

Utilising *strategic skills development* to support change in the sector

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Can strategic skills development drive much-needed change for career pathways to and through archaeology? This article delves into the work currently taking place at ClfA and explores that question.

Our role at ClfA includes promoting professional standards and ethics in archaeological practice, to make the most of the benefits that archaeologists bring to society. We believe that to maximise the value of archaeology, it needs to be carried out with professionalism, which in turn can help attract diverse talent and support career development. These beliefs are embedded within our ten-year strategic plan, and our strategic skills work supports the delivery of these actions. This remit is not a new one for ClfA – we have been championing skill development and promoting the value of training since the dawn of (ClfA) time. This work includes the creation of the National Occupational Standards for Archaeology, supporting the development of the Trailblazer apprenticeship standards in England and designing vocational awards (like the NVQ in archaeological practice).

Through my role as Sector Skills Manager we are increasing our capacity to work in this space, enabling us to respond to stakeholder requests for our time on strategic skills initiatives. Work ranges from chairing the (Northern Ireland) Archaeology 2030 'Professional Skills, Training and Specialisms' working group, to being part of the steering group for the (England-focused) Historic Environment Skills Forum. It is allowing ClfA to take a more strategic approach to skill development work and share brilliant practice across the UK.

We see this keenly in Scotland, where we have led Aim 5 (Innovation and Skills) of Scotland's Archaeology Strategy since 2015. Thanks to funding from the Historic Environment Scotland Partnership Fund, in Scotland we are developing new entry routes into archaeology and ensuring that all archaeologists have access to equitable training opportunities to meet present and future skills challenges. From apprenticeship development to careers fairs, from CPD provision for



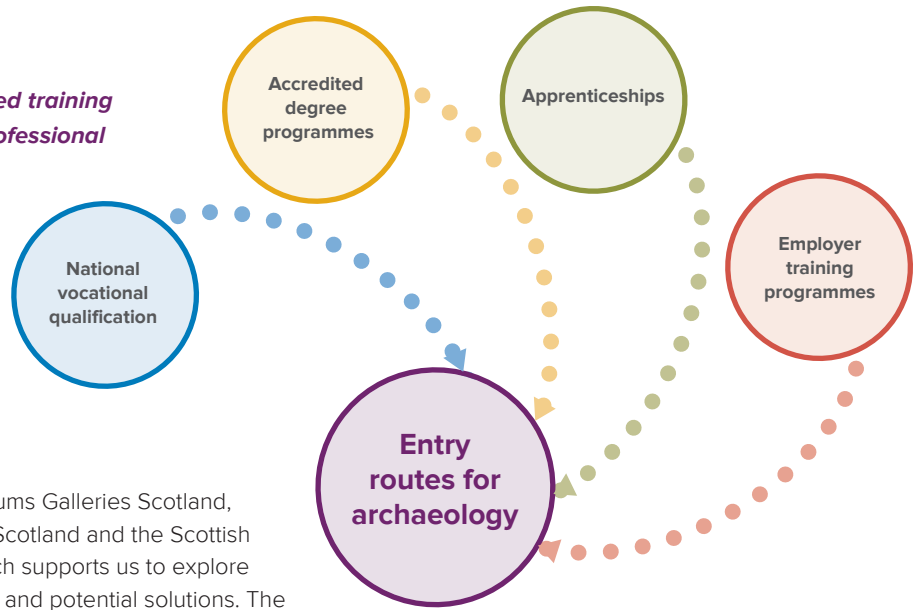
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mid-career archaeologists to entry-level qualification development – these workstreams are all guided by taking a strategic focus to training and skills development.

These initiatives have allowed us to work closely with the (Scottish) Skills Investment Plan for the Historic Environment, which has enabled fresh conversations within our sector and beyond. These new collaborations

*Careers fair at Edinburgh University.
Credit: ClfA*

ClfA-recognised training routes into professional archaeology



include working with Museums Galleries Scotland, ICON, Skills Development Scotland and the Scottish Qualification Authority, which supports us to explore shared challenges, barriers and potential solutions. The sub-sector collaboration, enabled by being part of the Skills Investment Plan (SIP) helps save time and resources and enables us to share expertise and learning experiences. In 2023 we played a lead role in facilitating consultation with the Scottish archaeology sector during the SIP refresh process. Within the new

plan (launched in April 2024), archaeology has been identified as one of the ten pillars of the plan and the new skills profile that has emerged from this process will support the continuing strategic skills development work taking place in Scotland.



Glencoe fieldschool. Credit: ClfA

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Throughout the UK, we see the benefit of taking this strategic approach, especially when acknowledging that skills and training (and the funding which can support it) are a devolved matter. As we know, our archaeologists work across borders, so our skill development work should too. ClfA's UK-wide remit allows different work strands from across the Home Nations to inform and inspire actions and initiatives in all corners of the UK. For example, data collection (on skills needs) in Scotland is helping inform data collection practice in Northern Ireland. Lessons learned during the (apprenticeship) Trailblazer process in England is helping inform apprenticeship development in Scotland. It takes skills and expertise to navigate these strategic conversations – both within the sector and with those who are non-heritage stakeholders. It takes time and resources to realign those viewpoints and demonstrate that we are a sector ready to deliver these initiatives. Ultimately, this joined-up approach will help save time and resources, capitalise on shared expertise and enable standardised development processes to take place in all areas of the UK.

Throughout all this strategic skills work, we are greatly aided by our volunteers and key stakeholders, which include our Special Interest and Area Groups, skill-focused working groups, Historic England, English Heritage, Cadw, Historic Environment Scotland, University Archaeology UK, the Historic Environment Division Department for Communities, Prospect Union, FAME, our Registered Organisations and many more. Those individuals are drawn from all areas of archaeology, and each give considerable time to support these initiatives. We could not do this work without them and are very thankful for their contribution.

ClfA's lead role in all these initiatives results in skills programmes that are aligned to our professional and ethical standards and integrated into the framework of professional accreditation that we provide. From entry-level qualifications to career development CPD, the new skills and knowledge (leading to competence) gained by the individual supports them with their progression to and through a career in archaeology. This alignment also reinforces the message to clients and the public

Go further

If you would like to explore these initiatives further, you can find out more at the links below:

Archaeology 2030 – <https://archaeology2030.org/>

ClfA's Careers Kit – <https://www.archaeologists.net/careers>

Historic Environment Skills Forum (Knowledge Hub Group, open for all to join) – <https://khub.net/group/resilience>

Scotland's Archaeology Strategy – <https://archaeologystrategy.scot/>

The Skills Investment Plan for the Historic Environment – <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/about-us/what-we-do/skills-investment-plan-for-the-historic-environment/>



that ClfA members are professionally accredited and skilled in the study and care of the historic environment.

Does this work support change within the sector? I believe so, but it is a long-term process and progress can sometimes be difficult to discern. However, as the professional institute for archaeologists, ClfA is able to take that long-term view and drive progress by taking a strategic approach.



*Cara Jones.
Credit: ClfA*