

The Institute of Conservation

Icon Professional Standards and Judgement & Ethics

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Introduction

The Icon Professional Standards and Judgement & Ethics guide the professional practice of conservators. There are five Professional Standards as well as Judgement & Ethics, each of which is broken down into individual 'criteria' which make up the overall 'standard'.

Initially developed in 1999, the Icon Professional Standards and Judgement & Ethics have been reviewed in 2007, 2013 and 2019 to ensure that they are fit for purpose. They provide the foundation of many areas of Icon's work including:

- Icon Accreditation
- Code of Conduct (2014)
- Icon Complaints procedure

This document should be read in conjunction with the Icon Glossary.

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Professional Standards and Judgement & Ethics



Standard 1: Assessment of cultural heritage

- a. Understand the significance and context of the heritage to be assessed, along with any implications for potential conservation measures.
- b. Assess the physical nature and condition of the heritage.
- c. Assess the impact of the environment and potential changes on the heritage.
- d. Assess the implications of taking no further action.
- e. Report on the findings of the assessment.



Standard 2: Conservation options and strategies

- a. Identify and evaluate conservation options.
- b. Develop advice, recommendations or policies relating to the different options available.
- c. Develop or negotiate a considered course of action for implementation.



Standard 3: Conservation measures

- a. Communicate appropriate practice in the care, protection and treatment of cultural heritage.
- b. Implement conservation measures.
- c. Ensure that measures and advice follow recognised conservation standards.
- d. Monitor and evaluate the effect of conservation measures.
- e. Document conservation measures.
- f. Recommend appropriate sources of further analysis, treatment or preventive care where these lie outside your remit or area of expertise.



Standard 4: Organisation and management

- a. Organise and manage work to ensure that it is completed appropriately.
- b. Ensure that your work practices and any you promote comply with applicable legal and contractual requirements.
- c. Ensure that your work practices and the area for which you are responsible comply with relevant Health & Safety regulations and guidelines, minimising risk to yourself and others.
- d. Adhere to good business or internal practice in dealing with clients, colleagues and other stakeholders.
- e. Ensure that adequate and accessible records are maintained.



Standard 5: Continuing professional development

- a. Keep yourself informed on changes in the profession as well as broader developments relevant to your work context.
- b. Ensure that your practice, knowledge, skills and techniques are up-to-date, both at a general level and in relation to individual projects and tasks that you undertake.
- c. Reflect on and learn from your practice.
- d. Promote conservation and the care of cultural heritage to expert and general audiences.



Professional Judgement and Ethics

- i. Understand the principles of conservation and demonstrate an in-depth understanding of the specific area(s) of your practice.
- ii. Be conversant with national and international principles, philosophies and guidelines relevant to your practice.
- iii. Understand the ethical basis of the profession and the responsibilities of the conservation professional to cultural heritage and to wider society.
- iv. Understand and observe the Icon Code of Conduct.
- v. Use an adequate level of critical thinking, analysis and synthesis in approaching conservation problems and developing appropriate solutions.
- vi. Appreciate and be prepared to consider alternative, valid methods and approaches that are relevant to your practice.
- vii. Observe legal requirements and obligations, including those relating to health and safety, the environment, employment and contract law, and international agreements.
- viii. Take responsibility for the care of cultural heritage within your influence.
- ix. Act with responsibility towards the environment, promoting environmental sustainability in conservation practice and minimising adverse environmental impact.
- x. Act responsibly and ethically in dealings with the public, employers, clients and colleagues.
- xi. Act with awareness of and respect for the cultural, historic and spiritual context of objects and structures.
- xii. Understand how the context in which conservation is carried out influences the practices and measures that are appropriate and acceptable.
- xiii. Handle value-conflicts and ethical dilemmas in a manner which maintains the interests of cultural heritage.
- xiv. Understand the limits of your own knowledge and abilities, and practise within them.



