



Conservation Salaries Survey 2024

Report on survey findings

March 2025



THE INSTITUTE OF CONSERVATION

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Introduction

Icon works to campaign on issues that matter most to the conservation profession. Fair levels of pay and remuneration clearly sits high on the priority list as one of the most pressing issues for all conservation-restoration professionals. Icon has committed to refreshing our salaries information on a biennial basis to ensure that we are utilising the most up-to-date information to inform our work.

This report presents the results of the latest survey, undertaken in 2024. To ensure that information is comparable we have used the same research methodology as in 2022. The 2024 survey ran from September to November 2024 and attracted 374 responses, of which 89% represented employed conservation roles, and 11% self-employed or freelance professionals (compared with 79% and 18% respectively in 2022).

We have presented data that relates to the following groups:

Salaried / employed professionals: An individual who works under an employment contract.

Self-employed: A person is self-employed if they run their business for themselves and take responsibility for its success or failure. Self-employed workers are not paid through PAYE, and they do not have the rights and responsibilities of an employee.

Company directors: Company directors run limited companies on behalf of shareholders. Directors have different rights and responsibilities from employees and are classed as office holders for tax and National Insurance contribution purposes.

Job titles on their own are not a useful indicator as to the level of salary that should be applied to a particular job role. The same title can mean

very different things to different employers, for example a 'Conservation Officer' in one organisation may be a junior team member who is working under the supervision of a more experienced colleague. However, the same title could be used in a small organisation where the individual is the only professional conservator and full responsibility for budgets and treatment decisions.

Through this research we have broken down a typical role description to consider the various aspects that contribute towards defining the salary level attributed to a particular job role.

This includes variables related to the employer, including the **type of organisation** and **where in the UK** they operate. It also includes the **type of role**, such as interventive practice, collections care or a management role; as well as the **material knowledge and technical skill** which is required to perform the role.

In addition, there are factors related to the overall **responsibility and accountability** associated with a particular job, including knowledge of conservation, people management, decision making and financial responsibility.

Finally, we considered those factors that relate to the profile of the individual that had been identified as necessary/essential to perform the job such as **qualification requirements, professional experience** and whether or not **Icon Accreditation** was identified as a requirement of the job role.

The figures presented throughout this report represent the latest information available. They are not recommended minimum salary levels.

Overall average salary levels

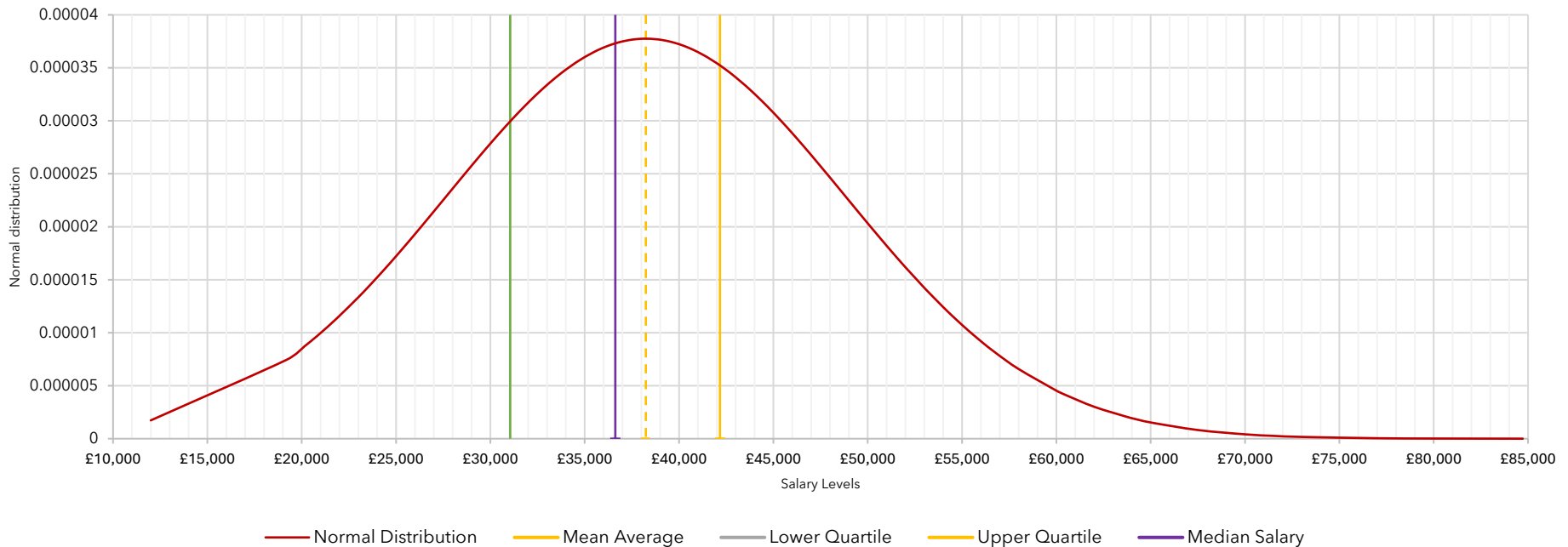
The median average salary of all survey respondents was £36,621, with half of respondents earning between £31,051.50 and £42,165.50. This figure covers all job roles and career stages.

