

THE diggers' forum

Campaign for a Living Wage

The Diggers' Forum was formed as an IFA Special Interest Group at the end of 2004. The Forum represents archaeologists involved in excavation and post-excavation roles (as opposed to managers, consultants, county officers, etc), staff that are poorly represented within the profession, leading many to feel disenfranchised, helpless and disillusioned.

Since our formation we have been looking at ways in which we can campaign to improve our position within the industry. There are many issues that need to be addressed:

- **Training**
- **Health and safety**
- **Job security**
- **Career development**
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However, poor pay and conditions affect all grades, and the problem is particularly acute for archaeologists working on-site and in the post-excavation process rather than desk-based managerial positions.

There are many factors that have contributed towards the working environment we find ourselves in, not least the competitive tendering process, with the unedifying spectacle of units competing to provide the lowest possible bid within a cut-throat market.

Since the IFA conference in April 2006, the Forum has been engaged in discussions with representatives from the IFA, Prospect and David Connolly of the British Archaeological Jobs Resource (BAJR) on the issue of pay levels within the industry. There is a need to comprehensively benchmark roles, institute an industry-wide pay review and begin a phased increase to sustainable levels across the entire profession. Each party is in agreement on what needs to be achieved and that we can have the greatest impact if we campaign together. A campaign specifically to engage the archaeological hierarchy and in particular, the organisations who pay our wages: the contracting units themselves.

The objective of those involved is to engage all unit managers (and their pay awarding bodies) across the country, directly, in an active process of wage improvement.

In the initial phase of the campaign, we ask unit managers (and their pay awarding bodies) to agree, in principle, to the following points:

Point 1 - Do you agree that archaeologists deserve a higher level of pay that fully represents their skills and experience?

Point 2 - Will you agree to engage with the Campaign for a Living Wage and enter into discussions on the issues raised during the process of the campaign?

Point 3 - Will you actively consider membership of an industry representative body, i.e. IFA RAO or SCAUM, if not already a member.

Point 4 - Will you agree, in principle, that all archaeological employers should meet the minimum pay and conditions set by IFA, Prospect and SCAUM?

Point 5 - Will you agree, in principle, to work with other archaeologists to raise these minima to match remuneration enjoyed by professionals in comparable posts in other sectors?

We also invite suggestions for other, better ways of raising archaeologists' pay.

Each organisation has a separate but complimentary role to play and different ways in which to actively contribute - some of these projects are already underway.

They include:

- The **IFA** changing its recommended minimum salaries to include allowances for annual and sick leave, pensions and working hours.
- **IFA** and **Prospect** instigation of a bench-marking scheme to determine proper pay levels and increase **IFA** recommended minimum salaries accordingly.
- Pending the improved minima, **BAJR's** revised pay-scale grades for 2007 with a career progression grading system.
- Prospect's ongoing negotiations with **SCAUM** to establish a minimum set of employment conditions.
- **BAJR's** ongoing monitoring of pay levels in both employment adverts and current posts.

The results of these projects will be presented as part of the campaign in the near future.

The essential elements are the need for industry-wide agreement, a formal timescale for each phase of the campaign, an understanding of what is sustainable within the framework and most importantly of all, it needs field-workers and post-excavation staff to actively be part of the solution. Prospect, BAJR, IFA and the Diggers' Forum will all function more effectively with your participation and support. If you are not already a member or subscriber to any of these organizations, we hope you will engage with the campaign and help us keep these issues at the forefront of the archaeological agenda.

The story so far.

The Diggers' Forum, Prospect, BAJR, IFA and SCAUM (Standing Conference of Archaeological Unit Managers) are all working to promote better pay for archaeologists. With IFA support, industry-wide negotiations between Prospect and SCAUM representatives are proceeding in a positive and productive way. In parallel, IFA has reformed its recommended minimum salaries to include allowances for annual and sick leave, pensions and working hours. BAJR has introduced revised pay scales for 2007 with a career progression grading system. All approaches are intended to identify an agreed minimum set of pay and conditions that can be widely promoted within archaeology.

But these initiatives are not enough. IFA, SCAUM, Prospect and BAJR all agree that we need year-on-year, substantial, above-inflation pay increases. To achieve this we need two things:

1. A set of target salaries that can be demonstrated as fair.
2. Coordinated movement by employers towards decent pay-levels, whilst minimizing the commercial risk of better payers being undercut – or put out of business – by poor employers.

The IFA is currently embarking on a process that will benchmark a range of archaeological jobs against similar posts in other sectors, comparing skills and responsibilities. This recognized job evaluation process will identify comparable terms and conditions – providing us for the first time with defensible arguments not just for why archaeologists should be paid more, but also for how much more. This will meet the first objective.

The second objective is more challenging:

- SCAUM has the potential to exert pressure on archaeological employers failing to meet the deal negotiated with Prospect – and peer pressure should never be underestimated as a force for change. SCAUM does not, however, have the power to enforce the agreed employment terms.
- BAJR works hard to ban poorly paid jobs from its website, weakening the ability of poor employers to recruit and encouraging them to pay better.
- IFA now requires Registered Archaeological Organizations to meet its recommended minimum salaries, and any IFA member who employs archaeologists must give 'due regard' to them. IFA can and does take action against members and RAOs that contravene its regulations. With RAOs employing approximately one-third of the archaeological workforce (and a much higher proportion of those in the commercial sector), the IFA recommendations have more or less eradicated the most extreme examples of poor pay. But to accelerate improvements to all aspects of archaeology, including pay, we need to be in a position whereby expulsion from IFA really hurts an employer's finances as well as reputation. While RAO status is clearly a commercial advantage, at least to archaeological contractors and consultants, we need to ensure that increasingly national and local authorities feel able to restrict commercially funded work to RAOs. The IFA is lobbying hard.

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