

Universal guidance for archaeological excavation

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Power Steele Building, Wessex Hall, Whiteknights Road, Earley, Reading, RG6 6DE

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1 Compliance with the Standard for archaeological excavation

- 1.1** Archaeological excavations take place for many reasons and in many circumstances: the Standard and this guidance apply to all of them (see <https://www.archaeologists.net/codes/cifa>).
- 1.2** The Standard **must** be met as a professional obligation. This guidance describes universally applicable good practice for archaeological excavation that **should** be followed, setting out how the profession currently anticipates that the *Standard for archaeological excavation* may be met, and the *Code of conduct* complied with. If the work undertaken fails to meet the *Standard for archaeological excavation* because of the way in which it was conducted, that work is 'sub-standard'.
- 1.3** This guidance outlines how outcomes or products **required** by the Standard can be attained and against which performance can be monitored. The archaeologist is free to make a considered selection of appropriate established techniques and to develop new methods. However, it is strongly recommended that the universal guidance for archaeological excavation, expressed using '**should**' in this document, is followed to maximise the likelihood of compliance with the Standard. Other clauses indicate permitted actions or identify advisable or desirable actions.
- 1.4** Due regard **should** also be given to the jurisdiction-specific guidance on archaeological excavation to ensure the work undertaken is in accordance with the legislation and policy of the country or jurisdiction of the place of work.
- 1.5** Departures from the universally applicable or jurisdiction-specific guidance should be undertaken with caution. Clear justification is required, with the reasons formally documented, including information outlining how the different approach will meet the Standard.
- 1.6** Professional practice is always evolving. New methods are being developed, and the circumstances in which archaeological work is commissioned and conducted are subject to changing legal, administrative, and ideological perspectives. This information is subject to regular review, and comments and recommendations on this guidance are welcome at any time.

2 Project design

Within this guidance project design is used as a universal term for the document that sets out how the archaeological work will be conducted. This document may be called something different depending on the jurisdiction of the work.

- 2.1** The project design author and/or project manager **should** be a Member (MCIfA) of CfA.

- 2.2** The project design **should** set out the proposed scheme of investigation in enough detail that all relevant parties can understand and agree what will be done, assess whether it is fit for purpose and check that it complies with any conditions or obligations. It **should** provide a benchmark against which the results of the work can be monitored and measured. Templates should therefore be used with care.
- 2.3** All those engaged in the project, including monitors and those commissioning work, **should** have read and understood the project design.
- 2.4** The proposed project team **should** have access to suitable expertise and appropriate reference material to assess the significance of remains and any materials recovered and to undertake further analysis, if recommended, during the post-excavation assessment phase of the project. This assessment **should** include reference to relevant research frameworks.
- 2.5** The project design **should** outline the research aims and the author **should** examine all appropriate resources.
- 2.6** The project design author **should** consider all available practicable methods of investigation and decide upon the most appropriate to meet the purpose of the work, seeking specialist advice where necessary.
- 2.7** The project design **should** set out a dissemination approach which addresses where and how the answers to the project's research questions will be publicised to different audiences, during and after implementation. The approach to dissemination and the level of detail reported **should** be proportionate to the significance of the asset and include a process for review.
- 2.8** Health and safety issues, public liability and commercial confidentiality, while important considerations, **should** not be used as a barrier to public engagement without clear justification.
- 2.9** Any variations to the project design **should** be circulated and understood within the project team and agreed in writing by all relevant parties.
- 2.10** It is advisable for archaeological excavation projects to be governed by a written contract or agreement to which the project design may usefully be annexed.
- 2.11** It is advisable to include statements on ownership of the paper and digital archive and copyright in a written contract or agreement.
- 2.12** The following **should** normally be included in the project design or accompanying documentation, subject to jurisdiction-specific requirements. There is no need to replicate in the project design any information adequately covered by a permit, licence, contract, etc so long as it is available to relevant parties if required.

- (a) non-technical summary

- (b) site location (including map) and descriptions
- (c) context of the project
- (d) geological and topographical background
- (e) archaeological and historical background
- (f) a statement on the relevant technical, research and ethical competences of the organisation undertaking the work
- (g) research aims of the project, including explicit reference to existing research frameworks and objectives, where appropriate
- (h) methods of investigation, including environmental sampling and scientific dating strategies, where appropriate
- (i) methods of recording, including spatial data collection standards
- (j) arrangements for immediate conservation and storage of artefacts in accordance with the *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (see <https://www.archaeologists.net/codes/cifa>)
- (k) methodology for producing a post-fieldwork assessment and analysis of project data
- (l) archiving strategy, including reference to data management plans, selection strategy and local repository requirements (where known), in accordance with the *Standard and guidance for the creation, compilation, transfer and deposition of archaeological archives* (see <https://www.archaeologists.net/codes/cifa>)
- (m) publication, dissemination and engagement proposals, detailing how the needs of relevant audiences will be met, including how the results may be usable for subsequent research
- (n) copyright
- (o) staffing (including specialists, both external and in-house), resources (excluding financial) and consideration of timescale
- (p) a statement on compliance with relevant professional, ethical and technical standards (including data standards), legislation and appropriate guidance
- (q) a tailored statement and plan detailing how public benefit will be delivered, including consideration of the potential for engagement and participation proportionate to the project
- (r) health and safety considerations
- (s) reference to the environmental protection policy (including carbon reduction plan) applying to the project
- (t) arrangements for monitoring progress and compliance by regulators, clients and their agents
- (u) contingency arrangements