We have chosen to present the median average as opposed to the mean which can be easily skewed by data that is towards the top and the bottom of the scales. We have used this figure as a point of comparison throughout the research

This represents an overall 15% increase on the salary levels identified through our 2022 salaries research report. However, this does not mean that all salaries have gone up across the sector and some areas of practice are still lagging behind.

A pressing concern for many conservators has been how salary levels compare to other professions. This is a challenging comparison to make. Whilst the underpinning knowledge, technical skill and professional approach are often similar; other professions such as Architecture are associated with much higher levels of legal and financial accountability and delivering projects for clients with larger budgets and resources available to them.

However, this should not undermine the importance of focusing on increasing salary levels, which are crucial drivers if the sector is to continue to attract and retain the highly skilled workforce that is essential to continue to protect and preserve our shared cultural heritage.



Factors relating to the employer

The first areas we have considered are those that relate to the employer. This includes the type of organisation, be it a national institution, local authority institution or organisation operating in the private sector, as well as where in the UK the organisation operates.

Type of employer

Respondents were asked to indicate the type of organisation they worked for based on standard categories which are used across Icon's labour market and workforce research. The majority of respondents, 35%, worked for charities, followed by 15% who worked for non-departmental public bodies. Typically, these may be small museums, galleries and archives, or national institutions.

Employer type	Median	Impact
Charity	£35,992	-2%
Central government organisation	£32,500	-11%
Central government organisation sub-unit	£39,500	8%
Local government organisation	£36,239	-1%
Local government organisation sub-unit	£36,668	0%
Non-departmental public body	£38,000	4%
Non-departmental public body sub-unit	£36,648	0%
Private limited company	£36,700	0%
Public limited company	£35,500	-3%
Social enterprise	-	-
University or other education institution	£40,000	9%
University or other education sub-unit	-	-

Salary levels are fairly uniform for all types of employers, including for those working for private sector employers where workers are paid close to the median average or all roles. Exceptions include the education sector (+9%) and some central government employers (+8%).

