



THE INSTITUTE OF CONSERVATION

Icon Statement on Brexit – 30<sup>th</sup> June 2016

The results of the UK's referendum on membership of the European Union - 52% voted to leave the Union and 48% voted to remain - came as a shock to many.

Untying such a complex relationship of over 40 years is a major undertaking. It may be years before the full impact of this decision unfolds. Until we know more, it is "business as usual". Nevertheless, we can try to anticipate how this decision might affect the cultural heritage sector in the longer term.

European funding for research will presumably no longer be available to UK institutions. We may assume that there will be a direct impact on conservation research as well as an indirect impact due to the cross-disciplinary nature of our field, with related disciplines, such as heritage science, art history and archaeology. This will not only affect universities but also museums and other heritage organisations that receive research funding from Europe. European initiatives already underway, such as Horizon 2020 (worth 80bn Euro 2014-2020), may be unaffected, but other subsequent calls for collaborative consortia may exclude UK institutions. It is essential that a strong case is made for continued support within conservation and cultural heritage research. Icon will seek to work with other partners within the cultural sector to ensure that we have a strong voice as the decisions that affect future funding are made.

The conservation profession has strong links across Europe and internationally and we are aware that many of our members work throughout Europe. The free movement of labour will be one of the issues that will need to be addressed. Icon will continue to represent the interests of conservation mindful that many conservation students who train at UK universities stay on to work in the UK and many of our finest cultural heritage organisations employ conservators and heritage scientists from Europe.

Icon also recognises that possible reductions in the subsidized fees for university students from European countries may have a disproportionate effect on conservation courses. We will continue to work with and advocate for the world class training that is offered in the UK.

Much of the vibrancy within the field of conservation is due to its international character and to the sharing of knowledge and expertise across borders. This is something that we value and we will continue to promote conservation as an outward and forward looking profession within a European and International context.

As we all continue to assess and come to terms with the impact on the UK's economy as a whole, on jobs, housing, transport, and internal funding streams, there will be many new challenges for us as individuals as well as for the cultural sector. At the heart of the Brexit vote lies a UK divided. Now, more than ever, we need to promote the social value of cultural heritage in bringing people together, in nurturing healthy communities and individual well-being, as well as making a significant contribution to economic sustainability. Cultural heritage can help us to answer the question 'What does it mean to be British?' in a way that can support social cohesion rather than division. Cultural heritage must be actively cared for so that the meaning and values as well as the material are preserved and made accessible to all. For that to happen we need a vibrant community of engaged people with professional conservators leading the way.

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