Standard 1: Assessment of cultural heritage

Standard 1 (points a–e below) requires you to demonstrate the ability to assess cultural heritage, including in situations that present complex conservation problems. The standard should be applied according to your work context, for instance your work might involve examining objects brought to a studio for treatment or advice, or it might call for you to provide the detailed assessment of a collection or structure, or a strategic assessment of a series of collections or defined area of cultural heritage.

Depending on the situation, you may need more than one level of assessment: for example, an initial, visual assessment followed by more detailed investigation and analysis or by ongoing monitoring and audit.

You must be able to:

1a) Understand the significance and context of the heritage to be assessed, along with any implications for potential conservation measures.

- Depending on context this may include considering how the heritage is used or displayed; the design and environmental context of the heritage; any personal, cultural, historic, spiritual, symbolic, intangible, aesthetic or economic significance; artist intent; previous conservation work; and the interests of current and where relevant past owners, custodians and other stakeholders.
- You may need to undertake research, which could be for instance visual, material, historic, archival or testimonial.

1b) Assess the physical nature and condition of the heritage.

- The methods used for assessment must not have an adverse impact on the condition or integrity of the heritage.
- You must refer to other competent sources where analysis lies outside of your area of personal competence or requires specialist resources.
- You must demonstrate an understanding of the material properties and typical degradation patterns of heritage appropriate to the area in which you work.

1c) Assess the impact of the environment and potential changes on the heritage.

- This needs to be applied as appropriate to the context of your work, for example it may involve asking the owner or custodian of an object about its current and proposed environment and use, it could involve carrying out a detailed assessment of a collection or site, or assessing the impact of development proposals, changes to the environment, or other potential changes affecting a site or structure.
- It should include an adequate assessment of risks in the context of its proposed environment and use.
- You must refer to other competent sources where analysis lies outside of your area of personal competence or requires specialist resources.

1d) Assess the implications of taking no further action.

- This will include implications, risks and benefits for the heritage under consideration and, as relevant to the situation, any risks to other objects or structures, the environment or surroundings, and to health and safety.

1e) Report on the findings of the assessment.

- The coverage, presentation and detail of the report or record need to be appropriate to the context of the assessment and the intended readership.
- Depending on context, the report or record may be for your own use, for the information of others, or for formal presentation or publication.



Standard 2: Conservation options and strategies

Standard 2 (points a–c below) builds on the assessment undertaken in standard 1. It requires evaluation and negotiation in contexts that present complex conservation problems. The standard should be applied according to your work context, for instance it could apply to decisions discussed with a client about objects brought to a studio for treatment or advice, a strategy for the management of a collection or building, or a response to a specific threat or conservation issue.

You must be able to:

2a) Identify and evaluate conservation options.

- Options could include managing the use, display, transportation, storage or method of assessment of the heritage differently; physical conservation treatments and measures; or preventive or protective measures.
- Options should be based on adequate assessment and research, and follow an explicit rationale.
- You should be able to identify options that require novel or adapted measures, and know how you would develop and implement or commission these.
- Evaluation will include identifying the risks, benefits and wider implications associated with the different options, including the degree of reversibility or retreatability, resilience to changes in environmental conditions however these are caused, implications for current and future use, and implications for subsequent conservation measures.

2b) Develop advice, recommendations or policies relating to the different options available.

- This will include considering the resource implications of the various options, their environmental impact, any implications for project management or development, and where relevant identifying sources of resourcing or funding.
- You should be able to advise on any legislation, official guidance or organisational policy that affects your area of conservation. Your advice or decisions will need to communicate and promote good conservation practice.

2c) Develop or negotiate a considered course of action for implementation.

- You should be able to negotiate with organisations and individuals as relevant to your area of practice.
- Actions should be open to renegotiation in the light of any new findings that emerge once conservation measures are under way.
- The agreed action should be recorded in a format and level of detail appropriate to the context.