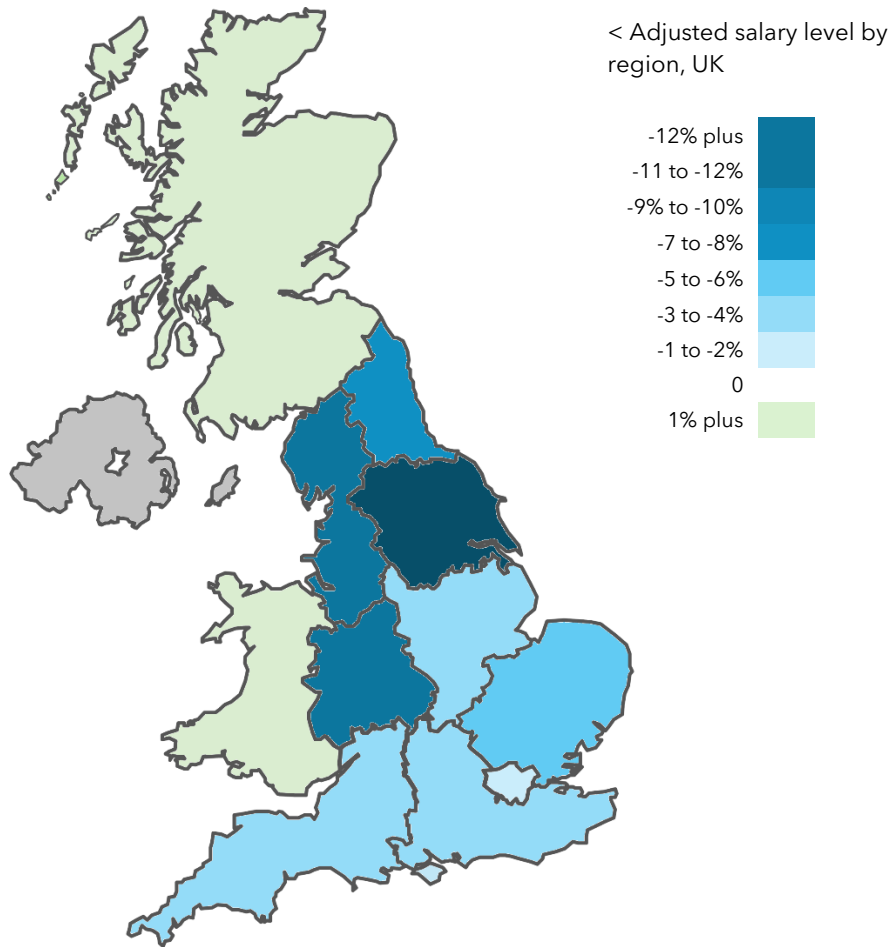
Geographical location

Salary levels are highest for jobs based in Scotland, London and Wales - all attracting salaries above the median average. They were lower in all other parts of the UK - particularly the West Midlands, North-West England and Yorkshire and the Humber where rates were between 12 and 15% below the national average.

Location	Median	Impact	Adjusted
East Midlands	£35,000	-4%	-4%
East of England	£34,500	-6%	-6%
North-East England	£33,668	-8%	-7%
North-West England	£32,000	-13%	-12%
Yorkshire and the Humber	£31,000	-15%	-13%
London	£38,884	6%	-1%
South-East England	£35,500	-3%	-4%
South-West England	£35,865	-2%	-4%
West Midlands	£32,138	-12%	-11%
<i>Northern Ireland*</i>	-	-	-
Scotland	£39,100	7%	6%
Wales	£38,238	4%	6%
UK wide roles	£35,250	-4%	-4%

* Insufficient responses received to make an assessment for Northern Ireland

On its own, this does not present the true picture of relative salary levels as it fails to take into account the relative cost of living in the different parts of the UK. For example, by adjusting the figures to take this account using ONS data, salaries in London go down from +6% to -1 below the national average. The only two areas above the national average remain Scotland and Wales.



Focus of job role

87% of the roles surveyed had some form of practical focus on interventive or preventive conservation. Alongside 'Public Engagement' these are the only three job areas that fall below the national average. This is significant as clearly these represent the core activity of the profession.

Focus of role	Median	Variance
Collections Care / Preventive	£35,943	-2%
Conservation Management	£40,000	9%
Conservation Science	£39,302	7%
Education	£38,499	5%
Interventive	£35,370	-3%
Management / Director Role	£52,000	42%
Policy	£39,750	9%
Public engagement	£36,000	-2%
Research	£39,347	7%

Underpinning material knowledge

Respondents were asked to indicate the underpinning material knowledge required to perform their job role, whether it focused on a hands-on approach, or a collections care or managerial position.

