

Future for Archaeological Archives Programme 2023–2024 update (FAAP)

Claire Tsang, Affiliate (9594), Archaeological Archives Principal, Historic England

Historic England is working with various partners across the archaeological and museums sectors on the Future for Archaeological Archives Programme (FAAP). The programme has been set up to find a sustainable future for archaeological collections recovered from excavations in England. The programme was developed in response to the Mendoza Review of museums in England, and government endorsement of Historic England's recommendations in response. Further information can be found on the FAAP webpage.¹ The FAAP action plan has five work packages and this update details the progress made over the past year on specific work packages, particularly focusing on work packages B and C.

Work package A: establishing the basis for action

This work package is complete. Effectively the initiation stage, it covered: ensuring the issue of archaeological archives is addressed by the Mendoza Review Action Plan, a Memorandum of Understanding between Historic England and Arts Council England (ACE), and DCMS endorsement of both.

Work package B: establishing the best option for future archive provision

Work in the last year has been towards developing the business case for a National Collection following on from the 2021 ACE/HE-funded report 'Options for Sustainable Archaeological Archives',² which recommended the creation of a National Collection of Archaeological Archives.

1 Collections use

Following on from research into university use of material archives by University Archaeology UK (HE research report 16/2022),³ the Society of Museum Archaeology (SMA) are collecting information on use of museum collections. Sixteen organisations are contributing to the survey and the report is due out later in 2024, with a session due at the SMA conference in November.

2 Current collecting in England

A snapshot survey conducted by Historic England in early 2024 revealed a 30 per cent decrease in collecting activities since 2012. The survey also examined charging patterns and selective collecting practices. This will shortly be available as an HE research report.

3 Business model for a national collection

Focusing on the requirements of museum and research institutions, to assist with the testing of the business model for a national store and collection of archaeological archives, HE funded the 'National Collection of Archaeological Archives Operating Model: Museum and Research Institution Needs', the results of which is available as an HE research report.⁴

Finds storage. Credit: Wessex Archaeology



4 Estimating the pipeline project

Giving understanding to the archaeology likely to be discovered in the next ten years, the Estimating the pipeline project is discussed on pages 18–19.

5 Reviewing charging models

As presented at Cifa's annual conference in Nottingham in 2023, assessing what kind of deposition charge model might work best to support the development of national guidance on implementation. This evidence will also be made available as an HE research report.

Work package C: developing the basis for cross-sector best practice

Efforts to promote best practices across the sector include:

6 Digital first approach

The Cifa Dig Digital toolkit, which supports a digital-first strategy for archaeological archives, went live in 2023. This year, online training courses have commenced. More details can be found on page 25.

7 Model deed of transfer

Work has resumed on the much-anticipated model deed of transfer and its supporting toolkit. This resource, set for a nine-month trial on the Collections Trust website, will offer standardised documentation for the transfer of title and guidance on orphaned archives.

In parallel with all this work, Historic England have been in discussions with DCMS about the problem and we are jointly seeking a long-term, sustainable solution that will meet the needs of museums, archaeological contractors and researchers, and developers and their agents.

The Future for Archaeological Archives Programme continues to make strides towards a sustainable future for archaeological archives in England. The advancements in Work Packages B and C illustrate a commitment to developing a comprehensive strategy that benefits museums, researchers and the broader community.

Historic England archive to go. Credit: Historic England



Historic England Research Report 49/2024: National Collections of Archaeological Archives Operating Model: Museum and Research Institution Needs. Credit: Historic England

Archaeological Archives Forum Dig Digital Joint Statement of Support. Credit: Archaeological Archives Forum/DigVentures



Claire Tsang

Claire is Historic England's Archaeological Archives Principal and Future for Archaeological Archives Programme manager.

¹ <https://historicengland.org.uk/research/support-and-collaboration/future-for-archaeological-archives-programme/>

² <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/research-and-data/options-sustainable-archaeological-archives>

³ <https://historicengland.org.uk/research/results/reports/16-2022>

⁴ <https://historicengland.org.uk/research/results/reports/49-2024>