance).

The immediate outcome of the pandemic was the closure of all maritime museums, historic vessels and charter / sail training operations, along with the postponement or cancellation of associated events, activities and training sessions.

2.2.1 Significant events cancelled included the Return to Dunkirk, hosted by the Association of Dunkirk Little Ships, which would have seen more than 70 vessels cross the Channel in May to commemorate the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Operation Dynamo. Many other events were similarly affected such as: the Thames Traditional Boat Festival (the largest event of its kind in Europe, which has run since 1977), British Classic Week at Cowes, the Scottish Traditional Boat Festival at Portsoy, the Falmouth Classics, the first birthday celebrations at Windermere Jetty Museum and the Fife Regatta.

2.2.2 At the time of lockdown, most operational vessels were undergoing their seasonal refit or had not yet been launched, raising concerns about leaving them out of the water for a prolonged period, especially during the heat of summer. In some cases, maintenance or survey work which would normally have been completed before the season was put on hold, causing vessels to

miss their booked slot at a yard or with a surveyor. As lockdown eases, some vessels are trying to re-book a place to complete the work, others remain in the yard but are not yet ready for launching, putting them further behind their usual schedule. Those who completed their refit already are in the position of having expended a large sum of money which they have no means of recouping whilst the vessel sits at the dock.

2.2.2.1 *Pilgrim of Brixham*, the oldest surviving operational Brixham trawler, is one such case, being run by a small charitable organisation which depends on charter fees and open days to survive. £10,000 had been spent on the annual refit (including the full Maritime & Coastguard Agency inspection) and the trust felt it had no choice but to suspend the 2020 sailing season and all associated bookings due to Covid-19. It has a small reserve which is now being deployed to help with core costs, but which would not even cover the cost of the above refit. The trust has furloughed the skipper and cancelled a seasonal contract, but otherwise relies on the help of volunteers, most of whom are over 70. It rents offices but does not pay business rates, so is ineligible for the Small Business Fund support grants. Happily, it has received a small grant from the Heritage Fund's emergency funding which will cover some of the overheads already expended for the season, but it still needs support to make up for lost revenue.

2.2.2.2 At Woodbridge Boat Yard in Essex, there was a rush to launch older vessels, particularly wooden ones, which are vulnerable to drying out if left ashore for a prolonged period. At the start of lockdown, they launched nine vessels from the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century that were considered at particular risk if not afloat. Some went back in the water with the refit half-completed - in one case, the vessel was unpainted and without masts, as it was considered the best way to ensure her safety and keep the hull in a stable environment for an indefinite period of non-use.

2.2.2.3 Following lockdown, all local Maritime & Coastguard Agency (MCA) Marine Offices were closed and, at the time of this submission, none were yet giving a date for re-opening. The MCA has issued a statement asking those vessels requiring surveyors to get in touch by email, so they can be put on a waiting list and dealt with in due course. However, this has led to a back-log of domestic passenger vessels requiring their annual out of the water survey which would normally have taken place in March/April. Recognising the difficulty, the MCA issued MIN 612 on 25 March setting out procedures in relation to Covid 19. This allows vessels in some circumstances to have their Passenger Certificates extended on a case-by-case basis, without the presence of a surveyor and with a supporting declaration from the owner.

2.2.3 Independent museums like the Black Country Living Museum (where the National Historic Fleet narrow boat *President* is based), the ss Great Britain Trust and the Mary Rose Museum, which receive up to 90% of funding

from visitors, were forced to close. Both ss *Great Britain* and the Mary Rose Museum are run by charities with annual outgoings of over £2 million on conservation – this is essential activity which must continue to ensure the preservation of the ships, regardless of whether the museum is open to the public. Independent museums rely on income generated during peak tourist season, so that effectively a whole year's finances have been lost as a result of Covid-19.