Overall material knowledge has a minimal impact on salary level - although this is somewhat unsurprising as this is clearly an essential requirement for all conservation jobs.

Material specialism	Median	Impact
Archaeology	£37,500	2%
Architecture	£40,740	11%
Archives / Library Materials	£36,734	0%
Books	£36,654	0%
Ceramics	£35,745	-2%
Decorative Surfaces	£39,471	8%
Engineering	£37,871	3%
Ethnography	£36,000	-2%
Frames	£40,000	9%
Furniture	£36,648	0%
Glass	£35,745	-2%
Historic Interiors	£37,863	3%
Horology	£43,541	19%
Leather	£36,000	-2%
Manuscripts	£36,888	1%
Metals	£36,000	-2%

Modern Materials	£36,524	0%
Musical Instruments	£43,000	17%
Natural History	£36,648	0%
Objects	£36,144	-1%
Paintings	£40,000	9%
Paper	£36,894	1%
Photographic Materials	£36,697	0%
Sculpture	£39,070	7%
Social History	£36,135	-1%
Stained and Painted Glass	£38,143	4%
Stone	£37,000	1%
Textiles	£36,335	-1%
Wall Paintings	£41,090	12%
Wood	£36,648	0%
Works of Art on Paper	£39,400	8%

Exceptions are noted for those with an underpinning knowledge of Architectural Conservation, Horology, Musical Instruments and Wall Paintings. This could be attributed to the relatively small workforce in these areas, but also the nature of the clients and commissioners in these areas of practice.

Level of responsibility and accountability

The more meaningful analysis comes when we look into the differing responsibilities associated with typical job roles. Unsurprisingly, the biggest impact on salary comes from factors relating to the broad management of a team or department as a whole; both in terms of people management and financial responsibility. This is the case for all jobs in every sector.

We have used the Novice to Expert Scale (below), which is also used to underpin the assessment standard for Icon Accreditation, to break down the levels of autonomy, technical skill and depth of understanding associated with four key factors that are present in most job roles.

Novice	Knowledge	Minimal, or 'textbook' knowledge unrelated to practice
	Standard of work	Unlikely to be satisfactory unless closely supervised
	Autonomy	Needs close supervision or instruction
	Complexity	Little or no conception of dealing with complexity
Beginner	Context	Tends to see actions in isolation
	Knowledge	Working knowledge of key aspects of practice
	Standard of work	Straightforward tasks likely to be completed to an acceptable standard
	Autonomy	Able to achieve some steps using own judgement, but supervision needed for overall task
Competent	Complexity	Appreciates complex situations but only able to achieve partial resolution
	Context	Sees actions as a series of steps
	Knowledge	Good working and background knowledge of area of practice
	Standard of work	Fit for purpose, though may lack refinement
Proficient	Autonomy	Able to achieve most tasks using own judgement
	Complexity	Copes with complex situations through deliberate analysis and planning
	Context	Sees actions at least partly in terms of longer-term goals
	Knowledge	Depth of understanding of discipline and area of practice
Expert	Standard of work	Fully acceptable standard achieved routinely
	Autonomy	Able to take full responsibility for own work (and that of others where applicable)
	Complexity	Deals with complex situations holistically, decision-making more confident
	Context	Sees overall 'picture' and how individual actions fit within it

Knowledge of conservation practice and theory

Knowledge of conservation practice and theory had the lowest impact on median salary levels. All jobs required post-holders to possess a depth of understanding of their discipline and area of practice. This requirement was present in 65% of the roles surveyed, and a further 26% were required to demonstrate a 'good' understanding of practice and theory.

Factor	Median	Impact
Minimal / textbook knowledge unrelated to practice	£21,350	-42%
Working knowledge of key aspects of practice	£26,826	-27%
Good working and background knowledge of area of practice	£32,000	-13%
Depth of understanding of discipline and area of practice	£40,000	9%

People management

Some form of management responsibility was present in 65% of job roles. The highest positive impact relates to those with responsibility for managing a team or the work of a department.

