

# HERITAGE STATEMENT 2021

In August 2021 Icon was given the opportunity to feed into the development of the upcoming **Heritage Statement** through our membership of the Historic Environment Forum. The new **Heritage Statement** will set out the Government's vision and strategy for heritage and the historic environment in the short and medium term.

Icon took part in two roundtable events (one with a general theme and one focused on climate change / sustainability). We were asked to share our feedback, thoughts and case studies in relation to the four topic areas set out below. The comments that we submitted are reproduced in this document and were shaped by Icon's Policy Advisory Panel.

## Recovery and Resilience

What long term outcomes for recovery would you like the Heritage Statement to have?  
What are the main problems / barriers to recovery which your organisation / the sector is facing, and do you have any suggested solutions?

### Icon policy paper:

- *Conservation Restores*: Icon sets out why investment in cultural heritage and conservation is vital for economic growth, the wellbeing of people and the UK's international competitiveness
  - <https://www.icon.org.uk/resource/conservation-restores.html>

### Long term outcomes for recovery:

- A stable and well-resourced cultural heritage sector with access to a balanced portfolio of revenue and capital funding.
- The capacity within the sector to build financial resilience and implement viable business plans that will return organisations to a healthy operational state.
- More effective models of collaboration and co-operation that made best use of the range of skills, talents and knowledge held within the sector's many dynamic and energetic organisations.
- Clear policy communications channels to ensure that Government hears and understands the needs of the sector, and also the many ways that we can contribute positively to creating a better, more just and equitable society for everyone.

### Barriers faced by the sector:

- General lack of funding and support for ongoing routine conservation work on objects and collections.
- Budget cuts within national and local museums and also Local Authority museums services. Institutions are not able to function properly and are barely able to carry out their core work. They cannot take on the additional work needed to make buildings and their collections more accessible to the public, implement environmentally friendly adaptations, or carry out anything other than basic maintenance.
- Decline in income for charitable heritage organisations e.g. National Trust caused by COVID-19. This has had a severe impact on freelancers and microbusinesses which rely on commissions from the larger cultural heritage institutions. When organisations such as NT

cut their project budgets then the pipeline for freelancers and microbusinesses dries up and they face going out of business. If conservation businesses don't survive then this will create a longer-term issue of the loss of conservation skills within the sector and fewer opportunities for emerging professionals to gain experience working in these small studios.

**Barriers faced by Icon:**

- General downturn in the economy and cuts in funding for museums and galleries have caused a reduction across all lines of our commercial income streams.
- Redundancies in the sector are causing members to leave the profession and widespread uncertainty about the future is making it more challenging to recruit new members.
- Lack of job security amongst members and concerns about the uncertain future are acting as a disincentive for them to pursue accreditation. This has a negative impact on our revenue and also potentially reduces the number of accredited conservator-restorers within the sector in the coming years.
- Lack of information from funders about the nature/scope of their future grant programmes makes it difficult to plan ahead and develop potential projects.

**Solutions:**

- Increase funding for national and local museums and encourage funders to prioritise conservation work within capital and activity projects in addition to engagement and outreach. Ensure that a proportion of project grants is used to conserve the collections that are the focus of the stories/engagement.
- Encourage investment, pride and engagement in the preventative conservation departments in non-national museums, archives and libraries. This work is not glamorous but it is vital to ensure that collections and their stories remain accessible to local communities.
- Remove business rate liability from museums and archives to bring them into parity with libraries.
- Provide financial support for sector networks and umbrella organisations (such as THA and Icon) so that they can continue to support individuals and organisations in their respective fields.

## Levelling Up and Placemaking

How can heritage support be levelling up the country? What are the barriers impacting on heritage contributing to the government's objectives for levelling up, and do you have any suggested solution or best practice case study?

**Icon policy papers:**

- *Conservation and Communities*: Conservation supports healthier and longer lives and contributes to the wellbeing of communities by facilitating meaningful engagement with our cultural heritage.
  - <https://www.icon.org.uk/resource/conservation-and-communities.html>
- *Conservation, the Economy and Business*: Conservation is a source of economic prosperity and growth, contributing to business, industry and employment.
  - <https://www.icon.org.uk/resource/conservation-the-economy-and-business.html>

**How heritage supports levelling up:**

Modern conservation practice is focussed on investing in the quality of people’s lives for the future.

**Solutions:**

- Allocate a greater share of public funding to non-national museums, galleries and archives.
- Invest in regional organisations – not just in terms of (much-needed) capital improvements to the buildings and infrastructure but also in terms of the staff. Levels of pay and reward are very low in conservation despite the high levels of skill and knowledge that conservators contribute to their organisation. They should be better rewarded and incentivised so that they are able to deliver greater public benefit in their local communities.

