

Foundations Archaeology – A Skills Audit

Who they are and what they are regarded for

Foundations Archaeology, is a small practice founded in April 1995 to undertake consultancy and contracting work on planning projects affected by archaeological constraints. It focuses on three things. The first is providing the archaeological expertise needed by planners and developers. The second is supplying the service to a consistently high level of quality and the third is a rapid response to their client's varied needs. While originally it aimed only to provide consultancy, it started responding to client demand to undertake field projects (evaluation & excavation), which now provides approximately 80% of the company's turnover.

What they wanted to achieve

Although Foundations Archaeology needed to undertake a skills audit as part of working towards an international standard (ISO9001) they did not want an audit to result simply in a list that fulfilled a compliance criterion for meeting a standard, but in something much more important to the practice. Clare and Roy King, who founded and run the practice, have always recognised their responsibility to train their people. Apart from anything else, consistent quality depends on it. However, they lacked an authoritative point of reference on which to decide what training was needed for the practice and the people working in it. National Occupational Standards (NOS) offers a framework within which the practice could identify the spread of skills it needed to be able to offer clients – its essential competencies. It could also identify additional skills it already had, and those it wanted to grow. On that basis it could then identify which of these its people already had and which they needed training and experience to develop.

The Outcome

Foundations Archaeology have produced

- a skills audit for the organisation
- a skills needs assessment for each individual member of the team.

These then provide valuable data with which to;

- create a plan for developing staff
- create meaningful targets and objectives
- establish organisational plans
- establish individual development plans
- support ISO compliance and development
- support a small business loan request
- support applications to gain and maintain IFA Registered Archaeological Organisation status
- allow individual staff to develop their own career plans

What did they do?

After both a general exploration of ideas with IFA and other agencies and a specific planning session with IFA and organisational development specialists, Grant Associates, Clare and Roy set themselves a simple project, but one they had to undertake in the context of heavy work demands.

The key stages were:

- going through the NOS to identify
 - those essential skills the organisation needed
 - the desirable skills the organisation also had
 - additional skills needed to enhance what Foundations Archaeology currently offer to their clients.

- The second stage was getting staff to
 - map their own skills
 - identify what skills and experience they each needed to support the work of Foundations Archaeology
 - identify skills they each wanted to grow in line with their personal or professional aspirations.

First we looked at ourselves individually....then we bunched that all together as a team – once we did that; we could see we are strong on some parts and identified the areas we are not so strong at. Not all of them were obvious before – and there were some things we hadn't thought about, for instance Health & Safety....we are quite good at that but we need to update on things....we've got to look at that and do even better at it.

Team Member.

The last stage was generating an easily accessible visual picture of that data.

Project Process

Month	Activity	Purpose
1	decision to pursue this project and project planning meeting	to establish project plan to clarify objectives and outcomes to identify stakeholders to clarify timescales
3	Identify Skills needs for Foundations Archaeology using NOS Index	To identify; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – list of essential skills – list of desirable skills – additional enhancements to our suite of skills identified in the NOS
3	Assess how we measure up currently to this set of skills	To identify against the required `skills where the practice was; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ good ▪ average ▪ poor or

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ skills were present but not well applied
4	Present list of Skills needs for consultation	To get feedback and input from others
4	Preliminary discussions with staff about the process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ to keep staff updated ▪ to clarify what is happening ▪ to allay any concerns ▪ to begin thinking about individual skills needs assessment
5	Request individuals to carry out self assessment of skills on following basis; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – good – needs some development – poor or non-existent 	To begin the process of assessing each team members skills and development needs via self-assessment To provide data for the team to use together in their team workshop
5	Team workshop (half day). Facilitated	To collectively review individual assessments and produce a team-wide presentation of data on individual team member skills

Questions, Debates and Responses

How do you make time for this work amidst all the urgent demands on people's time?

Actual time involved was not enormous, though the timespan itself was quite long. Clare says it probably took about 3 days of her time and 1 day each for each team member to attend a workshop - 10 staff days in total. The problem was trying to line up conversations with each member of staff and trying to have a team meeting when work was busy and everyone including Roy and Clare is very hands on. Clare and Roy managed to complete their project by adapting their plans to fit around commitments to clients and being opportunistic about making time with their staff.