Factor	Median	Impact
No people management responsibilities	£32,000	-13%
Line management / supervision of volunteers	£33,966	-7%
Line management / supervision of trainees / junior staff members	£37,999	4%
Line management / supervision of team	£43,541	19%
Line management / supervision of department	£53,000	45%

Decision making

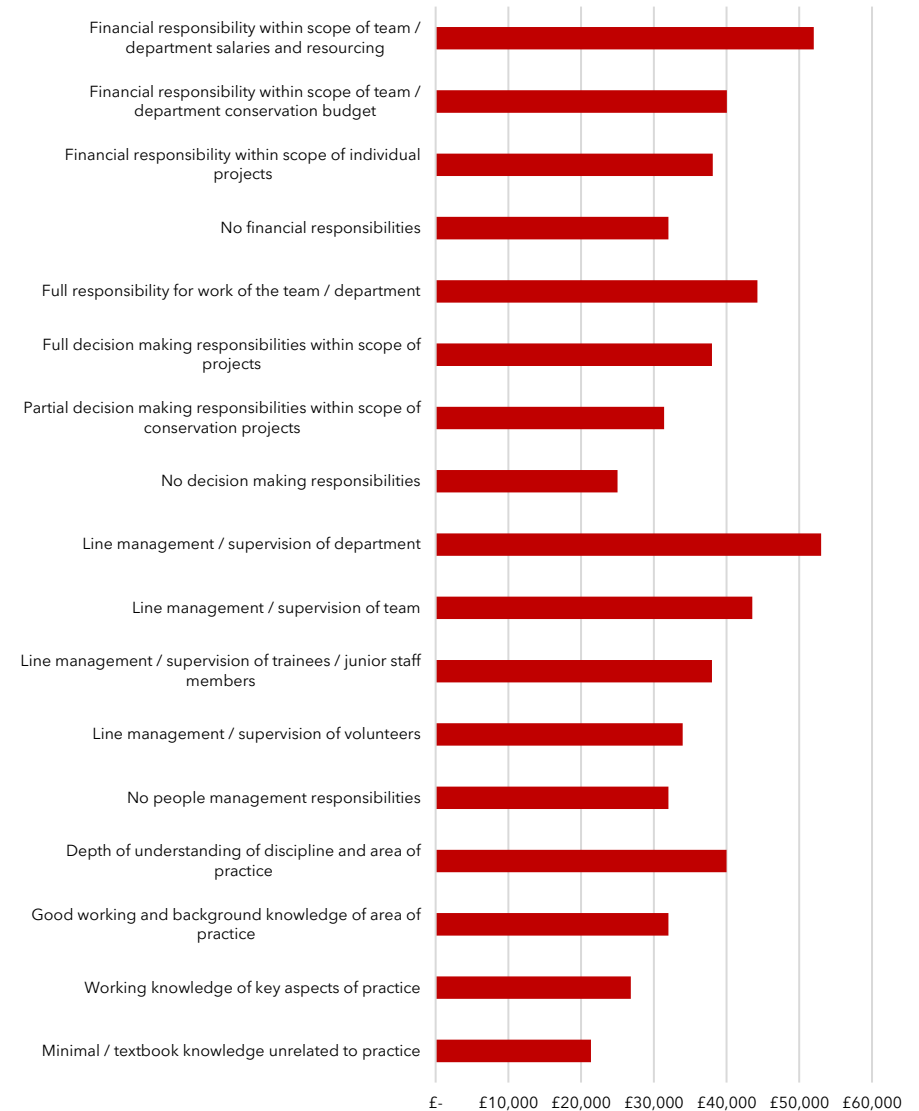
98% of roles included some form of accountability for decision making. Decision making as it relates to individual conservation projects appears to have minimal impact on median salary levels, although a more significant increase is noted for those that are ultimately accountable for conservation decision making of others.

