



## **Becoming a Professional**

### **The Job Market**

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Every year over 1000 students graduate with a degree in archaeology or a related discipline. While many do not intend to pursue an archaeological career, a recent survey has shown that 57% of undergraduate students would like to work in archaeology or a related area, (Croucher, Cobb & Brennan 2008; 22). It is estimated, however, that only 15% of archaeology graduates succeed in gaining employment in archaeology (Collis 2001), indicating how competitive the job market is. Despite this, in August 2007 6800 people in Britain worked as professional archaeologists, so some are clearly successful. For those who aren't, the practical training and valuable transferable skills of an archaeology degree allow graduates to take advantage of openings in Europe and beyond.



The job market in the historic environment sector is extremely varied. There are a broad range of directions individuals can follow and an equally broad range of routes into the profession.

Archaeology is a relatively young profession, both in the sense that it has only relatively recently become professionalised, and also that the workforce is younger than average. The average age for an archaeologist is 38 (Aitchison & Edwards 2008) demonstrating that many people do not stay in the sector for their whole working lives. Professional archaeologists will rarely get the remuneration of accountants, lawyers or doctors, but it is possible to earn a reasonable salary for a job which can be highly rewarding, and which may provide opportunities for research and travel. The most recent Labour Market Intelligence survey indicated an average salary across the profession of over £23,000, with the highest 10% of earners earning over £35,000 (Aitchison and Edwards 2008).

### **Making a start**

The first difficulty faced by most archaeology graduates is that an undergraduate degree in archaeology does not train you to be an archaeologist and it may be difficult to gain the skills that employers require. There is a difference between education and training and, like many professions, your initial degree does not necessarily qualify you to practice as a professional. Some skills are specific to the sector – experience of excavation, surveying, processing finds, drawing, data management in (or just using) Historic Environment Records and knowledge of on-site health and safety – these are known as 'vocational skills'. Employers also require transferable skills – confident use of information technology, the ability to contribute effectively as part of a team, presentation skills (verbal, graphic and written) and proactive problem solving. These are skills which, along with your academic knowledge, you will continue to develop throughout your career. You may have begun to develop many of these skills through other jobs or involvement in student activities or societies and you should make sure they are identified clearly on your CV.



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Many archaeologists will go on to undertake further study as part of a Masters programme following their undergraduate degree. There are a number of Masters degrees in Practical or Professional Archaeology available which are designed to provide the student with more of the vocational skills needed to work in archaeology. There may, however, be other ways of gaining such skills and graduates are advised to consider the costs, advantages and disadvantages carefully before embarking on further study.

The professional body for archaeology, the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA), has developed continuing professional development (CPD) structures through which professionals can document the skills they acquire and develop throughout their careers. IfA members are required to undertake and document CPD as part of their membership. Good employers assist this through staff development review processes, so that new skills benefit the organisation as well as enhancing an individual's career.

After the general academic and practical training of your degree there are a number of options to consider when looking for employment. Below are just some of them:

- **commercial organisations**, most developer funded field archaeology happens through the commercial sector, although commercial organisations also undertake work on historic buildings, underwater archaeology, specialist analysis, survey work, historic management and engage in community and outreach work. As well as private sector organisations, some university departments and local authorities have fieldwork teams which undertake work on a commercial basis.
- **local government/planning archaeology**, primarily involving the maintenance and enhancement of Historic Environment Records and providing information and advice to a wide range of stakeholders including planning authorities, developers, utilities and the general public. Some local government archaeology services fulfil important outreach functions as well.
- **private consultancy**, interpreting and delivering advice in the context of contract, legal and policy requirements for the protection of archaeology during the planning process and advising owners of archaeological sites how they should be preserved and enhanced
- **museums**, either through becoming a specialist curator or analyst, or through education and outreach work
- **education** through universities, various schools, colleges and other bodies
- **academic research and teaching**, normally requiring a PhD and post doctoral study
- **working for a national agency** such as English Heritage or Historic Scotland, one of the Royal Commissions or another national body.

For each of these areas different career strategies may be needed, although a good all-round grounding in basic archaeological skills, such as excavation, survey, recording, monument identification, report writing etc, will always be an advantage. A broad range of experience will also help you to decide which areas you might like to pursue in the future. Surveys of archaeological employment may give you some ideas about where the demands for skilled specialists are greatest. Above all, get to know your way around the archaeological world; the range of jobs requiring archaeological skills may be wider than think. Try to develop your own network of

contacts – consider attending or presenting a paper at the annual IfA conference, for instance. Keep up to date with the latest developments through the Council for British Archaeology's (CBA) website and publications, or via the IfA's *The Archaeologist* magazine.

If you do not already have contacts, you should keep in touch with staff and students in your university department who may hear about employment possibilities. You may also find it useful to subscribe to IfA's Jobs Information Service (which IfA members receive free by email). Unsolicited applications to archaeological employers, particularly commercial companies, can be worthwhile but you should make sure that your CV and covering letter are targeted appropriately. General CVs and applications which do not demonstrate any knowledge of the company you are applying to and the type of work it undertakes will invariably be rejected. The CBA provides information on short courses and conferences in its magazine *British Archaeology*, and on its website. Make sure you start building up a portfolio of work, e.g. examples of written work like your dissertation, any drawings or other work you have done, and start your CPD log to record your experience and training (for information on CPD, see the IfA website) while you are still at school or university.

