



THE INSTITUTE OF CONSERVATION

Building Our Industrial Strategy – Green Paper – Consultation response by Icon, the Institute of Conservation - 16 April 2017

Introduction

Icon is a UK charity and membership organisation which brings together those with a passion for the care of cultural heritage. Icon champions the value and practice of cultural heritage conservation.

The heritage industry contributes £21.7 billion or 2% of national GVA (Historic England, Heritage and the Economy, September 2016). The active conservation of cultural heritage enables these heritage assets to contribute significantly to the UK economy and to continue to do so in the future, as well as to provide opportunities for engagement and to contribute to social cohesion, identity and wellbeing. Heritage includes historic buildings and their contents, gardens and landscapes, archaeology, and museum, library and archive collections including digital.

Conservation of heritage provides employment and self-employment to conservators and other professionals, such as heritage scientists, across the UK in both urban and rural environments. Employment exists in public, private and civil society sectors, with one-third of all workplaces being micro-businesses (with less than five employees), thus contributing to the resilience of the economy. Many small conservation companies are locally based, supporting the local heritage tourism industry.

The conservation workforce provides services including protection, interpretation, management, conservation, restoration, advice, maintenance, education and skills development. The workforce is supported by research and innovation - both commercial and academic - and by other industries providing products.

Conservation requires specialist knowledge, technical skills, and a well-developed understanding of judgement and ethics. Conservation is a cross-disciplinary field bringing together knowledge of science and engineering, social sciences, and humanities as well as technical skills.

Icon is very glad to have the opportunity to comment on the Government's proposals. We would like to comment on two of the pillars: Developing Skills and World-leading Sectors.

Icon is a founding member of the National Heritage Science Forum and supports the points made by the NHSF in its response to the Industrial Strategy Green Paper.

Developing Skills

Q11. Do you agree with the different elements of the vision for the new technical education system?

Icon welcomes the government's proposals for technical education.

Clear, high quality routes: Icon welcomes a clear progression path between qualifications and from entry level to full professional competence. Icon has developed a vocational career path for the conservation professional from entry level to full professional competence that includes technical education. Icon has a level 4 qualification Conservation & Collections Care Technicians Diploma and professional accreditation (Professional Accreditation of Conservator-Restorers PACR), which supports excellence.

In addition to radically simplifying the set of qualifications, Icon advocates for resisting making vocational qualifications pseudo-academic routes with too much report writing, filling in web-based evidence streams and comment required by employers, external assessors and mentors. Instead, we advocate for a well-structured, evidence-based qualification, well-designed and straightforward, which is easy for a non-academic to absorb into their working life. A set of required skill sets should be set out, for which evidence is shown, and at the end, there should be a gateway to academic development, if the candidate wishes to pursue that option.

Icon welcomes the leadership of employers in developing and supporting technical education. Icon highly values work-based learning in conservation and welcomes the work-based element of the college route. Icon is working with employer partners in the heritage industry (Historic England, Institute of Historic Buildings Conservation, Chartered Institute for Archaeologists etc.) on the development of apprenticeship routes that are accessible to more people from a wider variety of backgrounds. The Trailblazer standards for the Historic Environment Practitioner will thus include standards for conservation.

We would welcome greater stability and continuity in structures and processes so that employers can engage more effectively with the development of the Trailblazer apprenticeship standards. Lack of continuity in directions from government has been a barrier.

We fully support the concept of "parity in esteem" between academic routes and vocational training. Icon's professional accreditation application and assessment process (PACR) does not have any pre-entry requirements as it is a professional benchmark of current practice against Icon's Professional Standards thus supporting excellence.

High-quality technical education providers with excellent teachers: While we do not yet have college routes for conservation we aim to progress this route for conservation. We advocate for colleges providing a technical route to include Icon's Professional Standards in their curricula.

Higher level technical education: We support the opportunity to progress to higher skill levels and to university.

A course-finding process for technical education: We support a mechanism that will enable more people to easily search for and apply to technical education courses.

Higher quality careers advice: This would be very welcome and would help with reaching a wider audience. Lack of careers advice has been a problem for the conservation field.

Icon welcomes education and training initiatives that will address the lack of diversity in the UK conservation workforce.