2.2.4 The three specialist boatbuilding colleges in the UK – the International Boatbuilding Training College, Lowestoft (IBTC Lowestoft), Boathouse 4 (IBTC Portsmouth) and the Boatbuilding Academy, Lyme Regis - were also closed as a result of lockdown. This had an immediate effect on student learning, but also a significant economic impact on the colleges. At IBTC Lowestoft, the lockdown coincided with their second annual intake of students, meaning expected income from fees was not received, leading to immediate cash flow difficulties.

### **3. How effectively has the support provided by DCMS, other Government departments and arms-length bodies addressed the sector's needs?**

3.1 Historic vessel owners have informed us of emergency funding received from a range of sources including: the National Lottery Heritage Fund; Arts Council England; Historic England; Sport England and Scottish Enterprise. However, in each case the support given is only a minor contribution to overall projected losses, so is likely to be an interim solution rather than a permanent fix.

3.2 Four organisations with craft on the National Register of Historic Vessels are known to have benefited from the National Lottery Heritage Fund's Emergency Fund, with grants totalling £101,000. Whilst this support has provided a lifeline for these organisations, as well as to others whom it has not been possible to quantify, there are some who had hoped for support from this source, but found that the criteria did not apply. For example, ss *Shieldhall*, a significant passenger carrying vessel on the National Historic Fleet, was forced to cease operations for the season due to Covid-19. Although she has received support from the Fund in the last ten years, she was deemed ineligible for emergency funding because the preservation society which manages her had accumulated a small reserve. This sum was to cover the costs of their next dry docking, without which the ship will not meet the MCA regulations for operation. It will now be used to cover the lost revenue this season but, with no mechanism for replacing this reserve, the ship will have to find alternative funding before next year.

3.3 Those who have received grant aid from emergency funding packages have gained immediate relief, but no indication of what longer term support may be available. This severely affects their ability to plan ahead. The Hovercraft Museum is in this category, having ceased all financial expenditure other than on essential rent to ensure that the grant it has been given lasts as long as possible. It anticipates reduced visitor numbers on re-opening due to social distancing requirements and questions what further aid might be available to grant aid this transition process.

3.4 As funders like the Arts Council and the Heritage Fund have focussed all their resources on emergency packages for the sector, this has led to a suspension of their normal project funding. Historic vessels that had been working on applications not yet submitted have been left with no sources of support for much needed conservation and no indication of when this funding might be back in place. Due to the length of the application process, this raises concern about the potential further deterioration in condition of some craft before they could hope to receive funding. As the Heritage Fund is the sector's principle form of support, this may lead to craft being out of action next season due to inability to grant aid works, and other projects being permanently abandoned, leading to significant losses.

3.4.1 The Northern Belle Trust was in the process of applying to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for a project grant to conserve the vessel when Covid-19 hit. The vessel attracts ongoing costs resulting from yard storage fees – these are considerable due to her length. The Trust will exhaust its reserves within months and, with the most likely funding route removed, the trustees have lost the impetus to maintain storage payments pending the outcome of their bid. Several planned community events that would also have raised income have had to be cancelled. As a result, the trust is seeking a new custodian for the vessel but, if this is not found, fear she will be scrapped.

3.5 Some organisations have found that none of the relief schemes apply and have been unable to meet the criteria for grant aid from sector funders.

3.5.1 Charitable bodies not focused on key services have failed to get government support despite being significantly affected. The Excelsior Trust, which has taken more than 10,000, often socially disadvantaged young people to sea, had to cease operations as a result of the virus and is projecting a £50,000 loss this year, based on overheads of £10,000 per month. It has started a crowdfunding campaign to cover its core costs and maintain the ship for next season.