3 Project execution

- 3.1 It is the responsibility of the archaeologist undertaking the work to define appropriate staff levels. Sufficient and appropriate resources (staff, equipment, accommodation, etc) **should** be used to enable the successful completion of the project in accordance with the project design. Any contingency elements **should** be clearly identified and justified.
- 3.2 Commissioning bodies and monitors **should** be advised that a reasonable degree of flexibility and professional judgement may be necessary to meet project objectives. It **should** be clear that the nature and scale of post-investigation analyses, publications and the archive will be tailored to the significance and research potential of the assets.
- 3.3 The level of recording and analysis **should** be appropriate to the research aims and purpose of the project and **should** take account of the potential of artefacts and ecofacts to contribute to the understanding of the nature, extent, preservation and significance of a site or asset. For example, consideration **should** be given to the processing of environmental samples at the fieldwork stage, where appropriate, to support the assessment of significance and preservation.
- 3.4 Following (or where suitable, during) fieldwork, the findings **should** be assessed against the project design to determine the extent to which the research aims have been met or could be met and to identify any new research questions to be incorporated in an updated project design.

4 Post-excavation assessment

- 4.1 The post-excavation assessment **should** be managed by a Member of ClfA (MClfA).
- 4.2 Post-excavation assessment work **should** be carried out by competent specialists who have read and understood the project design. The level of assessment of artefacts and ecofacts **should** be in accordance with the *ClfA Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (see <https://www.archaeologists.net/codes/cifa>). The level of recording and analysis **should** be appropriate to the research aims and purpose of the project.
- 4.3 The research aims of the project as outlined in the project design **should** be reviewed during the post-excavation assessment. If material is identified which would merit further study, the project design **should** be updated, even if the research aims remain unchanged.
- 4.4 In updating the project design, archaeologists **should** be aware of future research and/or resource management needs, together with requirements for the effective short- and long-term curation of the project archive (including retention/disposal considerations). The archaeologist **should** ensure that these are addressed and raised with the archaeological advisor (if applicable in the jurisdiction of the work) or other relevant authorities.

- 4.5** A post-excavation assessment report **should** be produced and form part of the project archive. The level of detail required will depend on the quantity and complexity of data and the extent to which those factors have required additional study of the material to form a reliable assessment. The report **should** include a statement of the quantity and perceived quality of the data in the site archive, a statement of the archaeological potential of the data to answer the project research aims, and recommendations for the analysis and data storage and curation requirements. See clause 4.7 for recommended report contents.
- 4.6** Data generated from post-excavation assessment and/or analysis **should** be included in the preserved archaeological archive subject to the archiving strategy and in accordance with the *Standard and guidance for the creation, compilation, transfer and deposition of archaeological archives and the universal guidance for archaeological archives* (see <https://www.archaeologists.net/codes/cifa>).
- 4.7** A post-excavation assessment report **should** normally include
- (1) introduction
 - (a) scope of the project (eg sites involved)
 - (b) circumstances and dates of fieldwork and previous work
 - (c) comments on the organisation of the report
 - (2) original research aims
 - (3) summary of the documented history of the site(s)
 - (4) interim statement on the results of fieldwork
 - (5) summary of the site archive and work carried out for assessment
 - (a) site records: quantity, work done on records during post-excavation assessment
 - (b) finds: factual summary of material and records; quantity, range, variety, preservation, work done during post-excavation assessment in accordance with the *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (see <https://www.archaeologists.net/codes/cifa>)
 - (c) environmental material: factual summary of human and animal bone, shell and each type of sample (eg flotation samples, whole earth samples or waterlogged wash-over samples), quantity, range, variety, preservation, work done on the material during post-excavation assessment in accordance with the *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (see <https://www.archaeologists.net/codes/cifa>)
 - (d) documentary records: list of relevant sources discovered, quantity, variety, depth of study of sources during post-excavation assessment
 - (e) supporting illustrations at appropriate scales

- (f) sufficient supporting data, tabulated or in appendices, and/or details of the contents of the project archive, to permit the interrogation of the stated conclusions
- (6) potential of the data
 - (a) a discursive appraisal of the extent to which the site archive might enable the data to meet the research aims of the project. Different classes of data **should** be discussed in an integrated fashion, sub-divided according to the research aims of the project
 - (b) a statement of the potential of the data in developing new research aims, to contribute to other projects and to advance methodologies
- (7) summary of the potential of the data in terms of local, regional, national and international importance
- (8) updated project design/post-excavation project design

5 Analysis, publication and dissemination

- 5.1** Analysis, publication and dissemination **should** be undertaken in accordance with the post-excavation project design.
- 5.2** The archaeologist undertaking the work **should** respect the requirements of the client or commissioning body concerning confidentiality, but **should** emphasise their professional obligation to make the results of archaeological work available to the wider archaeological community in accordance with the stated timeframe outlined in the project design.
- 5.3** Subject to the post-excavation project design, the report **should** normally contain sufficient data and references to the project archive to permit interpretations to be challenged. Similarly, reports **should** normally integrate the results of specialist analysis with the site sequence, to ensure that important data are not overlooked and an informative, interesting account is produced.
- 5.4** Subject to any reasonable contractual requirements on confidentiality, copies of the report **should** be submitted to an appropriate national or local record in accordance with the stated timeframe outlined in the project design.
- 5.5** Public engagement proportionate to the significance of the results and the project objectives **should** be included and may be achieved through a range of outlets. The digital report **should** be made available online to ensure that the results of the project are readily available to support public dissemination, future research and/or decisions about the site or asset.