



Special Interest Groups

The Diggers Forum has been campaigning for the past five years on behalf of professional archaeologists working in fieldwork and post-excavation. During this period we have worked with IfA staff and committees and other organisations, including BAJR (British Archaeological Jobs and Resources) and Prospect, raising awareness of issues that confront our membership on a day to day basis. Since the Forum was established we have gradually increased our representation within IfA, Forum members currently holding three seats on Council (down from four last year). It is important that we maintain a voice on Council and we hope to get more members on board in future.

At present our Group Committee is too small and with work commitments we have been unable to develop key themes we would have liked, in particular our *Campaign for a living wage*. We had hoped to move further forward on the pay issue, using IfA's *Benchmarking archaeological salaries* report as the main focus, but the recession has had a massive negative impact, creating an environment where commercial archaeological organisations are less likely to look at improving pay and conditions.

The *Salaries* report concluded that pay levels need to increase by 13% to 53% to bring archaeology in line with comparable professions and suggested phased above-inflation pay increases as one way to achieve this, a view strongly supported by the Diggers Forum. IfA Council has agreed to target a 13% increase in IfA-recommended pay minima by 2013, but because of the recession and its impact on the profession the initial increase has been postponed until the next financial year. Whilst we acknowledge the current harsh economic climate and the difficulties it has caused, not least for the many field staff who have been laid-off or who are now working three or four day weeks, we firmly believe the rise in salary minima should be pushed through at the earliest opportunity.

THE diggers' forum

Jez Taylor

We all know the issue of low pay within the heritage sector is not a new one and has been discussed at length over the years with little significant improvement. Raising pay levels within the competitive tendering system is challenging and unlikely to succeed without solid commitment from all involved, particularly those running organisations at high managerial levels. A few have managed to substantially increase wages beyond IfA recommended minima, but generally there is little evidence of firm, practical measures to address the issue, either historically or in more recent times, pre-recession. The will needed to tackle the situation seems to be lacking. Once the economic crisis has eased we hope IfA Registered Organisations will be prepared to review IfA recommended minima with the Council as a whole, with a view to adopting a bolder approach. The differential outlined in the salaries report of 13% to 53% reflects a broad spectrum of jobs and grades. It would be encouraging to see commercial organisations aiming for a higher percentage increase than 13% at the bottom end of the scale.

The recession has brought issues affecting field archaeologists into sharp focus, but economic forecasts suggest signs of recovery *may* be on the horizon. After a lull in activity, this could be an ideal time to review and change the Forum, making us stronger and more influential. IfA has received feedback highlighting a growing interest in Special Interest Groups, including the Diggers Forum, so it seems a good time to reorganise and re-launch. Over the next few months we want to invite new people onto the DF committee, increase membership and revitalise the *Campaign for a living wage*. If any members are interested in joining, please email groups@archaeologists.net.

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