

Museum Conservation Officer

Museum conservation officers keep works of art and historic objects in good condition. They preserve, restore and care for items ranging from paintings, ceramics, textiles or furniture to archaeological and geological specimens. They are sometimes called a conservator.

The Work

Many conservation officers specialise in one area of work such as paintings, fossils or furniture. Others work with a wider range of objects. You could be:

- examining objects to assess the type of material they are made of
- looking for signs and the causes of decay and damage
- deciding what repairs and treatment may be needed and cleaning and restoring objects so that their original features are not lost
- estimating the costs and time needed for the work to be done
- photographing objects and producing reports, and dealing with other paperwork
- providing support and protection for objects in fragile condition
- carrying out work to stop the condition of items deteriorating
- advising on the correct conditions of heat, light and humidity needed to keep objects in good condition
- maintaining records of objects, including work carried out.

Pay

The figures below are only a guide. Actual pay rates may vary, depending on:

- where you work
- the organisation you work for
- the demand for the job.

The starting salary for museum conservation officers is usually around £20,000 to £25,000 a year. Experienced conservation officers earn around £25,000 to £31,000 a year. Senior managers and heads of conservation can earn up to around £55,000 a year.

Conditions

- In museums and galleries you work regular hours in a studio or laboratory.
- Many conservators or restorers work on a freelance basis or on short term contracts.
- For some jobs you may have to concentrate for a long time while sitting or standing.
- You would work with a range of tools and materials, such as scalpels or carpentry tools and chemicals such as paints or solvents.
- You may have to do some heavy lifting and climb ladders.

Getting In

- Most entrants have a degree (SCQF Level 9-10) in conservation or in another relevant subject, such as fine art or geology, depending on the type of objects to be conserved.
- Entry to a degree course normally require 4-5 Highers in relevant subjects.
- There are no degree courses in museum conservation or restoration work in Scotland, but there are a few in England and Wales. A list of relevant courses is given on the website of the [Institute of Conservation \(ICON\)](http://www.icon.ac.uk).
- If your first degree is not in a conservation subject you will probably need a postgraduate qualification in conservation. A number of postgraduate courses in conservation are available in the UK. In Scotland, the University of Glasgow offers a two-year full time MPhil in Textile Conservation.
- There is a lot of competition for all work in this field and it is not easy to get in.
- Voluntary work experience can help you get in.
- You might be able to get short term work and this may lead to a permanent position.
- Higher Chemistry, or an equivalent qualification, is very useful for entry to conservation.
- You need good IT skills.

What Does It Take

You need to have:

- a genuine interest in conservation and the area you specialise in
- problem solving skills
- relevant scientific knowledge
- appropriate technical skills
- good practical skills
- excellent communication skills
- an enquiring mind and sound judgement
- a methodical approach
- patience.

You need to be able to:

- pay careful attention to detail
- concentrate well
- cost projects and work with budgets
- plan and organise your time well
- use your own initiative and judgement
- work unsupervised and often alone.

Training

Further training is on the job, combined with in-service and specialist training courses.

Getting On

- With experience and further skills, you may be able to move around within the public or private sector.
- For permanent employees in large museums there may be a formal promotion structure from assistant

conservation officer to conservation officer.

- You may also be able to move on to be a senior conservation officer.
- When you establish a good reputation, you could work as a freelance conservator or restorer. You may form partnerships with other conservators.
- You may be able to work in research into new conservation techniques.
- You may also be able to teach conservation and restoration techniques.
- You can become a member of a professional body, such as the Institute of Conservation, and work towards Professional Accreditation of Conservator-Restorers.

More Information

The Institute of Conservation website lists degree and postgraduate courses in conservation subjects. According to the Museums Galleries Scotland website, there are over 400 museums and galleries in Scotland. They vary in size from the National Museum of Scotland, with many employees, to small local museums and galleries.

The Creative and Cultural Skills website has a careers section called [Creative Choices](#) which covers careers information, jobs and opportunities in the heritage and culture sector, including conservation work.

Contacts

Institute of Conservation (ICON)

Tel: 020 3142 6799

Email: admin@icon.org.uk

Website: www.icon.org.uk

Twitter: [@Conservators_uk](#)

Facebook: www.facebook.com/pages/The-Institute-of-Conservation/367081813346500

Museum Jobs: cultural sector recruitment

Website: www.museumjobs.com

Museums Association

Tel: 020 7566 7800

Email: info@museumsassociation.org

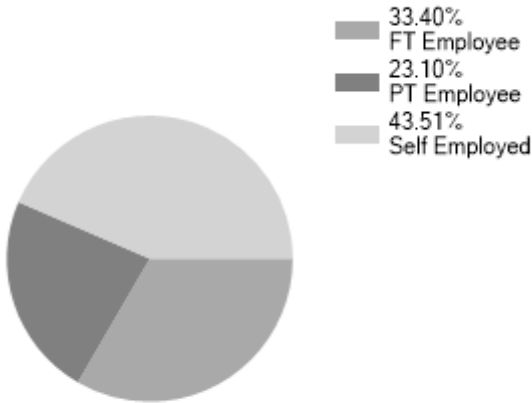
Website: www.museumsassociation.org/home

Twitter: [@MuseumsAssoc](#)

Facebook: www.facebook.com/MuseumsAssoc

Statistics

Employment Status UK %

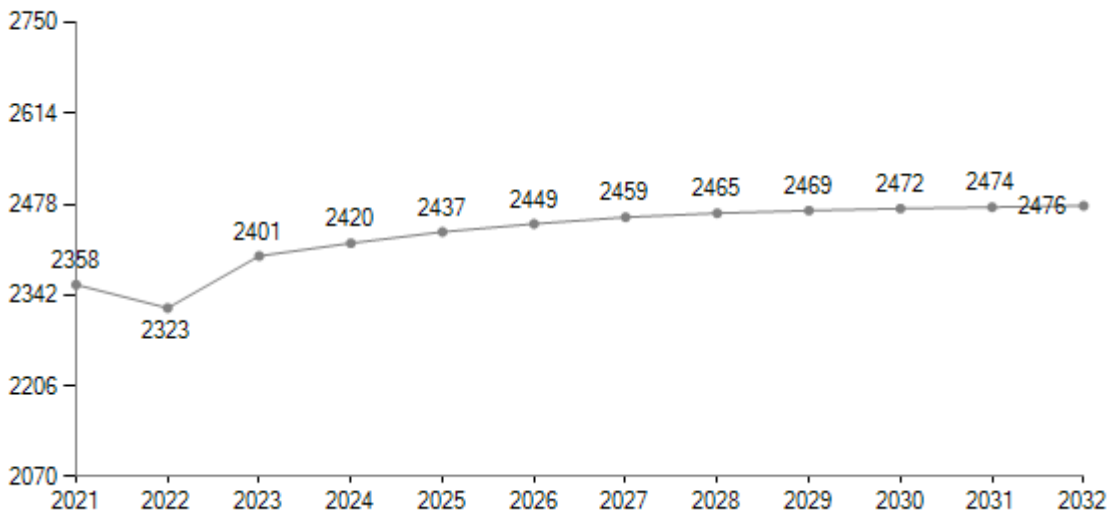


Past Unemployment - Scotland

No Claimant statistics available for Scotland.

LMI data powered by [LMI for All](#)

Predicted Employment in Scotland



LMI data powered by [Lightcast](#)