

Tracy Brabin MP
Email: Tracy.brabin.mp@parliament.uk

17 March 2020

Dear Tracy Brabin,

Support for self-employed workers during Coronavirus (COVID-19)

I am writing on behalf of [Icon \(The Institute of Conservation\)](#) to share our concerns about the impact of COVID-19 on the UK's self-employed and freelance cultural heritage workforce.

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.

Conservation is a vital part of the UK's world-renowned creative industries. Conservation activities can have an origin in individual creativity, skill and talent with conservators employing similar practical and technical skills to craftspeople, artists and designers.

An estimated third of our membership and the wider conservation workforce is self-employed, working in private practice. The majority of these practices are micro, small and medium-sized enterprises. We are concerned that this demographic may be particularly vulnerable to the spread of COVID-19 for the following reasons:

- While employees can be guaranteed sick pay when they self-isolate, freelancers and the self-employed do not have the same security and risk losing income if they are unable to turn up for work. While some freelance conservators work in their private studios many freelance conservators work on-site on major nationally important projects like the Westminster Palace and Lincoln Cathedral restoration projects.
- A wider slowdown of economic activity risks the income of freelancers, as they are inherently more volatile to fluctuations in the economy. For example, as businesses and people reduce activity due to precautions against the spread of COVID-19, conservators may be faced with cancelled contracts and reductions in commissions, leading to loss of income.
- Face-to-face contact is a necessary part of conservation, as conservators need to interact with people and their objects to consider the best approach to care and treatment. Restrictions on social contact would inevitably impact conservators' ability to accept commissions.

The future financial health of the cultural heritage conservation sector simply cannot be ignored. The conservation sector is deeply interconnected with other parts of the economy, maximising the commercial value of the tourism and cultural sectors and creative industries. For example, the major temporary exhibitions that draw huge paying audiences to regional and national museums would not be possible without the support of the conservators who ensure that the objects are in good condition and therefore ready for display or indeed to be loaned to other institutions. Creative professionals of all specialisms draw on heritage made accessible by conservators, while research

shows that the better performance of the creative industries is linked to a greater density of heritage assets within the region they operate.

The sector's freelance workers will require support to cope with the unforeseen financial challenges caused by COVID-19, such as:

- Access to statutory sick pay to cover loss of income for those who fall sick or have to self-isolate.
- Business support and economic assistance to the self-employed to cover potential loss of income due to cancelled contracts or commissions.

I hope you will include these points in your dossier to government on COVID-19 and the self-employed. If a meeting to discuss our concerns would be of interest, I would be happy to arrange this.

Yours sincerely,



Sara Crofts, Chief Executive