



THE INSTITUTE OF CONSERVATION

The Recognition of Professional Qualifications and Regulation of Professions

BEIS Call for Evidence:

<https://beisgovuk.citizenspace.com/trade/professionalregulationevidence/>

Icon submission - October 2020

Please tell us a little bit about who you are, including why you are interested in responding to this call for evidence. This may include any professional or policy experience, expertise, or research you wish to share. If you are happy to do so, please also let us know who you are and any organisational or institutional affiliations.

The Institute of Conservation (Icon) is a membership organisation and the professional body representing and supporting the practice and profession of cultural heritage conservation. Icon champions excellence in conservation and promotes the value of caring for cultural heritage. We are the authoritative source of information on conservation practice, policy and the profession.

We have approximately 2,500 members. Icon members are the heart of the conservation sector, working to protect and care for cultural heritage in museums, in private collections and wherever else it might be found. Members are supported through skills development, networking opportunities, advocacy, education and training.

We are responding to the consultation because a central part of our mission is to give confidence to the public that cultural heritage is protected to the highest standard by our members. Icon's Professional Standards and Accreditation Framework act as the quality assurance that cultural heritage is cared for by fully qualified and capable professionals. Our Professional Standards and Accreditation Framework are held in high regard internationally and we have been able to offer Accreditation to conservators working in countries where there is no existing system of professional accreditation.

The Conservation Register is our free online tool helping the public conveniently find and access an accredited conservator they can trust. It is endorsed by major commissioners of conservators, including English Heritage, the National Trust, SPAB, Historic Houses and Landmark Trust.

In which sectors are you primarily interested?

Cultural heritage and the arts

In which professions are you primarily interested?

Cultural heritage conservators and restorers and other professionals in the heritage sector

In which countries are you primarily interested?

England

Wales

Scotland

Northern Ireland

EU/Iceland/Liechtenstein/Norway/Switzerland

Other

We are a UK-wide organisation and a quarter of our members are based abroad.

Please let us know anything you think we need to understand regarding how effectively regulation works within the sectors in which you have particular interest or expertise.

As there is no legislation or regulation governing the cultural heritage conservation profession in the UK, Icon's professional standards fill this gap to a degree. As a professional body are well developed in ensuring the competence, skills and ethical practices of conservation professionals.

However, the lack of legislation means that there is a risk that people without the necessary skills, expertise and experience can undertake conservation and restoration treatment on heritage objects, which may have considerable financial, personal or cultural value.

Internationally, this has led to high profile cases of 'botched' conservation. For example, a copy of a famous painting by the baroque artist Murillo was recently damaged due to inappropriate restoration work.

The ability for anyone to call themselves a conservator or restorer clearly has the potential to lead to harmful damage of cultural heritage. However, heritage can be protected through mechanisms that are less expensive and resource-heavy than national-level regulation or legislation. We believe that a professional body with appropriate accreditation processes based on individual competence offers the most effective means to regulating the conservation profession. It can be more successful than legislative checks and controls that are generally deployed retrospectively.

Icon fulfils the role of self-regulation of the conservation profession in the UK through formal accreditation and the application of a mandatory Code of Conduct for members. Accredited members are assessed and reviewed by a panel of their Accredited peers. They are subject to regular Continuing Professional Development (CPD) reviews, which are also judged by their Accredited peers. In this way, Icon can actively verify that Accredited Conservator-Restorers are staying up to date with the latest approaches and technical advances in the sector. The Icon Accreditation framework has three components:

- An assessment process for accrediting professional capability against explicit standards
- A system for ensuring maintenance and enhancement of professional capability through Continuing Professional Development
- A means of removing ACR status from practitioners who fail to maintain a minimum standard of practice and ethics demonstrated through regular CPD returns.

We have robust procedures in place to ensure our regulatory mechanisms are kept up to date. We regularly review and update our standards and Code of Conduct, consult our membership and survey the wider profession.

