



THE INSTITUTE OF CONSERVATION

Fiona Hyslop MSP  
Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture  
The Scottish Government  
St. Andrew's House  
Regent Road  
Edinburgh  
EH1 3DG

31 March 2020

Dear Fiona Hyslop,

### **Support for cultural heritage sector self-employed workers**

I am writing on behalf of the [Institute of Conservation](#) (Icon) to commend your recent advocacy for the self-employed, which has resulted in vital support for these workers during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Icon is a membership organisation and charity, 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. Nearly 10% of our members are based in Scotland and directly supported by our [Icon Scotland Group](#). Conservation is a source of economic prosperity and growth, contributing to business, industry and employment and maximising the commercial value of the tourism and cultural sectors and creative industries.

A third of the conservation sector's workforce is self-employed and they face serious challenges at this time as their sources of new commission dwindle daily. Clients - whether museums or private individuals - are unlikely to be commissioning new conservation work during the crisis. The downturn in visitor income for institutions, such as the National Trust for Scotland, means that even once the pandemic is over this situation may continue for many months during the economic recovery. In addition, whilst employees can be guaranteed sick pay when they self-isolate, freelancers and the self-employed do not have the same security.

We have therefore welcomed the Chancellor's latest economic steps to support the self-employed. Many of the cultural heritage sector's workers will be able to benefit from the Self-employment Income Support Scheme and maintain their businesses and livelihoods. I have no doubt that your calls to the Chancellor to support the self-employed played a vital role in the Scheme's introduction.

However, we would argue that this support is needed now rather than in several month's time. The profits of small conservation businesses are often marginal and the effective 'take home pay' for conservators is very low. Conservators are unlikely to have reserves to tide them over until funds become available through the Scheme. Universal Credit payments simply will not cover the expenses and bills that are due immediately.

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We also have concerns that the SEISS is not as comprehensive as it first appears. There are certain demographics within the conservation sector that are at risk of falling between the cracks because they are not covered by SEISS or the Job Retention Scheme, including:

- Sole directors of limited liability companies who don't self-assess for tax and are not able to claim under the scheme.
- Conservators who started in self-employment after April 2019 or are recent graduates. These new entrepreneurs are already particularly vulnerable and require support while they grow their businesses.
- The many conservators who operate in the gig economy or juggle a variety of part-time jobs and freelance work and earn small amounts of income from a range of sources. While such individuals may be covered by the Self-employment Income Support Scheme and/or the Job Retention Scheme, navigating multiple application processes in order to access support will no doubt be a challenge.

It is clear that further action must be taken to support groups who have not yet been given sufficient support in the response to this crisis. Icon has written to the Chancellor, urging Government to:

- Implement the Self-employment Income Support Scheme as a matter of urgency.
- Consider measures to provide further interim support until the scheme is fully operational, for example immediate emergency cash grants, as called for by the [RSA](#).
- Extend the Self-employment Income Support Scheme so that it is truly comprehensive and accessible to those who need this support, or urgently provide information on how the workers not covered by the new aid measures (listed above) will be supported.
- Provide access to further business support advice to help self-employed workers navigate the different support options available. Discussions with our members over the last few days have indicated that there is a great deal of confusion with regard to eligibility and payment mechanisms.

We remain deeply impressed by the Scottish Government's commitment to Scotland's heritage, and your Cabinet's desire to place culture and heritage firmly at the heart of social and economic policies. As you know, heritage attractions form the backbone of tourism in this country. According to the Scotland's Historic Environment Audit 2018, the historic environment generated £4.2bn for the Scottish economy in 2017 and attracted 18m visitors to Scotland in 2018. It is therefore clear that the historic environment and the skills that protect its assets (buildings and collections) will be a significant factor in ensuring an economic and cultural recovery from this crisis.

We therefore hope you will consider the concerns and proposals raised by Icon on behalf of the conservation profession as you work with colleagues across the Scottish and UK Governments to develop and implement an effective support package that leaves no one behind. Icon is keen to support this vital work and is collaborating closely with sector bodies in Scotland and across the UK to coordinate efforts and to offer guidance to cultural heritage organisations at this challenging time. We would be happy to provide further information if needed.

Yours sincerely,



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Chief Executive