

# BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

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**H**ow can we ensure a sustainable future for our profession in the face of many challenges? We were keen to explore that at #ClfA2023 through a hybrid session that incorporated provocations, breakout groups and Jamboards!

This session challenged speakers and delegates to imagine a sustainable future for archaeology, with themes including skills development and career pathways, inclusion and accessibility, value and public benefit. Breakout groups considered what needs to happen for the vision to be achieved, using theory of change/logic modelling techniques.

Presenting to a packed room, our speakers were Rob Early, Head of Cultural Heritage and Archaeology at WSP, Caroline Raynor, Senior Project Manager at Costain, Michael D'Aprix, research student at UCL and Chair of ClfA's Advisory Council, Amy Atkins, Head of Continuous Improvement at MOLA, Megan Schlanker, Chair of ClfA's Early Careers Special Interest Group, Pen Foreman, Project Manager at the British Museum and ClfA's Board champion for EDI, and Barney Sloane, National Specialist Services Director at Historic England. They addressed

- themes of innovation and the need for co-creation and cooperative ways of working to meet challenges and harness the potential of new technologies
- the potential to build resilience though investing in, and valuing, archaeologists and their skills
- building sustainable and diverse structures and ways of working that support a much wider range of people to participate in and to stay within the sector
- the need for joined-up strategic change to support a more positive and inclusive future

Breakout groups then chose a topic to discuss in more detail: deconstructing current delivery systems, skills, breaking down silos and exploring how staff can be retained. The session Jamboard collected feedback from the room and Weaver's triangles were utilised to focus discussion. Common threads included the need to share good practice from inside and outside the sector, exploring the skills base of each organisation and assess training needs for both archaeological and non-archaeological skills (like people management or business leadership).

## So what did we learn?

We can choose to act in ways that are or are not sustainable. For something to be sustained, it must be valued. That starts with the historic environment being valued as our home, our habitat and for what it contributes to society. We also need to understand the different values that individuals and communities across the world place on their historic environment. We need to communicate that value to clients, stakeholders, governments and decision-makers and communicate in their language, using terms they are familiar with, like the UN sustainable development goals.

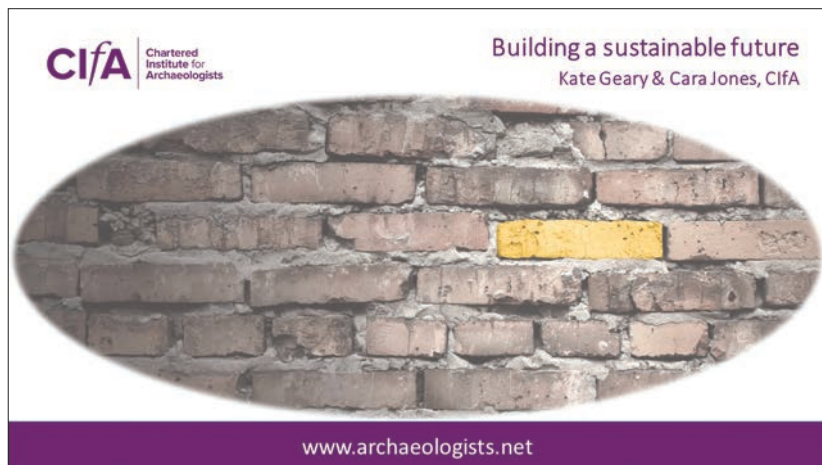
We also need to value ourselves (and each other) as technically skilled and ethically competent professionals aligned around a shared vision and sense of purpose. Part of that is valuing, and being able to articulate, the contribution archaeologists make to the economy, to knowledge gain and understanding, to wellbeing and to the important issues of the day, like supporting communities to navigate changes they see happening due to climate change.



Credit: Liz Gardner



Members of the Early Careers Group committee at ClfA 2023. Credit: ClfA



Introduction slide to the Building a sustainable future session at Cifa 2023

We particularly need to value each other as we move, albeit too slowly, towards a more diverse, inclusive and accessible profession – understanding what different individuals need to feel valued and supported in their engagement with archaeology.

Although the challenges we face as a discipline and as a profession – and the challenges that society faces – are immense and daunting, archaeologists, with their understanding of change across time, have the skillset and the mindset to respond to them. But we need to be aware of our impact – for example, how our actions contribute to carbon emissions or can (unintentionally) alienate a future archaeologist from joining the profession. Every single one of us can be an agent of change, regardless of our career stage.

Cifa turned 40 last year and we reflected on how the last 40 years have been characterised by emerging



Word cloud

*The future of our profession is dependent on our ability to provide sustainable and equitable careers.*

professional structures, commercialism, developing business practices and expertise and competition. Organisations and institutions in our sector have tended to jostle for position, competing for audiences, members and influence as they sought to justify their existences.

To sustain and grow as a profession over the next 40 years, we need to change our focus and behaviour to prioritise cooperation, co-creation and collaboration, actively seeking ways we can work together across disciplinary, institutional and national boundaries to find solutions to current and emerging challenges.

And we have to address how we value and reward our people. The future of our profession is dependent on our ability to provide sustainable and equitable careers. This will involve shifting away from acrimonious and divisive debates about whose fault it is, to working together on solutions that work for all of us. This theme was repeated throughout the conference but particularly by our early-career colleagues – we need to listen to them.

Of the participants in the session, two thirds thought that the institutions and structures we have in place could support the changes we identified as necessary to ensure sustainability, while one third disagreed and felt they needed completely reforming. It's hard to imagine where the capacity will come from to restructure, reimagine and reform, but it must be done if we're to achieve a sustainable future for archaeology.



Innovation cycle

### Acknowledgements

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this session – the speakers, the attendees and our colleagues who helped facilitate the discussion.