



THE INSTITUTE OF CONSERVATION

## Conservation and Soft Power

### 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.

Icon is currently developing an international strategy as an addendum to our [Strategy 2017-21](#); this will be published on our website shortly.

### The Conservation Sector's Contribution to Soft Power

**Conservation contributes to cultural diplomacy and soft power through the sector's international reputation and its support of other world-leading industries.**

1. The UK's **expertise in conservation and heritage science** is routinely sought internationally. Our long history of conservation has seen the development of an independent profession with its own standards, ethics, theory, education frameworks and notions of practice. The sector is immensely diverse, with distinct disciplines and specialisms ranging from textiles to buildings, and employment divided between the private, public and HE sectors.

Because of its history and diversity, there is considerable demand for the sector's skills, expertise and knowledge abroad. For example, Icon's The "[Golden Age](#)" report details the drive in China to collaborate with UK conservation professionals in education, training, consultancy, research and the development of standards.

2. The UK's **conservation education sector** has an international reputation that is second to none, contributing to the education of the domestic and global workforce and developing the subject and discipline. International students and researchers are attracted to the UK's leading centres of conservation training, learning conservation skills which they take back to their home countries, spreading skills and professional expertise beyond our borders.
3. The conservation sector **underpins key industries** vital to the UK's global reputation, including heritage, tourism and the creative industries. Conservation enables access to heritage by ensuring the survival of cultural heritage assets for the enjoyment and education of current and future generations.
4. Conservation organisations within the **civil society sector** add value to soft power rankings through their independent networks. A third of the conservation workforce works within civil society, the independence of which has been shown to be integral to fostering trust and credibility with the UK's global partners.

## Icon's Role

Icon supports the conservation sector's international engagement through the strategic priorities of its [Strategy 2017-2021](#):

Advocacy – raising the profile of the conservation sector's international work and its contribution to domestic agendas with decisionmakers and the public.

Excellence – contributing to the development of knowledge and high standards worldwide by supporting the exchange of information and expertise with new partners.

Engagement – encouraging people from across the globe to value and engage with heritage and conservation by making use of the opportunities presented by a more connected world.

Examples of current and recent activity responding to these priorities include:

1. In May 2019, we will host a high-level Chinese delegation, including the Directors of the Shaanxi Provincial Cultural Relics Bureau and the Terracotta Army Museum to further the aims of our Memorandum of Understanding with Shaanxi Provincial Museum Association.
2. In January 2019, we advised the Terracotta Army Museum on purchasing a suite of British Standards in conservation.
3. Icon has created a Getty Foundation funded programme to allow conservators from emerging economies to participate in the #Icon19 conference, adding to our international profile and generating connections with organisations around the world.
4. Our Chief Executive is a member of the Council of Europa Nostra and the Chair of Europa Nostra UK, fostering stronger links to European cultural heritage organisations.

## Asks to Government

Icon supports the government's impending Soft Power Strategy. We believe the Strategy should support the sectors that embody the values the government seeks to promote abroad. The cultural heritage conservation sector's democratic vision of custodianship and cultural and knowledge exchange is underpinned by values of democracy, diversity and freedom of expression.

The sector, however, is under-resourced and under-recognised, limiting its ability to make the most of its potential as a soft power resource. Consequently, we urge government to create favourable conditions for the sector to thrive both abroad and at home by:

- Championing our world-leading conservation sector at home and on the world stage and building greater awareness of its value to society.
- Protecting the infrastructure of conservation education and expertise through support for alternative entry routes like apprenticeships, vocal backing for higher education conservation courses and by placing arts and culture at the centre of early education.
- Fostering existing global networks and relationships established by heritage and conservation organisations and providing support for brokering new connections and collaborations.
- Supporting international posts or the backfilling of existing posts in smaller organisations to ensure that a sector composed of SMEs has the capacity for international engagement.
- Ensuring continued access to skilled labour from EEA countries post-Brexit.
- Supporting visa exemptions for accredited professionals to guarantee the international exchange of skills and expertise.