



THE INSTITUTE OF CONSERVATION

Lottery Consultation Paper for the Arts Council of Wales Lottery Strategy 2019-2024

Icon response

15 February 2019

The Institute of Conservation, Icon, welcomes the Arts Council of Wales Lottery Strategy 2019-2024 consultation and is grateful for the opportunity to comment on the proposals. We particularly support objectives to improve diversity, support international work and develop leadership within the arts and cultural sectors.

Icon is a registered charity and the UK professional body for the conservation of cultural heritage. Icon raises awareness of the value of caring for heritage and champions high standards of conservation. We represent nearly 3,000 individuals and organizations comprising professional conservators, heritage scientists and many others committed to cultural heritage.

Topic 1: For the benefit of all

What do you think of these ideas? Do you see any advantages or disadvantages? Do you have any ideas that you can share with us?

Icon strongly endorses the aim of encouraging greater diversity in participation in art and cultural activity. We agree that the cultural sector needs to actively tackle the lack of diversity to attract new skills, energy and ideas and to be more representative of contemporary Welsh society.

A diverse workforce is integral to diversifying audiences. Within cultural heritage conservation, the lack of awareness of the profession as a career, employers' emphasis on traditional higher education qualifications and the expectation of volunteering as a route to employment challenge efforts to increase workforce diversity. Further, a challenging funding environment for culture and the arts has reinforced the perception that the culture sector offers precarious and low-paid employment and is therefore unattractive to many.

The strategy should support the sector's actions to diversify and expand entry routes. Promoting careers within the culture and the arts is integral to ensuring that all young people, regardless of background, see the range of careers the sector has to offer. This could be done at relatively low cost, for example by encouraging culture sector professionals, such as conservator-restorers, to visit schools or enabling students to visit conservation studios and related places of work.

Icon advises the Arts Council of Wales to invest in the development of a more diverse spectrum of leaders; to set an example through its own governance, leadership and workforce; and to share guidance and training with organisations on how to recruit diverse talent.

Topic 2: Reaching every part of Wales

What do you think of these suggestions? Do you see any advantages or disadvantages? Do you have any ideas that you can share with us?

Icon agrees that prioritisation is essential in the current economic climate. In some areas, resources are so scarce that it has become increasingly difficult for people to make good – or any – funding applications. As a result, funding is increasingly awarded to better-resourced organisations and professionally developed projects, creating further imbalances.

However, we believe that the criteria for support should be based on several factors including a project's long-term sustainability and ability to allow the arts to deliver ongoing benefits to the greatest number of people. More clarity on how funding will be prioritised and how the parts of Wales that "need it most" will be identified would be welcome.

Topic 3: Making and enjoying the arts in Welsh

What do you think of these ideas? Do you see any advantages or disadvantages? Do you have any ideas that you can share with us?

Icon agrees that it is important to support the development of the Welsh language and creation of bilingual products to enable the broader appreciation of Welsh arts. Icon's activity focuses on the conservation of material cultural heritage but fully supports the conservation of language as a fundamental part of cultural heritage conservation. The Welsh language should be fully integrated, promoted and included in contemporary culture and events. The language skills of the sector's workforce could also be developed, for example through community projects in strongly Welsh speaking areas.

However, the above ideas should be progressed in tandem, as opposed to in competition with, those of Topic 1 "For the benefit of all." Concentrating on the Welsh language risks discriminating against or alienating those that cannot speak or learn it, for example due to hearing impairment, neurodiversity or disability. This would go against the aim of encouraging "a wider range of people" to participate in the arts (Topic 1). Topic 2 could be framed around supporting all the languages that contribute to a distinctive Welsh identity and consider ways to support both bilingual and visual-spatial language products to ensure alignment with diversity priorities.

Topic 4: In for the Long Haul

What do you think of these suggestions? Do you see any advantages or disadvantages? Do you have any ideas that you can share with us?

We support a strategic approach to designing funding initiatives. Embedding SMART objectives within programme specifications can help campaigns to deliver desired outcomes.

Increased collaboration between officers and organisations and the aim to reduce organisations' time spending writing applications is welcome. However, longer research and development periods will need to be fully supported to avoid only better-resourced organisations or more highly developed projects being progressed into the implementation phase. Smaller organisations with less capacity may need more support in initially applying for larger multi-year projects. Funding for the additional contribution required of applicants for longer research and development stages, both in terms of time and on-costs, would help ensure a level playing field and achieve greater equality in funding distribution.

Any staged long-term approach would require flexibility to address emerging opportunities and challenges. For example, the potential impacts of Brexit – the end of freedom of movement, a new immigration system, restrictions on the movement of materials and equipment and possible loss of visitor numbers to Wales – would all have a significant impact on the country's arts scene. The Migration Advisory Committee's recommendations of a £30k minimum salary for visas could exclude essential professional skilled roles in heritage and conservation (Icon's research shows that the average salary for a full-time professional conservator in 2012/13 was £28,000 and the median was £26,000).

Topic 5: All about the Artist

What do you think of these suggestions? Do you see any advantages or disadvantages? Do you have any ideas that you can share with us?

Icon welcomes the recognition that artists need a “critical mass of activity to support their work.” The conservation sector is a key component of this “critical mass.” Cultural professionals of all specialisms – in graphics, fashion, fine arts, architecture etc. – draw on our shared cultural heritage, which is safeguarded and made accessible by conservators and heritage scientists. Conservators ensure the work of past and current artists survives for the education and enjoyment of all generations, safeguarding the reference material that will inspire future generations of artists and cultural professionals. Icon consequently urges the Arts Council of Wales to support the conservation sector so that it can contribute to a prosperous and sustainable environment for the arts.