### **Workplace learning**

A number of organisations, particularly the larger consultancy firms, offer graduate training programmes or placements designed to develop the skills of new staff. The IfA also runs a workplace learning programme, currently funded through the Heritage Lottery Fund and English Heritage, of paid professional placements designed around National Occupational Standards in Archaeological Practice. Some placements are aimed at career entry level whereas others are targeted at more experienced archaeologists seeking to develop existing skills or develop new specialisms. In addition to valuable specialist skills, they are also designed to develop professional skills such as time-management, communication and teamwork.



Two workplace learning bursary holders receiving their NVQ certificates

The NVQ in Archaeological Practice, awarded by Education Development International (EDI) was developed by The Archaeology Training Forum as a practice qualification for archaeologists. Rather than demonstrating the attainment of educational benchmarks which may give insight into an individual's *potential* for skills and learning, they demonstrate an individual's existing competencies and skills, which is far more useful to employers and also provides a means of accrediting informal training and on-the-job learning. For more information please visit IfA's website.

### **Making progress**

Getting your first job in archaeology is just the start. If you want to pursue a career in archaeology you need to continue to think about your skills, what you have and what you need to develop, for the rest of your career. You should also consider gaining recognition of your competence and demonstrating your commitment to professionalism by joining the Institute for Archaeologists.

Once you have been working in archaeology for a while you will have a better idea of how the industry works and where you may wish to specialise. With this in mind, think about your longer term future, what your aspirations are and what training needs you may have in order to achieve them. The Training Online Resource Centre ([www.torc.org.uk/](http://www.torc.org.uk/)) website may help you identify relevant training resources. If your employer operates a staff development review procedure make sure your training requirements are incorporated into your yearly objectives and investigate whether your employer can help you to source or fund relevant training. Remember to keep your CV and CPD log updated and keep looking for opportunities in areas that interest you.

## **Relevant Organisations**

### **Institute for Archaeologists**

The Institute for Archaeologists (IfA) advances the practice of archaeology and allied disciplines by promoting professional standards and ethics for conserving, managing, understanding and promoting enjoyment of heritage. This work is mainly through the setting and maintenance of professional standards. The Institute also makes recommendations on salary levels, what levels of competence are needed at different levels of responsibility etc.; these are underpinned by a *Code of conduct*, and members commit themselves to maintaining these high standards. It has both individual members and a register of organisations who meet certain standards regarding responsible behaviour (including being good employers), and are termed ROs (Registered Organisations). There are five categories of individual membership: Affiliates, Students, Practitioners (PIfA), Associates (AIfA) and Members (MIfA); fees for corporate membership vary according to level of income. Some job adverts state that preference may be given to IfA members.

Institute for Archaeologists,  
SHES,  
University of Reading,  
PO Box 227,  
Whiteknights,  
Reading,  
RG6 6AB

tel 0118 378 6446

email [admin@archaeologists.net](mailto:admin@archaeologists.net)

[www.archaeologists.net](http://www.archaeologists.net)

### **IfA Jobs Information Service**

The Jobs Information Service provides weekly jobs bulletins which carries advertisements placed exclusively by employers and all archaeological, heritage and research opportunities appearing in the national press and specialist journals during that week. It is the most comprehensive source of information about work in archaeology and related disciplines.

This service is provided to IfA members free by e-mail, and is available to non-members at a fee of £20 for two months, £40 for six months, or £60 for one year. For further details contact the IfA offices.

### **Trade Unions**

There are three main trade unions to which archaeologists belong. For those in higher education it is the Universities and Colleges Union (UCU); for local government it is Unison; and for those in the private sector and many centrally government-funded organisations it is Prospect. For the first two, information will automatically reach you when you join an organisation, but for many freelance archaeologists, the information may not be so readily available. Further information on Prospect can be obtained from

75/79 York Road,  
London,  
SE1 7AQ

tel 020 7902 6600

[www.prospect.org.uk](http://www.prospect.org.uk).

## **Council for British Archaeology**

The CBA provides an on-line information service with career information and details of present educational and training courses. This service is TORC, the Training Online Resource Centre for Archaeology and it is online at: [www.torc.org.uk](http://www.torc.org.uk)

The CBA's full website includes a valuable directory of links to archaeological employers and a series of information sheets on subjects including training and working in different areas of archaeology.

Council for British Archaeology,  
St Mary's House,  
66 Bootham,  
York,  
YO30 7BZ

[www.britarch.ac.uk](http://www.britarch.ac.uk)

## **Creative Choices**

The Creative Choices website has been put together by Creative and Cultural Skills (the Sector Skills Council for Advertising, Crafts, Cultural Heritage, Design, Literature, Music, Performing, and Visual Arts) to give people advice on beginning and developing their careers. Archaeology and related disciplines fall under the heading of 'cultural heritage'. The website has information on courses, job profiles and case studies.

[www.creative-choices.co.uk](http://www.creative-choices.co.uk)

## **References**

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## **Some useful publications**

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