



THE INSTITUTE OF CONSERVATION

## Icon Statement on Coronavirus

**30 March 2020**

During a moment of global crisis we are reminded that our shared cultural heritage is one of the things that unites people and communities and can still offer uplifting moments of inspiration and joy, even though we may only be able to access it at a distance or digitally. As the UK deals with the Coronavirus (COVID-19), we know that there will be tough times ahead for people and organisations in the cultural heritage sector.

Icon remains committed to supporting our members and all those working in conservation whose lives and livelihoods will be affected by the pandemic. We want to support them at this challenging time and also ensure that our cultural heritage continues to be cared for and looked after for the benefit of individuals, communities and the nation, now and in the future.

Whilst strongly supporting the social distancing and self-isolation measures put in place, we are also aware that these vital restrictions are already having a serious impact on the cultural heritage sector that relies on income from audiences and visitors, has public engagement and participation at its core and is supported by a significant number of freelancers. Livelihoods, jobs, institutions and their collections are currently at high risk:

1. **Jobs** - Many conservators work in and for the museums, galleries, archives and historic sites that have closed across the UK. These individuals face an uncertain future as prolonged closure may be fatal to the small and independent organisations that employ them.
2. **Income** - Face-to-face contact is an integral part of conservation as conservators interact with people and objects to consider and identify the best approach to care and treatment. Conservators have already experienced cancelled contracts and reductions in commissions, leading to loss of income. Many freelance conservators work on-site on major nationally important projects like the Westminster Palace and Lincoln Cathedral restoration projects. Whilst conservators are adaptable and resourceful and will develop new ways of

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working it remains the case that social distancing measures will risk the income of these conservators where they are unable to work remotely.

3. **Security** - A third of the conservation workforce is self-employed and clearly, clients whether museums or private individuals are unlikely to be commissioning new conservation work during the crisis. 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 are also aware that individuals who are sole directors of limited companies are even less well protected at this time.
4. **Collections** – Objects and collections in institutions that are now closed are at risk as collections maintenance and the operation of vital environmental systems is often not possible. Many important day-to-day tasks are not currently being done and this will increase rates of deterioration and decay. With buildings empty other immediate threats such as equipment faults and leaking pipes may not be spotted in time to prevent damage.

We welcome the steps and measures already taken by the UK Government to mitigate the impact of social distancing and isolation measures. It is imperative that further help and assistance is made available for the conservation sector so that it can continue to support the economy, society and nation. Icon calls on Government and funders for:

- **Clarity and continued communications on timescales for the implementation of social distancing policies to help the sector plan ahead.** This is vital so that plans and strategies can be put in place to ensure the collections housed in the UK's institutions are looked after and can continue to engage and fascinate visitors once sites reopen.
- **A targeted and coordinated emergency package of support for the cultural heritage sector.** We commend the Chancellor's package of measures to support businesses but urge Government to ensure help is available for cultural organisations of all types and sizes. Clarity and support from Government and funding bodies to help cultural organisations navigate the process of applying for existing support will also be needed.

We are pleased to see that both Arts Council England and the National Lottery Heritage Fund have or will announce measures to support heritage organisations and we hope that they will be broad enough in scope to support all those most in need. However, inevitably there will be some organisations that are ineligible for their support and we will continue to draw attention to their plight. We are particularly concerned about local authority and independent museums.

- **Comprehensive support for the self-employed and sole traders.** We warmly welcome the Government's Self-employment Income Protection Fund, as well as the measures that will improve access to the welfare system, provide interim credit and defer taxes.

However, conservation businesses have ongoing expenses and bills to pay that cannot wait for the rollout of the Scheme under the current timetable. We therefore urge Government to implement these measures now, when they are most needed. Support is also required for workers that fall between the cracks of the Scheme, such as sole directors of limited liability companies and those that have entered self-employment after April 2019, such as recent graduates.

We are calling on Government to implement the Self-employment Income Support Scheme as a matter of urgency and to consider measures to provide more effective interim support until the scheme is fully operational (for example emergency cash grants, as called for by the [RSA](#)). We are also seeking information on how self-employed workers not covered by the Scheme will be supported.

We are aware that even when restrictions are lifted once the Coronavirus crisis is under control, the negative impact of current mitigation measures will still be felt across the sector. The conservation profession will therefore require ongoing support so that it is able to recover and, indeed, thrive in the future.

Icon looks forward to continuing to work closely with our members, partners across the sector, as well as colleagues across Government to support the cultural heritage sector during and after this crisis.

**Icon and its members would like to note that we are deeply grateful for the hard work and dedication of the NHS staff and we admire their courage and fortitude at this challenging time. We offer our sincere thanks to every individual who is working to care for others during the Coronavirus crisis.**