Advocating for the value of the arts should be a central element of the Arts Council’s role. The sector is generally low-paid, and the prevailing culture of time-limited projects results in short-term contracts with little job security for those who deliver the projects. As a high-profile body, the Arts Council of Wales is well-positioned to raise awareness of the value of the cultural sector and to influence decisionmakers. This can build resilience by attracting funders and creating an environment where the work of the sector’s professionals is better understood and valued, potentially leading to improved economic and social status.

Topic 6: Career development/leadership

What do you think of these suggestions? Do you see any advantages or disadvantages? Do you have any ideas that you can share with us?

Icon welcomes the suggestions to support career development and leadership.

Our research on the UK conservation labour market identified serious skills gaps in several areas of transferable professional skills in business, leadership and project management. While 5% of the UK conservation sector was based in Wales, the findings suggested that training in Wales was difficult to come by and required travel to England.

Creativity is one of the most future-proof skills we have and is what makes the cultural and arts sector unique. A challenging funding environment for culture has broadened roles and responsibilities within the workforce, calling for new generalist competencies in business and threatening the retention of traditional, creative and practitioner skills. Icon’s research revealed significant shortages and gaps in specialist conservation skills, which are integral to preserving our arts and heritage.

Icon consequently advocates for the Arts Council of Wales to support not only leadership development but also to back training programmes addressing specialist skills needs within the sector. Icon would be delighted to share its skills and experience in supporting the training and development of professionals within conservation, which could be applicable to the wider arts sector.

Topic 7: Encouraging greater resilience

What do you think of these suggestions? Do you see any advantages or disadvantages? Do you have any ideas that you can share with us?

We agree with the proposal to make business development services more broadly available. This could ensure equal support for large, small, established and emerging organisations. Encouraging greater resilience should also include support for organisations to adapt to opportunities offered by new technologies and challenges related to operating within the digital economy.

Topic 8: Working with the Arts Portfolio Wales

What do you think of these suggestions? Do you see any advantages or disadvantages? Do you have any ideas that you can share with us?

Icon is not responding to this question.

Topic 9: Taking Wales to the World

What do you think of these suggestions? Do you see any advantages or disadvantages? Do you have any ideas that you can share with us?

We urge the Arts Council of Wales to lead and participate in discussions on how Brexit can deliver the best outcomes for arts and culture. The Council should work in partnership with government and other relevant bodies to ensure that any changes to funding, ease of movement, trade and legal and regulatory frameworks foster an environment for the arts to thrive.

Icon believes in the value of international collaboration. Support for projects and organisations to promote themselves internationally can increase the sector's sustainability through new income from global audiences and sharing of skills, ideas and expertise. International strands in organisations' work demonstrate the ability of arts and culture to contribute to soft power and cultural diplomacy agendas.

We agree with the suggestions above. In addition, we propose measures to promote awareness of funding opportunities, support for organisations in making applications and the sharing of advice and best practice approaches to international working. This will be vital to encouraging smaller organisations, with little or no previous international experience, to increase their global reach.

Smaller organisations would also benefit from funding to support international posts. The cultural heritage conservation sector is made up of SMEs that can rarely devote resources to international work when it diverts from essential duties. New posts or the backfilling of existing posts when staff are routed to international projects would be beneficial.

Investment in international relationships should cover support for establishing new connections but also for building on existing networks. To maximise the potential of international engagement, relationships will need to be meaningful and built on trust. Longer-term collaboration will rely on support that nurtures relationships beyond their initial establishment.

Topic 10: Funding for Capital projects**What do you think of these suggestions? Do you see any advantages or disadvantages? Do you have any ideas that you can share with us?**

Icon believes that the ideas outlined for capital project funding have the potential to support resilience, diversity and sustainability. Supporting existing organisations and projects to become resilient and sustainable is important and may be more valuable and effective than creating new high-profile facilities.

The inclusion of environmental sustainability is particularly welcomed and needs to be central to all funding applications. Applicants should be encouraged to demonstrate how the project is working towards environmental sustainability goals. Julie's Bicycle has worked in partnership with Arts Council England to inspire environmental action across the arts and cultural sector and could be used as a model in Wales. The charity supports organisations and professionals to embed environmental sustainability into their operations, work and business practices.

The Arts Council of Wales could set an example for the sector by strengthening its commitment to supporting the Welsh Government's Well-being of Future Generations Act and its sustainable development goals.

Topic 11: Making things easier for you**What do you think of these suggestions? Do you see any advantages or disadvantages? Do you have any ideas that you can share with us?**

Icon agrees with the proposed approach. Any processes that reduce time and resources spent preparing applications would support parity of opportunity between smaller and larger organisations.

Our experience of applying for grants has shown that applications give rise to questions that cannot always be answered by consulting the programme guidance. Tailored advice is incredibly valued in these situations and we welcome the continued support provided by Development Officers and the Grants and Information team.

Tailored support can also benefit those who are less familiar with grant application processes (for example community groups) and contribute to removing funding barriers.

Topic 12: Over to you

We know that you will have ideas that you would like to share with us. Are there topics that are important to you that you think we should be talking about? Please share any other ideas or comments below. Thank you!

Icon welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation and supports the strategy's ambition for all people in Wales to enjoy and take part in the arts.

We hope that our response is useful in the finalisation of the strategy and we would be happy to contribute to the further development of the ideas outlined above. Our experience may prove helpful as an organisation practiced in working across UK civil society, the public and private sectors, with national and regional employers and small and microbusinesses.

Links to further information:

Icon website <https://icon.org.uk/>