Q13. What skills shortages do we have, or expect to have, in particular sectors or local areas, how can we link the skills needs of industry to skills provision by educational institutions in local areas?

Icon has developed a National Conservation Education & Skills Strategy https://icon.org.uk/system/files/documents/ncess_strategy.pdf that underpins the development of skills required across conservation SMEs and the conservation industry. Skills gaps in cultural heritage conservation would benefit from strengthening technical education, increasing the routes and opportunities. Technical skills gaps have been identified by employers across the industry. HEI courses, with business pressures to take on more students and reduce costs, are finding it difficult to maintain levels of practical teaching. In many cases, graduates are not meeting the needs of employers in terms of technical skills. Many graduates currently emerge with a high level of academic knowledge, but often lack the technical skills to work with objects. A number of conservators with those skills are approaching retirement, making the situation more acute. Compounding the issue, these specialists are often sole practitioners, thus these specialist skills could be lost from our sector.

Work through Trailblazers will help to overcome some of these issues, but there is a need to ensure that a complimentary technical education offer is developed in tandem to support this and the experts are available to teach.

Cultural heritage conservation is a small profession and would benefit from a strategy that supports smaller, niche skills sets to be maintained. The conservation workforce works and trains across a wide range of specialist subsets, e.g. stone, textiles, and digital skills. Skills gaps and shortages have been identified in some of these sub-sets, for example, employers and commissioners, e.g. the Church of England, have identified gaps in practical stained glass conservation and The National Archives and The British Museum have identified a need to develop digital skills. Icon has aimed to address these shortages and gaps through work-based internships. Icon has run a programme funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and others of 160 managed internships since 2006.

With a small sector (of around 5,000 practitioners), covering a wide range of different disciplines and geographical areas skills shortages can arise very quickly. Thus, any skills system must be adaptable to meet these demands which arise in specific fields. For example, there is a current need within Textiles Conservation. Being a small sector means that the number of students for enrolment on courses can be limited and course providers

cannot justify the cost of providing training. We would advocate for more flexible learning arrangements, such as coaching.

Q14. How can we enable and encourage people to retrain and up-skill throughout their working lives, particularly in places where industries are changing or declining? Are there particular sectors where this could be appropriate?

Conservation has a long tradition of attracting career changers and the heritage can benefit from those with transferable skills, e.g. engineering skills for industrial heritage conservation. As a vocational field it appeals to people who want to work closely with cultural heritage in a hands-on way. It is multi-disciplinary and is attractive to people who have interest across the sciences, humanities and art. The strategy to develop skills through technical education would be particularly suitable for the heritage industry as it would be attractive to a wide range of under-skilled people. As a subject of study, it can also generate interest in STEM subjects and feed into the development of transferrable craft skills and art/design practice. For example, graduates have gone on to careers in medicine and high-end jewellery design.

Icon aims to extend its reach to people at all stages and levels of training within conservation and is actively interested in traditional skills sets which can retain relevance, with training to support, and be deployed within the heritage industry e.g. furniture making into furniture conservation, stained glass working into stained glass conservation.

Sustaining heritage in one's local community where industries are declining could be attractive to local people. Heritage is also very attractive to volunteers. Icon is working with other heritage organisations to develop standards for the training and management of conservation volunteers.

We highlight the role of professional bodies in supporting continuous professional development throughout the professional's working life. Icon's professional accreditation (Professional Accreditation of Conservator-Restorers PACR) has mandatory on-going professional development built in.

World-leading sectors

The UK is recognised for excellence in conservation and we are a "world-leading sector" with potential for growth and increasing commercialization. This is demonstrated by the number of non-UK students attending university courses in the UK and by the large number of conservation departments and projects around the world that are led by UK-trained conservators and scientists.

We also wish to highlight the potential export value of conservation skills and knowledge to the economy and soft power and relationship building, particularly in post-Brexit times. Recently, Icon was invited along with other heritage professionals by The British Council to attend a High Level Cultural Exchange Tour of China as part of the UK campaign to build stronger cultural links with rapidly growing economies – the heritage industry has a lot to offer, both as a wealth creator and because it is a global leader.

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