

# IAI Round Table Discussion 24 March 2018

IAI Annual Conference, Clayton Hotel, Sligo

**Moderator:** Mary Teehan, Strategy Coordinator Archaeology 2025 (MT)

**Introduction:** Stuart Elder, Vice Chair IAI (SE)

**Minutes:** Bernice Kelly and Lynda McCormack

Participants were informed that the discussion would focus on two of the core objectives identified in *Archaeology 2025: Strategic Pathways for Archaeology in Ireland*:

1. Working towards recognised qualification-based definition of archaeologists.
2. Supporting improved conditions of employment and career development.

The aim of the discussion was to harvest thoughts and ideas on how these objectives could best be progressed.

Discussion points were raised in order to prime the participants:

*Should all archaeologists have a basic degree?*

*Should we implement a 'mentoring' system in the field?*

*Could the implementation of skills passports aid in career progression?*

**In order to increase openness of debate, the discussion was held under the Chatham House Rule.**

## Introduction

MT provided a background to the Archaeology 2025 initiative and noted that a key challenge for the profession going forward is the implementation of the core objectives set out in the strategy.

Focusing on the key discussion points of the session, MT noted that in the course of her research she established that 60% of the profession had earned well below the average industrial wage in 2014. Between 2007 and 2014 there was an 83% exodus from the profession, yet, despite low income the number of archaeologists eligible to hold an excavation licence increased by 242% in that time. Eighty-five percent of archaeologists hold a third-level degree with a further, significant percentage holding a post-graduate qualification. She alluded to the lack of confidence we have in ourselves as a profession, largely owing to external lack of recognition.

MT invited participants to consider and comment on these statistics. Views expressed are summarised below.

- A representative of UNITE Archaeology Branch presented views on behalf of the union, but also as a newly licensed archaeologist. It is the view of UNITE Archaeology that the most straightforward, legally binding way for the issues at stake to be addressed is through a Sectoral Employment Order (SEO). A SEO would establish minimum thresholds in terms of qualifications and experience. The representative noted that the current situation means that

anybody can arrive on site and announce themselves to be a Site Assistant as there are currently no minimum recognisable qualifications required for this grade of archaeologist. Equivalent grades in industry require craft workers, for example, to have four years' experience in their field.

- A participant (drawing from experience working in the areas of compliance and policy drafting) emphasised that as an EU member state, we are not operating within a vacuum—minimum educational standards have already been established for 'Archaeologist' under EU Directive. The minimum professional qualification required is a diploma of post-secondary level of three to four years' duration. In the Czech Republic, as another example, the requirement is a diploma of four to five-years' duration (a Master's Degree) as well as two years' experience. Hungary's and Poland's requirements are similar—a four to five year diploma is required to be an archaeologist. They noted that, skills and competencies aside, from the perspective of qualifications, we have to work within the existing framework. We also need to focus on how the need for a professional archaeologist is generated and who decides this need? How are the requirements for archaeological services portrayed under national and EU planning and environmental policies/laws? The public sector largely decides the need for archaeological services. Looking at the minimum criteria set-out for the role currently, generally, requirements call for a 'qualified individual' or a 'competent expert', with 'sufficient expertise'. The writing of an EIA report will require a competent expert with sufficient proficiency. Local Authorities and Consent Authorities have an explicit right to establish minimum qualifications. In the public sector, minimum criteria are set against the NFQ and rarely are public authorities sanctioned to express a requirement for a higher qualification or lengthy experience. In the private sector however, there is huge discretion and it is down to the individual procuring the archaeological services to specify requirements. Such individuals may be influenced by Quality Assurance when setting minimum requirements, and they will generally be guided by NMS criteria and minimum statutory requirements. The participant advised refraining from 'reinventing the wheel'—urging all stakeholders to consider, understand and follow the formula already established in law.
- A CifA representative provided an overview of the CifA tiered system of professional accreditation. Their institute is committed to keeping open an entry route for the non-graduate. CifA considers ability and competence in its accreditation system. He noted that a degree is not a demonstration of competence, but also added that experience is not a measure of ability. Qualifications such as diplomas and degrees are easy to measure, but so too are certificates.

**MT**, reverting to her opening statement, noted that while the majority of the profession holds a degree or a post-graduate qualification, there are those who have entered the profession in a more organic way over the years. She asked participants to deliberate further on an accreditation structure that caters for practitioners with various levels of experience and educational qualifications.