How do you get staff to engage in the process without feeling taken by surprise or threatened by self-assessing their skills?

We were concerned not to have people feeling this affected their employmentthat it was not part of the staff assessment system.

Business owner

Roy and Clare had planned to have one to one discussions with each member of staff early on in the process to involve people, explain the process and allay any anxieties that a skills assessment might create. Unexpected workload made it very difficult to schedule this, but Clare and Roy recognised

the importance of keeping their staff informed about the purpose of the project. So they used informal opportunities to keep people involved and informed. Then created the opportunity for all staff, core and temporary (7) to work together for half a day. In the end, staff felt that the self assessment and team workshop had been a useful and enjoyable use of time.

We handled it by being up front about why... They very much enjoyed looking at the standards and saying, "I do have that skill."

Business owner

How do you bring a clear structure, recognised by other professionals, to the things we need to do?

It was recognised at the outset that using the NOS to carry out a skills audit, necessary for the ISO certification, would be of great value in assuring clients that a small business is also highly professional. But it also turned out that using the standards to present an assessment of the business was also beneficial when applying for a small business loan. Equally using the NOS is a strong foundation for attaining other standards like Investors in People. In each case they are a tool for small practices to use to ensure they are taken seriously.

How people with a stake in this process see it and its results

Common sense standards - Team member

We found the standards common sense stuff, not intimidating, not jargonistic – it was very tool-like...by which, I mean we could say here's a problem area we are uncertain about. Let's look at it and use the standards to work out what we're really dealing with here.

Good for morale - Business owner

Well of course it was more work in the short term, but it was really good for morale. It makes people feel valued because we are spending time on something that contributes to their own personal and professional development. What we have to do now is match what we've got to what we need. And the training will not be just sending people on courses – together we can decide what training people need.

Making benchmarking easier - Grant Associates

This is a great start and shows how a small practice in the middle of a hectic workload can use these standards to create simple, down-to-earth ways of making their business stronger without creating lots of extra work. NOS let staff and partners talk sensibly about what they can do and how well they can do it. Its also a powerful way of reinforcing the connection between people in a small hard-working practice and the larger professional community.

A template for assessing skills resources - IFA, Head of Training and Standards.

Organisations can't realistically start to plan how to improve the set of skills that their staff possess until they have identified the starting point. This case study demonstrates that undertaking an organisational skills audit is an extremely straightforward process which facilitates organisational planning enormously. By carrying out this exercise, Foundations Archaeology have created a template that archaeological organisations of all scales can use to take the first, crucial step in assessing their skills resources – and so start the process of working with staff to raise the overall level of skill across the profession.

A step towards greater efficiency - Business owner

To make best use of this we now have to make sure we do something with it. We need to invest time and money, but it will help to make us more efficient and profitable or make our lives easier, or both. Most of all it's the sleep-at-nights principle!

Relevant standards for the profession - Team member

The problem with our job is it's all hands on and everybody does everything. We suffer from doing something one day and something different the next day. The NOS are definitely relevant because there are not many other professions without a standard to work to. My only concern is how do we make it become a benchmark that everyone works to?

Other units like ours would benefit from doing the same - Team member

I think it would be definitely worth other people doing the same as we did. It makes you think about what the team is and isn't. A lot of smaller units very similar to ourselves would benefit. We are always chasing instead of being top of things, and this for a change, is pro-active not reactive. It's a proactive move...asking ourselves are we making the same mistakes and what can we do to resolve that.

Next Steps

Foundations Archaeology have already identified in their project plan their next steps.