3.5.2 Passenger carrying craft, such as the historic vessels run by Colliers Launches - a family business based on the Thames for over 40 years - are seasonal operating from April to September and rely on this revenue to support themselves over the winter. Colliers Launches has proved ineligible for government funding other than furloughing as it does not pay business rates (falling under the Port of London Authority and Crown Estate jurisdiction) and, even if it could secure one, does not wish to take out a loan to meet its overheads without the prospect of the revenue to pay it back. Colliers Launches owns four registered historic vessels and carries 60,000 passengers per year. Similarly to *Excelsior*, the historic passenger launch *Alaska*, *Maid of the Loch* and others, it is looking to crowd-funding for immediate support.

3.5.3 Members of Industrial Museums Scotland were unable to receive either of the Business Continuity Grants due to the rateable value of their Museums, despite nearly all already receiving rate relief and being not-for-profit organisations. Other measures that helped the wider population also proved inapplicable to this sector. The suspension of business rates brought no

benefit to charities who do not pay them. Payment holidays for National Insurance, VAT or loans were no use in circumstances where the lost income would never be recouped. Cash flow loans were unsuitable when organisations were not generating net positive cash and many would be operating at breakeven when asked to repay. However, the move to flexible furloughing to allow part-time work was particularly welcomed.

#### **4. What will the likely long-term impacts of Covid-19 be on the sector, and what support is needed to deal with these?**

4.1 The historic vessel sector is dependent on volunteer support to manage its heritage. This has been heavily impacted as significant portions of volunteers are in major risk groups due to age, medical issues, or lifestyle factors. Many volunteers chose to stay at home from an early stage in the crisis and are unlikely to return until the risk fully diminishes. It will be difficult, particularly for smaller operational vessels, to guarantee a safe environment due to the confined spaces in which these individuals need to work (e.g. engine rooms, hatchways, cockpits). The fear is that volunteers will become disengaged due to the length of time they will be away from the heritage and the asset will therefore have an insufficient workforce to maintain or conserve it once it re-opens.

4.2 It will also take time to reassure the public that operational craft present a safe environment for visitors. For instance, the tug *Portwey*'s biggest income and interest generators are the steaming events it organises on the Thames from the O2 Dome to Tower Bridge and return. There is concern that members of the public will be fearful of taking such trips on a vessel with small public areas. As a membership organisation, *Portwey* relies on occasions like this to recruit new fee-paying members. The prolonged period of inactivity, followed by reduced activity and fewer visitors will cause significant financial difficulties for the Trust from which it will struggle to recover.

4.3 Operational historic vessels required to implement social distancing measures may have to significantly adjust their business plans and make physical adaptations in order to carry smaller numbers of people. As many charge per head, they will suffer financial losses if they are unable to run at full capacity, which may make their business model unviable. Some businesses are built on the premise of carrying large numbers and it may not be possible to modify this approach, putting the future of the organisation in jeopardy with a danger of craft ultimately being scrapped.

4.3.1 The Sea-Change Sailing Trust, an educational charity based in Essex, uses living and working together on a large traditional sailing vessel (a Thames sailing barge) to engage young people and vulnerable adults in positive shared endeavour. It is not possible to get the same results in virtual form, as the sailing experience is at the heart of the way this charity works. If carrying fewer numbers is the only means of achieving distancing, the charity would need additional support to cover the missing revenue whilst it seeks to adjust its business plan.

4.3.2 Passenger vessels like those run by Colliers Launches are usually able to carry up to 130 people on a single craft. To meet social distancing rules, the

company estimates that, even on the biggest of its four craft, only 30 people could be safely accommodated at a time.

4.3.3 The paddle steamer *Waverley* has the capacity to carry 800 passengers and needs to maximize numbers as her operational and maintenance costs are high. A 50% reduction in passengers, which is now being considered by other historic vessel operators to facilitate re-opening, would have a significant impact on craft such as this which need to fill their places in order to break even annually.

4.3.4 If social distancing measures become necessary in the longer-term, vessels will need to adapt to this, rather than waiting for ‘normality’ to return. Any changes required to make operation possible will have an effect on revenue. Therefore, in the medium term, concessions which help to reduce the cost base would assist. For example: an exemption allowing historic vessels to continue using red diesel for a longer period; a VAT concession for craft on the National Register of Historic Vessels; or mooring discounts (such as the 50% discount applied by Cherbourg in France for registered historic UK vessels) would all make a considerable difference.