Standard 3: Conservation measures

Standard 3 (points a–f below) requires a detailed knowledge of conservation along with the ability to implement conservation measures effectively, whether by carrying out treatments and protective measures directly or through an advisory, managerial or educational role. Meeting points a–f will show that you can work effectively with situations that present complex conservation problems, and that you can deal effectively with any unanticipated problems or findings.

You must be able to:

3a) Communicate appropriate practice in the care, protection and treatment of cultural heritage.

- Communication could for instance be in the form of advice, policies, strategies, recommendations, or educational inputs.
- Care, protection and treatment may relate to ongoing or exceptional situations, anticipating or responding to disasters or emergencies, or responding to external proposals and changes.
- You should be able to communicate knowledgably the conservation implications of any policy or plan for the heritage in your area of work.
- You should be able to advise on requirements for the ongoing protection of heritage that has left your care.

3b) Implement conservation measures.

- This includes being able to advise on the physical and chemical characteristics of materials and causes of decay, the measures and techniques to be used, and the use of relevant resources, skills and equipment.
- Measures may be for instance physical, chemical, environmental or statutory, or relate to managing or influencing the interaction of others with the heritage.
- You should be able to advise on new and developing techniques and their practical implications.
- The methods and techniques used should take into account relevant contextual and ethical factors as well as current research and guidance in the field concerned.
- You will need to understand the perspectives and roles of others who have an impact on the protection and care of the heritage, where necessary working with them to ensure that measures are effective.

3c) Ensure that measures and advice follow recognised conservation standards.

- This includes meeting relevant Icon standards or codes of practice, along with taking account of any applicable national, local or organisational standards, guidelines and policies.
- You will need to ensure that measures are implemented ethically and to the relevant standard regardless of whether you are carrying them out yourself, delegating or commissioning, or managing more broadly.

3d) Monitor and evaluate the effect of conservation measures.

- This requires you to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of measures that you have applied, using methods appropriate to the context of your work. This could be carried out for instance through continuous or periodic monitoring, by arrangement, or on an ad-hoc basis.
- It includes adjusting or renegotiating measures should findings indicate that this is necessary.

3e) Document conservation measures.

- Documentation should be of a form, level of detail and clarity appropriate to its intended use and value as a resource in its own right.
- It should be designed with the aim of enabling it to be maintained and accessed on an ongoing basis.

3f) Recommend appropriate sources of further analysis, treatment or preventive care where these lie outside your remit or area of expertise.

- This could relate, for instance, to remedial treatment, scientific analysis or specialist monitoring, or specialist preventive, preservation or legislative expertise.



Standard 4: Organisation and management

Standard 4 (points a–e below) is concerned with organising and managing work in a way that is effective, ethical and legal, applicable to all conservation professionals. It should be applied as relevant to your work role, ensuring that you meet the standards across the areas for which you are responsible.

You must be able to:

4a) Organise and manage work to ensure that it is completed appropriately.

- This applies to your own work, as well as to any work that you lead or delegate.
- It could be applied to your own work planning, project scheduling, the work-plan for a department or for a new development, timetabling and lesson-planning for a course, or how you manage consultancy or contract work (from the client or contractor/consultant perspective).
- It includes agreeing and meeting timescales, resourcing requirements and where appropriate budgets, keeping stakeholders informed of progress and renegotiating where necessary.

4b) Ensure that your work practices and any you promote comply with applicable legal and contractual requirements.

- This includes having an awareness and working knowledge of the legal requirements that are relevant to your work.
- It includes as relevant environmental protection and employment regulations, and ensuring work is covered by adequate insurance or indemnity.

4c) Ensure that your work practices and the area for which you are responsible comply with relevant Health & Safety regulations and guidelines, minimising risk to yourself and others.

- This includes the ability to carry out and act on risk assessments.

4d) Adhere to good business or internal practice in dealing with clients, colleagues and other stakeholders.

- This includes maintaining good working relationships, effective and open communication, and where applicable following good practice in managing people.
- Stakeholders can include for instance internal clients (e.g. curators, archivists, architects, elected members or trustees) and contractors, as appropriate.

