



THE INSTITUTE OF CONSERVATION

## Conservation and Immigration

### Icon Briefing

April 2019

The Institute of Conservation (Icon) is a registered charity and the professional body for the conservation of the UK's cultural heritage. Icon raises awareness of the cultural, social and economic value of caring for heritage and champions high standards of conservation. 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. Although most of our members are UK-based, a substantial contingent (currently 17.5%) are based abroad.

### Conservation and the Exchange of People and Skills

Icon believes that the exchange of expertise is core to the development and maintenance of our excellence in conservation and heritage science. Much of the vibrancy within the field of conservation is due to its international character and to the sharing of knowledge across borders.

The UK conservation sector has strong links across Europe and internationally. International students and researchers are attracted to the UK's leading centres of conservation training. Many conservation students who train at UK universities stay on to work in the UK while others apply their learning in back at home, spreading skills and professional expertise beyond our borders. Our finest cultural heritage organisations employ conservators from Europe while many of our members reciprocally work in Europe.

We are concerned that the Migration Advisory Committee's recent recommendations and the government's post-Brexit outline immigration policy will adversely affect the conservation sector. The sector is highly skilled but low paid: 78% of professional conservators hold at least one degree, with 46% holding postgraduate qualifications. The average salary for a professional conservator is £28,102, while the median salary is £26,000.<sup>i</sup> The proposed £30k salary threshold for Tier 2 visa applications would thus exclude the majority of conservators.

The inability to source conservators from the EU could create skills shortages in conservation and exacerbate existing ones, which have been reported in specialist areas including the conservation of paintings, metals, wood, clocks and scientific instruments.<sup>ii</sup> This seriously threatens the sector's capacity and international reputation, coupled with the decline in UK conservation education that is manifest in the recent closure of higher education courses.

### Asks to Government

We urge government to

- Ensure continued access to skilled labour from EEA countries post-Brexit.
- Ensure that any new visa system is based on skills required, not on salary levels.
- Consider exemptions for accredited professionals in any new visa system.

- Ensure that any new visa system does not restrict the ability of UK conservators to work abroad.
- Support the infrastructure of conservation education and training through vocal backing for higher education conservation courses and alternative entry routes like apprenticeships.

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<sup>i</sup> [https://icon.org.uk/system/files/documents/conservation\\_labour\\_market\\_intelligence\\_2012-13\\_0\\_0.pdf](https://icon.org.uk/system/files/documents/conservation_labour_market_intelligence_2012-13_0_0.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> [https://icon.org.uk/system/files/documents/conservation\\_labour\\_market\\_intelligence\\_2012-13\\_0\\_0.pdf](https://icon.org.uk/system/files/documents/conservation_labour_market_intelligence_2012-13_0_0.pdf)