

Green skills in archaeology

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We know that archaeology will contribute significantly to the climate agenda. But what specific knowledge and skills do we need as a sector to support this now, and what skills might we need in the future?

'Green skills' is an increasingly used term within discussions on the climate emergency. The UK government describes green skills as 'the knowledge, abilities, values and attitudes needed to live in, develop and support a society which reduces the impact of human activity on the environment', but if you search for 'archaeology green skills' (within your regular internet search engine!) very little appears. Heritage green skills (which is a bit more common) is very focused on the retrofit agenda, but does that cover the full scope of what archaeology can contribute? We know that archaeology will play a

significant role in the climate agenda so we need to understand the skills we will require to deliver on that.

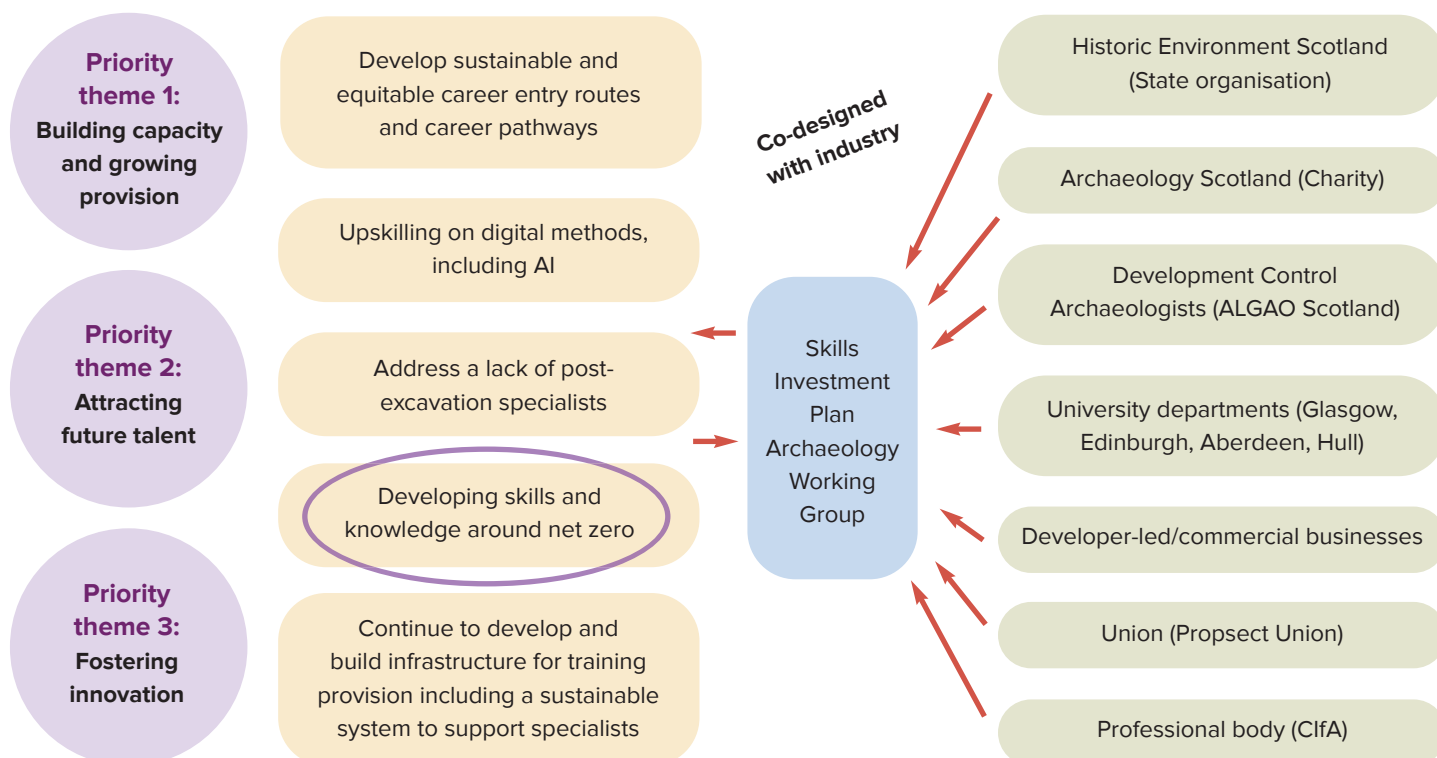
In 2024 the refreshed Scottish Skills Investment Plan for the Historic Environment was launched (detailed in TA 123) which listed five priority areas for strategic skills development for archaeology. Informed and co-designed with industry, this included 'developing skills and knowledge around net zero'. When the Skills Investment Plan Archaeology Working Group (chaired by ClfA) initially met to discuss this in June