4.4 Vessel owning museums will suffer from lost revenue and even those that have been able to furlough staff or benefit from the support schemes, will see a longer term impact which may show itself through wage cuts, redundancies, site closures or charities wound up.

4.4.1 Industrial Museums Scotland (IMS) reported that, despite cuts to funding in recent years, some of its members had been able to build flexibility or reserves into their cash flow. However, they will need to use these up in order to maintain staffing and museum standards, with most anticipating depleting their reserves before the end of August. Some of the smaller members have taken measures either not to re-open for the season, or to operate on winter hours and therefore not employ seasonal staff. Despite this, they are looking at financial insolvency before the start of the 2021 season. Of the larger members, one was faced with potential insolvency as early as May, but was supported by the job retention scheme.

Recognised as being of national significance by the Scottish Government, these museums employ over 200 people and contribute over £9m to the Scottish economy. Each year they welcome 900k visitors and 45k school pupils. Historic vessel owning members of IMS include: the Scottish Maritime Museum, the Scottish Fisheries Museum, *Maid of the Loch* and the Dundee Heritage Trust. Based on the cash flow projections of these museums, support may well be needed as far out as the 2022/23 financial year if they are to survive.

4.4.2 Some of the larger museum or operational ships have an iconic or destination role, bringing wider tourism value to their local area. For example, *HMS Warrior*, *HMS Victory* and *M33* collectively welcomed 445,038 visitors to Portsmouth Historic Dockyard last year. During 2019, *Cutty Sark* was named runner-up in the Best Landmark in Greenwich/Woolwich category at



the Time Out Love London Awards, and in February, the ship was named Best Family Attraction at the Tickets Remarkable Venue Awards. If vessels like these are closed or worse, people will be less likely to visit these places.

4.5 Privately owned historic vessels are likely to be impacted by the virus in the longer term, either because their condition may have deteriorated during lockdown where owners were not able to visit or maintain them in prolonged hot weather, or because owners may have less funds to spend on them due to the effect of Covid-19 on their own finances. Until the real impact of Covid-19 on the economy is known and the resulting level of redundancies across the country, it will not be possible to determine the full extent of the latter. In normal circumstances, there is limited grant aid available to support private owners in maintaining their heritage at an appropriate level, with historic vessel owners typically relying on their own resources or support from one of two streams – the NHS-UK Small Grants Scheme, or in cases where public benefit can be strongly demonstrated, the National Lottery Heritage Fund’s project grants.

4.5.1 The privately owned historic fishing vessel *Guiding Star* is berthed in Plymouth, close to the Cornish waters where she spent her working life. Her owner lives in London and usually visits his vessel via public transport. During the coronavirus outbreak, he was not able to go onboard for over three months. He postponed the annual refit which included essential maintenance work and, by early June, was concerned about her condition having been sent photographs indicating that she had deteriorated in the hot weather. Government guidance prohibited him from staying overnight or using public transport where it could be avoided and the distance he lives from the vessel therefore made it impossible for him to address the problem. An estimate for the works to be carried out by a local yard, including delivery of her to the site, came to £5,000 - a significant sum for an owner who normally undertakes his own maintenance at zero labour costs.

4.5.2 The NHS-UK Strategic Development Fund was launched in 2007 with initial support from DCMS and has now given out some £450,000 through its Small Grants Scheme. Due to diminishing resources in recent years, awards for vessel owners have been reduced to £1,000 or 50% of costs, whichever is the lesser and the fund typically only opens once per year, depending on NHS-UK’s ability to offer support from its own budget. In response to Covid-19, NHS-UK extended its small grants scheme to receive applications up to 30 June and more than double the normal level of requests were submitted. It will not be possible to grant aid all good applications due to limited resources, although NHS-UK has moved additional monies into the grant fund from other areas of its limited budget to offer the most support it can to the sector at this time.