**Climate and Environment**

What long term impact would you like the Heritage Statement to have around climate and the environment? What are the main barriers to reaching environmental sustainability for your organisation / the part of the sector you represent? How can the government help?

**Icon policy papers:**

- *Conservation and Sustainability*: Cultural heritage can be an accessible resource for communicating climate change, empowering people to confront the challenge and inspiring more sustainable lifestyles.
  - <https://www.icon.org.uk/resource/conservation-and-sustainability.html>
- *Preserving Cultural Heritage, Supporting the Green Transition*: Icon Chief Executive, Sara Crofts, offers some reflections on amplifying messages about the need to mainstream climate action into cultural heritage
  - <https://www.icon.org.uk/resource/supporting-the-green-transition.html>

**Barriers for conservation studios:**

- Cost – Many eco-friendly options such as green solvents or recyclable/biodegradable gloves are more expensive than standard products.
- Data – Many conservators want to make a difference but don’t know where they can be most effective while still making affordable choices. Information about the long-term performance of eco-friendly options is not readily available to practitioners.

**Government could help by:**

1. Providing financial support (grants or tax incentives) to carry out the following works to museum, gallery and archive buildings:
  - updating plant within buildings to more efficient and environmentally-friendly options
  - installing solar panels on roofs and / or ground heat source pumps where possible
  - increasing insulation in buildings (but taking into account the needs of the fabric and the character and current performance characteristics of older structures)
  - changing lighting to LEDs
  - installing charging points for electric vehicles and supporting other forms of sustainable transport

2. Incentivising the reduction in energy consumption in museum, gallery and archive buildings through fiscal measures e.g. not charging VAT on anything that saves or produces energy. So, PV systems, installing LED lights, or adding insulation would not incur VAT.

3. Supporting knowledge transfer from research institutions to those working in practice. A great deal of academic work has been carried out already, but is currently out of reach of the practitioners who would benefit most from this knowledge. Better mechanisms for sharing research proposals, projects and other initiatives so that we create bigger and better outcomes through building on and amplifying the work of others rather than repeating and constantly reinventing the same things would be beneficial.

## Diversity & Inclusion

What are the barriers to increasing diversity in the sector, both in terms of workforce and audiences, and how is your organisation overcoming these challenges? How can the Government support diversity?

### **Barriers to increasing diversity in the conservation sector are largely socio-economic:**

- Low levels of funding for cultural heritage organisations. This results in low pay for those in highly qualified and skilled conservation jobs. Current salaries for conservation staff are described as “impossible to live on” and there is lack of opportunity to progress upwards through job levels. This is a substantial distinctive to people entering the profession.
- High cost of training. A common route into conservation training is through an MA course after the completion of a BA. However, the increase in costs of university-delivered conservation courses discourages students with lower incomes from applying.
- A lack of full-time permanent jobs and the ability to work where you live. The conservation sector could be described as being part of the ‘gig economy’ with many conservation professionals juggling multiple part-time jobs and contracts (including teaching). Unless conservators are prepared, or are able, to move around the country to take up short-term contracts (many of which last only a few months), it is very difficult to work in the heritage sector without financial support from a partner, family or other independent means.
- Physical accessibility. Many buildings and workplaces in the cultural heritage sector are not physically accessible. While measures to achieve inclusive access for visitors have been implemented in many properties this rarely extends to back-of-house facilities for staff.
- An unequal focus in relation to the range of protected characteristics and wider disabilities. There is a lot of excellent positive action on certain aspects, such as race and ethnicity, but some other issues are not well recognised and are not being addressed. Lack of support for neurodiversity is a current discussion topic within the conservation sector as there are fewer resources and organisations focussing on this aspect of diversity.

### **Icon’s approach:**

- We set up a [Diversity and Inclusion Task & Finish Group](#) to create a theory of change model for the conservation profession.
- Supporting and championing conservation apprenticeships as a way to ensure greater access to conservation careers.

**Government could help by:**

- Making changes to apprenticeships to make it easier and more attractive for small and micro-businesses to take on apprentices. Offering greater financial and capacity support for those working in specialist sectors to be able to provide training and experience for young people from a diverse range of backgrounds.
- Encouraging grant funders to ensure that accessible and meaningful training opportunities for young people are included within all capital and activity projects.
- Ensuring that conservation is recognised and valued as an important aspect of the creative industries and that conservation practitioners have access to training and support packages targeted at creative professionals.