2024, it was agreed that there was no definitive list of what 'net zero' skills were required and, therefore, solutions to address that skill gap may not have the intended impact.



Delivery of the Skills Investment plan



Pillar	Pillar priorities	SIP priority
	Address a lack of post-excavation specialists	Building capacity and growing provision
	Develop sustainable and equitable career pathways	Attracting future talent and improving access
	Continue to develop and build infrastructure of training provision including a sustainable system to support specialists	Building capacity and growing provision
	Upskilling on digital methods including AI	Fostering innovation
	Developing skills and knowledge around net zero	Fostering innovation

Alongside this, the ClfA Climate Change Working Group have also been looking at green skills and exploring what can be done to support the sector to acquire these skills. The Heritage Carbon Literacy Course (funded by Historic England) is a great example of this support – enabling the heritage sector to collectively access tailored training on carbon literacy. ClfA has brought these two conversations together, using existing ClfA knowledge networks to reach out and gather data on what archaeology green skills can encompass. Taking this conversation to the Innovation Festival (held in October 2024), ClfA facilitated a session titled ‘Green skills in archaeology’ and heard from The National Trust, Historic England, Headland Archaeology, Arup and local government, as well as members of the audience.

Four key themes have emerged from these initial conversations:

- **Business processes adaptations** – which can include carbon literacy knowledge, creating and maintaining carbon reduction plans, responding

to climate-related demands from clients and tenders, changing recruitment practice to include non-archaeological climate-related skills

- **Nature based solutions** – which includes the archaeology skills that contribute to nature-based solutions to the climate emergency (could include solar developments, coastal erosion, peatland restoration and woodland expansion)
- **Science communication** – to maximise the potential for archaeologists to contribute to narratives on the climate emergency. This can include sharing our knowledge of past climate adaptation to inform future climate adaptation
- **Future talent development** – to ensure that knowledge and expertise on net zero and wider green skills are being developed within universities, Further Education colleges and workplace learning provision

The discussion also highlighted that different subsectors in archaeology are talking about green skills, but there is a need to support a collaborative response to ensure the sector can meet the challenges the climate agenda is presenting.

The Innovation Festival conversation enabled us to learn what existing practice is taking place (for example, the Sustainable Development and Archaeology degree course currently being offered by the University of the Highlands and Islands, or the business adaptation practice developed by Headland Archaeology) and is starting to connect those (knowledge) dots.

ClfA believes that the Innovation Festival session could be the start of reducing the siloed nature of green skills discussions but also recognises that more is needed. Using the strategic drivers like the Skills Investment Plan, we aim to continue these conversations and explore how we can share good practice, join up conversations and support the sector to gain the green skills it will need.

Acknowledgements

This conversation has been greatly informed by the ClfA Climate Change Working Group and the speakers from the Innovation Festival session, including Alex Llewellyn (ClfA), Hannah Fluck (The National Trust), Dan Miles (Historic England), Andy Boucher (Headland Archaeology), Daniel Phillips (Hertfordshire County Council) and Coralie Aitchison (Arup). We would also like to thank Catherine Cartmell and Mar Roige Oliver (Historic Environment Scotland) for their continued support with the Skills Investment Plan delivery.