**4.5.3 An effective way of supporting the sector, including those private owners who may have suffered economically from the crisis, would be to channel government funding via the NHS-UK Small Grants Scheme once again.**

## **5. What lessons can be learnt from how DCMS, arms-length bodies and the sector have dealt with Covid-19?**

5.1 Arms-length bodies such as the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Arts Council England and Historic England should be praised for the speed and level of their response in putting together emergency funding to support the sector. However, as mentioned in Section 3.4 above, by withdrawing the normal funding streams entirely, there are likely to be some longer term indirect impacts. Whilst there was a clear need to focus resources on the crisis, some guidance as to when the standard grant programmes might return would have reassured potential applicants and could still avoid precipitate decisions being made about the future of significant heritage assets.

5.2 NHS-UK reports to the Museums & Sponsorship team at DCMS and sent an update at the beginning of lockdown but, despite being the official government-funded organisation set up to represent the interests of historic vessels and maritime heritage, has had no direct communication during the crisis with its sponsoring body.

5.3 As a member of the Mobile Heritage Advocacy Group formed by Heritage Alliance, NHS-UK has given feedback during the pandemic to Government via Heritage Alliance's weekly meeting with the Heritage Minister. As a result, NHS-UK was offered the opportunity to comment on a final draft of the guidance issued by Historic England on working safely during Covid-19 in the heritage sector. Whilst many of the principles within this applied to historic vessels, it would have been beneficial to have been consulted earlier so as to have had a section or separate document specific to maritime heritage.

5.4 There has been a focus on resilience in recent funding from the Heritage Fund and this has helped to strengthen many organisations in the sector from a governance perspective. This has put them in a good position to deal with the Covid-19 threat. In contrast, years of austerity have sapped their resources, so that many have already taken considerable cuts and are therefore operating with very small or no reserves. Post Covid-19, it will be important to maintain the focus on resilience, whilst also looking at endowment funding to ensure that the sector doesn't continue to operate on the edge of survival, where another similar crisis could invoke a full cultural disaster.

## **6. How might the sector evolve after Covid-19, and how can DCMS support such future innovation to deal with future challenges?**

6.1 The sector has shown huge adaptability in the face of this crisis, with organisations delivering a wealth of online programmes, events, activities, exhibitions and learning in a very short space of time. Many have had minimal training or resources with which to do this, but have drawn on all available material to maintain an online presence and ensure that people continue to engage with their heritage even whilst unable to visit it in physical form. This has demonstrated the ability of even the smaller organisations to extend their online reach and, when looking at the rapid acceleration in digital growth during lockdown, it is likely the sector will seek to continue building on this by expanding its digital framework further. Digital resources can also be used to support social distancing by providing virtual access to small spaces (e.g. engine rooms) which are no longer viable to open to the public.

Additional funding streams to build and enhance this activity will be needed to support continued development across the sector going forwards.

6.1.1 At the start of lockdown, NHS-UK made a significant change to its *Flagship of the Year* scheme. Usually reflecting the cruising programme or visitor numbers of each successful craft, it instead welcomed applications for ‘virtual flagships’ in recognition of the fact that many historic vessels have had to cease operations, cancel or postpone events through circumstances beyond their control. The five 2020 Flagships have been selected for their tenacity in continuing to raise their profile throughout the Covid-19 outbreak by online activities, social media, developing learning resources, offering virtual tours and other creative means. They each receive a small grant which can be spent on digital activities and will have the full online support of NHS-UK over the coming months to help promote their vessels.

6.2 Social media has proved a lifeline for many historic vessels, being used as a means of promotional updates, but also as a way of connecting with their volunteer base and members whilst they are no longer able to access the ship.

