



THE INSTITUTE OF CONSERVATION

## Conservation Places & People APPG - call for evidence

### About Icon

Icon is a charity and the professional body for conservation, seeking to create positive change for cultural heritage. We are a membership organisation, which brings together those with a passion for conserving cultural heritage. We represent around 2,500 individuals and organisations comprising professional conservators, heritage scientists and many others with a commitment to ensuring the long-term survival of objects and collections, historic buildings and archaeology.

### Evidence

Icon welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to this inquiry.

*How can post pandemic efforts to boost skills training support efforts to revive neglected crafts key to historic building conservation?*

Targeted and strategic investment in practical crafts and arts education and training can support the skills of the current and future cultural heritage conservation workforce. Conservation is a highly skilled and cross-disciplinary practice that links the arts, humanities, social science, science and technology. Conservators combine knowledge of science with practical crafts skills and understanding of artistic methods.

Within the heritage sector there has been a decline in the technical and traditional crafts skills that are necessary to conserving our cultural heritage. A decline in the number of higher education conservation courses on offer in the UK is also increasing sector skills shortages and gaps. The Government's ambition to rebalance technical and academic education and to provide higher level technical skills (most recently outlined in the Skills for Jobs White Paper) stands to benefit the conservation sector that relies on practical and crafts-based skills.

An investment in technical education can strengthen the conservation pipeline by increasing awareness of crafts based careers. Icon panellists on the Fair Museum Jobs summit noted that "none of us knew that conservation was a career option until we were already at university." There are also considerable numbers of career changers within the cultural heritage conservation sector, with people pursuing a career in conservation at a later age. There is an

opportunity for higher technical education to provide these people with a route into the profession.

However, older learners will be keen to progress to employment more quickly, enhancing the importance of technical education providing the skills needed by industry. The ability of technical training to address skills needs will be reliant on the high standard and quality of the learning experience but also on allowing employers to play a prominent role in designing courses to ensure that the skills provided match those needed by industry.

Icon believes the involvement of professional bodies can play a pivotal role in this. For example, Icon's established communication channels to employers and the workforce can help disseminate information about training opportunities to target audiences. The input of professional bodies will be important to embedding professional industry standards at the heart of programmes. These standards will ensure students are equipped with the knowledge, skills and behaviours expected of them in employment in the field. Knowledge of and adherence to industry standards can facilitate a student's journey to achieving professional accreditation in the future, giving them a competitive advantage in the job market.

Investment in the skills that are fundamental to conservation can have far reaching benefits to society:

- Cultural heritage is economically vital, supporting hundreds of thousands of jobs in conservation but also across tourism, archaeology, and construction.
- An education in conservation contributes to a workforce that is resilient to automation through a high level of professional training and the delivery of creative and crafts skills. Creative skills have been shown to be the most resilient to automation with creative careers being amongst the most future proof. Research by the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre showed that creativity is consistently identified as the most significant predictor for the likelihood of growth for an occupation between now and 2030. Jobs in the UK's Creative Industries are growing at three times the UK average.
- Conservation preserves the source material of our future artists and cultural professionals, driving innovation across the arts and creative industries. The creative industries contribute £111.7 billion GVA to the UK, which is greater than the automotive, aerospace, life sciences and oil and gas industries combined. Creativity is an active process that is necessarily involved in innovation and will support the Government's ambitions to develop innovative solutions to society's biggest challenges.
- Conservation also delivers competencies in maths and technical education, helping to address the national shortage of STEM skills. The sector's predominantly female workforce stands as an example for women in the sciences, encouraging greater gender parity within the field.