Activity	Purpose
Review and plan reflection on project outcomes so far by senior partners	For senior partners to reflect on the outcomes of the process and; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ identify priority development needs for the practice ▪ establish organisational development plan
One to one conversations with each individual	To identify and plan individual development plans that support business needs and personal aspirations

Tools and Products

Produced as part of this project and available for you to use

- **Project Process Map for Organisational/Individual skills Audit**
- **Proforma for Organisational/Individual Skills Audit**
- **Plan for Team Workshop to evaluate individual skills and identify training needs**

Project Process Map for Organisational/Individual Skills Audit

Project planning

- Establish clear objectives
- Identify those whose help is needed for the project
- Identify key stakeholders
- Identify potential barriers
- Set realistic timescales and deadlines
- Set regular review points

Communication

- Communicate your plans to all or any who need to know
- Agree the involvement of others

Ensure clarity about your organisation

- What is your core work?
- What other work do you do?
- What work would you like to develop more in the future?
- What are the implications of external factors on the future of the work you deliver? E.g. client requirements; legislation; professional standards

**Identify skills relevant to your organisation from the NOS index
And assess your organisations competence in them.
Consult others for agreement**

Communicate your ideas on individual skills assessment

Each identify individual skills and collate data to create a team skills assessment .

If possible complete as a whole team in order to:

- Seek feedback from other team members
- reassure all team members
- discuss broader issues that arise from the collective, individual assessments
- to use as a team building opportunity.

Use data to plan organisational and individual development plans

Proforma for Organisational/Individual Skills Audit

To use the attached proforma, follow these steps.

- 1 In the absence of a business plan make a simple assessment of your current and future priorities by completing the first section of the proforma, identifying;
 - the work that is core to your business
 - other work that you do that is important to your business
 - your future plans and aspirations ie areas that you hope to develop in your business
- 2 With the above data as your reference, identify the skills that are essential to your current and future business. Use the NOS index to help you establish a comprehensive list of these skills and to identify any further skills that you need to develop but had not considered.
- 3 Assess your skill level against each skill, on the scale; expert/confident/limited/no experience. This will identify strengths and skills gaps. Use the detail of the NOS to clarify the detail of the skill and knowledge you are considering.
- 4 Identify any initial action that needs to be taken to address skills gaps

NB. This process can be followed by an individual or a group of people. For individual assessment it is useful to involve at least one other person who is familiar with your professional practice to help with your assessment.

Organisational/Individual Skills Audit Proforma

Priorities/ Core work

Other work

Future plans

Required skill	Current skill level				ACTION REQUIRED
	expert	confident	Limited	no experience	

Plan for Team Workshop to evaluate individual skills and identify training needs

Notes for the planning and running of a team workshop for Team skills Audit.

Time	Activity	Detail
At least 2 weeks before	Alert everyone to the workshop, when, where and why.	Avoid saying things that invite people to feel alarmed at the prospect of assessing their skills.
	Give people the organisation or team skill audit list to look at and think about.	As a tool for self-use before the workshop
At least 2 weeks before	Make sure there's a room available that's big enough for people to spread out.	Think about practical arrangements like handling phones, refreshments, copies of the NOS on paper or CD Rom, stationery and/or a grid on the wall to fill in
On the day 9.00	Explain the reasons behind this activity and what the next steps might be following the workshop. Option about what to do next below	
Option 1a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ask everyone to make two lists on two separate pieces of paper using a felt pen so that it is clearly visible, one with a Plus at the top and one with a Minus. explain the Plus list contains all the skills the organisation needs that they already have and are good at. The Minus list contains all the skills they want to have or want to become good at. each person in turn explains their list to everyone and gets feedback from the others on what to add to either list if they wish to. 	<p>Provide them with the organisation skills audit and the NOS as a point of reference.</p> <p>People could come with these lists pre-prepared or they could prepare them in the same room at the same time or at their own workstations around the office over 30-60 minutes.</p>
Option 1b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ask everyone to complete the individual skills audit pro-forma then each person in turn explains his or her list to everyone else and seeks feedback. 	<p>If the organisation skills audit grid is on the wall then that could be used as a scoreboard, with a separate column for everyone's name using a star to indicate good, tick for average, question-mark for poor and a cross for no experience.</p>

Option 2	<p>Having gathered together each individuals assessment of their own skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ask for views about what the complete picture shows re the skills in the practice – strengths, weaknesses and priority areas for development. • make a note of the priority skills for development and discuss who has an interest in developing those skills. 	<p>Write each suggested priority skill for development on a separate A4 sheet in felt pen large letter. You can add people's names to each list as time goes on.</p>
Close	<p>Collate all information on individual skills and plan to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • review overall skills needs picture and make organisational training plan • plan individual conversations with each team member to create individual training plans 	