Factor	Median	Impact
No decision making responsibilities	£25,000	-32%
Partial decision making responsibilities within scope of projects	£31,406	-14%
Full decision making responsibilities within scope of projects	£38,000	4%
Full responsibility for work of the team / department	£44,250	21%

Financial responsibility

40% of roles included no form of financial responsibility. As with other areas of accountability, the greatest impact on salary levels was seen in those responsibilities that relate to the broader management of a team as opposed to practical treatment.

Factor	Median	Impact
No financial responsibilities	£32,011	-13%
Responsibility within scope of individual projects	£38,100	4%
Responsibility within scope of team / department conservation budget	£40,050	9%
Responsibility within scope of department, salaries and resourcing	£52,000	42%



Experience of the individual

Given the deep level of understanding and high level of technical skill required to practice as a conservation professional, there are inevitably high expectations placed on individuals applying for jobs in the field.

Qualifications

It goes without saying that the conservation profession is a highly qualified sector, with 78% of respondents indicating that they hold either a Masters' Degree or a PhD. Overall, qualification level was shown to have a negligible impact on salary level - for example, holding a Masters' Degree only increased average pay by 1%.

We also saw that 20% of respondents held qualifications above the requirements of the job, although this is clearly a response to the fact that the majority of conservation training in the UK is at master's degree level. This is shown in the table below where green indicates the proportion of professionals with qualifications that match the requirement of the job role.

		Requirement of the job role				
		A Level / Higher	NVQ Level 4	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree	PhD
Qualification of respondents	A Level / Higher	0.30%	0.00%	0.30%	0.00%	0.00%
	NVQ Level 4	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
	Bachelor's Degree	0.00%	0.30%	10.51%	0.30%	0.00%
	Master's Degree	0.00%	0.30%	14.11%	37.24%	0.30%
	PhD	0.00%	0.30%	2.10%	2.40%	2.10%

Professional experience

Professional experience was only referenced in 65% of role descriptions, and where it is, the impact of experience broadly correlates with increased levels of accountability and responsibility associated with more senior professional roles.

		Requirement of the job role			
		0 to 2 years	3 to 5 years	6 to 10 years	11 years plus
Experience of respondents	0 to 2 years	9.31%	0.60%	0.00%	0.00%
	3 to 5 years	5.71%	4.20%	0.00%	0.00%
	6 to 10 years	1.50%	3.90%	1.50%	0.00%
	11 to 20 years	0.90%	7.21%	4.20%	0.90%
	21 to 30 years	1.20%	3.30%	6.91%	4.50%
	30 years plus	0.60%	3.60%	2.10%	2.70%

Professional accreditation

Icon Accreditation or working towards Accreditation was a requirement of 43% of job roles. This requirement resulted in an average of 10% uplift in salary level associated with those jobs.

Those roles where Accreditation is required are all either mid-career or senior professional roles, where greater levels of autonomy are essential requirements. For many employers, Icon Accreditation offers reassurance that candidates possess those attributes.

Overall assessment by job level

Bringing all this information together, we have made an assessment of average pay according to the level of job and career stage that these roles are likely to be suitable.

This assessment has been made solely based on the areas of responsibility and accountability which are common across all job roles. Factors relating to employer, focus of role and material understanding can then be applied to make a more detailed assessment of a specific job role.

Pay across all levels has increased by between 12 and 24% over the past two years. This is of course positive; however, it must also be put in the context of significant increases in inflation, and a cost of living crisis that has impacted the whole of the UK. This means that the real terms impact of pay increases is actually more modest.

Early career

Knowledge	Good working and background knowledge of area of practice
People management	No people management responsibilities, or Line management / supervision of volunteers
Decision making	Partial decision-making responsibilities within scope of conservation projects
Financial responsibility	No financial responsibilities
Typical experience	0 to 5 years
Example job titles	Assistant Conservator, Collections Care Assistant / Officer, Conservator

The median salary for someone in this job role is **£30,389**. Individuals are likely to be paid between **£25,483 and £32,000**.