4e) Ensure that adequate and accessible records are maintained.

- Records include conservation records, statutory records, records required by your organisation or needed for running your business, and any records that you or your colleagues need to work effectively.
- Recording should use relevant methods and formats including, where relevant, the use of appropriate technology and software.
- Records must be available and intelligible to the people who need access to them.
- Records must be maintained for an adequate period for their purpose, taking account of any statutory requirements, conservation guidelines and organisational policies.
- Appropriate levels of security and confidentiality should be maintained in accordance with the law on data protection, privacy and intellectual property.



Standard 5: Continuing professional development

Standard 5 (points a–d below) requires you to demonstrate active maintenance and improvement of your professional knowledge and abilities.

You must be able to:

5a) Keep yourself informed on changes in the profession as well as broader developments relevant to your work context.

- This includes maintaining familiarity and where appropriate contact with relevant bodies in the conservation field and beyond as relevant to your area of practice.
- It includes keeping track of emerging developments and research, in particular to be able to identify areas where further exploration is relevant to developing your practice and expertise.

5b) Ensure that your practice, knowledge, skills and techniques are up-to-date, both at a general level and in relation to individual projects and tasks that you undertake.

- Updating needs to be appropriate to your work context, e.g. if you carry out treatments you would be expected to understand and be able to use new techniques in your field where they are applicable to your work; if you are a manager or advisor you would be expected to understand what is available and where they are appropriate, but not to be able to carry them out; if you are an educator or trainer you would be expected to keep up-to-date in the areas in which you teach or train.

5c) Reflect on and learn from your practice.

- This includes identifying learning points and areas for further investigation or development from your work.

5d) Promote conservation and the care of cultural heritage to expert and general audiences.

- This includes being able to provide training or instruction to others where necessary.
- It could include contributing to the profession or cultural heritage field in various ways, providing demonstrations and expositions, or contributing to publications and web sites.



Professional Judgement and Ethics

Professional judgement and ethics (J&E) (points a-n below) are a core component of the professional standards. Your understanding and application of J&E should be evident across your work.

You can demonstrate your professionalism by showing convincing evidence of the application of professional judgement and ethical standards based on a substantial foundation of conservation knowledge and principles. Knowing when and how to seek relevant information is an important aspect of showing professional judgement. You should be able to handle a wide range of situations professionally, and apply ethical principles in practice. It is not sufficient to demonstrate knowledge of Icon's code of ethics or practice.

You must:

- i. Understand the principles of conservation and demonstrate an in-depth understanding of the specific area(s) of your practice.
- ii. Be conversant with national and international principles, philosophies and guidelines relevant to your practice.
- iii. Understand the ethical basis of the profession and the responsibilities of the conservation professional to cultural heritage and to wider society.
- iv. Understand and observe the Icon Code of Conduct.
- v. Use an adequate level of critical thinking, analysis and synthesis in approaching conservation problems and developing appropriate solutions.
- vi. Appreciate and be prepared to consider alternative, valid methods and approaches that are relevant to your practice.
- vii. Observe legal requirements and obligations, including those relating to health and safety, the environment, employment and contract law, and international agreements.
- viii. Take responsibility for the care of cultural heritage within your influence.

- ix. Act with responsibility towards the environment, promoting environmental sustainability in conservation practice and minimising adverse environmental impact.
- x. Act responsibly and ethically in dealings with the public, employers, clients and colleagues.
- xi. Act with awareness of and respect for the cultural, historic and spiritual context of objects and structures.
- xii. Understand how the context in which conservation is carried out influences the practices and measures that are appropriate and acceptable.
- xiii. Handle value-conflicts and ethical dilemmas in a manner which maintains the interests of cultural heritage.
- xiv. Understand the limits of your own knowledge and abilities, and practise within them.

The Institute of Conservation is a membership organisation and charity that brings together those with a passion for the care of cultural heritage.



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