

# A ROAD TO RUINS?

Funding cuts threaten UK heritage

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Experts working in heritage – [prospect.org.uk](https://prospect.org.uk)

# A ROAD TO RUINS?

## Funding cuts threaten UK heritage



The government's severe austerity policy has led to nearly a decade of funding cuts in our museums, galleries and other heritage organisations – despite the fact that heritage generates billions of pounds for the UK economy every year. This report highlights the concerns of Prospect members in relation to continual funding cuts, compounded by the uncertainty created by Brexit.

We are calling on the government and heritage organisations to make a change now, before irreversible damage is done. Otherwise, future generations may look back at our heritage and history as just another victim of 21st-century decay.

The story so far:

- In 2010 the Department for Culture, Media and Sport announced cuts amounting to 15% for national museums and galleries.
- Between 2010 and 2014 the budget for English Heritage was cut by 32%.
- In 2014 Prospect produced a report based on a survey of our 6,000 members working in the heritage sector. It highlighted deep issues in recruitment and retention of staff with key skills; reduction of services and programmes provided by heritage-based organisations; imposition of hidden charges to help maintain budgets; job losses leading to a reduction in the provision of services, and stagnation of pay leading to low morale and people leaving the sector.
- Further real terms cuts in expenditure have taken place over the past three years.
- In 2017 Prospect undertook a follow-up survey to see if the situation had improved or worsened, as well as to understand the potential impacts of Brexit. As highlighted in our subsequent report, our members see a declining future for heritage in the UK unless we act now.

**We must draw a line under the very serious cuts to budgets and resources before it is too late.**

**#SAVEOURHERITAGE**

*Mike Clancy*

Mike Clancy, Prospect general secretary

# OUR WORKERS IN HERITAGE

The areas of the heritage sector where Prospect members work include museums and galleries (including the nationals across the UK), historic gardens, heritage sites, archaeological trusts, natural heritage, unique library collections and historic records. The sector thrives on its international reputation and world-leading expertise. However, our research shows that:

- 82% of our members believe that funding cuts are having a serious, negative impact on their organisations. We believe this is likely to cause permanent damage to the UK's heritage sector – a key economic sector that was responsible for £20.2bn in expenditure in 2015 alone.
- The impact of funding cuts is leading to more pressure on staff to work extra hours and take on additional responsibilities previously carried out by higher and lower grade staff. 79% of our members reported an increase in workload over the past four years. 65% of our members reported a negative impact on their work/life balance.
- These cuts and, in particular, the consequent impact on pay, continue to undermine the ability of UK heritage organisations to recruit, retain and motivate highly skilled staff. The job reductions and 'job-stretch' referred to above could cause severe damage to heritage collections that are both internationally unique and irreplaceable.
- The cuts are also having an adverse impact on academic and historical research, conservation and collection care and collaboration with other heritage organisations.

- Our members have strong concerns that Brexit will worsen both the funding and staffing problems. The government currently has no clear plan for how it will address heritage issues during and after Brexit and many employing bodies are unsure of the potential impact or what they can do to mitigate against it.



**Wage freezes and recruitment freezes mean parts of the organisation are operating with about half the necessary staff. It is impossible to get qualified staff at the wage levels offered”**

- Prospect members are dedicated and passionate about the work they do. Pay is relatively low in comparison with jobs requiring similar skills outside the sector, with some of our members earning less than the London Living Wage. Our survey shows that many expert staff are close to leaving the sector, while others feel increasingly trapped as their skills and knowledge are not readily transferable outside the sector. This is damaging morale.

These findings are a wake-up call to the government. Austerity is not working. Rather, it is harming our heritage. It is damaging the sector's ability to maintain a return on investment, to provide good quality jobs, to encourage community development and tourism, and to produce a positive impact on health and well-being. Continuing cuts will only result in further irreversible damage to the sector.

## Heritage tourism

**£20.2  
BILLION**

£20.2 billion was generated in spending by domestic and international visitors

## Workloads over the past four years

**79%**

reported an increase in workload over the past four years

**LIFE**

**WORK**

**65%**

reported a negative impact on their work-life balance

# WHY IS HERITAGE IMPORTANT?

Our members working in heritage provide enjoyment, education and inspiration to the UK community through a better understanding and appreciation of our built, buried and natural heritage and the arts. Heritage helps us to understand our history and it develops scientific knowledge that improves real quality of life.

A healthy heritage sector has a proven positive impact on health and well-being – those who visit museums, for example, are 20% more likely to report good health.

There are also some very well researched economic benefits associated with the sector as follows:

- Every £1 invested in the sector generates between £4 and £6.
- The heritage sector was responsible for £20.2bn in tourist expenditure in England in 2015.
- Repair and maintenance of historic buildings also directly generated £9.6bn in construction sector output.
- 360,000 jobs are supported by heritage tourism.

## SURVEY OF MEMBERS

We asked our members which aspects of their employing organisation had been adversely affected by the cuts.

Key areas of concern included:

- **Recruitment** – 75% of members were concerned that spending cuts had undermined the recruitment of staff with the right skills and experience.

