



THE INSTITUTE OF CONSERVATION

DCMS Select Committee Inquiry: Social impact of participation in culture and sport

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/digital-culture-media-and-sport-committee/news/social-impact-inquiry-launch/>

Written evidence submitted by Icon, The Institute of Conservation.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Icon is a registered charity and the UK professional body for the conservation of cultural heritage. Icon raises awareness of the cultural, social and economic value of caring for heritage and champions high standards of conservation.
- 1.2 The conservation of cultural heritage creates social impact and maximises the social impact of other cultural heritage activities.
 - 1.2.1 Conservation enables and facilitates access to culture by ensuring the survival of cultural heritage for the enjoyment and education of current and future generations. Conservation also ensures that the authenticity of heritage is preserved and understood. Without conservation, the benefits of engaging with cultural heritage could not be maintained in the long term.¹
 - 1.2.2 Participation in conservation, a cultural practice itself, has a positive impact on social mobility, diversity, education, health and community engagement.
- 1.3 The conservation sector is threatened by a lack of awareness of its value and the profession, a decline in skills, an aging workforce and a challenging funding environment.
- 1.4 For conservation to maximise its social impact and to continue facilitating the benefit of other cultural practices, greater awareness of the activity and of the profession is needed as well as the sufficient provision of suitably qualified professionals through a strong educational system.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 Icon welcomes the invitation from the DCMS Committee to submit written evidence on the social impact of participation in culture and sport.
- 2.2 We represent nearly 3,000 individuals and organisations. Icon's membership incorporates not only professional conservators and heritage scientists, but many others who share a commitment to improving understanding of and access to our cultural heritage. Most of our members are UK-based but many also work internationally. Icon accredits conservators (Accredited Conservator-Restorers) who have reached a proficient level of practice,

¹Historic England, 2017. *Heritage Counts 2017: Heritage and Society*. Available at: <https://content.historicengland.org.uk/content/heritage-counts/pub/2017/heritage-and-society-2017.pdf> [accessed 9 February 2018].

judgement and ethics across Icon's professional standards which they must maintain through on-going professional development.

2.3 Our response is focused on Icon's areas of expertise, and as such, we submit evidence on the social impact of participation in the conservation of cultural heritage.

3. Which programmes best demonstrate the positive social impact that participating in sport and culture can have on the five central themes of this inquiry (social mobility, health, crime reduction, education, community engagement and diversity)?

3.1 The Icon Award for Conservation in the Community

3.1.1 Icon's Conservation in the Community Award marks the valuable efforts and excellence achieved by volunteers on conservation projects. It is presented to a project involving a professional conservator who has increased the learning of new skills by volunteers and benefited communities in accessing cultural heritage.²

3.1.2 In 2015 the award was given to 'Resurrecting the Coffin Works', the Birmingham Conservation Trust's rescue of a Victorian factory building along with its contents in a very deprived area of Birmingham.³ The project combined high conservation standards with excellent community engagement and public access where none previously existed.

3.1.3 The project provided volunteers with an opportunity to gain new skills, greater confidence and to learn about conservation. It increased social cohesion and inclusion by allowing the community to contribute to the conservation of an aspect of their heritage that had been previously inaccessible through its semi-derelict state. The factory now offers a range of community events, ensuring the site's continued contribution to wellbeing and education in the community. The restored building adds to the character of its setting, improving quality of life in the area.

3.1.4 The project demonstrates the positive impact of conservation projects on community engagement and education. Further, it showcases how conservation can enable heritage to maximise its social impact now and in the future.

3.2 Icon Twitter Conference

3.2.1 In October 2017, Icon encouraged conservators and the public to share conservation projects in a conference hosted on the social networking service Twitter.⁴ The project transposed a traditional networking and knowledge-sharing event onto an online platform, increasing the event's accessibility, outreach and diversity. The event comprised of over 1000 tweets and attracted over 2 million impressions – reaching an audience far greater than Icon's traditional events.

3.2.2 It removed economic barriers of participation by allowing people from around the world to partake for free, and with no travel required. The conference made local stories into global issues, celebrating the diversity of our shared cultural heritage and those who protect and care for it. It supported a truly democratic discussion and challenged perceptions of conservation as an elite or exclusive practice by allowing anyone in attendance to debate papers.

² <https://icon.org.uk/about-us/awards#community>

³ <http://www.coffinworks.org/newmanbros/newman-brothers-history/2013-2014-the-coffin-works/>

⁴ https://storify.com/Conservators_uk/icon-s-first-twitter-conference-is-here; https://storify.com/Conservators_uk/icon-tc-2017-part-2

- 3.2.3 The project demonstrated technology's ability to increase the social impact of participation in conservation. By reaching greater and more diverse audiences, social media allowed for the educational and health benefits of engaging with cultural heritage to be felt across a greater spectrum of society.

3.3 Trailblazer Apprenticeship Standards

- 3.3.1 Icon is supporting the development of Trailblazer Apprenticeship Standards for the Conservation Sector.⁵ The project supports new entrants into the profession, contributing to social mobility, education and the diversity of the heritage sector's workforce.
- 3.3.2 Apprenticeships give prospective candidates the opportunity to study for a recognised qualification whilst working and developing their practical skills on the job. They eliminate economic barriers to the profession by allowing learners to earn a salary during their training. Further, apprentices avoid debt built up through Student Loans as Apprenticeships are fully funded by the employer and the government. Through developing standards, Icon is contributing to ensuring that conservation learners are taught the right skills, aligned with the professional standards, to be competitive in the job market.
- 3.3.3 Eliminating economic concerns through non-traditional routes can increase the number and socio-economic background of those considering careers in conservation. A diverse workforce is important in making cultural heritage more relevant to communities, which can increase audience diversity. This, in turn, will allow for the educational and health benefits of engaging with cultural heritage to be felt across a greater spectrum of society.

