

Scottish Government, Funding for Culture, September 2021

Icon Response, September 2021

<https://yourviews.parliament.scot/cteea/funding-for-culture/>

1. What should be the Scottish Government's immediate priorities in supporting the culture sector's recovery through Budget 2022-23?

The care of our collective cultural heritage across Scotland requires specialist care by qualified and experienced conservation professionals working in public organisations and the private sector.

Icon welcomed the Scottish Government's ambition to "develop the conditions and skills for culture to thrive, so it is cared for, protected and produced for the enjoyment and enrichment of all present and future generations" (Culture Strategy, 2020). To be able to meet this vision, active support for the conservation profession across Scotland must be at the heart of the Government's priorities to support the cultural sector's recovery through the Budget 2022/23.

SUPPORT RETENTION OF CONSERVATION WORKFORCE

The small but highly specialised conservation workforce in Scotland is relatively evenly split across the public and private sectors, with a high degree of interconnectedness across both groups.

The specialised nature of the profession makes it impractical for an institution to directly employ individuals with all the skills required – as such most heritage institutions rely on their ability to commission services from the private sector (both freelancers/sole traders as well as companies) to undertake essential conservation work.

There is very little room for further reduction of the workforce given the relatively low number of workers across both the private and public sectors. The private sector has been particularly hard hit over the last 18 months – many businesses are at real risk of closure.

Any further cuts to the conservation workforce in heritage institutions or in the private sector because of funding cuts would result the development of a skills gap that could take a generation to close. By extension, this would also give rise to the real risk of irrecoverable loss of our collective cultural heritage.

Through the Budget 2022/23, the Government must commit to the maintenance and development of existing operating budgets of heritage organisations to allow them to

retain their directly employed workforce as well as to continue being able to commission essential conservation services from organisations in the private sector.

SUPPORT FOR TRAINING AND ENTRY ROUTES INTO THE CONSERVATION PROFESSION

The Scottish Government must ensure that through the Budget 2022/23 it is able to help mitigate the real risk of the development of a significant skills shortage within the conservation profession in Scotland. This must be achieved by supporting existing provision, the development of new training routes and the investment in skills development opportunities.

Supporting existing provision: There is only one programme in Scotland which teaches conservation, the MPhil programme in textiles conservation at the University of Glasgow – this must be safeguarded at all costs through continuing support for the Higher Education sector.

Development of new training routes: Icon strongly advocates for the development of vocational training routes in Scotland through the development of conservation specific Modern and Graduate Apprenticeship Programmes.

Support for work-based training: Through active support for the development and support for programmes, allowing graduates and those wishing to enter the heritage workforce to improve their employability through structured work-based learning programmes.

Continued active support for the development of training routes in the conservation profession would actively enhance the diversification of the conservation workforce to ensure it is clearly representative of society as a whole.

2. Do you agree with UNESCO that “a degree of restructuring is inevitable” [1] as the sector recovers from COVID? If so, what approach should the Scottish Government adopt?

The coronavirus pandemic has highlighted the importance of the tourism sector to the Scottish economy - museums and galleries, libraries, archives and heritage sites are a core part of this, alongside the conservation workforce which underpin the care of collections and heritage assets.

Whilst a degree of re-structuring may be inevitable, the Scottish Government must ensure that any decisions made do not unintentionally cause an irrecoverable loss of our cultural heritage. As well as the risk losing vital heritage assets, if we fail to consider the full impact of any ‘restructuring’ there is also the added risk of losing out on tourist income. There is also the possibility of losing UNESCO World Heritage status of the six sites in Scotland.

The focus of the Scottish Government's approach should be to support the sector in building up its resilience to ensure that it is sustainable and can be safeguarded from future threats. This includes supporting the diversification of income streams and in committing to long term budgets.

3. A crisis can also trigger new ways of thinking – should the Scottish Government rethink how it supports the culture sector?

Icon strongly supports the development of creative approaches to help work towards a more sustainable funding model to support the conservation profession.

Investment in collections care: Increased focus and support for the care of collections and investment in maintenance programmes across the public realm. Rather than simply undertaking reactive work, an investment in collections care would overall help prevent the need for interventive activities (and associated costs) where issues were avoidable.

Support the development of awareness of conservation across the heritage sector: Awareness of the risks to collections as well as an understanding of where to seek support is inconsistent across the heritage sector, particularly in small heritage organisations. Icon recognises that advice is already provided through Museums Galleries Scotland and Historic Environment Scotland, however it believes that this offer could be strengthened through actively creating (and committing to maintain support for) a central advisory role (possibly through MGS) to actively disseminate best practice and access to support across the heritage sector in Scotland.

Active support for key sector stakeholders: As the professional body for the conservation profession, Icon acts to support professional conservators, develop and maintain standards of professional practice, and champion conservation activities. Active investment in revenue funding in organisations such as Icon would help to strengthen the profession by supporting the maintenance and development of high standards of practice across the conservation profession in Scotland.

4. Specifically, are there opportunities to develop a more strategic approach through, for example, the medium-term financial strategy, a multi-year spending review and the National Performance Framework?

Icon welcomes the Scottish Government's ambition to develop a more strategic approach towards support for the cultural sector, in particular the proposal for a commitment towards multi-year funding review which would help ensure the sector can plan appropriately.

This would have the added benefit of helping to limit the use of short-term contracts which are common across the conservation sector and actively promote sustainable employment opportunities for the conservation profession.

In delivering the outcomes of this review Icon would welcome the opportunity to work more closely with the Scottish Government to ensure that the care and conservation of our cultural heritage – alongside the workforce that underpins these activities – is at the heart of the Government's approach towards supporting the heritage sector.