This represents a 12% increase on salary levels over the last two years.

Mid-career

Knowledge	Depth of understanding of discipline and area of practice, or Good working and background knowledge of area of practice
People management	No people management responsibilities, or Line management / supervision of volunteers or Line management / supervision of trainees / junior staff members, Line management / supervision of team
Decision making	Full decision-making responsibilities within scope of projects
Financial responsibility	Financial responsibility within scope of individual projects
Experience	3 to 10 years
Example job titles	Conservator, Senior Conservator, Project Manager

The median salary for someone in this job role is **£39,100**. Individuals are likely to be paid between **£35,885 to £46,704**.

This represents a 22% increase on salary levels over the last two years.

Senior professional

Knowledge	Depth of understanding of discipline and area of practice
People management	Line management / supervision of team, or Line management / supervision of department
Decision making	Full decision-making responsibilities within the scope of projects, or Full responsibility for work of the team / department
Financial responsibility	Financial responsibility within scope of team / department conservation budget, or Financial responsibility within scope of team / department salaries and resourcing
Experience	11 years plus
Example job titles	Head of Department, Head of Section, Senior Conservator, Senior Manager

The median salary for someone in this job role is **£48,103**. Individuals are likely to be paid between **£42,185** and **£52,000**.

This represents a 24% increase on salary levels over the last two years.

Summary and observations

There have been marked increases in salary levels across all roles, with the greatest increases being identified in mid-career and senior level positions where salary levels have increased by 22% and 24% respectively. Changes to pay levels have been more modest for early career opportunities where there has been a 12% increase. It is worth noting that inflation over the same period was 11%, meaning that the real benefit of pay increases has been limited.

The most significant factors positively influencing salaries relate to the level of autonomy and responsibility linked to people management and financial responsibility. At the same time those factors linked to knowledge of conservation practice and theory have a low overall impact on salary. This isn't surprising as clearly these are fundamental skills to practice in the field.

What is also interesting is the fact that employer type appears to have a minimal impact, particularly given that those working in the private sector do not benefit from any form of uplift when compared to those working directly for museums, galleries and archive services. There is certainly a need to challenge assumptions in this area, where the general discourse often mistakenly assumes the opposite is to be true.

The overall increase in salary levels across all roles is clearly very positive, however, this does not imply that salaries are where they should be for such a highly qualified and skilled profession. Nor does it suggest that all in the sector have benefited from these changes - clearly half of all workers earn less than the median salary level for their job level, which we believe should be the minimum expectation.

The same is true for all roles across the heritage sector - this is clearly shown by the Museums Association's recent benchmarking report, which showed that conservation salaries compare favorably to other similarly

highly qualified and technical roles, such as curatorial and collection management roles.

An important question to ask is what can be done with this information? Icon is not a union and therefore doesn't have the ability to get involved in individual disputes. However, what we *can* do is provide data and work with partners across the sector to highlight these issues and the risk that low overall salaries pose to the retention of the existing workforce, as well as attracting new talent into the sector.

In the same vein we can also work to highlight the continued need to employ fully trained and qualified professionals to ensure the best possible outcomes for conservation work. This is particularly important for all professionals, but particularly for those with funders, clients and commissioners of conservation services. Essentially, through stimulating demand we can encourage positive changes to pay and overall levels of remuneration.

Icon is also committed to working with and supporting those with the ability to directly influence change, such as the important work of the union, Prospect, and campaigning organisation, Fair Museum Jobs. We can also continue to highlight where opportunities fall below the average pay for a particular level of job role.

This is not a new challenge to the profession; low overall salaries have long been a problem for the wider heritage sector. Continued work is needed with professional conservators, partners and key stakeholders across the sector continuing to make the case for greater recognition and reward for conservation-restoration workers.

The Institute of Conservation
106-109 Saffron Hill
London EC1N 8QS

[Contact us](#)

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