

STANDARDS IN ARCHAEOLOGY

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The Southport report (2011) set out a vision for ensuring quality which stated that

work should be led by accredited experts working to a full range of agreed professional standards for types of work and their products, and that the standards and guidance would be readily available, consistent and framed in the relevant language to support and inform professional judgements on what is proportionate and reasonable, placing greater emphasis on professional implementation over reliance on local authority monitoring of work.

Since 2011 discussions have continued about how that vision might be achieved. The idea of placing greater emphasis on professional implementation, in the face of diminishing local authority resources, has occasionally proved controversial. Taryn Nixon's review of the Southport recommendations in 2017 concluded that *'the standards and guidance now in place represent the most robust infrastructure we have yet had'* but noted that *'where the sector seems weakest is in ensuring consistent commitment to standards, and in ensuring that sufficient training and familiarisation has taken place right across organisations'* and identified *'a reluctance to specify the use of accredited expertise'* as a barrier to achieving the vision (Taryn Nixon, 2017, *What about Southport?*).

A frequent criticism of ClfA is that it lacks 'teeth': the ability, or willingness, to take action against accredited individuals or Registered Organisations whose work or behaviour may have fallen short of the standards required by ClfA's *Code of conduct*, *Standards and guidance*, or policies. Enforcement, however, as any local authority archaeological advisor knows, is just the tip of the iceberg. Professional bodies should, and do, enforce compliance with standards through their professional conduct processes but the majority of their work in support of high standards (and thereby, the delivery of public benefit) goes on behind the scenes: developing guidance to support published standards, training to ensure the

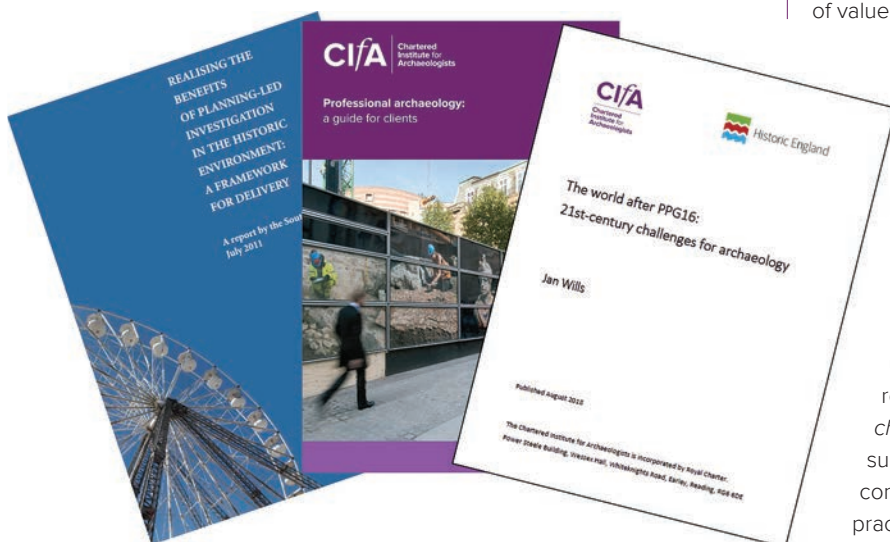
appropriate skills are available and providing advice to ClfA professionals facing specific issues in their work.

In a self-regulating profession, standards are not issued from 'on high'. They are defined by the profession itself, based on a shared understanding of what constitutes good practice, in order to deliver public benefit. Issues arise where there is a lack of shared understanding of, or commitment to, the mechanisms by which the profession can specify, promote, support compliance with, monitor and enforce its own standards.

The vision in the Southport report for a *'greater emphasis on professional implementation over reliance on local authority monitoring of work'* did not envisage professional bodies taking over the role of monitoring planning-led archaeological work from local authority advisors. Their role is crucial, under-resourced and requires vigorous defence in the face of ongoing cuts to local government services. Rather, it is based on the notion of **professionalism**, defined not by whether you get paid for your work, but by a personal and organisational commitment to undertake work to a high standard, in the public interest. For this to work requires a cultural shift away from compliance by enforcement (I adhere to standards because I might be sanctioned if I don't) towards a greater emphasis on individual commitment to upholding professional standards, and greater understanding of how they underpin the concept of value for the client *and* the public. It also requires much

more effort to explain the value of archaeological work to clients and why it is in their interest to use professionally accredited archaeologists.

The third 'pillar' required to achieve the Southport vision is a strong collaborative relationship between the various bodies with responsibility for setting standards, providing guidance and monitoring quality, based on mutual understanding and reinforcement of each other's roles. Feedback from the recent *21st-century challenges for archaeology* project, and elsewhere, suggests that the current landscape can appear confused and overcrowded, making it difficult for practitioners to navigate and understand.



From Southport to *21st-century challenges* to the workshops looking at the structure, funding and delivery of archaeology in Scotland on behalf of Scotland's Strategic Archaeology Committee, it's apparent that we haven't yet achieved the culture of confident professionalism and clear articulation of standards, quality and public benefit that the sector aspires to. But good progress is being made and there needs to be far more promotion of case studies and examples of good practice and leadership to illustrate what can be done. The list below outlines some of ClfA's recent and ongoing work to revise and update our Standards and guidance. More detail about these are on the ClfA website at www.archaeologists.net/news/projects-update-1573038615

- **Building capacity through innovation** – in partnership with the Association of Local Government Archaeologists (ALGAO), this project will identify barriers to innovation.
- **Mapping the sector** – jointly run by ClfA and ALGAO, this project will map the archaeology sector to better understand its structure and needs in relation to the provision of specialist advice.
- **Developing a finds reporting standards toolkit for grey literature** – initiated by the ClfA Finds Group, this project will produce a Toolkit to improve standards in finds reporting, in line with recommendations from the *Review of the standard of reporting on archaeological artefacts in England* (Cattermole 2017) <https://www.archaeologists.net/publications/reports>



Slide showing how standards and practice evolve

- **Re-imagining Scottish archaeology: structures, delivery and funding** – working on behalf of Scotland's Strategy Archaeology Committee, we held three workshops aimed at generating new ideas about the structure, funding and delivery of archaeology in Scotland <http://archaeologystategy.scot/>
- **Digital archives in archaeology** – ClfA is inputting into the DigVentures project to develop guidance for anyone working with digital data in archaeological projects. <https://digventures.com/projects/digital-archives/>
- **Write here! Write now!** – working with Historic England and others, we have outlined revisions to the Standards and guidance for field evaluation and for watching briefs to address issues of compatibility and comparability identified as part of synthesis projects.



Bruce Mann speaking at the ClfA desk-based assessment workshop in Edinburgh. Credit: ClfA