

Oliver Dowden MP
Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport
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18 August 2021

RE: Afghan archaeologist asylum seekers

Dear Mr. Dowden,

I am sure that you, like us, have been watching with horror as the situation in Afghanistan has unfolded. Archaeologists have long recognised a strong link with the culture of Afghanistan, particularly in the way that it has been spotlighted in the UK and western media since the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas by the Taliban in 2001.

UNESCO and other international actors have conducted a huge programme of investment in Afghan archaeology, which has meant substantial collaboration of international archaeologists with Afghan archaeologists to reconstruct, develop and interpret Afghanistan's cultural resources.

Nevertheless, as archaeologists, we are largely powerless to help at the present moment of crisis. But we may be able to help by paving the way for skilled archaeologists able to flee the country to work in the UK, where there is currently a shortage of skilled archaeologists. We've been talking to DCMS and Home Office officials about immigration rules and how we can make sure that we can meet the demand for archaeologists – whose work helps to facilitate infrastructure and housing development and maintains our world-leading reputation for archaeological research and innovation. We believe that the UK benefits from allowing skilled archaeologists from elsewhere into the workforce. In the case of Afghan archaeologists, it could help to save lives.

At present, Afghan archaeologists arriving in the UK as asylum seekers might be unable to seek work for 12 months. And Skilled Migrant visas may be impossible or dangerous to obtain. We look forward to hearing more about the Afghanistan Citizens' Resettlement Scheme, which we hope will provide solutions to these problems and clear away barriers to effective integration of asylum seekers into the UK workforce.

We would like to ask you, Minister, to use your influence to seek temporary relaxations to rules which would enable skilled Afghan asylum seekers to take up work in archaeology – as has been proposed for translators. If HMG could allow Afghan archaeologist asylum seekers to work from day one, recognising their plight and the status of archaeology is on the UK Shortage Occupation List, we believe that we, archaeological employers and our other sector partners would work hard and effectively to find them unfilled jobs in the UK.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Hinton', written in a cursive style.

Peter Hinton BA MCifA FRSA FSA FSA Scot FIAM

Chief Executive, Chartered Institute for Archaeologists

About the Institute

The Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CifA) is the leading professional body representing archaeologists working in the UK and overseas. We promote high professional standards and strong ethics in archaeological practice, to maximise the benefits that archaeologists bring to society, and provide a self-regulatory quality assurance framework for the sector and those it serves.

CifA has over 4,000 members and more than 80 registered practices across the United Kingdom. Its members work in all branches of the discipline: heritage management, planning advice, excavation, finds and environmental study, buildings recording, underwater and aerial archaeology, museums, conservation, survey, research and development, teaching and liaison with the community, industry and the commercial and financial sectors.