Icon's championing of high professional standards contributes to the low number of examples of poor decision-making about conservation treatments in the UK in comparison to the numerous high-profile international examples seen in the media in recent years. Further support and endorsement of Icon's Conservation Register and Accredited Conservator-Restorers would ensure this continues to be the case without having to introduce further regulation. A higher profile would enable Icon to fulfill its self-regulatory role even better and support its mission to increase public understanding of the value of professional expertise.

Please let us know anything you think we need to understand regarding how accessible the regulatory system is within the sectors in which you have particular interest or expertise.

Icon's membership represents professional conservators across the full breadth of the sector, from archaeology to modern materials (plastics), and from stained glass to manuscripts. With members drawn from all walks of life, Icon's membership includes conservators at all stages of their careers.

Icon's systems of self-regulation are transparent. Our Professional Standards, Code of Conduct and Ethical Guidance are publicly accessible online. Information about Icon Accreditation can be found on our website but we also offer people advice on pursuing Accreditation over the telephone and email.

We are continuously working to ensure that Accreditation is accessible to all. In 2020, Icon introduced a new membership category to ease the process towards Accreditation. The dedicated membership category is open to all conservators who are working towards becoming an Accredited Member of Icon. Pathway Membership helps conservators on their journey towards Accreditation by giving access to support from an Icon Mentor with experience of the assessment process and to dedicated professional development opportunities and advice.

Please let us know anything you think we need to understand regarding the extent to which the regulatory system is proportionate and/or offers good value for money (for all stakeholders) within the sectors in which you have particular interest or expertise.

Icon's membership represents an estimated three quarters of the UK conservation workforce, meaning some 600 non self-regulated conservators operate across the nation outside of our influence. We continuously seek to encourage these practitioners to become Icon members to ensure standards are maintained.

We set our membership fees so that they offer value for money and present minimal barriers to joining. Our fees are comparable to those of other membership and professional bodies within the heritage sector. We provide a concessionary rate for Accredited, Pathway and Associate Members who are earning an annual income of less than £20,000.

Icon's Conservation Register is free for the public to use.

Please let us know anything you think we need to understand regarding how effectively the regulatory system serves public interests within the sectors in which you have particular interest or expertise.

As a charity, Icon has a mission to provide advice and support for clients and those seeking to commission conservation work. The newly updated and redesigned Conservation Register guides anyone with a conservation issue to a number of qualified and competent practitioners covering a large range of specialisms and working across UK nations.

Using an Icon Accredited conservator provides a valuable guarantee that the professional will be appropriately qualified. More importantly, members of the public can feel confident that the practitioner will work within the limits of their knowledge and expertise as set out in Icon's Code of Conduct. If the client is unhappy with the work or the service they have received, then there is also recourse through Icon's robust complaints procedure. This combination makes for a high level of effective self-regulation within the conservation profession in the UK.

Our regulatory environment also supports jobs and skills, the economy and the UK's international reputation. We contribute to the success of UK businesses and organisations undertaking conservation work by raising the quality of staff employed. Our recommended salary guidelines ensure these skilled professionals receive fair wages, meaning they are more likely to stay in the UK and contribute to the economy. Many higher education conservation courses teach Icon's Professional Standards, helping graduates to enter the workforce equipped with a high degree of knowledge and professional judgement.

Icon benefits from an international presence, supporting high standards globally and increasing the UK's reputation abroad. Although most of our members are UK-based, a substantial contingent (17.5% of the membership in 2019) are based outside the UK. Icon regularly receives enquiries about accreditation from professional conservators who are not based in the UK, including the United States, Australia and Israel. In the past, Icon has undertaken accreditation assessments in Singapore, Italy and Belgium. Key to this process has been

ensuring that the standard and method of assessment has been consistent no matter where assessments take place.

The UK conservation sector is a leader in terms of conservation standards. Icon has been consulted on the development of conservation standards and accreditation by heritage professionals in China. In 2018, Shaanxi Province timed the establishment of the region's first professional body for conservators to coincide with Icon's visit to Xi'an. This was a tangible demonstration of Icon's influence on global standards. We would very much welcome the UK Government's support for Icon to market Icon accreditation to other countries, as this would strengthen the UK's leading position in terms of conservation standards and also protect our shared global heritage.