- A contributor noted that in terms of job opportunities, supply can be greater than demand in the profession. They queried the availability of data that would clarify the number of archaeologists currently working in the profession who do not hold a formal qualification. Is it possible that such individuals have attended part-time/night courses in archaeology? We operate in a space where professions are defined by qualification. In the commercial sector, archaeologists feel they are underpaid for the qualifications they hold, but is it also the case that individuals are overpaid for the work they're doing?

- A representative from an academic institution reflected on key educational objectives and forthcoming changes to the degree format at UCD. They acknowledged that there are many different ways of becoming an archaeologist and argued that there should always be a means for an individual to pursue an archaeological career. To tell someone that they don't hold the appropriate degree to work as an archaeologist is negative and unconstructive. In order to reach a definition of the role, we need to establish what most people actually *are* or what they *do* within the profession currently and not look at how they *became* an archaeologist. We also need to create pathways in to an archaeological career for people from other backgrounds. Citing the MSc in Experimental Archaeology and Material Culture at UCD as an example, they noted that applicants from varied disciplines/backgrounds are considered if they are a good fit for the course. The participant concurs that there is an EU framework to abide by and basic limitations to uphold. An individual procuring an engineer to build a house or a bridge, for example, would look at that engineer's qualifications before hiring them. They concluded by noting that the Irish universities are appalled at how their graduates are being 'chewed up' in the commercial sphere and recently issued statements in support of UNITE's efforts to establish better pay and conditions within the profession.
- A participant added that the ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) has been designed to facilitate individuals moving between different countries. The system accounts for the learning achievements and workload of the individual's previous courses (including achievements attained through non-traditional pathways), and allows the transfer of credits from one university to another. Credits contribute to an individual's degree programme or training.
- A representative from a further academic institution remarked that prior learning is recognised as well as an individual's skillset when it comes to accepting applications from mature students to their institution. Credit is awarded (in conformity with ECTS) in accordance with the individual's prior education and experiences. They acknowledge that many individuals have followed a random career trajectory, have acquired vocational skills or garnered valuable life experience and this accumulated experience is taken into account on reviewing applications.
- A CifA representative advocated that we look at what people can do as opposed to what people have learned and drew attention to the UK's national standards and guidance documents for archaeological practice for further insight.

**MT** invited graduates among the participants to discuss the difference between skills and qualifications from their point of view—are graduates armed with sufficient skills as they progress in to the working world?

- A UCD graduate noted that the additional requirements that graduates are expected to meet on entering the field of commercial archaeology is troubling. Citing Safe Pass training as an example, the cost to a graduate of achieving this certification is the first of many hurdles to jump. Adding this requirement to the struggle to find work on graduating can deter people from entering the commercial world of archaeology. Moreover, for someone who has spent five years at college to be told they need particular experience or an additional skillset on

entering the field is insulting. They added that only three students from their academic class of 40 have pursued a career in archaeology and suggested that this high drop-off rate could be explained by the difficulties and lack of opportunities that graduates encounter on entering the commercial world. The participant indicated that they had attended an archaeological field school, arming them with basic field experience. Attendance at field schools costs a lot of money however. Archaeology students in the USA have to clock-up quantifiable hours of field experience in order to attain their qualification – perhaps in Ireland students should be afforded this training as undergraduates – thus ensuring that they have acquired the basic field skills necessary on entering the commercial world.

- A QUB graduate spoke of their career path having left school at fifteen years of age, from training for an apprenticeship and working as a boiler technician, to their recent graduation with a doctoral degree in archaeology. They remarked on the clear career path that allows an apprentice to become a qualified tradesperson—paradoxically, the direction that commercial archaeology is going in, an archaeological degree is worth less than an apprenticeship. We complete a four to five-year degree in order to take home a minimum wage. They noted that the structure needs to be redressed.
- A participant drew attention to the professions’ ‘obsession’ with excavation and the eligibility to hold an excavation licence—this barometer of qualification does not account for the many different types of archaeologist. There are many eminent archaeologists who have contributed greatly to archaeology having entered the profession from different disciplines, e.g. Richard Warner, Richard Bradley and Mike Bailey. Echoing previous comments, the participant reiterated the need to focus on accommodating those at the bottom of the professional ladder.

