

Reviewing the Code of conduct: professional ethics in archaeology

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ClfA, like professional associations in other disciplines, defines professionalism as practising an occupation with skill, demonstrating and maintaining competence, agreeing to an ethical code and being accountable for complying with it, and acting in the interests of society.

Of the characteristics that distinguish a professional archaeologist from all others, one of the most important is the commitment to behave ethically. With due deference to our Charter, the *Code of conduct: professional ethics in archaeology* is our most important document. It provides the principles and rules that tell us how to be ethical.

But that's only half the story. The *Code* may tell us what we should do, but only because we told the *Code* what to say. This is the essence of self-regulation. We decide on our values, we define what

ethical behaviour looks like, we write rules about it and we impose them on ourselves.

So being a professional brings additional responsibilities. The touchstone for a professional body was set out in principles reported by Lord Benson to the House of Lords after one of our sister professional institutes lost its way (<https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1992/jul/08/the-professions>). They include

Thirdly, the governing body must set the ethical rules and professional standards which are to be observed by the members. They should be higher than those established by the general law.

Fourthly, the rules and standards enforced by the governing body should be designed for the benefit of the public and not for the private advantage of the members.

The restrictions we place on ourselves are tighter than the law or marketplace impose on others – but we accept them, and the risk of having to answer for our actions, because we want to act in the public interest. It appears to disadvantage us –

until we consider the greater trust placed in us than in those who are unaccountable or have no interest in acting ethically.

So the *Code* must accurately reflect our shared values, allow us to behave in ways that we think are right and forbid the opposite. Our *Code* is essentially 40 years old. It has been extended and amended, but the membership has never conducted a full review.

I undertook a scoping exercise that indicated potential to improve the *Code's* readability, to explain better its relationship with ClfA standards and guidance, and to verify its global application. It identified the potential to challenge some of the values that underpinned archaeological thinking when it was drafted. That analysis requires scrutiny by the membership, and the Advisory Council and Board have agreed that a review of the *Code* is needed. Around the time you read this, the process will be announced.

For further resources on ethics see <https://www.archaeologists.net/membership/ethics> and Hinton, P, forthcoming 2023, in Belford and Wait.

The logo for ClfA (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists) is displayed in a large, white, serif font. The letters 'C', 'I', and 'A' are in a standard serif typeface, while the 'f' is a stylized, lowercase script font that overlaps the 'I' and 'A'.