6.3 Crowd-funding has become a popular way to find financial support to see the vessel through the crisis, with organisations seeking to raise achievable levels based on monthly lost income and often applying a rewards strategy to encourage support. Crowd-funding was still relatively new and untried for many in the sector prior to Covid-19 and it is likely to gain more traction going forwards as people increasingly recognise its value and what has been achieved as a result of these rescue appeals. However, there is some concern that the significant giving to charitable organisations linked to the National Health Service (via Captain Tom and others) may affect the public’s willingness (or indeed ability given the likely level of job losses) to give to other worthy causes once Covid 19 is over. New grant programmes which offer an element of match-funding could be a way to build on the success of crowd-funding and encourage further public donations.

6.4 As seen through NHS-UK’s Skills for the Future project, SHTP 2, young people undertaking training placements, apprenticeships or those in full-time education have particularly suffered during the pandemic, missing out on learning opportunities and the means of gaining practical skills. Once social distancing measures are in place, it will be possible to offer increased outdoor activity to young people through those historic vessels which provide educational resources to schools and colleges. This could be developed and expanded to meet new guidelines, with smaller groups and day sails. With many universities already looking at online learning for the academic year of 2020/21, practical skills could be supported with short placements on board historic vessels in fields such as outdoor management and pursuits, marine engineering and conservation. Government funding to develop a schools programme and underpin further vessel skills training placements would enable our sector to offer this type of support to multiple education providers and diverse groups.

## **7. Conclusions**

7.1 The maritime heritage sector has responded to the crisis with fortitude and has striven to take the most effective measures possible to preserve its assets, whilst

remaining safe and following government guidelines with the closure of sites, cancellation of events and all passenger carrying activities. As lockdown eases, organisations across the sector are looking at the best way to re-open and return to operation, whilst maintaining appropriate social distancing measures. This will not be easy given the confined spaces on many of the vessels and, were the social distancing rule to be reduced from 2m to 1m, this would help with logistics for some operators and custodians.

7.2 Many maritime museums, businesses and vessels which were not able to carry out their usual operations, found other ways of contributing to the work of the National Health Service and front line organisations in the crisis. Museums such as Royal Museums Greenwich and National Museum of the Royal Navy were able to donate PPE equipment from their in-house stores. Maritime businesses on the South Coast, led by Sanders Sails (one of the businesses listed on the Shipshape Network skills directory), were able to use the technology on site to make scrubs, gowns and other PPE, with 20,500 gowns now produced. Royal Yacht *Britannia* donated food items from its shop to Local Leith charity PKHinnovation which works with people and communities to develop strategies to address social issues. During the Covid lockdown they put together parcels for socially isolated families.

7.3 The sector also made a huge contribution to public well-being during lockdown, with historic vessels and maritime museums offering online activities, learning and public engagement for people of all ages. Going forwards, we will be looking for further support for digital programmes to ensure that this level of creativity can be maintained.

7.4 Covid-19 has been an enormous challenge for the maritime heritage sector, shutting it down effectively overnight and cutting off its source of revenue at the peak tourism period. Whilst some organisations have been able to benefit from government aid and emergency funding, others have not and are now facing major financial problems which could lead to redundancies, insolvency and loss of the heritage. NHS-UK calls on government for further financial assistance, to be offered in a targeted second phase once the true impact of re-opening in a socially distanced way is known. Without ongoing support of this kind, there is a very real danger that significant heritage assets will permanently disappear.

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**15 June 2020**

**Notes:**

Impact statements were received from the following organisations:  
The Hovercraft Museum; the Excelsior Trust; Sea-Change Sailing Trust; Northern Belle Trust; Tall Ship *Glenlee*; Industrial Museums Scotland; historic vessels *Guiding Star*, *Greta*, *HMS Medusa*, *Pilgrim*, *Portwey*, *LV 50*.

Additional evidence was gathered via email correspondence, social media activity and phone meetings and has been recorded in a spreadsheet which can be supplied on request.