**MT** recapped on the points raised:

- the multifaceted nature of our profession has possibly prevented us from getting to a definition of ‘Archaeologist’
- there is a disconnect between what qualifies us and what we can do
- as an EU member state, it appears that there is a structure already in place for how we operate
- third-level students are potentially not being armed with enough skills to allow them to transition easily into the domain of field archaeology
- there is a need to consider a framework for archaeologists who have no interest in becoming licence eligible and wish to pursue a career in other areas of the discipline
- The CifA representative, in response to points raised by one of the graduate participants, added that the Skills Passport is a useful means of demonstrating the skills that have been acquired and should be more widely considered in Ireland. They added that acquiring such skills shouldn’t come at a financial cost – these skills are developed through work. Moreover, perhaps third level institutions should play a greater role in demonstrating to students the different paths that can be followed within an archaeological career and should better help students to identify their preferred path while undergraduates.

- A university graduate participating in the discussion agreed that third level institutions should play a stronger part in assisting undergraduates (and not just post-graduates) to identify suitable career paths in the profession.
- A participant from the US noted that they had worked in field schools in order to gain field experience and was advised to take a gap of two years between their MA and PhD to garner this experience. In the US there are various paid levels of field experience and those with an academic qualification who have enough experience to earn additional responsibilities are generally placed higher on the scale. One can progress from technician to Principal Investigator (a project archaeologist with additional responsibilities) but must have an advanced degree in archaeology/anthropology in order to do so. Roles such as State Historical Preservation Officer are often permanent positions, but competitions for these positions can be extremely challenging.

**MT** drew attention to the second topic of the meeting, namely, 'Supporting improved conditions of employment and career development'. To prime the discussion, MT posed the following questions:

1. How do we resolve the issue of poor conditions in the work place, particularly in the field?
  2. What should we aspire to?
  3. Can we have whistle blowers and if so, will there be consequences for those individuals?
  4. How do we encourage more confidence in our profession when it comes to dealing with poor conditions?
- One participant remarked that this is a 25-year-old conversation and has been the 'elephant in the room' for decades. Commercial archaeology does not protect wages and does not fight for appropriate conditions. We keep on doing the same thing and expecting the same outcome. Referring to James Bonsall's quest, as IAI's newly elected Chair, to explore proposals to appoint an IAI CEO, the participant believes such an appointment will give the IAI and the archaeological profession in Ireland a much stronger voice.
  - Another partaker reiterated the importance of a Sectoral Employment Order in standardising entitlements across the board. In the construction sector, welfare facilities are established on site before workers arrive – yet archaeologists are still expected to turn up to the workplace when the delivery of such facilities has been delayed. They referred to efforts by UNITE Archaeology to enforce mandatory conditions on site. On the matter of grading, they indicated that UNITE Archaeology has compiled a suggested grading framework that should be considered.
  - A representative from Transport Infrastructure Ireland noted that TII, as a sponsoring agency, is responsible for acquiring third-party archaeological services, and has become one of the biggest clients for private-sector archaeological services in Ireland. Staff of TII's Archaeology and Heritage Section have noticed a vast improvement in conditions on site owing to the proactive efforts of UNITE Archaeology to educate its members, report issues and to have conditions investigated. However, there is confusion on site much of the time as to who the client is and who is responsible for providing the obligatory facilities. TII is not the employer – so know your Client – is it a local authority, a private consultancy or a construction company? TII hires independent auditors to assess pay and conditions on TII sponsored projects—these

auditors seek data from the archaeological companies engaged to provide archaeological services on behalf of TII. A number of these audits have taken place in recent months and to date, no problems have been reported. TII will continue to audit conditions on its schemes in this fashion. However, everybody has a responsibility to promote proper conditions on site, if conditions do not meet the legal standard, then report it.

**MT** thanked all of the participants for their contributions, noting that the discussion on improving conditions will have to be continued at a later date. She indicated that all of the comments and observations would be collated and circulated to the membership. The Board of the IAI plans to build on the round table discussion, potentially with a one-day forum. In the interim, it is envisaged that proposals for establishing a grading framework will be drawn up and sent to the membership for further review/comment. She urged participants to start visualising how this framework would cater for all 'genres' of archaeologist.