The recommendations of the Southport Report and subsequent revision of CIfA guidance recognised the instrumental role of the WSI in determining the standard and quality of any archaeological investigation.

So what does the guidance say?

The revised paragraphs on Briefs, specifications and WSIs recognised that different terminology might be used in different circumstances but referred to a document which

set out the proposed scheme of investigation in sufficient detail to satisfy the planning archaeologist or monitor that it is an appropriate response to the brief and that works will be appropriate and proportionate to the known potential remains and the level of impact. It should also contain sufficient detail to provide a benchmark against which the results of the work may be measured and must be agreed by all relevant parties before work can commence.

The guidance goes on to advise that a WSI should

- be prepared and implemented by suitably accredited and competent persons, using specialist advice where necessary
- specify how the project team meets CIfA standards. It should set out how individual and corporate competences will be maintained and enhanced through training and CPD built into the project where appropriate
- set out the research objectives of the project. It should include where appropriate and possible explicit reference to existing research frameworks, and draw upon advice from appropriate specialists from within the proposed project team to ensure that the investigation will appropriately address national, regional and local objectives
- be suited to the project under consideration; any methods advocated should reflect the nature of archaeological remains likely to be found and should not become inflexible irrespective of site conditions or context. Standard templates should therefore be used with care

1 See, for example, section 3.2 in the Standard and guidance for excavation

A series of workshops were held in England in 2016 to help members to understand and comply with the new guidance, and examination of WSIs has been a focus of the Registered Organisations inspection process in 2017. Supported by Historic England and ALGAO, they were designed to link the new guidance directly with the emphasis on public benefit articulated in planning policy and guidance. Further workshops are planned in Scotland and Wales in 2018.

CIfA Standards and guidance

- Define good practice, and explaining general definitions in the Code of conduct
- Define a required outcome: the Standard
- Advise on how the outcome may be reached: the guidance
- Are formulated by the sector, based on current understanding of good practice
- Are used when commissioning or designing archaeological work in order to define measurable quality standards
- Are not optional: compliance with the Standard is a professional obligation for CIfA members and Registered Organisations

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A report by the Southport Group July 2011

Spotlight on... CIfA guidance on written schemes of investigation

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