- **A decline in professional standards** – 49% of respondents said that opportunities for professional development had decreased in the past four years. The concerns about a decline in professional standards relate to the increase in workload, the reduction of staff and the concerns that jobs are becoming stretched with staff taking on duties of grades below and above them.
- **Impact of spending cuts on academic/historical standards and collection care** – 40% of respondents identified a negative impact in this area. Likewise, conservation and collection care, special projects and working collaboratively with other organisations registered concerns in members' responses (36%, 34% and 32% respectively). All of these are worrying trends that have continued since Prospect's 2014 survey.



**Budgets cut across the board plus staff morale at an all-time low equals lower productivity and loss of potential. The library is doing what it can with limited resources, but given sufficient funds could have done so much more”**

## WORKLOAD

Increasingly high workloads were again reported by our members, with 79% reporting an increase over the past four years. This comes on top of the increases reported by 81% of our members in the

**A healthy heritage  
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**20%**

**Of all people who  
visit museums, 20%  
are more likely to  
report good health**

# Member concerns post-Brexit

78%

**Very/quite concerned about restrictions on movement**

**Potential impact of restrictions on movement of people following Brexit on the performance of organisation**

79%

**Very/quite concerned about loss of income**

**Potential loss of income for organisation as a result of the loss of European-based funding following Brexit**

2014 survey, 19% reported no change against 17% in 2014 and only 1% noted a decrease in workload – this was 2% in the past survey.

Continuing to increase demands on staff is unsustainable. It leads to poor morale and requires staff to work longer hours, compromising their health and work-life balance. The impact of high workloads is shown most starkly in the answer to the question: "To what extent has your work-life balance been affected by cuts in your organisation?" A staggering 65% indicated that it had been adversely affected, significantly up from 46% in our last survey. Only 33% now thought that their work-life balance was at the right level, down from 52%.

Members also reported that they were continuing to face pressure to carry out work above and below their grade, with 58% registering they had taken on responsibilities that would normally be undertaken by someone at a higher grade (same as in 2014) while 57% had

taken on responsibilities of a lower grade (56% in 2014.)

## BREXIT

78% of respondents were concerned or very concerned about the potential impact of restrictions on freedom of movement on the performance of their organisation post-Brexit. This suggests that our members recognise and value the contribution of non-UK EU nationals and have a significant concern about the impact of Brexit on the ability of their organisation to carry out its functions in relation to restrictions on freedom of movement.

Overall, the three biggest concerns members had were the impact of Brexit on colleagues (69%), the loss of income from EU-based funding (66%) and the loss of expertise (56%).

**Currently, the government has no clear plan to address issues of funding or staffing during or after Brexit negotiations.**



# WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN NEXT?

**We know that continuing real-terms cuts in public funding of heritage are counterproductive and are causing real damage to our communities and culture, and have the potential to cause long-term detriment to the UK's multibillion pound tourist economy. To address this:**

- The government must immediately commence a programme of increased and sustained real-terms investment in the sector to reverse the negative impacts of the cuts identified in this report. This must include encouraging employing bodies to improve pay, terms and conditions and to make a career in heritage a more attractive option for new entrants to the workforce.
- Heritage organisations need to be honest with government and the public about the negative impact of funding cuts, and the long-term damage that may not be reversible.
- Heritage organisations need to make a full assessment of the likely impact of Brexit on their organisation and make the case for public funding to replace any funds that may be lost as a result of the UK leaving the EU. They should also make representations to government to protect the interests of their employees who are non-UK EU nationals, and ensure that there is no damage to their work as a result of changes to the movement of people as a result of Brexit.
- Heritage organisations need to think about how they can engage better with Prospect and other recognised unions to address urgent issues identified in the decreasing quality of working conditions and morale. Issues include securing a better work-life balance for employees, improving the arrangements for childcare support to allow more part-time workers to be retained, and improving the diversity of staff.



# WHAT OUR MEMBERS SAY...

“With all the goodwill in the world, staff cannot continue to cover for the various losses of expertise and unfilled posts due to retirement or redundancy”

“The government needs to decide what it wants a museum to provide: collections for the future or visitor experiences today – with current funding I do not see that both are possible”

“We are now more reliant on external funds for large projects, eg European funds, and obviously Brexit is causing problems securing them”

“Morale is very low, and large numbers of staff have taken time off with stress-related conditions”

“My organisation has lost at least a quarter of its annual funding and almost the same proportion in staff numbers but with no measurable drop in expectation with regard to service delivery”

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**Every £1 invested in the sector  
generates between £4 and £6**

**Visitors made 192 million heritage-motivated  
trips in the UK in 2015, spending £17.5bn**

**The heritage sector generated £20.2bn  
in 2015 – 1.1% of UK GDP**

**386,000 jobs were supported by heritage  
tourism in the UK in 2015 – more than 1 in  
every 100 jobs in the UK economy**

**A healthy sector has a positive impact on health  
and well-being – those who visit museums  
are 20% more likely to report good health**

**80% of the population think local heritage  
makes their area a better place to live**

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**For more info, to get involved or to join online, visit  
[prospect.org.uk/joinus](http://prospect.org.uk/joinus)**