4. How can access to cultural and sporting professions be improved to enable greater diversity? How can the Government build a pipeline of talent?

4.1 Early Age Education

- 4.1.1 Exposure to arts, craft and design subjects at an early age is key to inspiring the next generation of cultural professionals. Creative subjects should be consequently placed at the centre of education policy.
- 4.1.2 We are concerned that the side-lining of creative disciplines in the national curriculum, for example through the EBacc, has led to a decline in the study of arts subjects.⁶ This threatens the talent pipeline and can only increase current skills gaps and shortages in the cultural heritage sector.⁷

4.2 Technical Education

⁵ <https://icon.org.uk/conservation/careers-training/trailblazer-apprenticeships>

⁶ Joint Council for Qualifications, 2017. *Summer GCSE Results*. Available at: <https://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/gcses/2017> [accessed 9 February 2018]; Ofqual, 2017. *Summer 2017 exam entries: GCSEs, level 1 / 2 certificates, AS and A levels in England*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/summer-2017-exam-entries-gcse-level-1-2-certificates-as-and-a-levels-in-england> [accessed 9 February 2018].

⁷ Aitchison, K., 2013. *Conservation Labour Market Intelligence 2012-13*. London: Icon. Available at: https://icon.org.uk/system/files/documents/conservation_labour_market_intelligence_2012-13_0.pdf [accessed 9 February 2018]; Hook, B., 2014. *Historic Environment Intelligence Team Assessment Report 2014-2015: Digest of Labour Market Intelligence for the Historic Environment*. Historic England. Available at: https://content.historicengland.org.uk/content/docs/research/2014-05_Labour_Market_Intelligence_v9.pdf [accessed 9 February 2018]; TBR, 2014. *The Historic Environment and Cultural Heritage Skills Survey*. Creative & Cultural Skills and Historic England. Available at: <http://blueprintfiles.s3.amazonaws.com/1384949416-The-Historic-Environment-and-Cultural-Heritage-Skills-Survey-FINAL2.pdf> [accessed 9 February 2018].

- 4.2.1 The Department for Education's T-levels give important parity to technical skills in the education system. The effective delivery of T levels has the potential to address skills needs in the cultural heritage sector and encourage more diverse entrants to cultural professions.
- 4.2.2 The government will need to work with sector employers to ensure T levels can meet the demands of their industries and that education providers deliver high quality training aligned with professional standards.
- 4.2.3 The government will also need to consult employers on overcoming barriers to offering T level work placements, including addressing funding issues, supervisors' time limitations and lack of awareness among employers.
- 4.2.4 Continued support for apprenticeships, for example through the Institute for Apprenticeships' Trailblazers program, can encourage new routes into the profession. See paragraph 3.3.

4.3 Higher Education

- 4.3.1 Government should support and encourage higher education institutions to deliver courses and degrees in cultural subjects.
- 4.3.2 There has been a recent decline in the number of UK higher education courses in cultural heritage conservation, which can only increase sector skills needs. We believe that economic considerations, weighing student numbers against costs to acquire appropriate facilities and equipment, has contributed to this decline.

4.4 Strategic Campaigns

- 4.4.1 Government and its arms-length bodies could develop strategic campaigns to support the cultural sector in improving diversity and securing the talent pipeline. This could take the form of a cross-governmental strategy or targeted funding and could support cultural organisations' initiatives to boost access, as described in paragraph 5.

4.5 Brexit

- 4.5.1 The government will need to address the impact of the UK's exit from the EU on the workforce and talent pipeline. More research is required on the numbers and post-Brexit intentions of EU nationals working and studying in conservation in the UK, to better understand this effect. The sector's needs should be considered in Brexit negotiations to minimise negative impact and to maximise opportunities.

5. How can museums, galleries and other cultural venues boost access and social impact?

5.1 Best Practice Learning

- 5.1.1 Cultural bodies could look at best practice recruitment examples and guidance used by sectors that attract diverse applicants and apply learning to their own recruitment procedures.

5.2 Campaigns

- 5.2.1 Traditional and social media campaigns could be used to build awareness of the diversity of professions available in the cultural sector and to promote the sector as an attractive place to work. Campaigns could showcase career success stories and provide insight into what it is like to work in the sector.

5.3 Youth Outreach

- 5.3.1 Extending opportunities for youth engagement, for example, through school visits, taster experiences, and work placements could increase young people's awareness of the sector.
- 5.3.2 Experiences with conservation can offer great benefit to young learners as it is a multi-disciplinary profession that can facilitate the study of art, craft, social history, science and technology.

5.4 Networks

- 5.4.1 Conferences, partnerships, sharing of resources and official networks can foster knowledge-exchange within the sector. Icon's Network model, for example, provides the means for Icon members to come together across conservation specialisms to discuss and drive forward specific issues or projects.⁸

5.5 Research

- 5.5.1 Research on how the benefits of cultural participation can be best measured, for example by using big health data and public data, will be important to maximising benefits and presenting value to decisionmakers.

5.6 APPG on Arts, Health and Wellbeing

- 5.6.1 We support the recommendations made by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing in its inquiry report *Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing – Second Edition*.⁹ The report contains recommendations for both sector organisations and government bodies.

⁸ <https://icon.org.uk/icon-networks>

⁹ All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing, 2017. *Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing – Second Edition*. Available at: <https://www.artshealthandwellbeing.org.uk/appg-inquiry/> [accessed 9 February 2018].